

October 31, 2013

Liberty and Law blog on the increasing militarization of the police.

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We have a very long article from Wired Magazine on how kids learn, focusing on a middle school teacher in Mexico. Here's an excerpt from the day the assistant principal of the school learned one class in his school had ten students who were in the 99.99 percentile in countrywide standardized math test results. And one student, a twelve-year-old girl, had the highest grade in the country.

Juárez Correa (**the teacher**) also brought something else back from the Internet. It was the fable of a forlorn burro trapped at the bottom of a well. Since thieves had broken into the school and sliced the electrical cord off of the classroom projector (presumably to sell the copper inside), he couldn't actually show them the clip that recounted the tale. Instead, he simply described it.

One day, a burro fell into a well, Juárez Correa began. It wasn't hurt, but it couldn't get out. The burro's owner decided that the aged beast wasn't worth saving, and since the well was dry, he would just bury both. He began to shovel clods of earth into the well. The burro cried out, but the man kept shoveling. Eventually, the burro fell silent. The man assumed the animal was dead, so

he was amazed when, after a lot of shoveling, the burro leaped out of the well. It had shaken off each clump of dirt and stepped up the steadily rising mound until it was able to jump out.

Juárez Correa looked at his class. "We are like that burro," he said. "Everything that is thrown at us is an opportunity to rise out of the well we are in."

When the two-day national standardized exam took place in June 2012, Juárez Correa viewed it as just another pile of dirt thrown on the kids' heads. It was a step back to the way school used to be for them: mechanical and boring. To prevent cheating, a coordinator from the Ministry of Education oversaw the proceedings and took custody of the answer sheets at the end of testing. It felt like a military exercise, but as the kids blasted through the questions, they couldn't help noticing that it felt easy, as if they were being asked to do something very basic.

Ricardo Zavala Hernandez, assistant principal at José Urbina López, drinks a cup of coffee most mornings as he browses the web in the admin building, a cement structure that houses the school's two functioning computers. One day in September 2012, he clicked on the site for ENLACE, Mexico's national achievement exam, and discovered that the results of the June test had been posted.

Zavala Hernandez put down his coffee. Most of the classes had done marginally better this year—but Paloma's grade was another story. The previous year, 45 percent had essentially failed the math section, and 31 percent had failed Spanish. This time only 7 percent failed math and 3.5 percent failed Spanish. And while none had posted an Excellent score before, 63 percent were now in that category in math.

The language scores were very high. Even the lowest was well above the national average. Then he noticed the math scores. The top score in Juárez Correa's class was 921. Zavala Hernandez looked over at the top score in the state: It was 921. When he saw the next box over, the hairs on his arms stood up. The top score in the entire country was also 921.

He printed the page and speed-walked to Juárez Correa's classroom. The students stood up when he entered.

"Take a look at this," Zavala Hernandez said, handing him the printout.

Juárez Correa scanned the results and looked up. "Is this for real?" he asked.

"I just printed it off the ENLACE site," the assistant principal responded. "It's real."

Juárez Correa noticed the kids staring at him, but he wanted to make sure he understood the report. He took a moment to read it again, nodded, and turned to the kids.

"We have the results back from the ENLACE exam," he said. "It's just a test, and not a great one."

A number of students had a sinking feeling. They must have blown it.

"But we have a student in this classroom who placed first in Mexico," he said, breaking into a smile.

Paloma received the highest math score in the country, but the other students weren't far behind. Ten got math scores that placed them in the 99.99th percentile. Three of them placed at the same high level in Spanish. The results attracted a quick burst of official and media attention in Mexico, most of which focused on Paloma. She was flown to Mexico City to appear on a popular TV show and received a variety of gifts, from a laptop to a bicycle.

Juárez Correa himself got almost no recognition, despite the fact that nearly half of his class had performed at a world-class level and that even the lowest performers had markedly improved.

His other students were congratulated by friends and family. The parents of Carlos Rodríguez Lamas, who placed in the 99.99th percentile in math, treated him to three steak tacos. It was his first time in a restaurant. Keila Francisco Rodríguez got 10 pesos from her parents. She bought a bag of Cheetos. The kids were excited. They talked about being doctors, teachers, and politicians.

Juárez Correa had mixed feelings about the test. His students had succeeded because he had employed a new teaching method, one better suited to the way children learn. It was a model that emphasized group work, competition, creativity, and a student-led environment. So it was ironic that the kids had distinguished themselves because of a conventional multiple-choice test. "These exams are like limits for the teachers," he says. "They test what you know, not what you can do, and I am more interested in what my students can do."

Now for some red meat before the weekend. Seth Mandel posts on Obamacare and arbitrary power.

Following on the heels of CBS's Benghazi report, NBC News is joining in the "now it can be told" parade. With the president safely reelected and ObamaCare surviving its key challenges at the Supreme Court, it is now apparently safe to start reporting on the fact that the health-care reform law was constructed on a very transparent falsehood. "Obama administration knew millions could not keep their health insurance" screams the headline, and the article notes that "the administration knew that more than 40 to 67 percent of those in the individual market would not be able to keep their plans, even if they liked them."

President Obama stuck by the ludicrous promise that those who liked their insurance could keep their insurance—"period," as the president liked to emphasize. This was never true, as conservatives pointed out time and again. The law was specifically designed to prevent this promise from being kept. But the media kept repeating it, so the president kept saying it. What's new in the NBC report is not that Obama knew he was peddling a false promise; of course the White House knew what it was up to. Rather, what's interesting is the degree to which the Obama administration concentrated on making sure that people couldn't keep their policies, even if it meant rewriting key parts of the law's regulations after the fact:

"None of this should come as a shock to the Obama administration. The law states that policies in effect as of March 23, 2010 will be "grandfathered," meaning consumers can keep those policies even though they don't meet requirements of the new health care law. But the Department of Health and Human Services then wrote regulations that narrowed that provision, by saying that if any part of a policy was significantly changed since that date — the deductible, co-pay, or benefits, for example — the policy would not be grandfathered."

ObamaCare continues to be the epitome of arbitrary government. Not only was the law unpopular when it was passed, but the administration then kicked the public while it was down by changing the law on the fly and ensuring that a key promise used to pass the law would be unfulfilled. Unilaterally extending deadlines, waiving requirements for interest groups, delaying aspects of the law: it turns out we didn't have to pass the law to find out what was in it, since it simply didn't matter what was in it. ...

Seth Mandel has more with an emphasis on Sebelius, the face of modern American fascism.

At one point early in her appearance before a House committee this morning, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius gave the country a moment of clarity in response to a question. "Hold me accountable for the debacle. I'm responsible." Yet almost every other thing she said in her testimony was aimed not only at evading her own responsibility for the disastrous rollout of ObamaCare but also to obfuscate the lies the administration has told about the program as well as the utter lack of accountability about the expenditure of vast sums on a website that is not only dysfunctional but insecure.

