

November 6, 2014

Next week we can rehash the vote.

Today we spend some time looking at QE (Quantitative Easing). Pickerhead has always thought this was nonsense on steroids. But, some of our regulars have a more favorable view. First up is James Pethokoukis.

Many conservatives loved pointing to Europe when its debt crisis seemed to be spiraling out of control. A cautionary tale, they said, of what can happen when government spending goes wild. But they had the story wrong, or at least incomplete. Europe's sovereign debt crisis was as much about slow growth as high debt. Anyway, these folks don't talk much about Europe any more. And maybe that's because it is now a cautionary tale of what happens when you combine fiscal austerity and tight money. That's the exact deflationary formula some have been recommending for America the past few years. And as Europe's experience shows, that would have been an utter disaster. Economist Michael Darda of MKM Partners: ...

Power Line's Scott Johnson posts a reader's letter with similar thoughts.

... During the Depression, the Fed did nothing like QE and the Treasury wanted to force liquidation of excess assets and inventories and debts. The result is economic cataclysm, especially in a leveraged economy with a fractional reserve banking system. Banks cannot liquidate and satisfy their depositors need for cash. Deposits are borrowings for the bank. They in turn lend out the money they have on deposit to generate a return, and this pays savers a return. But when an economy goes into recession, this system malfunctions because the credit that originally justified the loan can no longer support it. This is the natural course of the business cycle. But the banking system on the way down is equivalent to the problem of a fire in a crowded theater. Everybody cannot get out at once. Not even close. It's a fire in a vault really. Those lines of depositors waiting to take their money out cannot be satisfied.

It is easy to castigate the Fed and the Treasury for "bailing out" lenders and management teams, but the truth is more complicated. They were backstopping a system which holds the savings for the vast majority of Americans. As for the continuance of QE, I would revert to the Depression data and again observe that the Fed allowed the money supply to collapse by 1/3. This was devastating to the economy. Allowing monetary contraction through forced liquidation (which is the policy antidote to QE) would be beyond cataclysmic – it would make the Depression or today's Greece a walk in the park. Unemployment would be 30%, people's savings would be wiped out all at once – and the beneficiaries would be a tiny fraction of wealthy who would be able to buy assets for pennies from desperate sellers.

The primary criticism viz QE is that we are destroying the dollar and sowing the seeds of inflation. Maybe. But we are currently not inflating. At all. Commodity prices are falling or have fallen dramatically – gold, oil, you name it. The dollar has strengthened viz its alternative currencies, including gold and silver. There may be particular areas of price rises, but that means it's not a uniform monetary phenomenon. Measured inflation is tame. One of the "inputs" which drives inflation is something called monetary velocity, or the speed with which people spend their money on items. As it did in the depression, it has collapsed. During the depression, it was this particular input which was responsible for the collapse in the money supply. You can think of QE as effectively offsetting the decline in velocity. ...

Here's the [Power Line](#) post that the above letter.

We are approaching the end of year six of the regime of Quantitative Easing (QE) engineered by the Federal Reserve under Fed chairmen Ben Bernanke and now Janet Yellen. In place of responsible economic policy to revive economic growth and employment, we have had QE and the explosive growth of job-killing regulations (including Obamacare). In a recent look back at QE, New York Post columnist John Crudele credits QE with some good effects, but adds this inarguable observation, consistent with the avowed goals of QE:

"There's one more thing that QE accomplished: it has made the stock market soar. Interest rates have remained so low for so long that investors have had no other choice but to move their money into the stock market, thus creating a bubble.

Even those adverse to risk were forced to chase the better yields in stocks, no matter how dangerous that was.

But for every winner in QE there are 99 losers. While the richest 1% of the US population has been loving the rise in stock prices and other QE amenities, Fed policy has been taxing on the masses of savers. ..."

For a first, we have an item from [Hollywood Reporter](#). It is an interview with Sharly Attkisson. It is long but interesting. Thankfully it's the end of the week so there's time to read it.

***Sharyl Attkisson** is an investigative journalist who became the story when she quit CBS News after two decades amid allegations that the network refused to run some of her stories that were critical of President **Barack Obama**. Ahead of the Tuesday release of her book *Stonewalled: My Fight for Truth Against the Forces of Obstruction, Intimidation, and Harassment in Obama's Washington*, she spoke to *The Hollywood Reporter* about her struggles with CBS executives and her assertion that her computers were hacked, possibly by Obama operatives.*

Who did you tell at CBS that your computers were hacked?

