

February 2, 2014

Last week we ended with a small item on Pete Seeger thinking we were done with the subject. But then John Fund, knowing Pickerhead's Russian history bent, sent along his National Review article on ***The Totalitarian Troubadour***. Particularly telling in Fund's piece is how Seeger and his ilk did 180 degree turns on the instant of the German June 22, 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union.

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The next year, Pete Seeger, a member of the Young Communist League, lent his support for the effort to stop America from going to war to fight the Nazis. The Communist-party line at the time was that the war between Britain and Germany was "phony" and a mere pretext for big American corporations to get Hitler to attack Soviet Russia. The album Seeger and his fellow Almanac Singers, an early folk-music group, released was called "Songs for John Doe." Its songs opposed the military draft and other policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

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You ain't a-gonna send me 'cross the sea.
You may say it's for defense
That kinda talk ain't got no sense.*

Just one month after the album was released, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. The album was quickly withdrawn from circulation, and Seeger and his buddies immediately did a 180-degree turn and came up with new songs:

*Now, Mr. President
You're commander-in-chief of our armed forces
The ships and the planes and the tanks and the horses
I guess you know best just where I can fight . . .
So what I want is you to give me a gun
So we can hurry up and get the job done!*

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We can honor Seeger the singer and mourn his passing. But at the same time we should respect the power that popular culture has over people and warn against its misuse. The late Andrew Breitbart lived largely to remind us that culture is upstream of politics — our culture is a stream of influence flowing into our politics.

Pete Seeger aimed to change both our culture and our politics. Howard Husock wrote at NRO this week that he “was America’s most successful Communist.” ...

David Goldman, in the person of Spengler, was not kind to Seeger at all. At the end of the pull quote, there is a reference to "folksingers" in the Soviet Union. We follow with have more on that.

I first heard Pete Seeger perform when I was five or six, when I was a red-diaper baby and he was blacklisted and drunk. What I recall most about the encounter was that the tip of his needle-nose glowed bright red. He was performing for a children’s group of some sort at a time when his Communist background kept him out of public venues. His records — not just the Weavers albums, but the early Asch 78’s of the Almanac Singers — were daily fare in my home, along with Woody Guthrie’s children’s songs. My parents knew Guthrie casually; my father once organized a concert for him at Brooklyn College, and my mother was Arlo Guthrie’s nursery-school teacher.

I was not just a Pete Seeger fan, but a to-the-hammer-born, born-and-bred cradle fan of Pete Seeger. With those credentials, permit me to take note of his passing with the observation that he was a fraud, a phony, a poseur, an imposter. The notion of folk music he espoused was a put-on from beginning to end. ...

... His capacity to apologize for the brutalities of Communist regimes — including their repression of their own “folksingers” — remained undiminished with age, as David Graham reported in the Atlantic. ...

The Wiki on those folksingers in Ukraine calls them Kobzars or Kobzarski

... Blind itinerant musicians, known as kobzars and lirnyks, organized themselves into guilds along the same lines as professional craftsmen. These professional itinerant musicians would gather at regular meeting spots on particular dates to celebrate religious feasts, administer examinations for the induction of novices and masters, and collect money for placement of votive candles under icons of patron saints and to also discuss the business of the guild.

During the Soviet period the Kobzar guilds ceased to exist. ...

A blog from [Art Ukraine](#) quotes the composer Dimitri Shostakovich on how those wandering musicians "ceased to exist." Keep in mind this deed was by the government of Joseph Stalin that was defended time and again by Pete Seeger. The circumstances are similar to the 1940 murder of Polish officers, policemen and intellectuals in Katyn Forest. A few hundred folksingers gets lost in the millions murdered by the Communists. Here's Shostakovich;

"I am not a historian. I could tell many tragic tales and cite many examples, but I won't do that. I will tell about one incident, only one. It's a horrible story and every time I think of it I grow frightened and I don't want to remember it. Since time immemorial, folk singers have wandered along the roads of Ukraine. They're called "lirniki" and "banduristy" there. They were almost blind men---why that is so is another question that I won't go into, but briefly, it's traditional. The point is, they were always blind and defenseless people, but no one ever touched or hurt them. Hurting a blind man---what could be lower?"

"And then in the mid thirties the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Lirniki and Banduristy was announced, and all the folk singers had to gather and discuss what to do in the future. 'Life is better, life is merrier,' Stalin has said. The blind men believed it. They came to the congress from all over Ukraine, from tiny, forgotten villages. There were several hundred of them at the congress, they say. It was a living museum, the country's living history. All its songs, all its music and poetry. And they were almost all shot, almost all of those pathetic blind men killed.

"Why was it done? Why the sadism -- killing the blind? Just like that, so that they wouldn't get underfoot. Mighty deeds were being done there, complete collectivization was under way, they had destroyed kulaks as a class, and here were these blind men, walking around singing songs of dubious content. The songs weren't passed by the censors. And what kind of censorship can you have with blind men? You can't hand a blind man a corrected and approved text and you can't write him an order either. You have to tell everything to a blind man. That takes too long. And you can't file away a piece of paper, and there's no time anyway. Collectivization. Mechanization. It was easier to shoot them. And so they did."