The most egregious of her comments was to claim in an exchange with Rep. Joseph Pitts that "the website has never crashed." Ironically, at the very moment that she was saying this, the website had crashed. That sort of denial is almost clinical in nature. But what was most telling about Sebelius's performance was not so much the ongoing denial that uncounted millions are losing the coverage they were told they could keep or her difficulty in answering any detailed questions about why the website had been so poorly designed or why her department had failed to supervise the project adequately or account for its lack of functionality or security. Instead, it was the arrogant, cavalier nature of her responses to questions about the debacle. ...

.. ObamaCare was a bill that was rammed through Congress on a partisan vote in which the normal legislative process was ignored and questions were swept under the rug. It was sold to the public with lies and it is now being implemented in a fashion that is hurting at least as many citizens as those it is supposed to help. But at no point in this process has the administration shown itself willing to listen to the people being inconvenienced or harmed or even, as Sebelius repeated today, to give an exemption or a delay in the personal mandate as a result of the website debacle.

In a perverse way this makes sense, since it is in keeping with the top-down spirit of this attempt to have the government begin the process of taking over American health care. In the view of the president and Sebelius, the lies and the failures are mere details that are insignificant when compared to their ambitions and what they believe are their good intentions.

There is no better example of the arrogance of unchecked power than this legislation and the manner in which its authors have foisted it upon the country. While a divided Congress is unlikely to hold Sebelius or the administration accountable for this, it will be up to the American people to remember this awful, arrogant performance and the huge credibility gap of this administration the next chance they have to hold Washington, if not Sebelius, accountable.

Late night humor from **Andrew Malcolm**.

Leno: A New York man was arrested for trying to join al Qaeda. He said it was so much easier than trying to enroll in ObamaCare. One click and he was in.

Fallon: The economy gained 148,000 jobs last month. Of course, they were all hired to fix Obama's ObamaCare website.

Conan: Looks like Joe Biden really is running for president in 2016. Trying to appear presidential this week, Biden launched a website that doesn't work.

Liberty and Law

The War On Us

by Angelo M. Codevilla

Increasingly, the US government's many police forces (often state and local ones as well) operate militarily and are trained to treat ordinary citizens as enemies. At the same time, the people from whom the government personnel take their cues routinely describe those who differ from them socially and politically as [illegitimate, criminal, even terrorists](#). Though these developments have separate roots, the post-9/11 state of no-win war against anonymous enemies has given them momentum. The longer it goes on, the more they converge and set in motion a spiral of civil strife all too well known in history, a spiral ever more difficult to stop short of civil war. Even now ordinary Americans are liable to being disadvantaged, hurt or even killed by their government as never before.

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In a casual conversation, a friendly employee of the US Forest Service bemoaned to me that he was on his way to a US Army base, where he and colleagues would practice military tactics against persons who resist regulations. A forester, he had hoped to be Smokey the Bear. Instead, he said, "we are now the Department of Provocation." In fact every US government agency, and most state and local ones now police their ever burgeoning regulations with military equipment, tactics, and above all with the assumption that they are dealing with people who should not be dealt with any other way.

Modern militarized government stems from the Progressive idea that society must mobilize as for war to achieve "the greater good." Hence we have "wars" on everything from hunger and drugs and ignorance and global warming. Reality follows rhetoric. Since the health of "the environment" is a matter of life and death, [the Environmental Protection Agency](#) must deal with "enemies of the planet" with armored cars, machine guns, and home invasions. Apparently, even the [Department of Education has SWAT teams](#).

The general population is increasingly inured to violence. The latest “Grand Theft” video game, for example, involves torturing a prisoner. Fun. That is only one step beyond the popular TV show “24” in which the audience cheered the hero’s torture of terrorist suspects. Contrast this with *Dragnet*, the most popular TV cops drama of the 1950s, whose Sergeant Joe Friday knocked on doors and said “yes ma’m, no ma’m.”

But governments, including ours, do not and cannot oppress citizens equally.

Persons who possess the greatest power have the larger opportunity to direct blame and distrust, even mayhem, onto those they like least. Since the mid- 1990s, authoritative voices from Democratic President Bill Clinton to Republican New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, echoed by the media have intoned a familiar litany: America is beset by racism, sexism, homophobia, and religious obscurantism, by domestic abuse, greed, and gun owners. These ills are not so different from those found in backward parts of the world where we fight “extremism” in order to fight terrorism. Indeed these ills argue for fighting extremism, indeed for nation-building in America as well as abroad. Who in America embodies extremism? Who is inherently responsible for social ills, including terrorism? Who will have to be re-constructed? No surprise: the ruling class’ political opponents: the conservative side of American life.

This has deep roots. In 1963, the ruling class imputed President John F. Kennedy’s assassination to the “climate of hatred” in conservative Dallas, Texas even though the assassin was a Communist. No less than Chief Justice Earl Warren indicted right wing “bigots.” Today, computer searches find that the term “extremist” correlates in the major newspapers with “conservative” or “right wing” at twelve times the rate it does with “liberal” or “left wing.”

The focus on “Homeland Security” has only added “terrorism” to our ruling class’ excuses for “going after” conservative Americans. And so, the Department of Homeland Security uses its intelligence “fusion centers” to [compile ominously worded dossiers](#) against such groups as “pro-lifers” and such “anti government activists” as “homeschoolers” and “gun owners.” The FBI infiltrates the Tea Parties as it once did the Communist Party. DHS conducts its “practice runs” against mockups of these groups. The IRS audits conservative groups.

Why not? President Barack Obama called these very groups “enemies of democracy,” and Vice President Joseph Biden has called them “terrorists.” Obama Administration spokesmen have referred to them as “jihadists,” “hostage takers,” persons “with bombs strapped to their chests, etc. Indeed a Rasmussen poll shows that 26% of the Obama Administration’s supporters – possibly not the least influential among them – regard the Tea Parties as the top terrorist threat to America.

No official act is needed for like-minded persons at the top of society to act in mutually pleasing ways. No law, no official policy, much less conspiracy is needed – only the prejudices and convenience, the intellectual, social, *identity* of those in power. Why should not officials all across the US government act according to their superiors’ opinions, to what they hear from the best people and what they read in the best media, indeed according to their shared beliefs?

Angelo M. Codevilla is professor emeritus of international relations at Boston University. His book Peace Among Ourselves and With All Nations is forthcoming from Hoover Institution Press.

Wired

How a Radical New Teaching Method Could Unleash a Generation of Geniuses

by Joshua Davis



These students in Matamoros, Mexico, didn't have reliable Internet access, steady electricity, or much hope—until a radical new teaching method unlocked their potential.

