

January 15, 2014

John Fund reports how easy voter fraud can be and how difficult it will be to get Dem office holders to enforce the law.

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But New York City's watchdog Department of Investigations has just provided the latest evidence of how easy it is to commit voter fraud that is almost undetectable. DOI undercover agents showed up at 63 polling places last fall and pretended to be voters who should have been turned away by election officials; the agents assumed the names of individuals who had died or moved out of town, or who were sitting in jail. In 61 instances, or 97 percent of the time, the testers were allowed to vote. Those who did vote cast only a write-in vote for a "John Test" so as to not affect the outcome of any contest. DOI published its findings two weeks ago in a searing 70-page report accusing the city's Board of Elections of incompetence, waste, nepotism, and lax procedures.

The Board of Elections, which has a \$750 million annual budget and a work force of 350 people, reacted in classic bureaucratic fashion, which prompted one city paper to deride it as "a 21st-century survivor of Boss Tweed-style politics." The Board approved a resolution referring the DOI's investigators for prosecution. It also asked the state's attorney general to determine whether DOI had violated the civil rights of voters who had moved or are felons, and it sent a letter of complaint to Mayor Bill de Blasio. Normally, I wouldn't think de Blasio would give the BOE the time of day, but New York's new mayor has long been a close ally of former leaders of ACORN, the now-disgraced "community organizing" group that saw its employees convicted of voter-registration fraud all over the country during and after the 2008 election.

Greg Soumas, president of New York's BOE, offered a justification for calling in the prosecutors: "If something was done in an untoward fashion, it was only done by DOI. We [are] unaware of any color of authority on the part of [DOI] to vote in the identity of any person other than themselves — and our reading of the election law is that such an act constitutes a felony." The Board is bipartisan, and all but two of its members voted with Soumas. The sole exceptions were Democrat Jose Araujo, who abstained because the DOI report implicated him in hiring his wife and sister-and-law for Board jobs, and Republican Simon Shamoun.

Good-government groups are gobsmacked at Soumas's refusal to smell the stench of corruption in his patronage-riddled empire. ...

Richard Epstein posts on how Dems kill jobs.

The latest government labor report indicates that job growth has slowed once again. It is now at a three-year low, with only an estimated 74,000 new jobs added this past month. To be sure, the nominal unemployment rate dropped to 6.7 percent, but as experts on both the left and the right have noted, the only reason for this "improvement" is the decline of labor force participation, which is at the lowest level since 1978, with little prospect of any short-term improvement.

The Economic Logic of Supply and Demand

One might think that these figures would be taken as evidence that a radical change in course is needed to boost labor market participation. The grounds for that revision rest on a straightforward application of the fundamental economic law of demand: As the cost of labor increases, the demand for labor will decrease. There are, of course, empirical disputes as to just how rapidly wage increases will reduce that demand for labor.

The federal government has apparently (and foolishly) assumed that these effects will be small, and that the unemployed can somehow be better helped by government interventions into the labor markets. However, only a free market in labor is able to balance changes in both supply and demand, so as to reduce the incidence of unemployment. Government efforts to impose various minimum wages will, happily, have little adverse effect if the market wage is greater than the government mandate. But the same form of increase could have devastating effects on labor markets when the required wage is set too high relative to market wages. The number of workers eager to take jobs at these higher levels will be great, but the number of jobs available at that wage level will shrink. Unemployment levels will increase, and working off the books could increase.

The correct policy choice is strong deregulation of labor markets, which will spur higher labor market participation, albeit at somewhat lower wages. But once people get into the labor force, they can hone their skills in ways that will allow them to command higher wages. Government mandates can never lead to sustainable wage increases. Higher levels of labor productivity can.

...

Bret Stephens has a good take on the Gates book.

There are evangelizers who prefer the company of the heathen and prudes known to spend their nights in strip clubs—presumably to keep a watchful and warning eye on the ways of the wicked.

And then there is Robert Gates in Washington.