Pickerhead pleads guilty to knowing too much minutia about Russian and the Soviet Union. However we should all pay attention to the irony that the system of government that promised to do so much for common citizens, in fact did; by killing more of them than any other state in the 20th Century.

R. J. Rummel author of Death by Government provides these estimates of the most brutal governments of the last century;

61,911,000 Murdered: Soviet Union

35,236,000 Murdered: Communist Chinese

20,946,000 Murdered: German National Socialists

10,214,000 Murdered: Nationalist Chinese

Pete Seeger has a lot to atone for.

Back to the state of the union show. [Andrew Malcolm](#) has a post and with it a chart comparing the length of speeches for presidents since Reagan. What president has been kindest to us? Ronald Reagan of course.

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Instead, Jay Leno referred accurately in his late-night monologue to the Obama administration as "lame Duck Dynasty."

[Sean Davis](#) at The Federalist has 11 facts about the minimum wage you didn't hear during the state of the union. Number 11 shows the corruption involved.

11) A Change In The Minimum Wage Often Triggers Union Wage Hikes And Benefit Renegotiations

The famous investment banker J.P. Morgan said something along the lines of, "Every man has two reasons for everything he does: a good reason and the real reason." Giving minimum wage workers a little extra cash is the White House's "good" reason for supporting a hike in the minimum wage. But what's the real reason? Richard Berman, a union analyst, studied numerous union contracts and published his findings on their terms in the Wall Street Journal in 2013:

The labor contracts that we examined used a variety of methods to trigger the [wage] increases. The two most popular formulas were setting baseline union wages as a percentage above the state or federal minimum wage or mandating a flat wage premium above the minimum wage.

Other union contracts stipulate that, following a minimum-wage increase, the union and the employer reopen wage talks.

[...]

Minimum-wage hikes are beneficial to unions in other ways. The increases restrict the ability of businesses to hire low-skill workers who might gladly work for lower wages in order to gain experience. Union members thus face less competition from workers who might threaten union jobs.

And there you have it. The “real” reason behind the minimum wage push is to pay back the labor unions who helped re-elect the president in the form of higher wages, increased negotiating leverage, and less competition for jobs. The president’s decision to unilaterally hike the minimum wage for federal contract workers to \$10.10 an hour doesn’t really make sense until you view it through that lens (is there a critical mass of federal contractors who make only the minimum wage?).

Unfortunately, when it comes to politics, the good reason is rarely, if ever, the real reason.

NY Times interviews [Salman Khan of the Khan Academy](#).

In 2008, Salman Khan, then a young hedge-fund analyst with a master’s in computer science from M.I.T., started the Khan Academy, offering free online courses mainly in the STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Today the free electronic schoolhouse reaches more than 10 million users around the world, with more than 5,000 courses, and the approach has been widely admired and copied. I spoke with Mr. Khan, 37, for more than two hours, in person and by telephone. What follows is a condensed and edited version of our conversations.

Q. How did the Kahn Academy begin?

A. In 2004, my 12-year-old cousin Nadia visited with my wife and me in Boston. She’s from New Orleans, where I grew up.

It turned out Nadia was having trouble in math. She was getting tracked into a slower math class. I don’t think she or her parents realized the repercussions if she’d stayed on the slower track. I said, “I want to work with you, if you are willing.” When Nadia went home, we began tutoring by telephone. ...

... The Internet videos started two years later when a friend asked, “How are you scaling your lessons?” I said, “I’m not.” He said, “Why don’t you make some videos of the tutorials and post them on YouTube?” I said, “That’s a horrible idea. YouTube is for cats playing piano.”

National Review

Totalitarian Troubadour

We shouldn't forget that Pete Seeger was Communism's pied piper.

by John Fund

For some liberals, there really are no adversaries to their left. President Obama's statement Tuesday on the death of folk singer Pete Seeger at age 94 was remarkable. Seeger was a talented singer, but he was also an unrepentant Stalinist until 1995, when he finally apologized for "following the [Communist] party line so slavishly." You'd think Obama might have at least acknowledged (as even Seeger did) the error of his ways. Instead, Obama celebrated him only as a hero who tried to "move this country closer to the America he knew we could be."

"Over the years, Pete used his voice — and his hammer — to strike blows for worker's rights and civil rights; world peace and environmental conservation," said Obama. "We will always be grateful to Pete Seeger." Not even a hint that the "world peace" Seeger was seeking was one that would have been dominated by the Soviet Union.

I found Seeger a highly talented musician who raised American folk music to a new standard. But, as with other artists — the Nazi-era filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl and the fascist poet Ezra Pound — an asterisk must be placed beside their names for their service in behalf of an evil cause.

Time magazine's [obituary of Seeger](#) was entitled: "Why Pete Seeger Mattered: The Pied Piper of the People's Music."

Recall that the original Pied Piper lured away the children of an entire town. They disappeared into a cave and were never seen again. When Seeger sang "If I Had a Hammer," what he really meant was "If I Had a Hammer and Sickle."

As historian Ronald Radosh wrote: "Seeger would sing and give his support to peace rallies and marches covertly sponsored by the Soviet Union and its Western front groups and dupes — while leaving his political criticism only for the United States and its defensive actions during the Cold War." Radosh, an admirer and onetime banjo student of Seeger's, says he is grateful Seeger ultimately acknowledged the crimes of Stalin.