José Urbina López Primary School sits next to a dump just across the US border in Mexico. The school serves residents of Matamoros, a dusty, sunbaked city of 489,000 that is a flash point in the war on drugs. There are regular shoot-outs, and it's not uncommon for locals to find bodies scattered in the street in the morning. To get to the school, students walk along a white dirt road that parallels a fetid canal. On a recent morning there was a 1940s-era tractor, a decaying boat in a ditch, and a herd of goats nibbling gray strands of grass. A cinder-block barrier separates the school from a wasteland—the far end of which is a mound of trash that grew so big, it was finally closed down. On most days, a rotten smell drifts through the cement-walled classrooms. Some people here call the school *un lugar de castigo*—"a place of punishment."

For 12-year-old Paloma Noyola Bueno, it was a bright spot. More than 25 years ago, her family moved to the border from central Mexico in search of a better life. Instead, they got stuck living beside the dump. Her father spent all day scavenging for scrap, digging for pieces of aluminum, glass, and plastic in the muck. Recently, he had developed nosebleeds, but he didn't want Paloma to worry. She was his little angel—the youngest of eight children.

After school, Paloma would come home and sit with her father in the main room of their cement-and-wood home. Her father was a weather-beaten, gaunt man who always wore a cowboy hat. Paloma would recite the day's lessons for him in her crisp uniform—gray polo, blue-and-white skirt—and try to cheer him up. She had long black hair, a high forehead, and a thoughtful, measured way of talking. School had never been challenging for her. She sat in rows with the other students while teachers told the kids what they needed to know. It wasn't hard to repeat it back, and she got good grades without thinking too much. As she headed into fifth grade, she assumed she was in for more of the same—lectures, memorization, and busy work.

Sergio Juárez Correa was used to teaching that kind of class. For five years, he had stood in front of students and worked his way through the government-mandated curriculum. It was mind-numbingly boring for him and the students, and he'd come to the conclusion that it was a waste of time. Test scores were poor, and even the students who did well weren't truly engaged. Something had to change.

He too had grown up beside a garbage dump in Matamoros, and he had become a teacher to help kids learn enough to make something more of their lives. So in 2011—when Paloma entered his class—Juárez Correa decided to start experimenting. He began reading books and searching for ideas online. Soon he stumbled on a video describing the work of Sugata Mitra, a professor of educational technology at Newcastle University in the UK. In the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s, Mitra conducted experiments in which he gave children in India access to computers. Without any instruction, they were able to teach themselves a surprising variety of things, from DNA replication to English.



Elementary school teacher Sergio Juárez Correa, 31, upended his teaching methods, revealing extraordinary abilities in his 12-year-old student Paloma Noyola Bueno.

Juárez Correa didn't know it yet, but he had happened on an emerging educational philosophy, one that applies the logic of the digital age to the classroom. That logic is inexorable: Access to a world of infinite information has changed how we communicate, process information, and think. Decentralized systems have proven to be more productive and agile than rigid, top-down ones. Innovation, creativity, and independent thinking are increasingly crucial to the global economy.

And yet the dominant model of public education is still fundamentally rooted in the industrial revolution that spawned it, when workplaces valued punctuality, regularity, attention, and silence above all else. (In 1899, William T. Harris, the US commissioner of education, celebrated the fact that US schools had developed the “appearance of a machine,” one that teaches the student “to behave in an orderly manner, to stay in his own place, and not get in the way of others.”) We don't openly profess those values nowadays, but our educational system—which routinely tests kids on their ability to recall information and demonstrate mastery of a narrow set of skills—doubles down on the view that students are material to be processed, programmed, and quality-tested. School administrators prepare curriculum standards and “pacing guides” that tell teachers what to teach each day. Legions of managers supervise everything that happens in the classroom; in 2010 only 50 percent of public school staff members in the US were teachers.

The results speak for themselves: Hundreds of thousands of kids drop out of public high school every year. Of those who do graduate from high school, almost a third are “not prepared academically for first-year college courses,” according to a 2013 report from the testing service ACT. The World Economic Forum ranks the US just 49th out of 148 developed and developing nations in quality of math and science instruction. “The fundamental basis of the system is fatally flawed,” says Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor of education at Stanford and founding director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. “In 1970 the top three skills required by the Fortune 500 were the three Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic. In 1999 the top three skills in demand were teamwork, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. We need schools that are developing these skills.”

That's why a new breed of educators, inspired by everything from the Internet to evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, and AI, are inventing radical new ways for children to learn, grow, and thrive. To them, knowledge isn't a commodity that's delivered from teacher to student but something that emerges from the students' own curiosity-fueled exploration. Teachers provide prompts, not answers, and then they step aside so students can teach themselves and one another. They are creating ways for children to discover their passion—and uncovering a generation of geniuses in the process.

At home in Matamoros, Juárez Correa found himself utterly absorbed by these ideas. And the more he learned, the more excited he became. On August 21, 2011—the start of the school year — he walked into his classroom and pulled the battered wooden desks into small groups. When Paloma and the other students filed in, they looked confused. Juárez Correa invited them to take a seat and then sat down with them.

He started by telling them that there were kids in other parts of the world who could memorize pi to hundreds of decimal points. They could write symphonies and build robots and airplanes. Most people wouldn't think that the students at José Urbina López could do those kinds of things. Kids just across the border in Brownsville, Texas, had laptops, high-speed Internet, and tutoring, while in Matamoros the students had intermittent electricity, few computers, limited Internet, and sometimes not enough to eat.

“But you do have one thing that makes you the equal of any kid in the world,” Juárez Correa said. “Potential.”

He looked around the room. “And from now on,” he told them, “we’re going to use that potential to make you the best students in the world.”

Paloma was silent, waiting to be told what to do. She didn’t realize that over the next nine months, her experience of school would be rewritten, tapping into an array of educational innovations from around the world and vaulting her and some of her classmates to the top of the math and language rankings in Mexico.

“So,” Juárez Correa said, “what do you want to learn?”

In 1999, Sugata Mitra was chief scientist at a company in New Delhi that trains software developers. His office was on the edge of a slum, and on a hunch one day, he decided to put a computer into a nook in a wall separating his building from the slum. He was curious to see what the kids would do, particularly if he said nothing. He simply powered the computer on and watched from a distance. To his surprise, the children quickly figured out how to use the machine.

Over the years, Mitra got more ambitious. For a study published in 2010, he loaded a computer with molecular biology materials and set it up in Kalikuppam, a village in southern India. He selected a small group of 10- to 14-year-olds and told them there was some interesting stuff on the computer, and might they take a look? Then he applied his new pedagogical method: He said no more and left.

Over the next 75 days, the children worked out how to use the computer and began to learn. When Mitra returned, he administered a written test on molecular biology. The kids answered about one in four questions correctly. After another 75 days, with the encouragement of a friendly local, they were getting every other question right. “If you put a computer in front of children and remove all other adult restrictions, they will self-organize around it,” Mitra says, “like bees around a flower.”

