

December 16, 2013

Jennifer Rubin, who has become a bete noire for some on the far right, celebrates the budget deal.

The margin was simply stunning — 332 to 94 — for House passage of a two-year budget that restores some monies for defense, includes minor pension reform, eschews tax increases and maintains the basic structure of the sequester. The far-right groups (Heritage Action, Club for Growth) and their minions squawked, but they were ignored and even insulted by the speaker, who questioned how the folks that brought us the shutdown could question a bipartisan budget deal that takes away the threat of tax hikes and a shutdown for the remainder of the Obama presidency. The era of bullying by the hardliners — if not over — is at least waning.

The victory is a substantial one for the House leadership, for mainstream Republican groups like the Chamber of Commerce (which has roused itself to take on the far right) and most especially House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), who struck the deal and persuaded the 168 other Republicans to join him in passing the bill (Dems provided nearly as many votes).

In essence, Ryan saved the GOP from itself, allowing it to forgo endless squabbles and shutdown threats in order to concentrate on the best issues for them, primarily Obamacare. In staring down the far-right groups, the speaker and others in House leadership gain some running room to use on immigration and other issues. With a win this big — one that the country desperately wanted to end the budget histrionics — why quiver at the prospect of Heritage Action e-mails or threats by Club for Growth to primary incumbents? (Let them try to primary 169 Republicans.) ...

Roger Simon has the same take.

Excuse me, but I'm a little confused. Just why are "movement" conservatives and libertarians so angry with Paul Ryan about the budget deal he made with Patty Murray?

Now, of course, I understand why some politicians are angry, or pretending to be. They're Ryan's competition for POTUS in 2016, assuming the Wisconsin congressman wants to run. They're positioning themselves for a campaign. But the rest of us?

Let's stipulate this: No conservative or libertarian is going to get what he or she wants on government spending — or even anything remotely close to it — without winning the Senate in 2014 and the presidency two years later. Barring mass lobotomies, it ain't gonna happen — not with Barack Obama and Harry Reid standing in the way. You have to get rid of these people first.

The good news is, as of this moment — thanks to the Obamacare fiasco that will likely continue for some time, even get worse, and, to a lesser extent, the Iran deal that, in all probability, is headed for disaster — things are running in the right's direction. What Ryan quite obviously was trying to do is keep it that way — tread some water until we have at least the first of those elections (2014). He was following Hippocrates' prescription to do no harm. ...

Turns out the same blasé attitudes that gave us the healthcare.gov disaster were in charge of security at Mandela's memorial. Byron York has the story. This is an administration filled with mediocrities like Ben Rhodes, who must be well liked by Valerie Jarrett, because there cannot be anything else to recommend him. ("Bete noire", "blasé"; Pickerhead has become continental.)

It's becoming increasingly clear that when President Obama arrived at the Nelson Mandela memorial service in Johannesburg, South Africa Tuesday, he stepped into an atmosphere so chaotic, disorganized, and unsafe that under any other circumstances the White House and Secret Service might well have insisted the president not appear.

FNB Stadium, where the memorial was held, seats 95,000 people. Even with a steady rain and thousands of empty seats in uncovered areas, there were tens of thousands of people in the area with the president. It appears most of them got in without going through any security.

"There were no security checks upon entry to the stadium," a local South African activist wrote Friday in a letter to the Johannesburg Star newspaper. "I walked freely to my seat without passing through metal detectors, being searched or any other check."

The stadium's main entrance was "completely unattended," a reporter for a Washington, D.C., television station told Politico. "There were no workers performing bag checks or pat-downs — there were no magnetometers to walk through, no metal detector wands being used — anywhere." ...

... Even as Obama flew to South Africa, White House officials confidently told reporters that the South African government could take care of things. "The sheer number of leaders appearing in the same place at one time raises numerous logistical and security challenges, but the White House expressed confidence in the South African government's ability to handle the event," CNN reported. "'We have not heard any concerns,' Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes told reporters aboard Air Force One. 'The South Africans hosted the World Cup, so they have experience hosting significant crowds and managing events like this.'"