Fair enough, but it's not enough to say, as liberal blogger Mike O'Hare wrote, that Seeger "was wrong 'for the right reasons' (ignorance and misplaced hope, not bloody-mindedness or cruelty), and in the days he got Stalin wrong, a lot of good people did the same."

Actually, the vast majority didn't, and we shouldn't forget those who did. The late John P. Roche, who served as president of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action in the 1960s and was a speechwriter for Hubert Humphrey, once told me that the success American Communists had in the 1930s by wrapping their ideology in the trappings of American traditions had to be remembered. "If authoritarianism of the right or left ever comes to America it will come surrounded by patriotism and show business," he told me. "It will be made fashionable by talented people like Pete Seeger."

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I recall interviewing East German dissidents in 1989 who were still angry at [Seeger](#) and [Kris Kristofferson](#) for the concerts they did on behalf of the Communist regime that built the Berlin Wall. He was hailed in the pages of *Neues Deutschland*, the Communist-party newspaper in East Berlin, as “the Karl Marx of the teenagers.”

By all means, let’s remember Pete Seeger for his talent while also remembering the monstrous causes he sometimes served.

Spengler

[Pete Seeger: A Mean-Spirited and Vengeful Recollection](#)

by David Goldman

I first heard Pete Seeger perform when I was five or six, when I was a red-diaper baby and he was blacklisted and drunk. What I recall most about the encounter was that the tip of his needle-nose glowed bright red. He was performing for a children's group of some sort at a time when his Communist background kept him out of public venues. His records — not just the Weavers albums, but the early Asch 78's of the Almanac Singers — were daily fare in my home, along with Woody Guthrie's children's songs. My parents knew Guthrie casually; my father once organized a concert for him at Brooklyn College, and my mother was Arlo Guthrie's nursery-school teacher.

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There is no such thing as an American "folk." We are a people summoned to these shores by an idea, not common ties of blood and culture. There is folk music in America where pockets of ethnicity resisted assimilation: African-American blues, for example, or the English songs frozen in amber in white Appalachia. That is why the best American popular music always came from black sources, performed either by black musicians or white emulators from George Gershwin on down.

Seeger's (and Guthrie's) notion of folk music had less to do with actual American sources than with a Communist-inspired Yankee version of Proletkult. The highly personalized style of a [Robert Johnson](#) and other Delta bluesmen didn't belong in the organizing handbook of the "folk" exponents who grew up in the Communist Party's failed efforts to control the trade union movement of the 1940s. The music of the American people grew out of their churches. Their instrument was the piano, not the guitar, and their style was harmonized singing of religious texts rather than the nasal wailing that Guthrie made famous. Seeger, the son of an academic musicologist and a classical violinist, was no mountain primitive, but a slick commercializer of "folk" themes with a nasty political agenda. His capacity to apologize for the brutalities of Communist regimes — including their repression of their own "folksingers" — remained undiminished with age, as [David Graham](#) reported in the *Atlantic*.

I'm willing to forgive Seeger his Stalinism. Some of my most-admired artists were Stalinists, for example, Bertolt Brecht, whose rendition of his own "[Song of the Unattainability of Human Striving](#)" from *The Threepenny Opera* is the funniest performance of the funniest song of the 20th century. I can't forgive him his musical fraud: the mind-deadening, saccharine, sentimental appeal to the lowest common denominator of taste in his signature songs — "I Had a Hammer," "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?," and so forth. Bob Dylan (of whom I'm not much of a fan) rescued himself from the bathos by poisoning the well of sentimentality with irony. His inheritance is less Dylan than the odious Peter, Paul and Mary.

One of Seeger's great selling points is that during the great leveling of the 1960s, any idiot who could play three chords on a guitar could plunk and howl through most of his repertoire. Try to play like Robert Johnson. There's a great gulf fixed. Johnson may have been self-taught, but his music sought to rise above adversity and sorrow with craft and invention. The folkies aimed lower. [Tom Lehrer](#) got it exactly right half a century ago. I know how mean-spirited and vengeful this sounds, but after suffering through this pap through my childhood, I feel entitled. Everyone deserves a few free passes at petty rancour, and I am going to use one of mine on Pete Seeger.

Related: For more thoughts about Seeger, don't miss Ed Driscoll on "[Pete Seeger's Totalitarian Trifecta.](#)" and Rick Moran, who asks, "[Is It Possible to Love the Artist, but Hate His Politics?](#)"

Wikipedia

[Kobzarskyi Tsekh](#)

[Ukrainian](#) literally "Kobzar guild" - is an organization of [kobzars](#), which existed from the 17th century in [Ukraine](#).

Blind itinerant musicians, known as [kobzars](#) and [lirnyks](#), organized themselves into guilds along the same lines as professional craftsmen. These professional itinerant musicians would gather at regular meeting spots on particular dates to celebrate religious feasts, administer examinations for the induction of novices and masters, and collect money for placement of votive candles under icons of patron saints and to also discuss the business of the guild.

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Art Ukraine

["Stalin's Massacre of the Bandurysty, Ukraine's Blind Peasant Minstrels"](#)

by Dmitrii Shostakovich, Russian Composer, (1907-1975)

"...national art was considered counterrevolutionary. Why? Because it was, like any ancient art, religious, cultic. If it's religious, then tear it out with its roots. I hope someone will write down the history of how our great native art was destroyed in the twenties and thirties. It was destroyed forever because it was oral. When they shoot a folk singer or a wandering storyteller, hundreds of great musical works die with him. Works that had never been written down. They die forever, irrevocably, because another singer represents others songs.