A charismatic and convincing proselytizer, Mitra has become a darling in the tech world. In early 2013 he won a \$1 million grant from TED, the global ideas conference, to pursue his work. He’s now in the process of establishing seven “schools in the cloud,” five in India and two in the UK. In India, most of his schools are single-room buildings. There will be no teachers, curriculum, or separation into age groups—just six or so computers and a woman to look after the kids’ safety. His defining principle: “The children are completely in charge.”

“The bottom line is, if you’re not the one controlling your learning, you’re not going to learn as well.”

Mitra argues that the information revolution has enabled a style of learning that wasn’t possible before. The exterior of his schools will be mostly glass, so outsiders can peer in. Inside, students will gather in groups around computers and research topics that interest them. He has also recruited a group of retired British teachers who will appear occasionally on large wall screens via Skype, encouraging students to investigate their ideas—a process Mitra believes

best fosters learning. He calls them the Granny Cloud. “They’ll be life-size, on two walls” Mitra says. “And the children can always turn them off.”

Mitra’s work has roots in educational practices dating back to Socrates. Theorists from Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi to Jean Piaget and Maria Montessori have argued that students should learn by playing and following their curiosity. Einstein spent a year at a Pestalozzi-inspired school in the mid-1890s, and he later credited it with giving him the freedom to begin his first thought experiments on the theory of relativity. Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin similarly claim that their Montessori schooling imbued them with a spirit of independence and creativity.

In recent years, researchers have begun backing up those theories with evidence. In a 2011 study, scientists at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Iowa scanned the brain activity of 16 people sitting in front of a computer screen. The screen was blurred out except for a small, movable square through which subjects could glimpse objects laid out on a grid. Half the time, the subjects controlled the square window, allowing them to determine the pace at which they examined the objects; the rest of the time, they watched a replay of someone else moving the window. The study found that when the subjects controlled their own observations, they exhibited more coordination between the hippocampus and other parts of the brain involved in learning and posted a 23 percent improvement in their ability to remember objects. “The bottom line is, if you’re not the one who’s controlling your learning, you’re not going to learn as well,” says lead researcher Joel Voss, now a neuroscientist at Northwestern University.

In 2009, scientists from the University of Louisville and MIT’s Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences conducted a study of 48 children between the ages of 3 and 6. The kids were presented with a toy that could squeak, play notes, and reflect images, among other things. For one set of children, a researcher demonstrated a single attribute and then let them play with the toy. Another set of students was given no information about the toy. This group played longer and discovered an average of six attributes of the toy; the group that was told what to do discovered only about four. A similar study at UC Berkeley demonstrated that kids given no instruction were much more likely to come up with novel solutions to a problem. “The science is brand-new, but it’s not as if people didn’t have this intuition before,” says coauthor Alison Gopnik, a professor of psychology at UC Berkeley.

Gopnik’s research is informed in part by advances in artificial intelligence. If you program a robot’s every movement, she says, it can’t adapt to anything unexpected. But when scientists build machines that are programmed to try a variety of motions and learn from mistakes, the robots become far more adaptable and skilled. The same principle applies to children, she says.



Students at Brooklyn Free School direct their own learning. There are no grades or formal assignments.

Evolutionary psychologists have also begun exploring this way of thinking. Peter Gray, a research professor at Boston College who studies children's natural ways of learning, argues that human cognitive machinery is fundamentally incompatible with conventional schooling. Gray points out that young children, motivated by curiosity and playfulness, teach themselves a tremendous amount about the world. And yet when they reach school age, we supplant that innate drive to learn with an imposed curriculum. "We're teaching the child that his questions don't matter, that what matters are the questions of the curriculum. That's just not the way natural selection designed us to learn. It designed us to solve problems and figure things out that are part of our real lives."

Some school systems have begun to adapt to this new philosophy—with outsize results. In the 1990s, Finland pared the country's elementary math curriculum from about 25 pages to four, reduced the school day by an hour, and focused on independence and active learning. By 2003,

Finnish students had climbed from the lower rungs of international performance rankings to first place among developed nations.

Nicholas Negroponte, cofounder of the MIT Media Lab, is taking this approach even further with his One Laptop per Child initiative. Last year the organization delivered 40 tablets to children in two remote villages in Ethiopia. Negroponte's team didn't explain how the devices work or even open the boxes. Nonetheless, the children soon learned to play back the alphabet song and taught themselves to write letters. They also figured out how to use the tablet's camera. This was impressive because the organization had disabled camera usage. "They hacked Android," Negroponte says.

One day Juárez Correa went to his whiteboard and wrote " $1 = 1.00$." Normally, at this point, he would start explaining the concept of fractions and decimals. Instead he just wrote " $\frac{1}{2} = ?$ " and " $\frac{1}{4} = ?$ "

"Think about that for a second," he said, and walked out of the room.

While the kids murmured, Juárez Correa went to the school cafeteria, where children could buy breakfast and lunch for small change. He borrowed about 10 pesos in coins, worth about 75 cents, and walked back to his classroom, where he distributed a peso's worth of coins to each table. He noticed that Paloma had already written .50 and .25 on a piece of paper.

"One peso is one peso," he said. "What's one-half?"

Juárez Correa felt a chill. He had never encountered a student with Paloma's level of innate ability.

At first a number of kids divided the coins into clearly unequal piles. It sparked a debate among the students about what one-half meant. Juárez Correa's training told him to intervene. But now he remembered Mitra's research and resisted the urge. Instead, he watched as Alma Delia Juárez Flores explained to her tablemates that half means equal portions. She counted out 50 centavos. "So the answer is .50," she said. The other kids nodded. It made sense.

For Juárez Correa it was simultaneously thrilling and a bit scary. In Finland, teachers underwent years of training to learn how to orchestrate this new style of learning; he was winging it. He began experimenting with different ways of posing open-ended questions on subjects ranging from the volume of cubes to multiplying fractions. "The volume of a square-based prism is the area of the base times the height. The volume of a square-based pyramid is that formula divided by three," he said one morning. "Why do you think that is?"

He walked around the room, saying little. It was fascinating to watch the kids approach the answer. They were working in teams and had models of various shapes to look at and play with. The team led by Usiel Lemus Aquino, a short boy with an ever-present hopeful expression, hit on the idea of drawing the different shapes—prisms and pyramids. By layering the drawings on top of each other, they began to divine the answer. Juárez Correa let the kids talk freely. It was a noisy, slightly chaotic environment—exactly the opposite of the sort of factory-friendly discipline that teachers were expected to impose. But within 20 minutes, they had come up with the answer.

“Three pyramids fit in one prism,” Usiel observed, speaking for the group. “So the volume of a pyramid must be the volume of a prism divided by three.”