Now it is clear that American confidence was misplaced. And the United States is lucky the president emerged safely from the confusion and disorder of FNB Stadium.

Ed Carson at IBD drills into the unemployment numbers.

The official unemployment rate has fallen to a five-year low of 7%. But put away the champagne.

That gradual decline reflects a historic drop in labor force participation. Without that drop, joblessness would be 11.3%, holding at 11% or higher in every month but one in the last 50 months.

To be considered unemployed, a person has to be out of work but actively looking. So when people give up the job hunt, they reduce unemployment — even if the number of people working hasn't risen.

At the start of the recession in December 2007, the labor force participation rate was 66%. It fell sharply, tumbling to 62.8% in October, a 35-year low. It rose slightly to 63% last month.

The actual labor force has declined by 217,000 so far this year, even with nonfarm payrolls up by 2.1 million.

During recessions and the early stages of a recovery, discouraged people leave the workforce. So the unemployment rate at these times typically masks how bad the job market really is.

But the size and scope of the distortion is far higher now than in past economic recoveries. The gap between the official and "true" unemployment rate is 4.3 percentage points — more than four years after the recession ended.

After the brief 1990-1991 slump, the unemployment gap never was wider than 2 percentage points. ...

Nolan Finley says Robin Hood policies hurt the poor. If you understand that the government always screws up, you then expect that policies to help the poor will make them poorer.

President Barack Obama has some bad news for poor and working class Americans: He's going to spend the final three years of his presidency attacking the income gap.

"The combined trends of increased inequality and decreasing mobility pose a fundamental threat to the American dream, our way of life, and what we stand for around the globe," the president said in a recent speech.

No coincidence the pledge to stamp out inequality comes at the same time Obama's popularity and performance ratings are plunging due to the Obamacare fiasco. He always pivots to populism when he gets in trouble.

But this is no grand shift. Obama has been playing Robin Hood since Day One. All his major initiatives have been built on soaking the rich.

And what's happened? Those on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder have less disposable income than they did when he took office, and the fat cats are fatter than ever. ...

Megan McArdle says the pill was important, but there would be no sexual revolution with antibiotics.

Last night, I had a drink with Peter Huber, who has a terrific new book out on how the legal system is holding back medical innovation. We chatted about a lot of things, but one thing we discussed was how antibiotics have been the unseen driver of so many developments in the modern world.

Most of them are medical, like transplant surgery, and I've written about those before. But here's one you might not have thought of: the sexual revolution. Most of us, if we think about it at all, probably attribute the rise in premarital sex to The Pill, among other factors. But before the birth control pill, there was another invention that was just as necessary: antibiotics. ...

Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink? Turns out there's gobs of fresh water in aquifers under the world's oceans. [Walter Russell Mead](#) with the story. *We may soon be looking to our oceans for our freshwater—or more accurately, we'll be looking underneath our oceans. A new [study](#), the first to comprehensively survey the world's known reserves of undersea freshwater, estimates that there are roughly 120,000 cubic miles—more than 100 times the amount of freshwater we've drilled from the ground since 1900—of fresh and nearly-fresh water trapped underneath seabeds. The upshot: we could be seeing more offshore drilling for water as well as oil in the future. [ScienceDaily reports](#):*

"... The water, which could perhaps be used to eke out supplies to the world's burgeoning coastal cities, has been located off Australia, China, North America and South Africa. [...]

These reserves were formed over the past hundreds of thousands of years when on average the sea level was much lower than it is today, and when the coastline was further out, [lead author Dr Vincent Post] explains..."So when it rained, the water would infiltrate into the ground and fill up the water table in areas that are nowadays under the sea. ' ...

Right Turn

[A big win for Ryan, the GOP and the country](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

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Action e-mails or threats by Club for Growth to primary incumbents? (Let them try to primary 169 Republicans.)