"I am not a historian. I could tell many tragic tales and cite many examples, but I won't do that. I will tell about one incident, only one. It's a horrible story and every time I think of it I grow frightened and I don't want to remember it. Since time immemorial, folk singers have wandered along the roads of Ukraine. They're called "lirniki" and "banduristy" there. They were almost blind men----why that is so is another question that I won't go into, but briefly, it's traditional. The point is, they were always blind and defenseless people, but no one ever touched or hurt them. Hurting a blind man---what could be lower?"



"And then in the mid thirties the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Lirniki and Banduristy was announced, and all the folk singers had to gather and discuss what to do in the future. 'Life is better, life is merrier,' Stalin has said. The blind men believed it. They came to the congress from all over Ukraine, from tiny, forgotten villages. There were several hundred of them at the congress, they say. It was a living museum, the country's living history. All its songs, all its music and poetry. And they were almost all shot, almost all of those pathetic blind men killed.

"Why was it done? Why the sadism -- killing the blind? Just like that, so that they wouldn't get underfoot. Mighty deeds were being done there, complete collectivization was under way, they had destroyed kulaks as a class, and here were these blind men, walking around singing songs of dubious content. The songs weren't passed by the censors. And what kind of censorship can you have with blind men? You can't hand a blind man a corrected and approved text and you can't write him an order either. You have to tell everything to a blind man. That takes too long. And you can't file away a piece of paper, and there's no time anyway. Collectivization. Mechanization. It was easier to shoot them. And so they did."

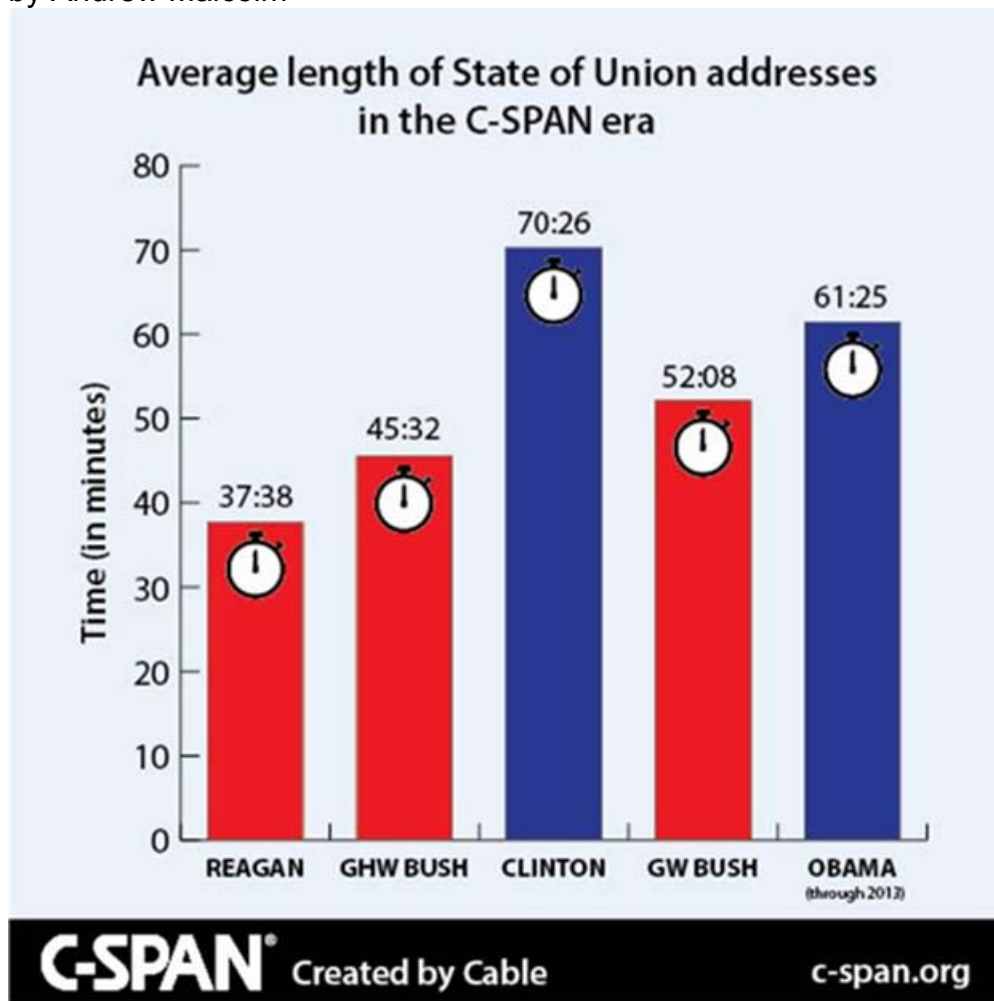
"Testimony: The Memoirs of Dimitri Shostakovich"

*Reprinted In: "Famine In The Soviet Ukraine, 1932-1933"
A Memorial Exhibition, Widener Library, Harvard University*

IBD

Obama bemoans worsening income inequality as if he hasn't been president

by Andrew Malcolm



President Obama gave another speech Tuesday night. It was the 93rd time a president has personally delivered a State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress. And it sounded like it.