*The first person I spoke to was Washington bureau chief **Chris Isham**.*

Did he believe you?

He appeared to.

Did CBS care? Did they do anything about it?

*God, you know, there's a lot of people there. He seemed to care. He hired a separate computer forensics firm to look at the computers. They, too, agreed that there had been highly sophisticated remote intrusion of my computers. They decided to dig deeper and embark upon a process that spanned a number of months, during which time the situation with the Associated Press and the government spying on Fox News reporter **James Rosen** was disclosed, as well as **Edward Snowden's** NSA information. ...*

Now for the important stuff. [Slate's Explainer](#) tells us why ghosts say. "Boo!"

... Variations of the word boo—including bo and boh—have been found in books as published as far back as 500 years ago. While the Oxford English Dictionary notes the similarity between bo and the Latin boāre and the Greek βοᾶν, both meaning “to cry aloud, roar, shout,” it’s unlikely that bo and boo—as nonsensical exclamations—derived from these words. An etymological dictionary of Scottish from 1808 notes that the sound might denote “a sound in imitation of the cry of a calf,” or be related to menacing creatures like the bu-kow and the bu-man (a possible ancestor of the modern bogeyman).

The combination of the voiced, plosive b- and the roaring -oo sounds makes boo a particularly startling word. Some linguists argue that the “ooh” or “oh” sounds can be pronounced at a higher volume than other vowel sounds, such as the “ee” in “wheel.” Since boo is a monosyllable, it can also be said very quickly, which may add to its scariness.

If you want to frighten someone in Spain, you can say uuh (pronounced like ooh in English), and in France you can say hou. A Czech ghost might say baf. In most European languages, including non-Romance languages like Polish, the sound boo is also understood as an attempt to scare someone, but it comes in different spellings. For example, the Spanish version is written as ¡bú! ...*

American.com

[Did QE work? Yeah, it did. And the right should acknowledge that](#)

by James Pethokoukis



Many conservatives loved pointing to Europe when its debt crisis seemed to be spiraling out of control. A cautionary tale, they said, of what can happen when government spending goes wild.

But they had the story wrong, or at least incomplete. Europe's sovereign debt crisis was as much about slow growth as high debt. Anyway, these folks don't talk much about Europe any more. And maybe that's because it is now a cautionary tale of what happens when you combine fiscal austerity and tight money. That's the exact deflationary formula some have been recommending for America the past few years. And as Europe's experience shows, that would have been an utter disaster. Economist Michael Darda of MKM Partners:

The US and the UK have dramatically outperformed the EZ over the last four years despite even more contractionary fiscal policy. This can only be explained by differing central bank policies, in our view. In short, what the Market Monetarists call monetary offset has succeeded in propelling NGDP forward at a slow, steady pace (just over 70% of the pre-crisis trend) in both the US and UK despite persistent fiscal headwinds. By contrast, a chronically behind the curve/too tight ECB has led to a NGDP trend in the EZ that is just 45% of its pre-crisis average. ... The US and the UK have enjoyed steady but unspectacular growth while the EZ has barely crept out of a monetary policy-induced double-dip recession and now faces the prospect of stagnation and deflation. ... We simply do not know of another natural experiment as powerful as this for assessing whether QE/forward guidance "worked." Relative to the ECB's disastrous policies, it has been a smashing success.

Could have been better, of course. Adding a nominal GDP level target would likely have enhanced the effectiveness of Fed action, maybe even requiring less bond buying. But still a powerful counterfactual that will hopefully influence future policy debates.

Power Line

In defense of QE

by Scott Johnson

A long-time reader and professional investor responded both to the critical if tentative substance as well as the spirit of inquiry in which I posted ["The Age of QE"](#) yesterday. Our reader's company is devoted to private equity investment and he has asked me to withhold his name for professional reasons; I thought readers interested in the subject would appreciate his response. He writes:

I want to offer some perspective on QE. As an investor and professional participant in the markets and a conservative, I thought I would try to offer something of a defense of the Fed and its decision to pursue what has been called QE, printing or what I remember being called open market purchases in my macroeconomic classes. The opposing case is typically what I think of as a populist case that doesn't really reflect an understanding of some important topics which inhere to a functioning capitalist economy and, very importantly, our fractional reserve banking system and the need for liquid (i.e. functioning) markets with a bid and offer.