In his floor speech, Majority Leader Eric Cantor reminded his colleagues: “I think we can all agree that arbitrary, indiscriminate, across-the-board spending cuts are not the smartest way to cut spending. Last year, House Republicans passed two bills that would have replaced the sequester’s indiscriminate, across-the-board cuts. This bill is a reflection of our priority to replace the sequester with permanent savings that will responsibly reduce our deficit.” That was an unmistakable jab at the GOP hardliners who flip-flopped on defense spending and the Senate Republicans who get a free “no” vote despite their past objections to across-the-board cuts.

As for 2016, the far right predicted the end of Ryan’s presidential ambitions. [ABC News](#) quoted him as saying, “If I’m not good at this job, why should I ask somebody for another job?” That, make no mistake, is a slap at the grandstanders in the Senate who aspire to the presidency yet have no accomplishments to their name. Those senators can all afford to vote no, protect their right flank and let the real leaders, Ryan especially, govern. It is actually a pretty powerful argument in Ryan’s favor — the man who can get a huge majority to preserve a very conservative agenda (e.g. no taxes, spending cuts). The GOP senators are acting like senators while Ryan is acting like the party’s leader.

Meanwhile, the House also passed the defense authorization bill, without the provision that threatened to take line commanders out of sexual assault investigations and disciplinary proceedings. (Alternative reforms supported by the military were included, as the speaker pointed out in a statement.) Contrary to the hype of a few isolationists, the pro-defense contingent in the House showed its determination both on the budget and the defense authorization bill; perhaps Obama’s reckless foreign policy has frightened enough lawmakers into taking their national security role more seriously.

The winners: House leadership, Ryan, business groups, national security, conservative hawks, Obamacare opponents, the economy, Republicans challenging red state Dems (the budget deal is an argument for GOP governance), Congress and voters (wondering if government was permanently broken).

The losers: MSM (no more budget fights!), Jim DeMint, Club for Growth, Senate Republicans aspiring to the presidency, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (if Ryan runs, Walker won’t), the right-wing media (again shown to have little influence in Congress), immigration reform opponents, the left (no Obamacare distractions, no unemployment benefit extension and no tax hikes) and the president (it’s now Obamacare 24/7).

Roger L. Simon
[Mr. Ryan’s Dilemma](#)

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The good news is, as of this moment — thanks to the Obamacare fiasco that will likely continue for some time, even get worse, and, to a lesser extent, the Iran deal that, in all probability, is headed for disaster — things are running in the right's direction. What Ryan quite obviously was trying to do is keep it that way — tread some water until we have at least the first of those elections (2014). He was following Hippocrates' prescription to do no harm.

The harm would be shutting down the Congress, because the public seriously dislikes that. They turn against you — and for good reason. They understand you don't have the votes to accomplish what you say you want and are posturing for the most part. Even some low-information voters get that. It's pretty obvious.

We saw that happen during Ted Cruz's filibuster, when public approval for Republicans went to all-time lows. Cruz was certainly right about Obamacare, but the voters clearly didn't care for his approach. Why repeat it, especially when you can get to the same place in other ways? And budget considerations are much more complex. With Obamacare, the bad results were in people's faces almost immediately. The results of deficits are too far away and too easily obfuscated for most people to feel the pain immediately, even though it may ultimately be even more important.

So this is about strategy and it's hard to see why Ryan didn't have the correct one. He moves us closer to the goal, winning those elections and thereby being able to make serious change.

Although this is true, I can sympathize with those who are upset, even if I don't agree with them. I am angry as well. Things have really gotten out of hand. But now is time for extra patience because the cards are still being dealt and they are coming our way. The wise poker player keeps his cool. Soon he may have four aces — or even draw to a straight flush.

In the meantime, we should be making constructive proposals, such as Rand Paul recently made about bringing [“economic freedom zones”](#) to Detroit. It is important to publicize such things widely because they are (relatively) fresh and creative. They expose the other side for what they are — stodgy, old and hypocritical.