Obama has looked and sounded as if he's mailing it in these past few weeks. Not Tuesday night. He seemed genuinely involved and invested in his 7,000 words.

Unfortunately for him and anyone who chose to listen to the whole 65 minutes, there wasn't anything new or even much to invest any thought in. (Scroll down for full text.) Ear candy for Obama lovers.

Here are some general observations:

Obama has clearly run out of ideas. He's recycling ones from his unremarkable address last year and even some distinct phrasings from his predecessor's State of the Unions. He's also taken to "small ball," last week meeting to cut voters' waiting times and last night offering a way for workers to save for retirement.

Ironic because Obama used to criticize Bill Clinton for seizing on small ideas to give the impression of meaningful activity. But great news for Obama's opponents.

This is the historic fellow who arrived at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue promising a radical transformation of American society. And now, thanks in large part to his own gaffes, scandals and political ineptitude, he's reduced to dickering over voting lines and college loan interest rates.

And threatening to issue executive orders because the Congress he's above wooing like a real political leader is, in a bipartisan way, acting like an equal branch of government.

Which it is.

Obama's trademark healthcare reform is sinking of its own weight and scale. Obama is so proud of that achievement that he didn't mention it until two-thirds of the way through and never once said "Affordable Care Act" or "ObamaCare." He again resorted to recycling his bogus enrollment numbers debunked weeks ago even by his usually complicit D.C. media.

Remember back in 2008 on a cul-de-sac near Toledo when a guy known as Joe the Plumber engaged Obama, who let slip his goal of wealth redistribution? Well, Obama is still trying to make a big deal out of this awful thing called income inequality. By which he means the rich get richer and the middle or lower classes lose ground in a free, competitive society.

These last four years, Obama complained, "inequality has deepened. Upward mobility has stalled. The cold, hard fact is that even in the midst of recovery, too many Americans are working more than ever just to get by, let alone to get ahead. And too many still aren't working at all."

This is a stunning and inexplicably stupid admission of his own failure. As Brit Hume observed, "Who's been president?" And -- *oh, look!* -- as the [Washington Post noted](#), in recent decades income equality improved the most under the two Bushes. That's gotta sting the Chicagoan.

Obama apparently didn't have time in his remarks to note that under his economic "leadership" the labor force participation rate is at an historic low and that last month more people left the workforce than found jobs.

He claimed the Afghan war is winding down, which, of course, it isn't. The American role is winding down, but the country will have to go it alone unless Obama negotiates a status of forces agreement for residual trainers, as the president failed to do in Iraq.

Obama also apparently didn't have time to mention that although he's presided over only 38% of the 13-year combat struggle, he's responsible for 74% of the 2,309 American casualties.

Remember in 2012 how Osama bin Laden was still dead and al Qaeda was "decimated" and "on the run"? Well, now Obama's AQ portrait has morphed. "The threat has evolved," Obama explains now, and "danger remains."

Nor did he have rhetorical room to update the nation on his professed quest to bring the Benghazi murderers to justice. Nor explain his role in that deadly debacle. Nor apologize -- genuinely and clearly -- for his repeated reassuring lies about keeping your doctor and health plan.

Leading up to his speech, Obama aides tipped reporters that it was going to be a hardline partisan assault to set the boundaries of the midterm election campaign. The aides may have been left out of the loop of last-minute changes in tone. Or, more likely, they wanted to overstate the harshness so what did come out, seemed tame by comparison.

"Opportunity is who we are," Obama proclaimed. State of the Union addresses do not rescue doomed presidencies. But Obama had an opportunity to sketch a new, more positive path for the 1,087 days left on his White House lease.

Instead, Jay Leno referred accurately in his late-night monologue to the Obama administration as "lame Duck Dynasty."

The Federalist

11 Facts About The Minimum Wage That President Obama Forgot To Mention

Most minimum wage workers are under 25 and work in sales or food preparation.

by Sean Davis

During his annual State of the Union address before Congress, President Barack Obama made a big deal about the need to increase the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. The move followed months of promises and rhetoric from the White House about how important it was to the economy to increase the minimum wage.

Back in August, the White House Twitter account even posted an infographic claiming that 15 million workers would "directly benefit" from a minimum wage increase and that "nobody who works full-time should live in poverty." And in December, both the White House and the president's labor secretary publicly expressed support for nationwide strikes by hourly workers demanding higher pay (because nothing says "I deserve a raise" like refusing to show up to work).

Unfortunately for the White House, many of its claims about the minimum wage are divorced from reality. Here are 11 facts about the minimum wage that Barack Obama forgot to mention during his State of the Union address.

1) Only 1 Percent Of The U.S. Labor Force Earns The Minimum Wage

Despite the hoopla surrounding the issue, only a tiny percentage of American workers actually earn the federal hourly minimum wage: 1 percent, to be exact. In 2012, the most recent year for which nationwide minimum wage data is available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), roughly 1.5 million hourly workers were paid the federal minimum wage of \$7.25. To put that into perspective, the U.S. labor force consisted of nearly 155 million workers in 2012.