The former defense secretary devoted most of his adult life to climbing the structures of power in Washington, D.C. He was deputy CIA director under Ronald Reagan and CIA director under George H.W. Bush. He then served at the Pentagon for 4½ years under both George W. Bush and Barack Obama—holding the job longer than all but four of his predecessors. He was retired with a Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Now he wants you to know he was offended, irritated, enraged, scandalized, "too old for this \$%&," and just plain itching to quit nearly every day he spent at the top. ...*

... Deep in the book Mr. Gates writes that "A favorite saying of mine is 'Never miss a good chance to shut up.'" His memoir is one big missed chance.

And [Jonathan Tobin](#) says the timing of the book helped the president.

President Obama earned some civility points yesterday by refusing to fire back at Robert Gates after the former secretary of defense disparaged aspects of his leadership style as well as taking shots at Vice President Biden and Hillary Clinton in his new memoir. While Obama admitted he was “irked” by the timing of the publication of the book, he praised the former secretary as an “outstanding” cabinet member and friend. Though Democrats were blasting Gates for writing a book that was mined for negatives quotes about their two leading presidential contenders in 2016, even a Republican like John McCain said that he should have waited until the administration he served was out of office before writing a memoir. ...

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National Review

[Voter Fraud: We've Got Proof It's Easy](#)

Undercover agents were able to vote as dead people, but election officials are attacking the agents.

by John Fund

Liberals who oppose efforts to prevent voter fraud claim that there is no fraud — or at least not any that involves voting in person at the polls.

But New York City's watchdog Department of Investigations has just provided the latest evidence of how easy it is to commit voter fraud that is almost undetectable. DOI undercover agents showed up at 63 polling places last fall and pretended to be voters who should have been turned away by election officials; the agents assumed the names of individuals who had died or moved out of town, or who were sitting in jail. In 61 instances, or 97 percent of the time, the testers were allowed to vote. Those who did vote cast only a write-in vote for a “John Test” so as to not affect the outcome of any contest. DOI published its findings two weeks ago in a searing 70-page report accusing the city's Board of Elections of incompetence, waste, nepotism, and lax procedures.

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Good-government groups are gobsmacked at Soumas's refusal to smell the stench of corruption in his patronage-riddled empire. "They should focus not on assigning blame to others, but on taking responsibility for solving the problems themselves," Dick Dadey of the watchdog group Citizens Union told the *Daily News*. "It's a case of the Board of Elections passing the buck." DOI officials respond that the use of undercover agents is routine in anti-corruption probes and that people should carefully read the 70-page report they've filed before criticizing it. They are surprised how little media attention their report has received.

You'd think more media outlets would have been interested, because the sloppiness revealed in the DOI report is mind-boggling. Young undercover agents were able to vote using the names of people three times their age, people who in fact were dead. In one example, a 24-year female agent gave the name of someone who had died in 2012 at age 87; the workers at the Manhattan polling site gave her a ballot, no questions asked. Even the two cases where poll workers turned away an investigator raise eyebrows. In the first case, a poll worker on Staten Island walked outside with the undercover investigator who had just been refused a ballot; the "voter" was advised to go to the polling place near where he used to live and "play dumb" in order to vote. In the second case, the investigator was stopped from voting only because the felon whose name he was using was the son of the election official at the polling place.

Shooting the messenger has been a typical reaction in other states when people have demonstrated just how easy it is to commit voter fraud. Guerrilla videographer James O'Keefe had three of his assistants visit precincts during New Hampshire's January 2012 presidential primary. They asked poll workers whether their books listed the names of several voters, all deceased individuals still listed on voter-registration rolls. Poll workers handed out ten ballots, never once asking for a photo ID. O'Keefe's team immediately gave back the ballots, unmarked, to precinct workers. Debbie Lane, a ballot inspector at one of the Manchester polling sites, later said: "I wasn't sure what I was allowed to do. . . . I can't tell someone not to vote, I suppose." The only precinct in which O'Keefe or his crew did *not* obtain a ballot was one in which the local precinct officer had personally known the dead "voter."