Juárez Correa was impressed. But he was even more intrigued by Paloma. During these experiments, he noticed that she almost always came up with the answer immediately. Sometimes she explained things to her tablemates, other times she kept the answer to herself. Nobody had told him that she had an unusual gift. Yet even when he gave the class difficult questions, she quickly jotted down the answers. To test her limits, he challenged the class with a problem he was sure would stump her. He told the story of Carl Friedrich Gauss, the famous German mathematician, who was born in 1777.

When Gauss was a schoolboy, one of his teachers asked the class to add up every number between 1 and 100. It was supposed to take an hour, but Gauss had the answer almost instantly.

“Does anyone know how he did this?” Juárez Correa asked.

A few students started trying to add up the numbers and soon realized it would take a long time. Paloma, working with her group, carefully wrote out a few sequences and looked at them for a moment. Then she raised her hand.

“The answer is 5,050,” she said. “There are 50 pairs of 101.”

Juárez Correa felt a chill. He’d never encountered a student with so much innate ability. He squatted next to her and asked why she hadn’t expressed much interest in math in the past, since she was clearly good at it.

“Because no one made it this interesting,” she said.

Our educational system is rooted in the industrial age. It values punctuality, attendance, and silence above all else.

Paloma’s father got sicker. He continued working, but he was running a fever and suffering headaches. Finally he was admitted to the hospital, where his condition deteriorated; on February 27, 2012, he died of lung cancer. On Paloma’s last visit before he passed away, she sat beside him and held his hand. “You are a smart girl,” he said. “Study and make me proud.”

Paloma missed four days of school for the funeral before returning to class. Her friends could tell she was distraught, but she buried her grief. She wanted to live up to her father’s last wish. And Juárez Correa’s new style of curating challenges for the kids was the perfect refuge for her. As he continued to relinquish control, Paloma took on more responsibility for her own education. He taught the kids about democracy by letting them elect leaders who would decide how to run the class and address discipline. The children elected five representatives, including Paloma and Usiel. When two boys got into a shoving match, the representatives admonished the boys, and the problem didn’t happen again.

Juárez Correa spent his nights watching education videos. He read polemics by the Mexican cartoonist Eduardo del Río (known as Rius), who argued that kids should be free to explore whatever they want. He was also still impressed by Mitra, who talks about letting children

“wander aimlessly around ideas.” Juárez Correa began hosting regular debates in class, and he didn’t shy away from controversial topics. He asked the kids if they thought homosexuality and abortion should be permitted. He asked them to figure out what the Mexican government should do, if anything, about immigration to the US. Once he asked a question, he would stand back and let them engage one another.

A key component in Mitra’s theory was that children could learn by having access to the web, but that wasn’t easy for Juárez Correa’s students. The state paid for a technology instructor who visited each class once a week, but he didn’t have much technology to demonstrate. Instead, he had a batch of posters depicting keyboards, joysticks, and 3.5-inch floppy disks. He would hold the posters up and say things like, “This is a keyboard. You use it to type.”

As a result, Juárez Correa became a slow-motion conduit to the Internet. When the kids wanted to know why we see only one side of the moon, for example, he went home, Googled it, and brought back an explanation the next day. When they asked specific questions about eclipses and the equinox, he told them he’d figure it out and report back.



Sugata Mitra’s research on student-led learning inspired Juárez Correa.

Juárez Correa also brought something else back from the Internet. It was the fable of a forlorn burro trapped at the bottom of a well. Since thieves had broken into the school and sliced the electrical cord off of the classroom projector (presumably to sell the copper inside), he couldn’t actually show them the clip that recounted the tale. Instead, he simply described it.

One day, a burro fell into a well, Juárez Correa began. It wasn’t hurt, but it couldn’t get out. The burro’s owner decided that the aged beast wasn’t worth saving, and since the well was dry, he would just bury both. He began to shovel clods of earth into the well. The burro cried out, but the man kept shoveling. Eventually, the burro fell silent. The man assumed the animal was dead, so he was amazed when, after a lot of shoveling, the burro leaped out of the well. It had shaken off each clump of dirt and stepped up the steadily rising mound until it was able to jump out.

Juárez Correa looked at his class. “We are like that burro,” he said. “Everything that is thrown at us is an opportunity to rise out of the well we are in.”

When the two-day national standardized exam took place in June 2012, Juárez Correa viewed it as just another pile of dirt thrown on the kids' heads. It was a step back to the way school used to be for them: mechanical and boring. To prevent cheating, a coordinator from the Ministry of Education oversaw the proceedings and took custody of the answer sheets at the end of testing. It felt like a military exercise, but as the kids blasted through the questions, they couldn't help noticing that it felt easy, as if they were being asked to do something very basic.

Ricardo Zavala Hernandez, assistant principal at José Urbina López, drinks a cup of coffee most mornings as he browses the web in the admin building, a cement structure that houses the school's two functioning computers. One day in September 2012, he clicked on the site for ENLACE, Mexico's national achievement exam, and discovered that the results of the June test had been posted.

Zavala Hernandez put down his coffee. Most of the classes had done marginally better this year—but Paloma's grade was another story. The previous year, 45 percent had essentially failed the math section, and 31 percent had failed Spanish. This time only 7 percent failed math and 3.5 percent failed Spanish. And while none had posted an Excellent score before, 63 percent were now in that category in math.

The language scores were very high. Even the lowest was well above the national average. Then he noticed the math scores. The top score in Juárez Correa's class was 921. Zavala Hernandez looked over at the top score in the state: It was 921. When he saw the next box over, the hairs on his arms stood up. The top score in the entire country was also 921.

He printed the page and speed-walked to Juárez Correa's classroom. The students stood up when he entered.

"Take a look at this," Zavala Hernandez said, handing him the printout.

Juárez Correa scanned the results and looked up. "Is this for real?" he asked.

"I just printed it off the ENLACE site," the assistant principal responded. "It's real."

Juárez Correa noticed the kids staring at him, but he wanted to make sure he understood the report. He took a moment to read it again, nodded, and turned to the kids.

"We have the results back from the ENLACE exam," he said. "It's just a test, and not a great one."

A number of students had a sinking feeling. They must have blown it.

"But we have a student in this classroom who placed first in Mexico," he said, breaking into a smile.

Paloma received the highest math score in the country, but the other students weren't far behind. Ten got math scores that placed them in the 99.99th percentile. Three of them placed at the same high level in Spanish. The results attracted a quick burst of official and media attention in Mexico, most of which focused on Paloma. She was flown to Mexico City to appear on a popular TV show and received a variety of gifts, from a laptop to a bicycle.

Juárez Correa himself got almost no recognition, despite the fact that nearly half of his class had performed at a world-class level and that even the lowest performers had markedly improved.

