April 29, 2014

Sometimes cacti get in the way on Arizona golf courses

Good **WSJ Essay** on our limitless natural resources.
How many times have you heard that we humans are "using up" the world's resources, "running out" of oil, "reaching the limits" of the atmosphere's capacity to cope with pollution or "approaching the carrying capacity" of the land's ability to support a greater population? The assumption behind all such statements is that there is a fixed amount of stuff—metals, oil, clean air, land—and that we risk exhausting it through our consumption.

"We are using 50% more resources than the Earth can sustainably produce, and unless we change course, that number will grow fast—by 2030, even two planets will not be enough," says Jim Leape, director general of the World Wide Fund for Nature International (formerly the World Wildlife Fund).

But here's a peculiar feature of human history: We burst through such limits again and again. After all, as a Saudi oil minister once said, the Stone Age didn't end for lack of stone. Ecologists call this "niche construction"—that people (and indeed some other animals) can create new opportunities for themselves by making their habitats more productive in some way. Agriculture is the classic example of niche construction: We stopped relying on nature's bounty and substituted an artificial and much larger bounty.

Economists call the same phenomenon innovation. What frustrates them about ecologists is the latter's tendency to think in terms of static limits. Ecologists can't seem to see that when whale oil starts to run out, petroleum is discovered, or that when farm yields flatten, fertilizer comes along, or that when glass fiber is invented, demand for copper falls.

That frustration is heartily reciprocated. Ecologists think that economists espouse a sort of superstitious magic called "markets" or "prices" to avoid confronting the reality of limits to growth. The easiest way to raise a cheer in a conference of ecologists is to make a rude joke about economists.

Ship breakers in Bangladesh reported on in **Daily Mail, UK**.
The sad beauty of these incredible images cast a light on the shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh, where workers face death and injury from accidents and environmental hazards for just a few dollars a a day.

Chittagong Ship Breaking Yard is the largest of its type in the world. Around 80 active ship breaking yards line an eight-mile stretch of the coast, employing more than 200,000 Bangladeshis and accounting for half of all the steel in Bangladesh.

Ship breaking is the dismantling of ships for scrap recycling. Most ships have a lifespan of a 25-30 years before there is so much wear that repair becomes uneconomical, but the rising cost to insure and maintain aging vessels can make even younger vessels unprofitable to operate. ...

The Cliven Bundy stand-off with the Feds never seemed to have a foundation we could understand. So, other than John Fund's piece on the proliferation of SWAT teams at all levels of government, we have ignored the kerfuffle. Thank God. **Jonathan Tobin** posts on Commentary's reluctance to champion that cause too.
You may have noticed that among the many and varied topics touched upon by COMMENTARY writers in recent weeks, none of us chose to weigh in on the Bundy Ranch controversy that attracted so much notice on cable news, talk radio, and the blogosphere. The reason was that none of us considered the standoff between a Nevada tax scofflaw and the federal government over grazing rights fees to rise to the level of an issue of national interest. The government may own too much land in the West and may have acted in a heavy-handed manner in this case but anyone with sense understood that stiffing the feds is likely to end badly for those who play that game, something that even a bomb-thrower like Glenn Beck appeared to be able to understand.

Moreover, there was something slightly absurd about the same people who froth at the mouth when "amnesty" for illegal immigrants is mentioned demanding that Cliven Bundy be let off the hook for what he owed Uncle Sam. ...

... The Bundy ranch standoff is a teachable moment for libertarians and conservatives. We don't need to waste much time debunking the claim that a belief in limited government and calls for an end to the orgy of taxing and spending in Washington are racist. These are risible, lame arguments that fail on their own. But like liberals who need to draw a distinction between their positions and those of the anti-American, anti-capitalist far left, those on the right do need to draw equally bright lines between themselves and the likes of Cliven Bundy. If they don't, spectacles such as the one we witnessed this week are inevitable.

Jennifer Rubin has more on the subject with warnings for the GOP.
Even before uttering his disgusting, racist remarks, Cliven Bundy was bad news. He waged a legal fight over a fee for grazing rights for more than a decade – and lost everywhere. His solution? Meet federal officials with guns when they tried to enforce a lawful court order to remove his cattle from government land. Why in the world would talk show hosts and U.S. senators Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and Dean Heller (R-Nev.) think such a character was admirable?

On this I am in full agreement with the Weekly Standard's Scrapbook: "Cliven Bundy is no hero of any kind. No conservative would pick and choose the laws he intends to obey, defy the rest, and challenge the rule of democracy with guns. No hero would adopt the terrorist's tactic of placing innocents in harm's way. Any fool can pick up a weapon and aim at an officer of the law; the moral power of civil disobedience lies in the willingness to defer to the law and accept punishment on principle."

The Bundy situation is not an isolated one. The far-right — including talk show hosts, bloggers and some elected officials — often show zeal for bad causes because they imagine harebrained or illegal ideas are true expressions of liberty and opposition to the scourge of big government. These are the people who thought the shutdown was a great idea because it is "important to fight." Many of them perpetrated the falsity that the National Security Agency was "listening to your phone calls" and that a surveillance program with zero instances of abuse that was helpful to our national security had to be dumped.

They are drawn to unsavory cranks like a moth to a flame. Not only did Rand Paul, for example, embrace Bundy before his racist comments, he also hired on the pro-Confederate "Southern Avenger" and dubbed Edward Snowden a modern-day Martin Luther King Jr. Others in the right-wing groups spent hundreds millions of dollars and climbed on the bandwagon for crank Senate candidates who challenged strong conservative incumbents. ...

Where did they come from? In Pickerhead's factory they're called "ghost turds." The **NY Times** calls them packing peanuts.
In 1960, a research chemist named Maurice Laverne Zweigle packed a raw egg and a few handfuls of skinny, bendy, polystyrene noodles into a small cardboard box, sealed the flaps and tossed it off a third-floor roof. His invention worked: The egg was unscathed.

“At first we called it ‘spaghetti,’□” said Zweigle, now 88 and still living near his former employer, the Dow Chemical Company, in northern Michigan. The tubular shape was Zweigle’s key discovery: Whereas plastic spheres would have slid around the fragile item and let it fall to the bottom, the noodles tangled together to form a secure nest. ...