2) Teenagers Comprise The Single Largest Age Group Of Minimum Wage Workers

Teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 years comprise 31 percent of all minimum wage workers in the U.S. according to the BLS. Workers between 20 and 24 years of age comprise 24 percent of all minimum wage workers, those between 25 and 34 years comprise 15.5 percent, workers between 35 and 44 years comprise less than 10 percent, and those 45 years and up comprise roughly 20 percent of all minimum wage workers in the U.S.

3) Most Minimum Wage Workers Are Under The Age Of 25

According to federal data, over 55 percent of all federal minimum wage workers are under the age of 25. Unsurprisingly, young workers are also the most likely to be unemployed. As of last month, the unemployment rate for 16-to-19-year-olds was 20.2 percent, and the unemployment rate for 20-to-24-year-olds was 11.1 percent. The overall U.S. unemployment rate currently sits at 6.7 percent.

4) A Majority Of Those Who Earn The Minimum Wage Work In Food Preparation Or Sales

In addition to classifying minimum wage workers by age, BLS also categorizes them according to their industry and occupation. Data for 2012 indicate that most minimum wage workers work in “food preparation and serving related occupations” (26.1 percent of all minimum wage workers) or in “sales and related occupations” (25.5 percent of all minimum wage workers), an occupation that often pays commissions and bonuses in addition to fixed hourly rates.

5) Less Than 5 Percent Of People Who Earn The Minimum Wage Work In Construction Or Manufacturing

While there seems to be a persistent belief that a large number of minimum wage workers are salt-of-the-earth construction manufacturing types, that’s just not the case. In fact, less than 5 percent of all minimum wage workers are employed in the construction (0.8 percent) or manufacturing industries (3.3 percent) according to federal wage data.

6) A Majority Of Them Also Worked Less Than 30 Hours Per Week

It is true that it is difficult to make a living when you earn only \$7.25 an hour. It’s even harder to make a living when you don’t work full-time. BLS says that in 2012, 51.5 percent of U.S. workers earning the federal minimum wage – roughly 800,000 out of 1.5 million — worked an average of 29 hours or less each week.

7) Less Than One-Third Worked Full-Time

You read that correctly. Only 32 percent of the country’s minimum wage workers work full-time — 501,000 out of more than 1.5 million, to be exact. And of those 501,000 minimum wage workers who regularly put in a full work week, only 39 percent are men. Now, it can be argued that it’s not these workers fault that they’re unable to find full-time hourly work. However, Obama administration laws and regulations haven’t made it easier to find full-time work. Recently enacted laws like Obamacare have made the quest even more difficult by creating enormous incentives for employers to shift workers to part-time roles to avoid the health law’s onerous mandates and regulations.

8) A Full-Time Minimum Wage Worker In 2014 Will Make 24 Percent *More* Than The Federal Poverty Limit

A White House tweet and accompanying infographic from last August said, “It’s time to raise the minimum wage because nobody who works full-time should live in poverty.” But a little math and a quick look at the 2014 federal poverty guidelines show that a single individual who earns the current federal minimum wage and works full-time will earn \$14,500 in a year (50 weeks per year x 40 hours per week x \$7.25 per hour). By way of comparison, the federal poverty limit for 2014 for a one-person household is \$11,670.

Wage income from a two-earner family with two kids where both adults earned the minimum wage would exceed the federal poverty limit by 22 percent: \$29,000 in income compared to a four-member household federal poverty limit of \$23,850. And that’s before federal benefits like Medicaid and food stamps are included.

9) One-Third Of Minimum Wage Workers Either Dropped Out Of Or Never Attended High School

Educational attainment is clearly a significant factor in determining a worker’s hourly wage. According to BLS, over 36 percent of minimum wage earners — 568,000 out of more than 1.5 million — lack a high school diploma. Only 4 percent of minimum wage workers have a bachelor’s degree or higher. That doesn’t mean a college education is best for everyone, but it does suggest that lacking one can make it more difficult to move up the pay ladder.

10) There Are Nearly Six Times More Minimum Wage Workers Today Than In 2007

In 1980, the number of minimum wage workers in the U.S. reached a peak of 4.7 million workers. At that time, the prevailing federal minimum wage was \$3.10 an hour. In 2007, following more than two decades of economic prosperity, the number of Americans earning the minimum wage bottomed out at 267,000 workers. Since then, the number has risen dramatically, exceeding 1.5 million workers as of 2012, the most recent year for which data are available.

11) A Change In The Minimum Wage Often Triggers Union Wage Hikes And Benefit Renegotiations

The famous investment banker J.P. Morgan said something along the lines of, “Every man has two reasons for everything he does: a good reason and the real reason.” Giving minimum wage workers a little extra cash is the White House’s “good” reason for supporting a hike in the minimum wage. But what’s the real reason? Richard Berman, a union analyst, studied numerous union contracts and published his findings on their terms in the Wall Street Journal in 2013:

The labor contracts that we examined used a variety of methods to trigger the [wage] increases. The two most popular formulas were setting baseline union wages as a percentage above the state or federal minimum wage or mandating a flat wage premium above the minimum wage.

Other union contracts stipulate that, following a minimum-wage increase, the union and the employer reopen wage talks.

[...]

Minimum-wage hikes are beneficial to unions in other ways. The increases restrict the ability of businesses to hire low-skill workers who might gladly work for lower wages in order to gain experience. Union members thus face less competition from workers who might threaten union jobs.