His other students were congratulated by friends and family. The parents of Carlos Rodríguez Lamas, who placed in the 99.99th percentile in math, treated him to three steak tacos. It was his first time in a restaurant. Keila Francisco Rodríguez got 10 pesos from her parents. She bought a bag of Cheetos. The kids were excited. They talked about being doctors, teachers, and politicians.

Juárez Correa had mixed feelings about the test. His students had succeeded because he had employed a new teaching method, one better suited to the way children learn. It was a model that emphasized group work, competition, creativity, and a student-led environment. So it was ironic that the kids had distinguished themselves because of a conventional multiple-choice test. “These exams are like limits for the teachers,” he says. “They test what you know, not what you can do, and I am more interested in what my students can do.”

Like Juárez Correa, many education innovators are succeeding outside the mainstream. For example, the 11 Internationals Network high schools in New York City report a higher graduation rate than the city’s average for the same populations. They do it by emphasizing student-led learning and collaboration. At the coalition of Big Picture Learning schools—56 schools across the US and another 64 around the world—teachers serve as advisers, suggesting topics of interest; students also work with mentors from business and the community, who help guide them into internships. As the US on-time high school graduation rate stalls at about 75 percent, Big Picture is graduating more than 90 percent of its students.

But these examples—involving only thousands of students—are the exceptions to the rule. The system as a whole educates millions and is slow to recognize or adopt successful innovation. It’s a system that was constructed almost two centuries ago to meet the needs of the industrial age. Now that our society and economy have evolved beyond that era, our schools must also be reinvented.

For the time being, we can see what the future looks like in places like Juárez Correa’s classroom. We can also see that change will not come easily. Though Juárez Correa’s class posted impressive results, they inspired little change. Francisco Sánchez Salazar, chief of the Regional Center of Educational Development in Matamoros, was even dismissive. “The teaching method makes little difference,” he says. Nor does he believe that the students’ success warrants any additional help. “Intelligence comes from necessity,” he says. “They succeed without having resources.”

More than ever, Juárez Correa felt like the burro in the story. But then he remembered Paloma. She had lost her father and was growing up on the edge of a garbage dump. Under normal circumstances, her prospects would be limited. But like the burro, she was shaking off the clods of dirt; she had begun climbing the rising mound out of the well.

Want to help teachers like Sergio Juárez Correa make a difference? Here’s how you can [get involved in the student-centered movement](#).

Contentions

ObamaCare and Arbitrary Power

by Seth Mandel

Following on the heels of CBS's Benghazi report, NBC News is joining in the "now it can be told" parade. With the president safely reelected and ObamaCare surviving its key challenges at the Supreme Court, it is now apparently safe to start reporting on the fact that the health-care reform law was constructed on a very transparent falsehood. "Obama administration knew millions could not keep their health insurance" screams the headline, and the article [notes](#) that "the administration knew that more than 40 to 67 percent of those in the individual market would not be able to keep their plans, even if they liked them."

President Obama stuck by the ludicrous promise that those who liked their insurance could keep their insurance—"period," as the president [liked to emphasize](#). This was never true, as conservatives pointed out time and again. The law was specifically designed to prevent this promise from being kept. But the media kept repeating it, so the president kept saying it. What's new in the NBC report is not that Obama knew he was peddling a false promise; *of course* the White House knew what it was up to. Rather, what's interesting is the degree to which the Obama administration concentrated on making sure that people couldn't keep their policies, even if it meant rewriting key parts of the law's regulations after the fact:

None of this should come as a shock to the Obama administration. The law states that policies in effect as of March 23, 2010 will be "grandfathered," meaning consumers can keep those policies even though they don't meet requirements of the new health care law. But the Department of Health and Human Services then wrote regulations that narrowed that provision, by saying that if any part of a policy was significantly changed since that date — the deductible, co-pay, or benefits, for example — the policy would not be grandfathered.

ObamaCare continues to be the epitome of arbitrary government. Not only was the law unpopular when it was passed, but the administration then kicked the public while it was down by changing the law on the fly and ensuring that a key promise used to pass the law would be unfulfilled. Unilaterally extending deadlines, waiving requirements for interest groups, delaying aspects of the law: it turns out we didn't have to pass the law to find out what was in it, since it simply didn't matter what was in it.

Speaking of arbitrary power, key administration advisor Valerie Jarrett took to Twitter last night to [attempt to spin](#) the story. Even by the standards of this administration, Jarrett's effort was both inept and bitterly defensive:



Valerie Jarrett ✓
@vj44



FACT: Nothing in #Obamacare forces people out of their health plans. No change is required unless insurance companies change existing plans.

↩ Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite ⋮ More

As Mary Katherine Ham [noted](#), this “delusion” amounts to: “no change is required by you under Obamacare unless your insurance company goes and changes your existing plan to *comply with Obamacare*.” Jarrett’s combination of contempt for private industry and self-indulgent blame shifting is characteristic of the Obama administration.

Blaming the insurance industry was perhaps inevitable. But other attempts to spin the news don’t do much better since there’s no refuting the core of this latest PR disaster. Here, for example, is *Time* magazine’s [headline](#): “The Bright Side of Obamacare’s Broken Promise.” There’s no question it’s a broken promise; but the president’s defenders hope they can mitigate that damage by explaining that the government deceived you for the greater good. Welcome to the team.

Here is how *Time*’s report opens: “President Obama has broken his promise that Americans who like their health insurance plans can keep them under the Affordable Care Act. Citing the new law, insurers have recently [mailed](#) policy cancellation notices to hundreds of thousands of people across the country, providing more ammunition to critics who say the law is bad for consumers.” It’s true: the continuing confirmation that the law is bad for consumers will provide ammunition to those who point out that the law is bad for consumers.

Then *Time* warns: “And that number may grow.” It seems it already has. CBS [reports](#) that “more than two million Americans have been told they cannot renew their current insurance policies — more than triple the number of people said to be buying insurance under the new Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare.”

Given all this, Obama’s motivation for peddling the false promise becomes clear. The public already disliked the law, and he was barely able, through procedural tricks and horse trading, to muster the votes to pass it. Imagine how much more difficult his task would have been had the sales pitch for ObamaCare not been “If you like your plan, you can keep your plan,” but rather “If you like your plan, you’re selfish and don’t know what’s good for you, and you need to be coerced into doing your part to help the president establish a new entitlement scheme.”

Contentions

[Sebelius and the Arrogance of Power](#)

Jonathan S. Tobin

At one point early in her appearance before a House committee this morning, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius gave the country a moment of clarity in response to a question. “Hold me accountable for the debacle. I’m responsible.” Yet almost every other thing she said in her testimony was aimed not only at evading her own responsibility for the disastrous rollout of ObamaCare but also to obfuscate the lies the administration has told about the program as well as the utter lack of accountability about the expenditure of vast sums on a website that is not only dysfunctional but insecure.