WSJ

The World's Resources Aren't Running Out

Ecologists worry that the world's resources come in fixed amounts that will run out, but we have broken through such limits again and again

by Matt Ridley

A worker inspects solar panels in Dunhuang, China. We have an estimated supply of one million years of tellurium, a rare element used in some panels.

How many times have you heard that we humans are "using up" the world's resources, "running out" of oil, "reaching the limits" of the atmosphere's capacity to cope with pollution or "approaching the carrying capacity" of the land's ability to support a greater population? The assumption behind all such statements is that there is a fixed amount of stuff—metals, oil, clean air, land—and that we risk exhausting it through our consumption.

"We are using 50% more resources than the Earth can sustainably produce, and unless we change course, that number will grow fast—by 2030, even two planets will not be enough," says Jim Leape, director general of the World Wide Fund for Nature International (formerly the World Wildlife Fund).

But here's a peculiar feature of human history: We burst through such limits again and again. After all, as a Saudi oil minister once said, the Stone Age didn't end for lack of stone. Ecologists call this "niche construction"—that people (and indeed some other animals) can create new opportunities for themselves by making their habitats more productive in some way. Agriculture is the classic example of niche construction: We stopped relying on nature's bounty and substituted an artificial and much larger bounty.

Economists call the same phenomenon innovation. What frustrates them about ecologists is the latter's tendency to think in terms of static limits. Ecologists can't seem to see that when whale oil starts to run out, petroleum is discovered, or that when farm yields flatten, fertilizer comes along, or that when glass fiber is invented, demand for copper falls.

That frustration is heartily reciprocated. Ecologists think that economists espouse a sort of superstitious magic called "markets" or "prices" to avoid confronting the reality of limits to growth. The easiest way to raise a cheer in a conference of ecologists is to make a rude joke about economists.

I have lived among both tribes. I studied various forms of ecology in an academic setting for seven years and then worked at the Economist magazine for eight years. When I was an ecologist (in the academic sense of the word, not the political one, though I also had antinuclear stickers on my car), I very much espoused the carrying-capacity viewpoint—that there were limits to growth. I nowadays lean to the view that there are no limits because we can invent new ways of doing more with less.

This disagreement goes to the heart of many current political issues and explains much about why people disagree about environmental policy. In the climate debate, for example, pessimists see a limit to the atmosphere's capacity to cope with extra carbon dioxide without rapid warming. So a continuing increase in emissions if economic growth continues will eventually accelerate warming to dangerous rates. But optimists see economic growth leading to technological change that would result in the use of lower-carbon energy. That would allow warming to level off long before it does much harm.

It is striking, for example, that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's recent forecast that temperatures would rise by 3.7 to 4.8 degrees Celsius compared with preindustrial levels by 2100 was based on several assumptions: little technological change, an end to the 50-year fall in population growth rates, a tripling (only) of per capita income and not much improvement in the energy efficiency of the economy. Basically, that would mean a world much like today's but with lots more people burning lots more coal and oil, leading to an increase in emissions. Most economists expect a five- or tenfold increase in income, huge changes in technology and an end to population growth by 2100: not so many more people needing much less carbon.

In 1679, Antonie van Leeuwenhoek, the great Dutch microscopist, estimated that the planet could hold 13.4 billion people, a number that most demographers think we may never reach. Since then, estimates have bounced around between 1 billion and 100 billion, with no sign of converging on an agreed figure.

Economists point out that we keep improving the productivity of each acre of land by applying fertilizer, mechanization, pesticides and irrigation. Further innovation is bound to shift the ceiling

upward. Jesse Ausubel at Rockefeller University calculates that the amount of land required to grow a given quantity of food has fallen by 65% over the past 50 years, world-wide.

Ecologists object that these innovations rely on nonrenewable resources, such as oil and gas, or renewable ones that are being used up faster than they are replenished, such as aquifers. So current yields cannot be maintained, let alone improved.

In his recent book "The View from Lazy Point," the ecologist Carl Safina estimates that if everybody had the living standards of Americans, we would need 2.5 Earths because the world's agricultural land just couldn't grow enough food for more than 2.5 billion people at that level of consumption. Harvard emeritus professor E.O. Wilson, one of ecology's patriarchs, reckoned that only if we all turned vegetarian could the world's farms grow enough food to support 10 billion people.

Economists respond by saying that since large parts of the world, especially in Africa, have yet to gain access to fertilizer and modern farming techniques, there is no reason to think that the global land requirements for a given amount of food will cease shrinking any time soon. Indeed, Mr. Ausubel, together with his colleagues Iddo Wernick and Paul Waggoner, came to the startling conclusion that, even with generous assumptions about population growth and growing affluence leading to greater demand for meat and other luxuries, and with ungenerous assumptions about future global yield improvements, we will need less farmland in 2050 than we needed in 2000. (So long, that is, as we don't grow more biofuels on land that could be growing food.)

But surely intensification of yields depends on inputs that may run out? Take water, a commodity that limits the production of food in many places. Estimates made in the 1960s and 1970s of water demand by the year 2000 proved grossly overestimated: The world used half as much water as experts had projected 30 years before.

The reason was greater economy in the use of water by new irrigation techniques. Some countries, such as Israel and Cyprus, have cut water use for irrigation through the use of drip irrigation. Combine these improvements with solar-driven desalination of seawater world-wide, and it is highly unlikely that fresh water will limit human population.

The best-selling book "Limits to Growth," published in 1972 by the Club of Rome (an influential global think tank), argued that we would have bumped our heads against all sorts of ceilings by now, running short of various metals, fuels, minerals and space. Why did it not happen? In a word, technology: better mining techniques, more frugal use of materials, and if scarcity causes price increases, substitution by cheaper material. We use 100 times thinner gold plating on computer connectors than we did 40 years ago. The steel content of cars and buildings keeps on falling.

Until about 10 years ago, it was reasonable to expect that natural gas might run out in a few short decades and oil soon thereafter. If that were to happen, agricultural yields would plummet, and the world would be faced with a stark dilemma: Plow up all the remaining rain forest to grow food, or starve.

But thanks to fracking and the shale revolution, peak oil and gas have been postponed. They will run out one day, but only in the sense that you will run out of Atlantic Ocean one day if you take a rowboat west out of a harbor in Ireland. Just as you are likely to stop rowing long before you bump into Newfoundland, so we may well find cheap substitutes for fossil fuels long before they run out.