New Hampshire's Democratic governor, John Lynch, sputtered when asked about O'Keefe's video, and he condemned the effort to test the election system even though no actual votes were cast. "They should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, if in fact they're found guilty of some criminal act," he roared. But cooler heads eventually prevailed, and the GOP state legislature later approved a voter-ID bill, with enough votes to override the governor's veto. Despite an exhaustive and intrusive investigation, no charges were ever filed against any of O'Keefe's associates.

Later in 2012, in Washington, D.C., one of O'Keefe's assistants was able to obtain Attorney General Eric Holder's ballot even though Holder is 62 years old and bears no resemblance to the 22-year-old white man who obtained it merely by asking if Eric Holder was on the rolls. But the Department of Justice, which is currently suing Texas to block that state's photo-ID law,

dismissed the Holder ballot incident as “manufactured.” The irony was lost on the DOJ that Holder, a staunch opponent of voter-ID laws, could have himself been disenfranchised by a white man because Washington, D.C., has no voter-ID law. Polls consistently show that more than 70 percent of Americans — including clear majorities of African Americans and Hispanics — support such laws.

Liberals who oppose ballot-security measures claim that there are few prosecutions for voter fraud, which they take to mean that fraud doesn't happen. But as the New York DOI report demonstrates, it is comically easy, given the sloppy-voter registration records often kept in America, to commit voter fraud in person. (A 2012 study by the Pew Research Center found that nationwide, at least 1.8 million deceased voters are still registered to vote.) And unless someone confesses, in-person voter fraud is very difficult to detect — or stop. New York's Gothamist news service reported last September that four poll workers in Brooklyn reported they believed people were trying to vote in the name of other registered voters. Police officers observed the problems but did nothing because voter fraud isn't under the police department's purview.

What the DOI investigators were able to do was eerily similar to actual fraud that has occurred in New York before. In 1984, Brooklyn's Democratic district attorney, Elizabeth Holtzman, released a state grand-jury report on a successful 14-year conspiracy that cast thousands of fraudulent votes in local, state, and congressional elections. Just like the DOI undercover operatives, the conspirators cast votes at precincts in the names of dead, moved, and bogus voters. The grand jury recommended voter ID, a basic election-integrity measure that New York has steadfastly refused to implement.

In states where non-photo ID is required, it's also all too easy to manufacture records that allow people to vote. In 2012, the son of Congressman Jim Moran, the Democrat who represents Virginia's Washington suburbs, had to resign as field director for his father's campaign after it became clear that he had encouraged voter fraud. Patrick Moran was caught advising an O'Keefe videographer on how to commit in-person voter fraud. The scheme involved using a personal computer to forge utility bills that would satisfy Virginia's voter-ID law and then relying on the assistance of Democratic lawyers stationed at the polls to make sure the fraudulent votes were counted. Last year, Virginia tightened its voter-ID law and ruled that showing a utility bill was no longer sufficient to obtain a ballot.

Given that someone who is dead, is in jail, or has moved isn't likely to complain if someone votes in his name, how do we know that voter fraud at the polls isn't a problem? An ounce of prevention — in the form of voter ID and better training of poll workers — should be among the minimum precautions taken to prevent an electoral miscarriage or meltdown in a close race.

After all, even a small number of votes can have sweeping consequences. Al Franken's 312-vote victory in 2008 over Minnesota senator Norm Coleman gave Democrats a filibuster-proof Senate majority of 60 votes, which allowed them to pass Obamacare. Months after the Obamacare vote, a conservative group called Minnesota Majority finished comparing criminal records with voting rolls and identified 1,099 felons — all ineligible to vote — who had voted in the Franken–Coleman race. Fox News random interviews with ten of those felons found that nine had voted for Franken, backing up national academic studies that show felons tend to vote strongly for Democrats.

Minnesota Majority took its findings to prosecutors across the state, but very few showed any interest in pursuing the issue. Some did, though, and 177 people have been convicted as of mid 2012 — not just “accused” but actually *convicted* — of voting fraudulently in the Senate race. Probably the only reason the number of convictions isn’t higher is that the standard for convicting someone of voter fraud in Minnesota is that the person must have been both ineligible and must have “knowingly” voted unlawfully. Anyone accused of fraud is apt to get off by claiming he didn’t know he’d done anything wrong.