The most egregious of her comments was to claim in an exchange with Rep. Joseph Pitts that “the website has never crashed.” Ironically, at the very moment that she was saying this, the website had crashed. That sort of denial is almost clinical in nature. But what was most telling

about Sebelius's performance was not so much the ongoing denial that uncounted millions are losing the coverage they were told they could keep or her difficulty in answering any detailed questions about why the website had been so poorly designed or why her department had failed to supervise the project adequately or account for its lack of functionality or security. Instead, it was the arrogant, cavalier nature of her responses to questions about the debacle.

Sebelius came to the committee with plenty of notice after delaying her appearance by a week, but arrived armed with no firm answers on how the website problems had occurred, why the preparations for it were inadequate, and how her team had failed to note the questions that had been raised about its ability to function. Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent, but no one in Sebelius's department appears to have been capable of briefing her on this or even to supply simple answers to questions about the decision-making process that allowed the debacle to proceed. She tried to portray herself as a remote spectator to the process that led to the debacle even as she sought to pretend that she was the one to blame.

Sebelius contradicted herself almost continually. At one point she blamed crashes on Verizon and other times, as she told Pitts, she claimed there were no crashes. She claimed 700,000 persons had been enrolled, but when pressed for details about the numbers, she said that the website problems meant there was no reliable data to report. She said at one point that the problems would be fixed by November 30 but then qualified that to say that what we could expect was merely a gradual improvement with no end date at which all problems would be resolved.

Yet the consistent theme of her testimony was that a program the entire country knows is malfunctioning was working just fine. The cost increases and plan cancellations that so many Americans were facing in the coming months were mere technicalities. She denied that she and the president had lied about people keeping their coverage but then said that those who had lost their plans should just "go shopping."

Sebelius could barely contain her contempt for the questions Republicans asked her about these points (since almost all the Democrats on the committee used their time to merely criticize the GOP for talking about the problems). Her eye rolling and barely concealed impatience with demands for accountability never stopped. While this was a stylistic failure, it betrayed more about ObamaCare and the spirit with which it is being imposed on the country than she may have thought.

ObamaCare was a bill that was rammed through Congress on a partisan vote in which the normal legislative process was ignored and questions were swept under the rug. It was sold to the public with lies and it is now being implemented in a fashion that is hurting at least as many citizens as those it is supposed to help. But at no point in this process has the administration shown itself willing to listen to the people being inconvenienced or harmed or even, as Sebelius repeated today, to give an exemption or a delay in the personal mandate as a result of the website debacle.

In a perverse way this makes sense, since it is in keeping with the top-down spirit of this attempt to have the government begin the process of taking over American health care. In the view of the president and Sebelius, the lies and the failures are mere details that are insignificant when compared to their ambitions and what they believe are their good intentions.

There is no better example of the arrogance of unchecked power than this legislation and the manner in which its authors have foisted it upon the country. While a divided Congress is unlikely to hold Sebelius or the administration accountable for this, it will be up to the American people to remember this awful, arrogant performance and the huge credibility gap of this administration the next chance they have to hold Washington, if not Sebelius, accountable.

IBD

Late Night Humor

by Andrew Malcolm

Conan: Obama says Americans who are having trouble signing up on the broken ObamaCare website should call 1-800-We-Didn't-Think-This-Through.

Conan: A California woman gave birth over the weekend in a Barnes & Noble store. In the "New Releases" section.

Conan: The other day many people were unable to update their Facebook status for a few hours. For those few hours we were actually competitive with China.

Leno: California's Christina Cortez says she was shocked to hear her hubby had been arrested for running a meth lab. Doesn't every house have 6,000 packets of Sudafed? Flu season is near, you know.

Leno: Yes, Christina Cortez said she had no idea of her husband's meth business. But, looking back, she said there were clues, like the time their house exploded.

Fallon: The economy gained 148,000 jobs last month. Of course, they were all hired to fix Obama's ObamaCare website.

Fallon: Columbia researchers may have a new way to re-grow hair on bald men. As opposed to that other cure for baldness: a nice car.

Fallon: A new study says that first-born children are better students than their younger siblings. They'd have studied middle children too, but, eh, who cares?

Fallon: New York police are seeking two thieves who stole more than \$60,000 from a Whole Foods store. Whole Foods got it all back though, when the next customer paid for an apple.

Leno: Scary stuff. Two masked men robbed a Manhattan Whole Foods store of more than \$60,000. The men are considered armed and organic.

Leno: There's still too much confusion over the ObamaCare website. For instance, it asks for your age. But it's unclear if it means your age now or your age when you actually get into the site.

Leno: Obama says if you're having trouble on the ObamaCare website, you can mail in your application. Only the federal government could develop a website slower than the Postal Service.

Leno: A New York man was arrested for trying to join al Qaeda. He said it was so much easier than trying to enroll in ObamaCare. One click and he was in.

Conan: Simon Cowell and his pregnant girlfriend are expecting a boy. Cowell was seen out shopping for tiny boy's T-shirts, and also some clothes for his son.

Conan: Critics say the president looks like a TV pitchman selling ObamaCare. Obama denies it. He says: "Don't take my word for it, just ask some of these satisfied customers."

Fallon: China now requires 30% of all TV shows be educational. In the U.S. 30% of all shows must be hosted by Ryan Seacrest.

Fallon: Only 12% of Americans think the ObamaCare rollout went well. While 100% of Republicans think the ObamaCare rollout went GREAT!

Fallon: The White House fires a staffer for leaking administration information on Twitter. President Obama called it "unacceptable." Americans called it "karma."

Conan: It's being reported that there are now more subscribers to Netflix than HBO. Which is why today HBO changed its slogan to, "OK. Fine—We'll Show More Boobs."

Conan: Someone in the White House sent out hundreds of anti-Obama tweets. The account was immediately shut down and Malia has been grounded.

Conan: In England, while the driver slept, thieves stole 6,000 cans of baked beans from his truck. When asked about the thieves, police said, "We should be hearing from them shortly."

Conan: Looks like Joe Biden really is running for president in 2016. Trying to appear presidential this week, Biden launched a website that doesn't work.

Conan: In order to control prostitution, Switzerland has opened "sex drive-thrus." Officials say the most popular item ordered so far at sex drive-thrus is the "Briefly Happy Meal."

Fallon: Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was in the Oval Office to meet with Obama and Joe Biden the other day. Obama said, "It's an honor to have you here." While Biden said, "Hello, I'm not supposed to talk."

Leno: Some improvement to the ObamaCare website. To address the problem of millions unable to log-on, they've added the phone number of a suicide hotline.

Leno: Much speculation already about what Obama will do after 2016. One pastime I think we can safely rule out is website designer.

Fallon: Obama wants the ObamaCare website fixed by Thanksgiving. The IT guy replied, "Yeh, well, I want a girlfriend and that ain't happening either."