The economist and metals dealer Tim Worstall gives the example of tellurium, a key ingredient of some kinds of solar panels. Tellurium is one of the rarest elements in the Earth's crust—one atom per billion. Will it soon run out? Mr. Worstall estimates that there are 120 million tons of it, or a million years' supply altogether. It is sufficiently concentrated in the residues from refining copper ores, called copper slimes, to be worth extracting for a very long time to come. One day, it will also be recycled as old solar panels get cannibalized to make new ones.

Or take phosphorus, an element vital to agricultural fertility. The richest phosphate mines, such as on the island of Nauru in the South Pacific, are all but exhausted. Does that mean the world is running out? No: There are extensive lower grade deposits, and if we get desperate, all the phosphorus atoms put into the ground over past centuries still exist, especially in the mud of estuaries. It's just a matter of concentrating them again.

In 1972, the ecologist Paul Ehrlich of Stanford University came up with a simple formula called IPAT, which stated that the impact of humankind was equal to population multiplied by affluence multiplied again by technology. In other words, the damage done to Earth increases the more people there are, the richer they get and the more technology they have.

Many ecologists still subscribe to this doctrine, which has attained the status of holy writ in ecology. But the past 40 years haven't been kind to it. In many respects, greater affluence and new technology have led to less human impact on the planet, not more. Richer people with new technologies tend not to collect firewood and bushmeat from natural forests; instead, they use electricity and farmed chicken—both of which need much less land. In 2006, Mr. Ausubel calculated that no country with a GDP per head greater than $4,600 has a falling stock of forest (in density as well as in acreage).

Haiti is 98% deforested and literally brown on satellite images, compared with its green, well-forested neighbor, the Dominican Republic. The difference stems from Haiti's poverty, which causes it to rely on charcoal for domestic and industrial energy, whereas the Dominican Republic is wealthy enough to use fossil fuels, subsidizing propane gas for cooking fuel specifically so that people won't cut down forests.

Part of the problem is that the word "consumption" means different things to the two tribes. Ecologists use it to mean "the act of using up a resource"; economists mean "the purchase of goods and services by the public" (both definitions taken from the Oxford dictionary).

But in what sense is water, tellurium or phosphorus "used up" when products made with them are bought by the public? They still exist in the objects themselves or in the environment. Water returns to the environment through sewage and can be reused. Phosphorus gets recycled through compost. Tellurium is in solar panels, which can be recycled. As the economist Thomas Sowell wrote in his 1980 book "Knowledge and Decisions," "Although we speak loosely of 'production,' man neither creates nor destroys matter, but only transforms it."

Given that innovation—or "niche construction"—causes ever more productivity, how do ecologists justify the claim that we are already overdrawn at the planetary bank and would need at least another planet to sustain the lifestyles of 10 billion people at U.S. standards of living?

Examine the calculations done by a group called the Global Footprint Network—a think tank founded by Mathis Wackernagel in Oakland, Calif., and supported by more than 70 international

environmental organizations—and it becomes clear. The group assumes that the fossil fuels burned in the pursuit of higher yields must be offset in the future by tree planting on a scale that could soak up the emitted carbon dioxide. A widely used measure of "ecological footprint" simply assumes that 54% of the acreage we need should be devoted to "carbon uptake."

But what if tree planting wasn't the only way to soak up carbon dioxide? Or if trees grew faster when irrigated and fertilized so you needed fewer of them? Or if we cut emissions, as the U.S. has recently done by substituting gas for coal in electricity generation? Or if we tolerated some increase in emissions (which are measurably increasing crop yields, by the way)? Any of these factors could wipe out a huge chunk of the deemed ecological overdraft and put us back in planetary credit.

Helmut Haberl of Klagenfurt University in Austria is a rare example of an ecologist who takes economics seriously. He points out that his fellow ecologists have been using "human appropriation of net primary production"—that is, the percentage of the world's green vegetation eaten or prevented from growing by us and our domestic animals—as an indicator of ecological limits to growth. Some ecologists had begun to argue that we were using half or more of all the greenery on the planet.

This is wrong, says Dr. Haberl, for several reasons. First, the amount appropriated is still fairly low: About 14.2% is eaten by us and our animals, and an additional 9.6% is prevented from growing by goats and buildings, according to his estimates. Second, most economic growth happens without any greater use of biomass. Indeed, human appropriation usually declines as a country industrializes and the harvest grows—as a result of agricultural intensification rather than through plowing more land.

Finally, human activities actually increase the production of green vegetation in natural ecosystems. Fertilizer taken up by crops is carried into forests and rivers by wild birds and animals, where it boosts yields of wild vegetation too (sometimes too much, causing algal blooms in water). In places like the Nile delta, wild ecosystems are more productive than they would be without human intervention, despite the fact that much of the land is used for growing human food.

If I could have one wish for the Earth's environment, it would be to bring together the two tribes—to convene a grand powwow of ecologists and economists. I would pose them this simple question and not let them leave the room until they had answered it: How can innovation improve the environment?

Mr. Ridley is the author of "The Rational Optimist" and a member of the British House of Lords.

Daily Mail

The wages of fear: The harrowing plight of the ship breakers of Bangladesh - one of the most dangerous jobs in the world