Let's first consider a world without the Fed and without QE. In effect this is what we experienced, briefly, when Lehman went bankrupt, when Washington Mutual was seized by the FDIC (and lots of other banks essentially became insolvent). If you think about it, when that happens – markets freeze and liquidity evaporates — savers lose all of their savings. Depositors at a bank are savers. Buyers of money market mutual funds are savers. When Lehman went bankrupt, their related money market mutual funds "broke the buck" – they were worth less than par.

The only thing that prevented this phenomenon from spreading was the willingness of the Fed and the Treasury to replace the banks as providers of liquidity and backstop deposits and so forth.

During the Depression, the Fed did nothing like QE and the Treasury wanted to force liquidation of excess assets and inventories and debts. The result is economic cataclysm, especially in a leveraged economy with a fractional reserve banking system. Banks cannot liquidate and satisfy their depositors need for cash. Deposits are borrowings for the bank. They in turn lend out the money they have on deposit to generate a return, and this pays savers a return. But when an economy goes into recession, this system malfunctions because the credit that originally justified the loan can no longer support it. This is the natural course of the business cycle. But the banking system on the way down is equivalent to the problem of a fire in a crowded theater. Everybody cannot get out at once. Not even close. It's a fire in a vault really. Those lines of depositors waiting to take their money out cannot be satisfied.

It is easy to castigate the Fed and the Treasury for "bailing out" lenders and management teams, but the truth is more complicated. They were backstopping a system which holds the savings for the vast majority of Americans. As for the continuance of QE, I would revert to the Depression data and again observe that the Fed allowed the money supply to collapse by 1/3. This was devastating to the economy. Allowing monetary contraction through forced liquidation (which is the policy antidote to QE) would be beyond cataclysmic – it would make the Depression or today's Greece a walk in the park. Unemployment would be 30%, people's savings would be wiped out all at once – and the beneficiaries would be a tiny fraction of wealthy who would be able to buy assets for pennies from desperate sellers.

The primary criticism viz QE is that we are destroying the dollar and sowing the seeds of inflation. Maybe. But we are currently not inflating. At all. Commodity prices are falling or have fallen dramatically – gold, oil, you name it. The dollar has strengthened viz its alternative currencies, including gold and silver. There may be particular areas of price rises, but that means it's not a uniform monetary phenomenon. Measured inflation is tame. One of the "inputs" which drives inflation is something called monetary velocity, or the speed with which people spend their money on items. As it did in the depression, it has collapsed. During the depression, it was this particular input which was responsible for the collapse in the money supply. You can think of QE as effectively offsetting the decline in velocity.

Monetary authorities always dance on the head of a pin in this way, trying to balance all of these inputs and avoid catastrophe. It's a difficult task.

The truth is, the deflationary forces in the global economy are extraordinary. Technology, innovation, credit, freer movement of capital and labor – all of these forces have combined to create massive excess capacity in most of the world. This is fundamentally deflationary. Those who long for deflation are being a bit glib (which we would get without monetary intervention, believe me). William Jennings Bryan railed about being nailed to a cross of gold. That's deflation that arises from the gold standard – truly hard money). He was a populist. In today's world, modest deflation would – as it always does – rebound to the benefit of lenders (unless it also consumed them to in a deflationary spiral , as it likely would in the end). Rapid inflation is to the benefit of borrowers at the expense of lenders. There is a reason why all of these quasi populist, socialist third world countries inflate and destroy their currencies rather than deflate. Stable, predictable and modest inflation is probably best for us all, dancing on the head of the pin.

All in all, while he gets tremendous criticism (as did Volker, Greenspan and now does Yellen), Bernanke probably deserves a great deal of credit and a big thank you from all of us, wealthy, middle and lower classes. Middle classes have been more significantly damaged by tax policy and

Obamacare than anything else (i.e. fiscal transfers away from them). But the Fed really has preserved the stability of the banking and monetary system from which we all derive extraordinary benefit.

So how do we get out of this difficult, zombie economy we are in? True, real economic growth that derives from our natural competitive advantages – technological applications which yield productive and rapid growth in output (energy is the most important example) and fuel domestic industrial development and job growth. Cheap energy is our long term way out. And we need to buy time with measures like QE and some fiscal relaxation through middle class tax relief.