Given that we now know for certain how easy it is to commit undetectable voter fraud and how serious the consequences can be, it’s truly bizarre to have officials at the New York City Board of Elections and elsewhere savage those who shine a light on the fact that their modus operandi invites fraud. One might even think that they’re covering up their incompetence or that they don’t want to pay attention to what crimes could be occurring behind the curtains at their polling places. Or both.

John Fund is a national-affairs columnist for National Review Online. Along with Hans von Spakovsky, he is the author of [Who’s Counting: How Fraudsters and Bureaucrats Put Your Vote at Risk](#)

Hoover Institution

[How Democrats Kill Jobs](#)

To reduce unemployment, we need a free market in labor.

by Richard A. Epstein

The latest [government labor report](#) indicates that job growth has slowed once again. It is now at a three-year low, with only an estimated 74,000 new jobs added this past month. To be sure, the nominal unemployment rate dropped to 6.7 percent, but as experts on both the left and the right have noted, the only reason for this “improvement” is the decline of labor force participation, which is at the lowest level since 1978, with little prospect of any short-term improvement.

The Economic Logic of Supply and Demand

One might think that these figures would be taken as evidence that a radical change in course is needed to boost labor market participation. The grounds for that revision rest on a straightforward application of the fundamental economic law of demand: As the cost of labor increases, the demand for labor will decrease. There are, of course, empirical disputes as to just how rapidly wage increases will reduce that demand for labor.

The federal government has apparently (and foolishly) assumed that these effects will be small, and that the unemployed can somehow be better helped by government interventions into the labor markets. However, only a free market in labor is able to balance changes in both supply and demand, so as to reduce the incidence of unemployment. Government efforts to impose various minimum wages will, happily, have little adverse effect if the market wage is greater than the government mandate. But the same form of increase could have devastating effects on labor markets when the required wage is set too high relative to market wages. The number of workers eager to take jobs at these higher levels will be great, but the number of jobs available

at that wage level will shrink. Unemployment levels will increase, and working off the books could increase.

The correct policy choice is strong deregulation of labor markets, which will spur higher labor market participation, albeit at somewhat lower wages. But once people get into the labor force, they can hone their skills in ways that will allow them to command higher wages. Government mandates can never lead to sustainable wage increases. Higher levels of labor productivity can. And this critique of minimum wage laws is equally applicable to other labor market interventions, including overtime rules, family leave statutes, mandatory collective bargaining, and mandated healthcare benefits that likewise distort labor markets.

It is therefore disheartening to observe that the dismal failures in the current labor market have led to renewed calls for further government intervention at both the federal and state levels. More specifically, progressives are calling for a two-pronged program that couples increased unemployment benefits with increased worker protections on all these key fronts. This agenda will only deepen the current malaise.

The Living Wage Comes to de Blasio's New York

The futility of these policies was made evident by two stories, which appeared side by side in the New York Times last week. The first of these stories carries the headline "[After Winning a Raise, 175 Workers At a Queens Casino Lose Their Jobs.](#)" That result would never have happened if the workers had won their raises by demonstrating higher levels of productivity to their employer, The Resorts World Casino. Instead, these wage increases were dictated by a labor arbitrator who doubled the base wages for workers in the casino under the living wage arrangement that he imposed on the firm.

No one should be thrilled that restaurant workers have to settle for wages of \$5 per hour plus tips. But a steady job at that level is better than no job at the \$12 base pay ordered by the arbitrator. The casino sought to raise food prices to compensate for the increased costs, but the law of demand applies to consumers as well. In hard times, they won't stand for the increased prices, so the casino closed a food operation that could only operate at a loss, leaving 175 union members to scramble for jobs.

This sobering reality has not made the slightest impression on Mayor Bill de Blasio, who inserted himself strongly into the decision of the New York City Council to elect Melissa Mark-Viverito as its Speaker. Ms. Mark-Viverito served as a top labor union organizer in the healthcare industry before she joined the City Council in 2005, and her defiant acceptance speech echoed the long-term sentiments of de Blasio in seeking greater justice and equality for all New Yorkers. She pushed an agenda that will lead to further debacles in the mold of Resorts World Casino.