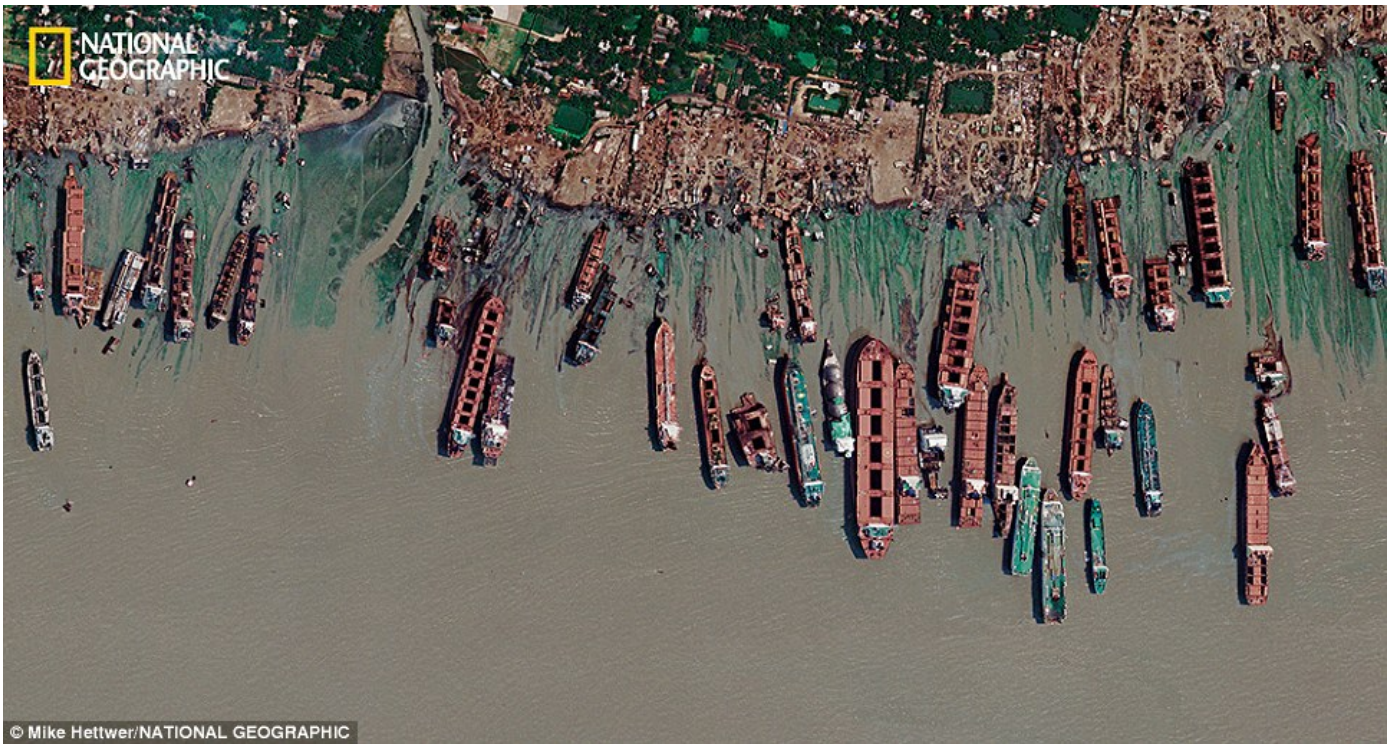
Arduous and dangerous job employs 200,000 Bangladeshis and is notorious for injuries to and deaths of workers

by Sam Webb

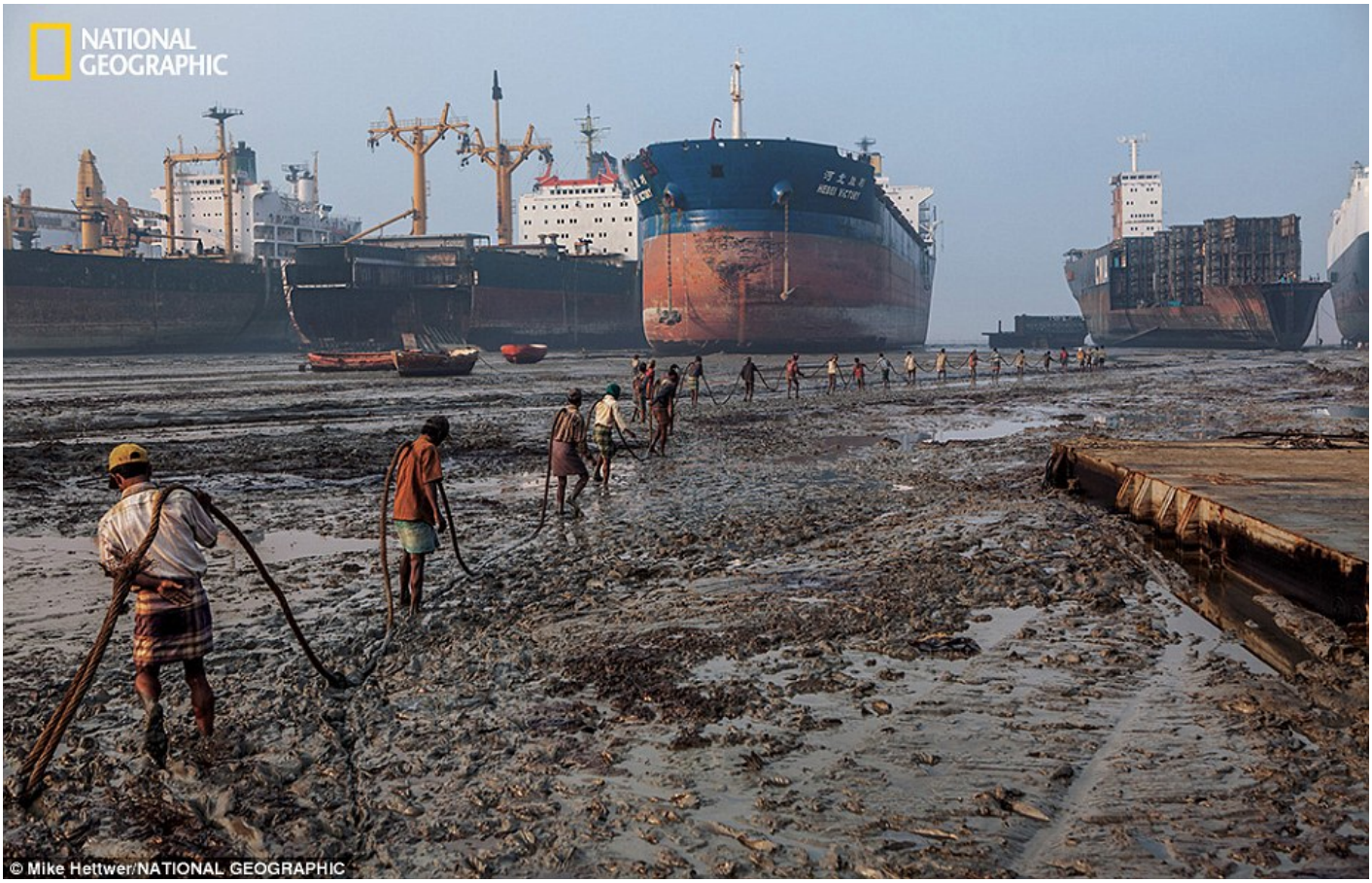
The sad beauty of these incredible images cast a light on the shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh, where workers face death and injury from accidents and environmental hazards for just a few dollars a a day.