I wrote back that I really hadn't thought about inflation so much as "accommodative" policy accommodating absurd federal spending. Our friend responded:

I read your post as being a bit open. You suggested that nobody has really talked about it and you were searching for a populist case against QE, but you identified one in the Post article.

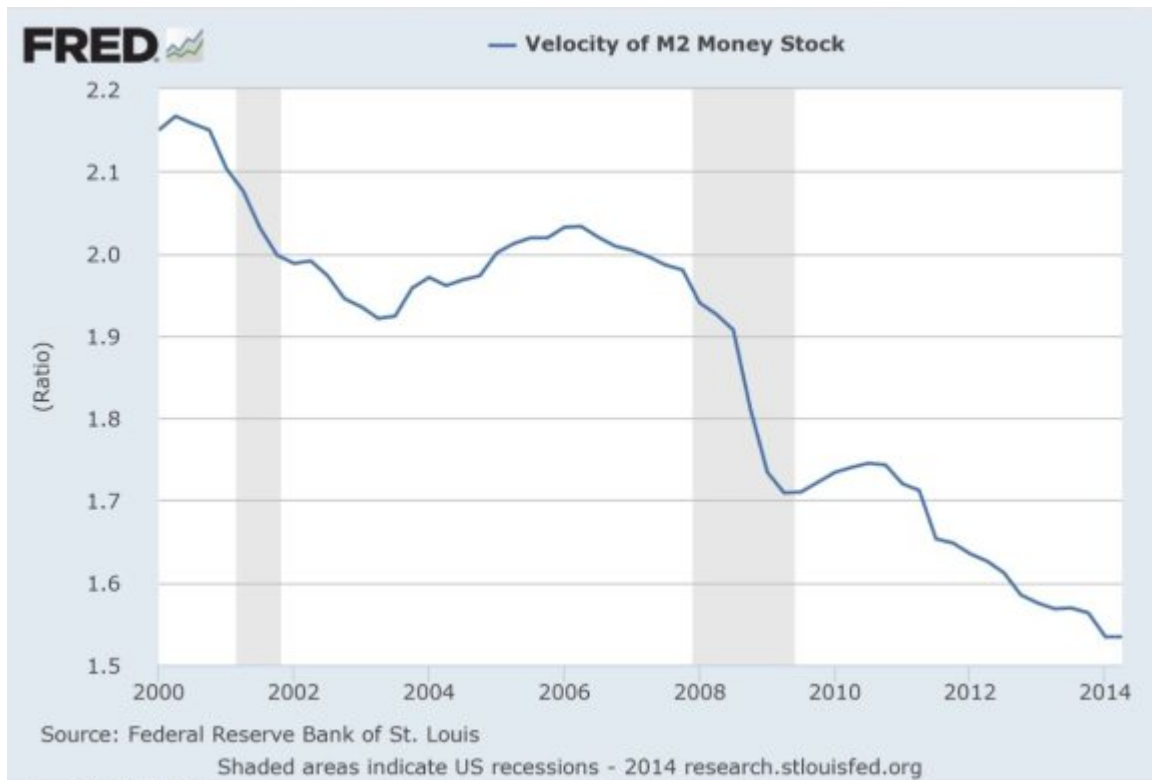
I tend to think the populist case is that it is a boondoggle for the 1% while the 99% have their savings get eroded. My observation is that QE and bank recapitalizations which deter deflation and support modest inflation benefit borrowers and depositors, which is a majority. The beneficiaries of modest deflation would be lenders at the expense of borrowers. And in the case of spiraling/spiking deflation (which is a likely case versus modest deflation) everybody would lose except only hard asset and cash holders with no debt (the VERY wealthy). No analysis on this topic is perfect, but the empirical evidence from the 1930s suggests that rampant deflation and monetary shrinkage is much more damaging to the populist than QE and maintenance of the banking system.

I think the linkage of monetary accommodation to aggressive fiscal spending doesn't really work in this case. It is true that we engaged in massive fiscal expansion and unprecedented deficit spending in 2009 and 2010. On the other hand we have been reducing the fiscal deficit substantially since then and this is actually contractionary. Reducing the deficit from 10% of GDP to 4% of GDP is still very contractionary and a very big drag on growth. One can argue about the components of that contraction as a policy matter being poor choices (tax increases to pay for bad social spending, to your point). But I wouldn't link the Fed's expansionary policy to our fiscal policies and choices.