Above all, when you are about to win, it is not the time to turn your guns on each other.

Examiner

Nelson Mandela memorial security scandal: 'There were no checks'

by Byron York

It's becoming increasingly clear that when President Obama arrived at the Nelson Mandela memorial service in Johannesburg, South Africa Tuesday, he stepped into an atmosphere so chaotic, disorganized, and unsafe that under any other circumstances the White House and Secret Service might well have insisted the president not appear.

FNB Stadium, where the memorial was held, seats 95,000 people. Even with a steady rain and thousands of empty seats in uncovered areas, there were tens of thousands of people in the area with the president. It appears most of them got in without going through any security.

"There were no security checks upon entry to the stadium," a local South African activist wrote Friday in a letter to the Johannesburg Star newspaper. "I walked freely to my seat without passing through metal detectors, being searched or any other check."

The stadium's main entrance was "completely unattended," a reporter for a Washington, D.C., television station told Politico. "There were no workers performing bag checks or pat-downs — there were no magnetometers to walk through, no metal detector wands being used — anywhere."

Britain's The Independent newspaper reported that "thousands of guests entering the FNB stadium in Soweto on Tuesday, especially those who had arrived very early, were not searched." In addition, members of the media "were permitted to enter the press area directly beneath where politicians and dignitaries were seated without being asked to show passes." And the Daily Mail reported that "the first crowds entered the stadium without being searched."

When South African security officials did perform security checks, they were often trying to restrain the bodyguards and entourage members of visiting dignitaries and celebrities. But conflicts seem to have been resolved by letting everybody in. For example, a delegation from Canada encountered problems until "all of the Canadians were able to get in during the confusion that reigned at security checkpoints as thousands of people poured in," according to a report in the National Post.

The South African government promised tight security for the event. "Working off plans developed for years in secret, the South African government is using an elite military task force, sniper teams and canine teams to help secure the stadium," CNN reported before the event. "In addition, helicopters and military jets frequently fly overhead."

It was a show of security. But it wasn't security.

And then there was the question of Thamsanqa Jantjie, the fake sign language interpreter who stood next to Obama as the president addressed the crowd. Jantjie has in the past been charged with murder, attempted murder, rape, theft, housebreaking and kidnapping, according to the South Africa-focused news organization eNCA.com. Jantjie also suffers from schizophrenia and told reporters he was hallucinating even as he stood next to Obama.

Allowing a man with Jantjie's record to stand within arm's length of the president of the United States is a huge security concern in itself. In addition, the lack of security checks at entrances raises the question of whether Jantjie had been searched for weapons. It's bad enough to have a violent, crazy man who has been through a body search stand next to the president. It's absolutely unconscionable to allow that man next to the president with no search.

If Jantjie was searched, it was likely not by Americans. Before the event, CNN reported that a "Secret Service spokesman noted that while the agency's preference is to bring their own metal detectors to such events, they do not have authority over local law enforcement in foreign countries and would be working with South African officials on security matters."

Even as Obama flew to South Africa, White House officials confidently told reporters that the South African government could take care of things. "The sheer number of leaders appearing in the same place at one time raises numerous logistical and security challenges, but the White House expressed confidence in the South African government's ability to handle the event," CNN reported. "'We have not heard any concerns,' Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes told reporters aboard Air Force One. 'The South Africans hosted the World Cup, so they have experience hosting significant crowds and managing events like this.'"

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IBD

[True unemployment rate 11% or higher in 49 of the last 50 months](#)

by Ed Carson

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At the start of the recession in December 2007, the labor force participation rate was 66%. It fell sharply, tumbling to 62.8% in October, a 35-year low. It rose slightly to 63% last month.

The actual labor force has declined by 217,000 so far this year, even with nonfarm payrolls up by 2.1 million.

During recessions and the early stages of a recovery, discouraged people leave the workforce. So the unemployment rate at these times typically masks how bad the job market really is.