Chittagong Ship Breaking Yard is the largest of its type in the world. Around 80 active ship breaking yards line an eight-mile stretch of the coast, employing more than 200,000 Bangladeshis and accounting for half of all the steel in Bangladesh.

Ship breaking is the dismantling of ships for scrap recycling. Most ships have a lifespan of a 25-30 years before there is so much wear that repair becomes uneconomical, but the rising cost to insure and maintain aging vessels can make even younger vessels unprofitable to operate.



A satellite image shows a mile-long stretch of the Bangladeshi coast just north of Chittagong, where ships from around the world are beached and dismantled



Arduous: At low tide ship-breakers haul a 10,000-pound cable to a beached ship to winch pieces ashore as they dismantle it

Swarms of laborers from the poorest parts of Bangladesh use acetylene torches and their hands to slice the carcass into pieces. These are hauled off the beach by teams of loaders, then melted down.

Ship breaking allows materials from the ship, especially steel, to be recycled. Equipment, fuel and chemicals on board the vessel can also be reused.

Peter Gwin, writing for **National Geographic**, visited the region to see it first hand. He described the guards, razor wire-topped fences and signs prohibiting photography there, installed following scrutiny in the ship breaker's operations after a spate of deaths.

After workers spent several days cutting through the decks of the Leona I, a large section suddenly crashes, sending shards of steel flying toward the yard managers. Built in Split, Croatia, the cargo vessel was at sea for 30 years, about the average ship's life span

He said: 'In the sprawling shantytowns that have grown up around the yards, I met dozens of the workers. Many had deep, jagged scars. "Chittagong tattoos," one man called them.

'Some men were missing fingers. A few were blind in one eye.

'In one home I meet a family whose four sons worked in the yards. The oldest, Mahabub, 40, spent two weeks as a cutter's helper before witnessing a man burn to death when his torch sparked a pocket of gas belowdecks.

'"I didn't even collect my pay for fear they wouldn't let me leave," he says, explaining that bosses often intimidate workers to keep silent about accidents.'

Fishermen place their nets at low tide in front of the ship-breaking yards in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Today Chittagong is partially soaked with oil and toxic mud.

Ship breaking is dangerous work and can expose workers to toxic chemicals.

The work is back-breaking because these massive ships are not designed to come apart, but withstand some of the harshest conditions imaginable at sea.

They are often constructed with toxic materials, such as asbestos and lead.

When ships are scrapped in the developed world, the process is more strictly regulated and expensive, so the bulk of the world's shipbreaking is done in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, where labour is cheap and oversight is minimal.

Contentions

Bundy's Teachable Moment for the Right

by Jonathan S. Tobin

You may have noticed that among the many and varied topics touched upon by COMMENTARY writers in recent weeks, none of us chose to weigh in on the Bundy Ranch controversy that attracted so much notice on cable news, talk radio, and the blogosphere. The reason was that none of us considered the standoff between a Nevada tax scofflaw and the federal government over grazing rights fees to rise to the level of an issue of national interest. The government may

own too much land in the West and may have acted in a heavy-handed manner in this case but anyone with sense understood that stiffing the feds is likely to end badly for those who play that game, something that even a bomb-thrower like Glenn Beck appeared to be able to understand. Moreover, there was something slightly absurd about the same people who froth at the mouth when "amnesty" for illegal immigrants is mentioned demanding that Cliven Bundy be let off the hook for what he owed Uncle Sam.

Unfortunately some other conservatives liked the imagery of a rancher and his supporters opposing the arrogant power of the federal government and Bundy became, albeit briefly, the flavor of the month in some libertarian circles. So when he was caught uttering some utterly repulsive racist sentiments by the *New York Times* earlier this week some of the same pundits that had embraced him were sent running for cover. As they have fled, they have found themselves being pursued by jubilant liberals who have attempted to use Bundy's lunatic rants to brand all of conservatives and Tea Partiers as racists. This was a popular theme today taken up by left-wingers at the *New York Times*, Salon, and *New York* magazine who all claimed that Bundy exposed the dark underside of libertarianism in general and conservative media in particular. While Jonathan Chait may consider to be an *Onion*-like coincidence that libertarian sympathizers are all crackpot racists, that is about as cogent an observation as an attempt to argue that most liberals are unwashed socialist/anti-Semitic lawbreakers just because many of the Occupy Wall Street protesters they embraced fell into those categories.

But there is another moral to this story that should give some on the right pause. In their enthusiasm to embrace anyone who sings from the same "agin the government" hymnal, some libertarians have proved themselves willing to lionize people that were liable to besmirch the causes they cherish. As our Pete Wehner pointed out recently, that some figures identified with conservatism have embraced sympathizers with the Confederacy as well as open racists and anti-Semites is a matter of record.

That the liberal attempt to tar all Tea Partiers as racists is unfair is beside the point. It is one thing to believe in small government, federalism, and to fear the willingness of liberals to undermine the rule of law. It is quite another to treat the government as not just a problem but as the enemy. The U.S. government is not the enemy. When run by responsible patriots it is, as it was designed to be, the best defense of our liberty, not its foe. As Charles Krauthammer ably stated on Fox News earlier this week:

First of all, it isn't enough to say I don't agree with what he [Bundy] said. This is a despicable statement. It's not the statement, you have to disassociate yourself entirely from the man. It's not like the words exist here and the man exists here. And why conservatives, some conservatives, end up in bed with people who, you know, — he makes an anti-government statement, he takes an anti-government stand, he wears a nice big hat and he rides a horse and all of the sudden he is a champion of democracy. This is a man who said that he doesn't recognize the authority of the United States of America. That makes him a patriot?