At this juncture, there can be no doubt that the control of the City Council has passed from more traditional Democrats, who showed commendable awareness of the downside of aggressive labor market intervention, to firebrands who think that they can help their constituents by initiating legislative warfare against the business interests whose health is essential to job creation in New York City.

The dominant force behind Ms. Mark-Viverito's rise to power was [the Working Families Party](#), so we can be sure that all restraint has been cast to the wind. The WFP is headed by a shrewd activist and union organizer Dan Cantor, who champions massive government interference in labor and housing markets in New York City. The WFP aggressive agenda calls for the [living wage laws](#) on projects that receive City funding, which will translate into fewer projects that the City will be able to afford.

For folks like Dan Cantor and his allies, demand curves do not slope downward, so in their minds the greater burdens on employers will result in simple wealth transfers to workers, without any adverse collateral effects whatsoever, including loss of jobs. That short-sighted thinking is sure to have adverse effects on the economic prospects of New York City. Existing employers may not abandon the City entirely, but they will surely cut back on their operations wherever possible by locating key portions of their businesses in more hospitable jurisdictions. Other investors who might have thought about coming to New York are more likely to look elsewhere. The mindless jubilation of the New York City Council is likely to be curtailed once these dim realities set in.

Congressional Mischief

The economic naiveté in New York City does not stand alone. The same pressures are at work at the federal level as well, where the bad employment numbers have been used to justify further federal intervention into labor markets. A recent angry New York Times [editorial](#) is entitled "No Jobs, No Benefits, and Lousy Pay." As an accurate reflection of the state of the U.S. economy, the title should lead the Times to reconsider the policies that it has long defended in the face of their obvious failure. No such luck: The Times is determined to double-down on policies that have already failed.

It is strongly in favor of the use of long-term unemployment benefits to cushion the blow to those who are unemployed. But it never asks the hard questions about the potential downsides of these programs. This initiative creates an incentive for others to cut back on their search for new jobs. At best, it is just not certain which way the causality runs. Do unemployment benefits create the very risk of long-term unemployment that they are intended to respond to? Do the taxes that are needed to fund these benefits take resources out of the private sector, which helped to drag the rate of job creation to its current low levels?

The same can be said about the Times' support for sharp increases in the minimum wage laws, which are based on the dubious grounds that the minimum wage historically stood at half the average wages, not the third of average wages (\$7.25 to \$20.10) that it stands at today. But the Times offers no explanation as to why that historical ratio supplies the correct normative benchmark for thinking about labor regulation. The closer the minimum wage gets to average wages, the greater its distortions on market activity. Moreover, these distortions will have synergistic interactions with other forms of labor regulation, including the proposals for mandated sick leave with pay, which is high on the WFP's agenda for New York City. In combination, such policies are likely to further aggravate the effects of government intervention.

That point is, however, totally lost on Ross Eisenbrey of the [Economic Policy Institute](#), which is a faithful backer of additional interference in labor markets. Writing in the Times, he claims that it is now time to expand the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 so that it covers a higher percentage of salaried workers. Once again, the historical averages are thought to supply the proper benchmark, and Eisenbrey of course has no trouble establishing that relative to inflation,

fewer salaried workers are now exempted from overtime protections, which he regards as a key feature of the labor markets. To be sure, Eisenbrey recognizes that this new turn of the regulatory screw could deter employers from asking workers to work overtime. But he regards that shift as commendable because it could lead in his view to the creation of new jobs to fill the excess demand, which is in line with the views of the 1938 New Deal champions of the bill.

But it is all an exercise in wishful thinking, for there are many other scenarios that could take hold once the overtime limits are done. Eisenbrey does not ask whether it would be exceedingly difficult to add new workers to the mix if there is no place for them to work, whether the cost of additional training makes this option prohibitive, whether the new workers will need to receive costly certifications to take their new positions, or whether the short-term requirements of additional labor makes it unwise to add on workers.