And there you have it. The “real” reason behind the minimum wage push is to pay back the labor unions who helped re-elect the president in the form of higher wages, increased negotiating leverage, and less competition for jobs. The president’s decision to unilaterally hike the minimum wage for federal contract workers to \$10.10 an hour doesn’t really make sense until you view it through that lens (is there a critical mass of federal contractors who make only the minimum wage?).

Unfortunately, when it comes to politics, the good reason is rarely, if ever, the real reason.

NY Times

It All Started With a 12-Year-Old Cousin

Salman Khan Turned Family Tutoring Into Khan Academy

by Claudia Dreifus



Salman Khan at the offices of Khan Academy, which reaches more than 10 million users. Bill Gates invested in the school.

In 2008, Salman Khan, then a young hedge-fund analyst with a master’s in computer science from M.I.T., started the [Khan Academy](#), offering free online courses mainly in the STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Today the [free electronic schoolhouse](#) reaches more than 10 million users around the world, with more than 5,000 courses, and the approach has been [widely admired and copied](#). I spoke with Mr. Khan, 37, for more than two hours, in person and by telephone. What follows is a condensed and edited version of our conversations.

Q. How did the Khan Academy begin?

A. In 2004, my 12-year-old cousin Nadia visited with my wife and me in Boston. She's from New Orleans, where I grew up.

It turned out Nadia was having trouble in math. She was getting tracked into a slower math class. I don't think she or her parents realized the repercussions if she'd stayed on the slower track. I said, "I want to work with you, if you are willing." When Nadia went home, we began tutoring by telephone.

Did you have background as a math educator?

No, though I've had a passion for math my whole life. It got me to M.I.T. and enabled me to get multiple degrees in math and engineering. Long story shortened: Nadia got through what she thought she couldn't. Soon word got around the family that "free tutoring" was going on, and I found myself working on the phone with about 15 cousins.

To make it manageable, I hacked together a website where my cousins could go to practice problems and I could suggest things for them to work on. When I'd tutor them over the telephone, I'd use Yahoo Doodle, a program that was part of Yahoo Messenger, so they could visualize the calculations on their computers while we talked.

The Internet videos started two years later when a friend asked, "How are you scaling your lessons?" I said, "I'm not." He said, "Why don't you make some videos of the tutorials and post them on YouTube?" I said, "That's a horrible idea. YouTube is for cats playing piano."

Still, I gave it try. Soon my cousins said they liked me more on YouTube than in person. They were really saying that they found my explanations more valuable when they could have them on demand and where no one would judge them. And soon many people who were not my cousins were watching. By 2008, I was reaching tens of thousands every month.

Youtube is a search engine where producers can upload short videos at no cost. Would the Khan Academy have been possible without this technology?

No. Before YouTube, the cost of hosting streaming videos was incredibly expensive. I wouldn't have been able to afford the server space for that much video — or traffic. That said, I was probably the 500th person to show up on YouTube with educational videos. Our success probably had to do with the technology being ready and the fact that my content resonated with users.

In your videos, the viewers never actually saw you — just cartoonlike equations you'd drawn. The voice-overs were friendly and encouraging. Had you taken the dread out of math instruction?

I tried to strike a balance. There's some STEM teaching where the lecture is blah — no joy, no intonation. On the other side, you have people who try to make it fun by making it less math-y. That's often cheesy. I was trying to get to the idea behind the math and say: "This is a really interesting idea. Once you get it, it's beautiful."

Least Common Multiple Video by Khan Academy

Talk about the "studio" you built to record your videos.

It was in a closet at my home. It had a \$900 desktop from Best Buy and a \$200 microphone. I had a little pen tablet that I got from Amazon and screen capture software. I drew on an art program on my computer while talking into a microphone.

Around 2009, I left my job at the hedge fund to devote myself full time to building the Khan Academy. I dreamed a lot. Then, one day, [the philanthropist] Ann Doerr sent a text message. Something like "I'm at the [Aspen Ideas Festival](#) and Bill Gates is on stage. For the last five minutes, he's been talking about the Khan Academy, how he uses it for his kids."

He ended up supporting us financially, allowing the Khan Academy to become a real organization.

How are Khan Academy tutorials different from MOOCs, the massive open online courses that many universities offer for free?

They tend to be regular courses transplanted into the virtual world. They tell you what to do in Week 1, Week 2. You take a final exam. Some people pass. Some don't.

That's not what we want. We don't want to see who can keep up with an M.I.T. course and who can't. We want to get everyone to the point that they have the knowledge that the M.I.T. course is trying to teach them. When you go to the site today, you get a test to evaluate where you are in math. You determine your own pace. And you don't go to the next level until you've mastered the previous one.

Another difference between us and many of them is we have a platform where people can get personalized suggestions. Our software tracks your progress and customizes your lessons. You can take as long as necessary to get to a high level.

We're more like a highly enriched, personalized textbook, a tool for you on your own or your teacher or tutor.

Last April, when administrators at San Jose State university wanted to use Harvard's online version of Professor Michael Sandel's "Justice" course as the basis of their undergraduate philosophy class, some San Jose State faculty [members protested](#), saying the school was shortchanging students. Were the professors resisting progress?