I love this country and I love the constitution and it's the constitution that established a government that all of us have to recognize. And for him to reject it was the beginning of all of this. And now what he said today is just the end of this. And I think it is truly appalling that as Chuck [Lane] says, there are times when somehow simply because somebody takes an opposition, he becomes a conservative hero. You've you got to wait, you've got to watch, you have got to think about. And look, do I have the right to go graze sheep in Central Park? I think not. You have to have some respect for the federal government, some respect for our system, and to say you don't and you

don’t recognize it and that makes you a conservative hero, to me, is completely contradictory and rather appalling. And he has now proved it.

The Bundy ranch standoff is a teachable moment for libertarians and conservatives. We don’t need to waste much time debunking the claim that a belief in limited government and calls for an end to the orgy of taxing and spending in Washington are racist. These are risible, lame arguments that fail on their own. But like liberals who need to draw a distinction between their positions and those of the anti-American, anti-capitalist far left, those on the right do need to draw equally bright lines between themselves and the likes of Cliven Bundy. If they don’t, spectacles such as the one we witnessed this week are inevitable.

Right Turn

The GOP should not show enthusiasm for anti-government crack-pots

by Jennifer Rubin

Even before uttering his disgusting, racist remarks, Cliven Bundy was bad news. He waged a legal fight over a fee for grazing rights for more than a decade – and lost everywhere. His solution? Meet federal officials with guns when they tried to enforce a lawful court order to remove his cattle from government land. Why in the world would talk show hosts and U.S. senators Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and Dean Heller (R-Nev.) think such a character was admirable?

On this I am in full agreement with the Weekly Standard’s Scrapbook: “Cliven Bundy is no hero of any kind. No conservative would pick and choose the laws he intends to obey, defy the rest, and challenge the rule of democracy with guns. No hero would adopt the terrorist’s tactic of placing innocents in harm’s way. Any fool can pick up a weapon and aim at an officer of the law; the moral power of civil disobedience lies in the willingness to defer to the law and accept punishment on principle.”

The Bundy situation is not an isolated one. The far-right — including talk show hosts, bloggers and some elected officials — often show zeal for bad causes because they imagine harebrained or illegal ideas are true expressions of liberty and opposition to the scourge of big government. These are the people who thought the shutdown was a great idea because it is “important to fight.” Many of them perpetrated the falsity that the National Security Agency was “listening to your phone calls” and that a surveillance program with zero instances of abuse that was helpful to our national security had to be dumped.

They are drawn to unsavory cranks like a moth to a flame. Not only did Rand Paul, for example, embrace Bundy before his racist comments, he also hired on the pro-Confederate “Southern Avenger” and dubbed Edward Snowden a modern-day Martin Luther King Jr. Others in the right-wing groups spent hundreds millions of dollars and climbed on the bandwagon for crank Senate candidates who challenged strong conservative incumbents.

The habit of leaping before they look, embracing crack-pots and celebrating defiance of the government by violence or criminal means (e.g. stealing government secrets) is a bad one, frankly a disqualifying one for office. A basic requirement of political leadership is the ability to assess

character and evaluate the soundness of new faces and political tactics. Elected officials, after all, take an oath to the Constitution; to elevate characters like Bundy and Snowden is to encourage *violation* of our system of elected representatives and duly appointed judges.

This virulent anti-government sentiment is decidedly unconservative, as Peter Wehner and Michael Gerson wrote:

A truly conservative response to the advance of a liberal or progressive ideology, however, would not involve the adoption of an opposite and equally narrow ideology. Just as the breakdown of family structures does not prove the illegitimacy of family life but instead points to the urgency of its revitalization, the alternative to government overreach is not the dogmatic disparagement of government but the restoration of government to its proper and honored place in American life.

It is historically erroneous to regard America's founders as proto-libertarians. Hamilton warned about "a zeal for liberty more ardent than enlightened," while Madison cautioned that "liberty may be endangered by the abuses of liberty as well as by the abuses of power." Similarly mistaken are exaggerated claims of galloping tyranny and utopian visions of a wholesale dismantling of much of the modern state. None of this lays a foundation for an appealing public philosophy. American citizenship has evolved around the exercise of liberty in a complex, mutually dependent web of institutions. One of those institutions is and must be government — effective, respected, and limited.

When right-wing politicians and extreme libertarians embrace an anti-government vision, they reduce the appeal of their message to a narrow subset of the electorate. It is impossible to expand the party to take in more African American and Hispanic voters, let alone retain middle-class moderates, with a paranoid vision of government. The purveyors of the anti-government message do not breed confidence with voters. (The reaction to the shutdown demonstrated the public's lack of patience for those who delighted in disabling government.) To the contrary, they scare off all but the true believers and do harm to their party and the conservative movement, which is blemished by the worst characteristics of the most extreme right-wingers.

Mainstream conservatives and the GOP as a whole should shun not only the Bundys out there, but also the politicians and media figures who defend them. If they can't tell right away that Bundy is a nut, Snowden is a traitor and a "Southern Avenger" is a racist, do we really think they will get the big questions and tough calls right?

NY Times
Who Made That Packing Peanut?
by Daniel Engber

In 1960, a research chemist named Maurice Laverne Zweigle packed a raw egg and a few handfuls of skinny, bendy, polystyrene noodles into a small cardboard box, sealed the flaps and tossed it off a third-floor roof. His invention worked: The egg was unscathed.

‘‘At first we called it ‘spaghetti,’□’’ said Zweigle, now 88 and still living near his former employer, the Dow Chemical Company, in northern Michigan. The tubular shape was Zweigle’s key discovery: Whereas plastic spheres would have slid around the fragile item and let it fall to the bottom, the noodles tangled together to form a secure nest.