Once these possibilities are on the table, it is clear the rosy predictions of the New Deal managers ignore a range of unpleasant possibilities that could follow from the tightening of overtime rules. For example, some current workers could be sacked from their positions and replaced by a smaller number of higher-salaried workers who are still exempt from these overtime restrictions. Or the business could decide to reduce the scale of operations, costing other workers jobs, because it cannot turn at existing levels of operation once the new restrictions are imposed.

The Better Way: Deregulation

It is just fantasy to think that the addition of any new constraint to labor markets will make matters better than they are. Efforts to make workers better off by making employers worse off will not have their desired effect. It is of course easy to take employers down a notch. But the second half of the program is far harder to implement, given that employers have incentives to minimize their losses from regulation, and will do what it takes to avert the adverse effect of new external constraints.

Labor markets are no different from other markets. They work because they create win/win relationships. In contrast, the government's regulatory efforts to create win/lose relations will not work. What those efforts will get are the lose/lose scenarios that have been the bitter fruit of recent labor market regulations.

WSJ

Robert Gates's Dereliction of 'Duty'

Serving as secretary of defense isn't really a duty. It's an honor that shouldn't be treated as a burden.

by Bret Stephens

There are evangelizers who prefer the company of the heathen and prudes known to spend their nights in strip clubs—presumably to keep a watchful and warning eye on the ways of the wicked.

And then there is Robert Gates in Washington.

The former defense secretary devoted most of his adult life to climbing the structures of power in Washington, D.C. He was deputy CIA director under Ronald Reagan and CIA director under [George H.W. Bush](#). He then served at the Pentagon for 4½ years under both George W. Bush and [Barack Obama](#)—holding the job longer than all but four of his predecessors. He was retired with a Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Now he wants you to know he was offended, irritated, enraged, scandalized, "too old for this \$%*&," and just plain itching to quit nearly every day he spent at the top.



Mr. Gates offers all this in his new memoir "Duty," which hits bookstores Tuesday but already has been widely quoted for the dirt it dishes on the Obama administration.

Among other political titillations: [Hillary Clinton](#)'s 2007 opposition to the Iraq surge was entirely political, a function of the pressure she was facing from Mr. Obama in the Iowa caucus. The president had no faith in his own Afghanistan strategy even as he sent 30,000 additional troops to the country to execute it. [Joe Biden](#) has been "wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades."

Also, decisions on foreign policy are made with "a total focus on politics." The Obama administration's national security staff was stuffed with arrogant micromanagers who thought they knew better than four-star commanders. "The controlling nature of the Obama White House, and its determination to take credit for every good thing that happened while giving none to the career folks in the trenches who had actually done the work" was offensive to him.

Such are the revelations in this book, at least the witting ones, and they helpfully confirm what people already know about this administration. More interesting, however, are Mr. Gates's unwitting revelations.

Take this vignette from 2010: That January, Mr. Gates called for "a highly restricted meeting of the principals to discuss the possibility of conflict with Iran with little or no advance notice." Nothing happened for a few months, until a story somehow appeared in the New York Times saying nothing was happening. Three days later, the principals met with the president in the Oval Office.

Mr. Gates describes the meeting in detail and then concludes with this nugget:

"I was put off by the way the president closed the meeting. To his very closest advisers, he said, 'For the record, and for those of you writing your memoirs, I am not making any decisions about Israel or Iran. Joe [Biden], you be my witness.' I was offended by his suspicion that any of us would ever write about such sensitive matters."

This is related without irony on page 393.

But it isn't only the president's sensitivity that angered Mr. Gates. "I was more or less continuously outraged by the parochial self-interest of all but a very few members of Congress," he writes. When Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert decided in 2007 to strike Syria's nuclear reactor and asked Mr. Bush not to disclose the existence of the reactor publicly—a request Mr. Bush honored—"I was furious." When, two years later, Benjamin Netanyahu pressed him to provide Israel with advanced military equipment to counterbalance a \$60 billion arms sales to Saudi Arabia he is, again, "furious." On Libya: "I had considered resigning over the Libya issue."

He didn't, of course.