Fallon: Buffalo researchers are developing a Wi-Fi network that works underwater. While Time Warner is developing a Wi-Fi network that works.

Fallon: A new government report finds 700 IRS employees owe \$5.4 million in back taxes. IRS workers said, "Gee, I hope I don't find out about this."

Fallon: The Xerox machine is 75 years old this month. You can tell because drawer No. 1 always needs to be emptied, while drawer No. 2 is always jammed.

Fallon: Researchers in Japan recently created a robot that can walk exactly like a human. You can tell it walks like a human because it starts texting the second someone else is behind it.

Fallon: Another NSA scandal, The agency is accused of spying on 35 world leaders. Yeah, it was 34 prime ministers and Oprah.

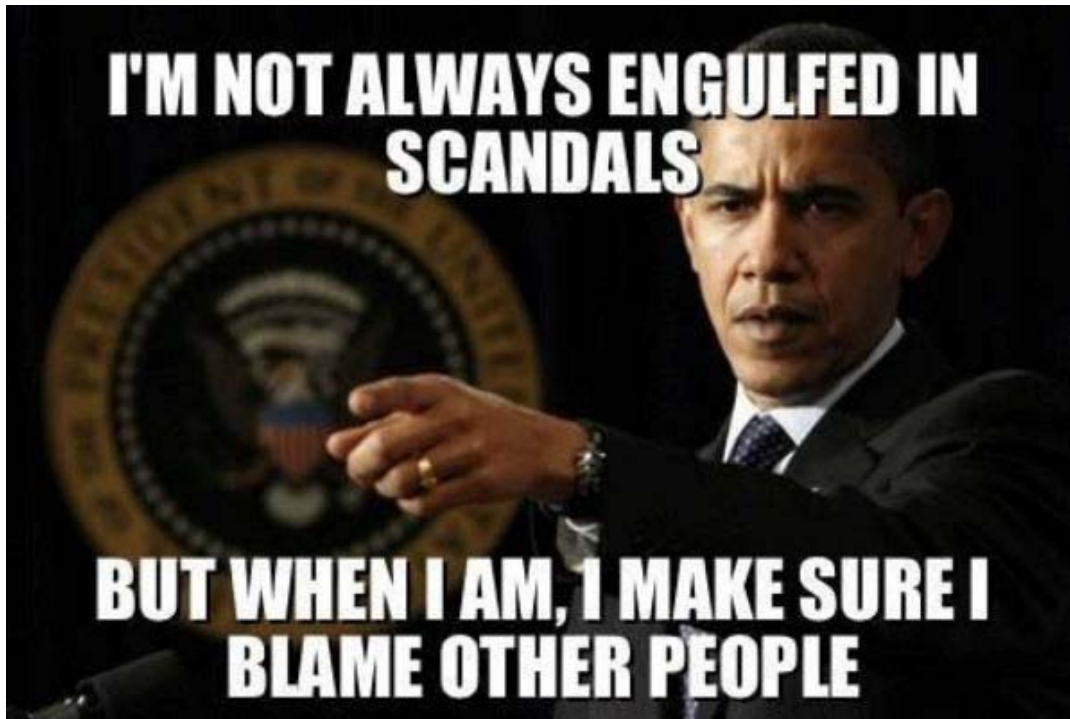
Leno: Amazing NASA technology. It's now sending broadband between Earth and the Moon at 622MB a second. In a related story, the ObamaCare website is still down.

Leno: President Obama now promises the ObamaCare website will be fixed by December. So if you're doctor's given you three weeks to live, you're screwed.

Leno: Kind of insensitive. ABC announced a new sitcom about a man with Alzheimer's disease. It's called "I Forget How I Met Your Mother."

Internet: Aides today told President Obama that two Brazilians had been killed in Afghanistan. Obama, who's presided over the worst economic recovery in a half-century, was visibly shaken. "How many is a brazillion?" he asked.





Stay crooked, my friend.





His BIGGEST Lie

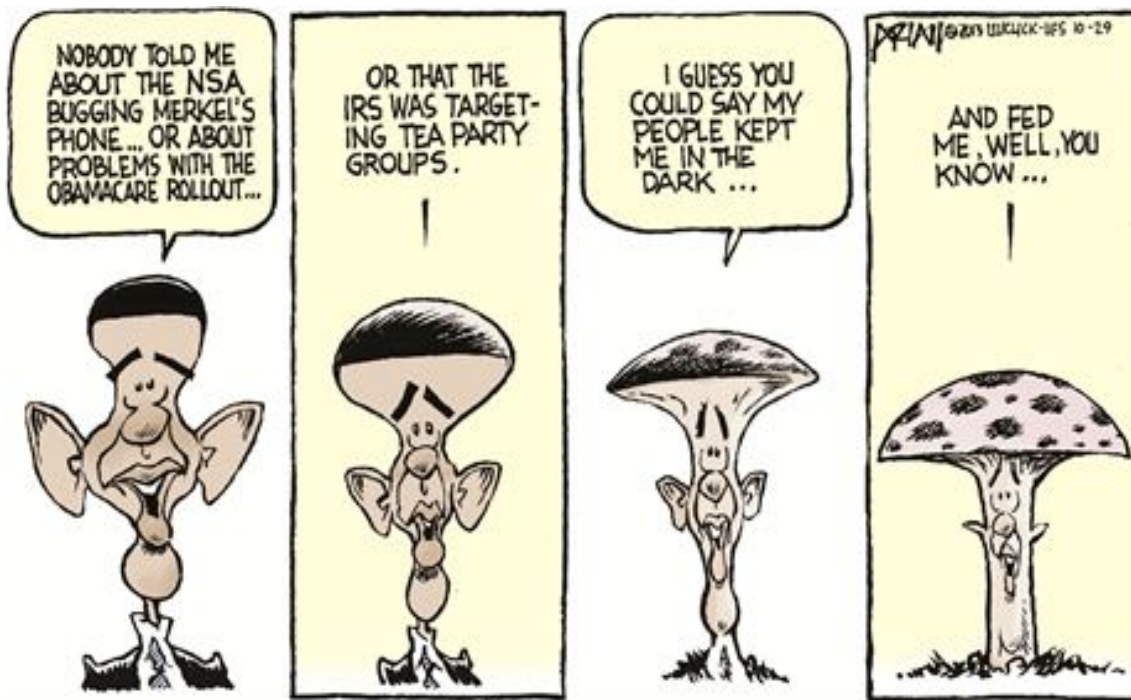




NO ONE REALLY KNOWS WHAT'S IN IT

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YEARS LATER HE WOULD BELIEVE, WITH ALL HIS HEART, THE PROMISE THAT HE COULD KEEP HIS HEALTH CARE PLAN IF HE LIKED HIS HEALTH CARE PLAN.