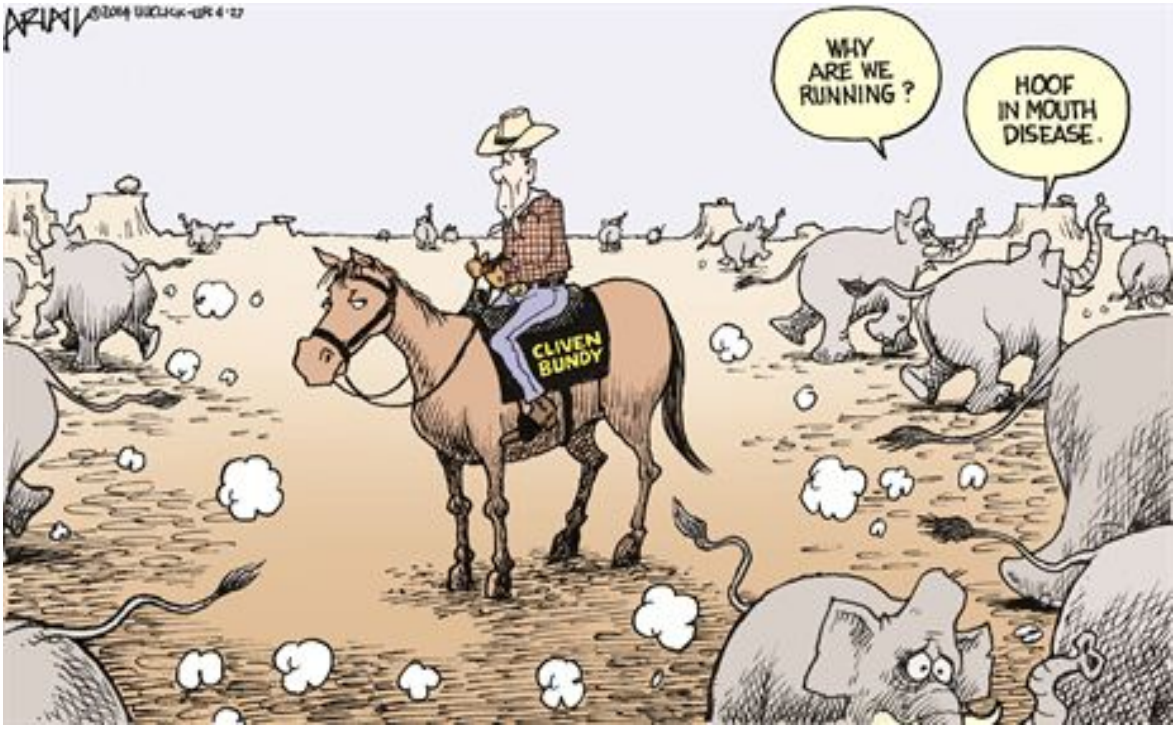
Dow soon began to sell futuristic packing foam to consumers. The company presented polystyrene fill at a plastics exposition at the New York Coliseum in the summer of 1961. (The event was introduced by the deputy director of NASA.) Sold in 200-pound drums, the foam was meant to be a substitute for shredded paper, sawdust, ribbons of wood and even popcorn. Polystyrene proved to be much lighter than these other options and less susceptible to moisture and verminous infestation.

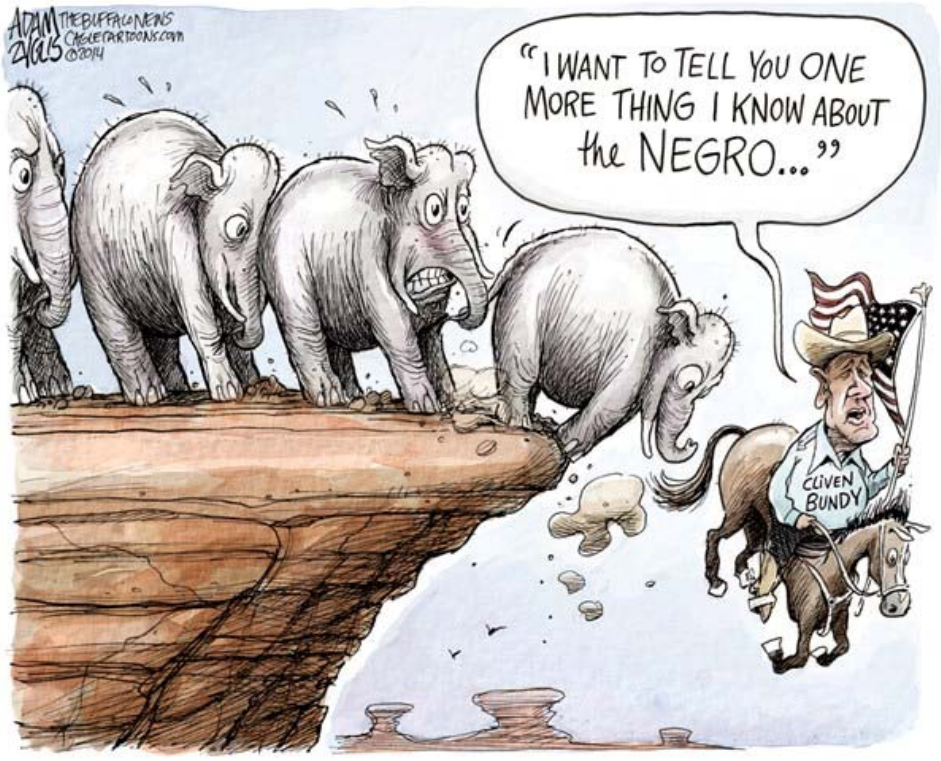
Zweigle’s original shape did pose some problems, though. The five-inch tubes were tricky to produce, and they could get caught up in factory hoppers. Polystyrene packing foam should meet two criteria, says Robert Meisner, head of the packaging program at the University of Wisconsin at Stout. It must be “flowable” enough to fall from hoppers into cardboard boxes yet prone enough to snag that it will make a viable cushion.

Zweigle cut his noodles down to smaller sizes, and other inventors tested more elaborate shapes. Some versions from the 1970s looked like C’s or E’s in cross section, with grooves etched along their sides to make the foam more springy. Today’s polystyrene fill often takes the form of figure eights or fattened S’s. Whatever their shape, these products are now described as “packing peanuts.”

Polystyrene peanuts have fallen out of favor lately because of worries over chemicals used in their manufacture and the fact that they aren’t easily recycled. Consumers may also find them messy,

especially when the foam builds up a static charge and sticks to hands and clothes. Some companies have now switched to other forms of filler, like molded pulp, crinkled cardboard, air-filled “pillow packs” and nuggets made from bio-plastic. But there will always be a place for Zweigle’s peanuts. “For cushioning, nothing works as well as the foams,” Meisner says. “And they’re cheap to produce. Cut the polystyrene in half, and look at it under the microscope; it’s mostly air. They’re selling air.”