But the size and scope of the distortion is far higher now than in [past economic recoveries](#). The gap between the official and "true" unemployment rate is 4.3 percentage points — more than four years after the recession ended.

After the brief 1990-1991 slump, the unemployment gap never was wider than 2 percentage points.

In the 1981-1982 slump, the official rate soared to a 10.8% peak. But the labor force actually rose as baby boomers, including women, rushed into the job market. So the official unemployment rate overstated labor market weakness as the Reagan boom took hold.

So why is there such a huge gap between official and "true" unemployment today? Some of it is demographics. Aging baby boomers are now leaving the workforce while many young adults are in school. Those secular trends may be exaggerated by the recession and weak recovery. Women are no longer increasing their workforce participation, a decades-long trend that offset declining participation among men.

But demographics are only part of the story. Employment rates are barely above cycle lows for the core 25-54 working age group.

It's actually not surprising that unemployment would be essentially flat under a steady participation rate.

The U.S. economy is growing more or less at a 2% annual rate (Q3's 3.6% pop reflected huge stockpiling by businesses and will likely subtract from Q4's pace).

The U.S. needs about 2% growth to absorb productivity gains and normal labor force growth. Any lower and unemployment would rise — under normal conditions.

There are some hopeful signs. Nonfarm payrolls have risen by 200,000 or more for the last two months, with gains across many industries.

But the latest Job Openings and Labor Turnover report showed that October's net job gain reflected a big drop in layoffs to their lowest level since the survey began in 2000. Gross hiring actually fell.

That lack of job churn is particularly bad news for the long-term unemployed. With little actual hiring going on, their skills atrophy and employers avoid them. The average duration for the unemployed rose to 37.2 weeks in November, the highest so far this year.

If and when the job market really heats up, expect a flood of people to enter or re-enter the labor market. That will likely keep the official jobless rate from falling, though "true" unemployment would presumably fall from double-digit levels.

In the meantime, get ready for more "good" news on unemployment. Extended jobless benefits are set to expire at year-end. That means 1.3 million longtime unemployed who officially are in the labor force could drop out. That [could reduce the official jobless rate](#) by up to half a percentage point by some estimates.

Detroit News

Robin Hood policies hurt poor

by Nolan Finley

President Barack Obama has some bad news for poor and working class Americans: He's going to spend the final three years of his presidency attacking the income gap.

"The combined trends of increased inequality and decreasing mobility pose a fundamental threat to the American dream, our way of life, and what we stand for around the globe," the president said in a recent speech.

No coincidence the pledge to stamp out inequality comes at the same time Obama's popularity and performance ratings are plunging due to the Obamacare fiasco. He always pivots to populism when he gets in trouble.

But this is no grand shift. Obama has been playing Robin Hood since Day One. All his major initiatives have been built on soaking the rich.

And what's happened? Those on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder have less disposable income than they did when he took office, and the fat cats are fatter than ever.

According to Bloomberg, the richest Americans earned a larger percentage of the total national income last year than they have since 1917. The top 10 percent earned twice as much as the bottom 10 percent. January's big tax hikes on investors and new Obamacare taxes targeted at the wealthy haven't slowed the 1 percent's rise.

Workers, meanwhile, captured a smaller share of total economic output than in any year since 1952. Factcheck.org reports real household income is down 5 percent during the Obama years, while the number of food stamp recipients is up 49 percent.

The more Obama has tried to help the poor and middle, the worse off they've become. That's a factor of policies that have throttled economic growth and dampened job creation. Obamacare is hurting the middle class in a number of ways, but mostly because employers are wary of adding new workers due to the costly insurance mandates.

Higher taxes have also discouraged job creation. There are still more workers than jobs in the post-recession economy, and that depresses wages.

The wealthy, meanwhile, are stacking up dollars. Obama's monetary policies have kept interest rates artificially low to offset the damage done by Obamacare and higher taxes, and the low rates are fueling a housing and stock market boom.