I think they are right. To tell the San Jose faculty, "Hey, move over, we've got the Harvard guy on tape — why don't you facilitate him teaching your kids and you grade the papers?" — that's the incorrect way to be thinking about leveraging technology. The single most valuable thing that

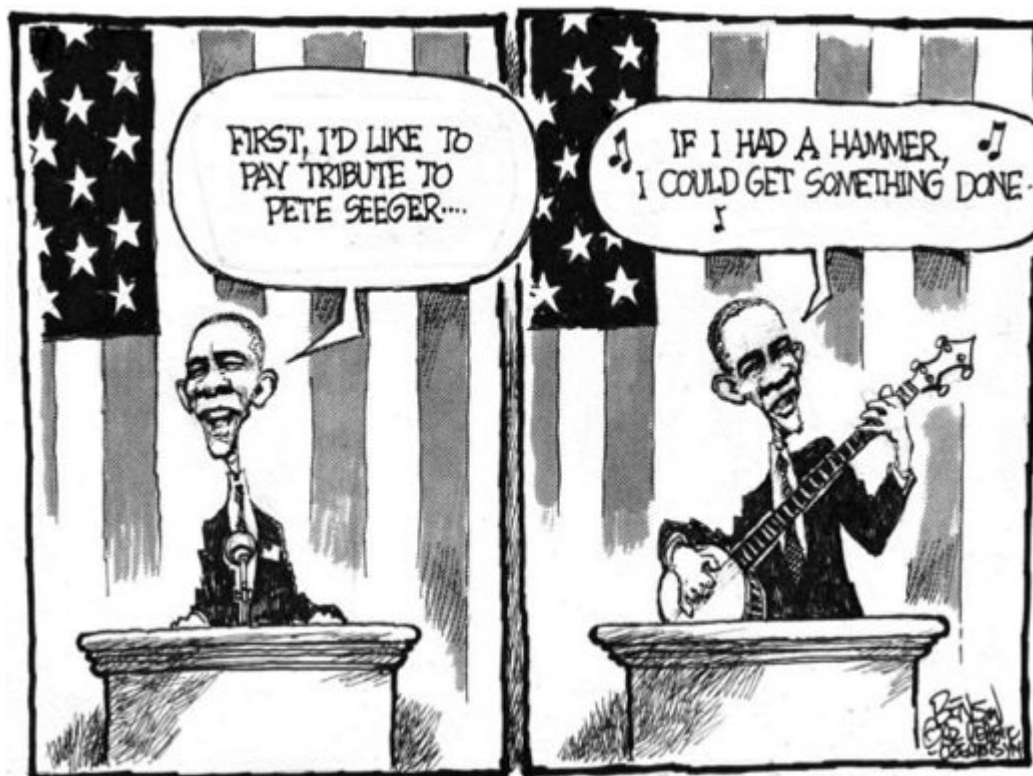
any student at San Jose State could have is a conversation with their professor. He or she doesn't need to watch Michael Sandel having a Socratic dialogue with Harvard students.

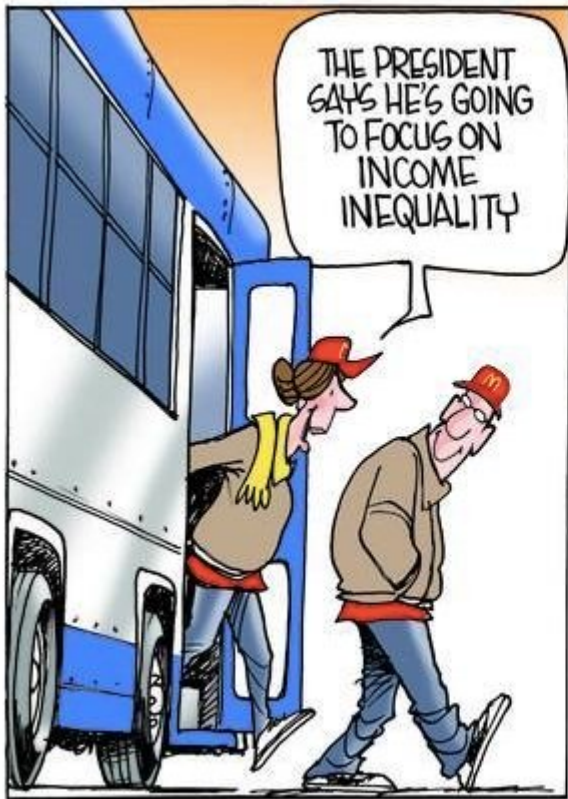
The Washington Post had [an article](#) last year saying a viewer had discovered that two of your tutorials were wrong and you'd removed them from your offerings. Have you been growing too quickly, doing too much?

You know, the benefit of this form is that everything we do is out there. You get feedback and critiques. And when we see [an error], we take a second look. I view that as very healthy. We are definitely imperfect, but we have processes in place to put in a check. In a traditional classroom, you often don't know when a professor makes a mistake.

What ever became of your cousin Nadia?

Nadia is now a pre-med and writing major senior at Sarah Lawrence. She's turned out to be a very impressive young woman. I do, however, sometimes joke with her that a lot is riding on her future!







TIM KELY

Q: IS IT TIME TO END THE WAR ON DRUGS?

NO.



NO.



NO.