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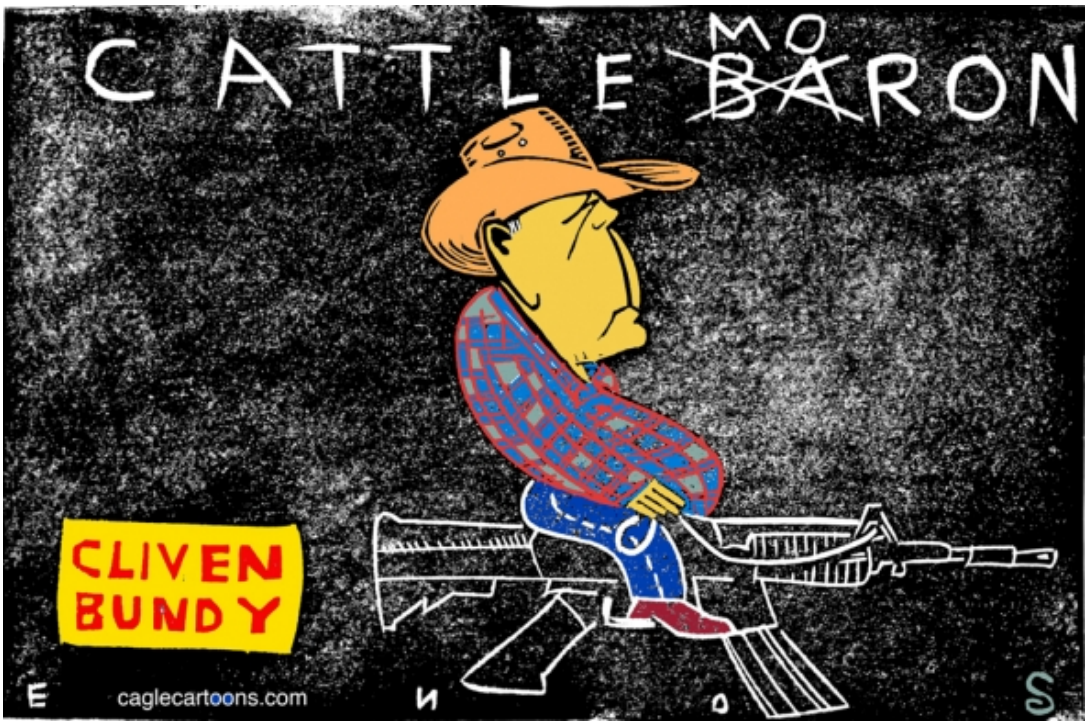
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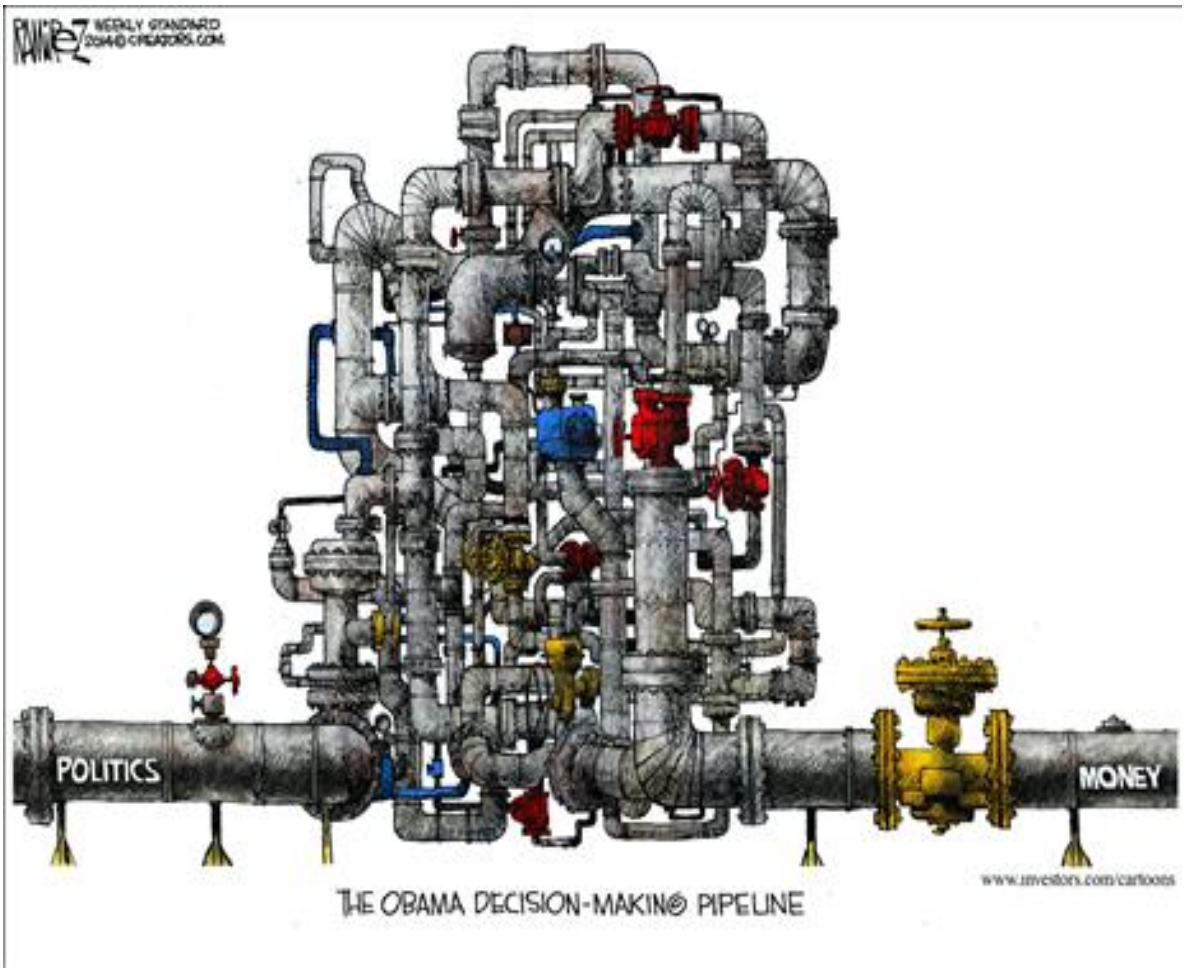
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