It would be better for everyone if the wealthy were gaining by planting their money in job creating enterprises, but unfavorable capital gains rates work against investment.

Try as he might, Obama can't spread the wealth. History is gorged with populist politicians convinced they can work the levers of government to make the poor richer by making the rich poorer. The poor just always end up getting poorer.

Obama should loosen his grip on the private economy and let businesses start creating jobs again. A tighter job market will increase wages for everyone.

If the president stops obsessing about transferring wealth, he'll have a chance of actually narrowing the income gap.

Bloomberg

No Antibiotics, No Sexual Revolution

By Megan McArdle



Last night, I had a drink with Peter Huber, who has a terrific new book out on [how the legal system is holding back medical innovation](#). We chatted about a lot of things, but one thing we discussed was how antibiotics have been the unseen driver of so many developments in the modern world.

Most of them are medical, like transplant surgery, and I've written about those before. But here's one you might not have thought of: the sexual revolution. Most of us, if we think about it at all, probably attribute the rise in premarital sex to The Pill, among other factors. But before the birth control pill, there was another invention that was just as necessary: antibiotics.

The sexually transmitted diseases of yesteryear were pretty nasty. If you're interested, you can Google up images of tertiary syphilis, but I don't recommend it unless you've got a strong stomach. The initial symptoms of various common STDs were also unpleasant, and in women, could severely impair your fertility. You could use condoms, of course, but then, you could also use condoms to prevent pregnancy.

Then suddenly STDs weren't so risky. You might have to make an embarrassing visit to the doctor and get a shot, but that's nothing compared with [horrible treatments using arsenic or mercury](#) that were mostly ineffective. It's no coincidence that the sexual revolution seemed to come to an abrupt halt when AIDS entered the scene. And as I understand it, AIDS is relatively hard to get compared with other STDs.

Without antibiotics, any chance sexual encounter could lead to a permanent disease that, among other things, would probably make it hard to find a long-term relationship partner. In that world, we'd probably have a lot fewer chance sexual encounters.

So thank antibiotics for your open heart surgery -- but while you're at it, thank them for your sexual freedom, too.

American Interest

[Water Wars Another Kick to Malthus](#)

by Walter Russell Mead

We may soon be looking to our oceans for our freshwater—or more accurately, we'll be looking underneath our oceans. A new [study](#), the first to comprehensively survey the world's known reserves of undersea freshwater, estimates that there are roughly 120,000 cubic miles—more than 100 times the amount of freshwater we've drilled from the ground since 1900—of fresh and nearly-fresh water trapped underneath seabeds. The upshot: we could be seeing more offshore drilling for water as well as oil in the future. *ScienceDaily* [reports](#):

The water, which could perhaps be used to eke out supplies to the world's burgeoning coastal cities, has been located off Australia, China, North America and South Africa. [...]

These reserves were formed over the past hundreds of thousands of years when on average the sea level was much lower than it is today, and when the coastline was further out, [lead author Dr Vincent Post] explains..."So when it rained, the water would infiltrate into the ground and fill up the water table in areas that are nowadays under the sea.

Some of these reserves will be fresh enough that they won't need to go through the energy-intensive desalinization process, while some of them will be only slightly brackish, and will be easier and, importantly, cheaper to desalinate. In fact, this kind of offshore drilling for water is

already happening; NPR [notes](#) that there are already operations in places like Cape May, NJ to drill for and eventually desalinate low-salinity water.

Water scarcity has been a favorite topic for the Chicken Littles of the world. Just 18 years ago the vice president of the World Bank was [ominously warning](#) that “the wars of the next century will be fought over water.” It’s easy to drum up fears of “water wars” some undetermined time in the future, but studies like this one, and discoveries of new water sources like [this one](#) in Kenya, or [this one](#) under the Sahara, suggest that these fears that have gripped Malthusians—and that Malthusians have in turn used to push through otherwise unworkable policy recommendations—are a lot less serious.





ANOTHER FUNERAL, ANOTHER SELFIE



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