"I did not enjoy being secretary of defense," Mr. Gates writes at one point in the book. Fair enough; he could have retired after serving out the remainder of President Bush's term. He didn't. "People have no idea how much I detest this job," he quotes from an email he wrote in mid-2008, trying to scotch rumors that he would serve under the next administration. Fair enough; he could have turned down Mr. Obama's offer when it was made. He didn't. "If you want me to stay for about a year, I will do so," he told Mr. Obama after the 2008 election. Fair enough; he could have kept the promise to the letter. He didn't; he stayed on for another 29 months.

Those are choices Mr. Gates made for his own reasons. Serving as secretary of defense, after all, isn't really a duty; it's an honor and a privilege.

Honors and privileges, however, do have duties. One is: Don't treat them as a burden. Another is: Don't betray the confidence of those who bestow them on you. A third is: Resignation is honorable, but the tell-all memoir against a president still in office is not. When people wonder why Mr. Obama seems to listen only to Valerie Jarrett and other hacks, maybe it's because at least he can count on their loyalty.

Deep in the book Mr. Gates writes that "A favorite saying of mine is 'Never miss a good chance to shut up.'" His memoir is one big missed chance.

Contentions

[Gates Book Timing Helped Obama](#)

by Jonathan S. Tobin

President Obama earned some civility points yesterday [by refusing to fire back](#) at Robert Gates after the former secretary of defense disparaged aspects of his leadership style as well as taking shots at Vice President Biden and Hillary Clinton in his new memoir. While Obama admitted he was "irked" by the timing of the publication of the book, he praised the former secretary as an "outstanding" cabinet member and friend. Though Democrats were blasting Gates for writing a book that was mined for negatives quotes about their two leading presidential contenders in 2016, [even a Republican like John McCain](#) said that he should have waited until the administration he served was out of office before writing a memoir.

Gates' critics may have a point about Washington etiquette though few liberals protested when Scott McClellan, who had served as George W. Bush's press secretary, penned a tell-all

memoir that blasted his boss and his policies. The notion that there should be a waiting period before those who serve in government can write books seems to be more about good manners than ethics. But despite the nasty nature of some of the exchanges between Gates and administration defenders, the president was right to tread softly on the issue. Though some of the book doesn't do much to make the president and his colleagues look good on some points, by waiting until Obama was safely re-elected before coming clean about Obama's war leadership, Gates did his former boss a huge favor and the voters a disservice.

Gates' pious disclaimers about the book controversy being created by sensationalist journalists skimming quotes are patently insincere. Those quotes were highlighted by his publisher and distributed to the press precisely in order to create buzz about the book and increase sales. To that end, they have succeeded brilliantly. The Gates book became a huge political story and though it was quickly overshadowed by Chris Christie's Bridgegate scandal, the former secretary's publishers are crying all the way to the bank about all the free publicity they have received. Had Gates waited until Obama was safely out of office, there wouldn't be much buzz about the book. Nor would his sales be as great.

But Oklahoma Senator Jim Inhofe [has a far more salient point](#) when he noted that if there is any criticism to be made about Gates, it is that he waited too long to tell the American people about the cynicism of the president toward the armed forces and the truth about both Obama and Hillary Clinton's opposition to the Iraq troop surge. There appears to be much in the book that would have fueled an important discussion about the president's conduct during his re-election campaign. Had Gates spoken up during 2012 about the nature of the administration's decision-making process about the Afghanistan War and other behind-the-scenes details it would have negatively affected the president's chances for a second term. While it is doubtful that any book, no matter how much it dishes on Biden and Clinton will affect the 2016 contest, but his Cabinet colleagues will suffer far more than Obama as result of Gates' indiscretions.

As such, President Obama is probably right to ease up on Gates (who has rightly noted that he was more critical of the president's aides than of the commander-in-chief) whose decision to keep quiet this long did him as much good as anything he did while at the Pentagon.

**YEAH, IF YOU COULD FIND A WAY TO
EXPLAIN THIS COLD WEATHER ON
GLOBAL WARMING...**

THAT'D BE GREAT

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It's so cold outside
I just saw a teenager
with his pants pulled
all the way up!



ROTTEN&CARDS USER CARD