Those choices are really the product of a badly flawed and broken budget process "managed" by a Democratic Senate led by Harry Reid and abetted by President Obama. The Fed doesn't have much to do with it.

UPDATE: Our reader recommends Niall Ferguson's [column](#) about monetary policy in the Wall Street Journal today. It is behind the Journal's subscription paywall but accessible [here](#) via Google.

STEVE adds: This is a good analysis of the case in favor of QE, and I find it compelling. One factor that ought to be mentioned as to why the enormous monetary growth hasn't led to inflation, in addition to the factors mentioned above, is the collapse in "velocity," i.e., the speed with which money turns over in the economy basically. This factor—"V" in the famous basic equation of monetarism that Friedman made famous, " $MV=PQ$ "—fell sharply during the recession of 2008-2010, *and has kept falling since then*. You can see the chart from the Federal Reserve below. I believe this is unprecedented in the history of Post-WWII recessions, but I haven't gone back and looked. There are some reasons to think a new, lower level of velocity might endure, but if it doesn't?



Power Line

The Age of QE

by Scott Johnson

We are approaching the end of year six of the regime of Quantitative Easing (QE) engineered by the Federal Reserve under Fed chairmen Ben Bernanke and now Janet Yellen. In place of responsible economic policy to revive economic growth and employment, we have had QE and the explosive growth of job-killing regulations (including Obamacare). In a recent look back at QE, New York Post columnist John Crudele credits QE with some good effects, but adds this inarguable observation, consistent with the avowed goals of QE:

There's one more thing that QE accomplished: it has made the stock market soar. Interest rates have remained so low for so long that investors have had no other choice but to move their money into the stock market, thus creating a bubble.

Even those adverse to risk were forced to chase the better yields in stocks, no matter how dangerous that was.

But for every winner in QE there are 99 losers. While the richest 1% of the US population has been loving the rise in stock prices and other QE amenities, Fed policy has been taxing on the masses of savers.

In fact, "tax" is a perfect word. QE has been an invisible tax on savers beyond anything Washington could have ever conceived.

Every dollar that has benefited a borrower during QE has come out of the pocket of a saver in the form of a lower return on [his] assets.

In fact, QE is now widely recognized by both supporters and opponents as causing the single largest shift ever in wealth, from middle class savers to rich Wall Street investors.

And that this should have happened under a Democratic president who came into office championing wealth redistribution in the other direction is both shocking and ironic.

I don't know if all that is exactly right — Ramesh Ponnuru [mounted a defense](#) of QE3 addressing some of these issues in 2012 — but the silence around the phenomenon of QE is notable. You would almost think it must be accounted an unalloyed good that the banks have been recapitalized on the backs of middle class savers, and perhaps it is, though it's hard to see how it all ends well.

It is late in the day to have a debate over the policy, yet it is overdue. There must be a good populist case to be made against it. As I say, I don't pretend to know the right answer, but the headline of Crudele's column suggests what the populist case would sound like: ["Obama's \\$4 trillion gift to the rich."](#)

UPDATE: A reader recommends this guest post at Zerohedge: ["How the Federal Reserve is purposely attacking savers."](#)

Hollywood Reporter

[Former CBS News Reporter Sharyl Attkisson Claims Existence of Obama Enemies' List](#)

by Paul Bond



"I kind of assume I'm on a list. I don't think I'm the only one"

Sharyl Attkisson is an investigative journalist who became the story when she quit CBS News after two decades amid allegations that the network refused to run some of her stories that were critical of President **Barack Obama**. Ahead of the Tuesday release of her book *Stonewalled: My Fight for Truth Against the Forces of Obstruction, Intimidation, and Harassment in Obama's*

Washington, she spoke to *The Hollywood Reporter* about her struggles with CBS executives and her assertion that her computers were hacked, possibly by Obama operatives.

THR reached out for a response from CBS News, but the organization declined to comment.

Who did you tell at CBS that your computers were hacked?

The first person I spoke to was Washington bureau chief **Chris Isham**.

Did he believe you?

He appeared to.

Did CBS care? Did they do anything about it?

God, you know, there's a lot of people there. He seemed to care. He hired a separate computer forensics firm to look at the computers. They, too, agreed that there had been highly sophisticated remote intrusion of my computers. They decided to dig deeper and embark upon a process that spanned a number of months, during which time the situation with the Associated Press and the government spying on Fox News reporter **James Rosen** was disclosed, as well as **Edward Snowden's** NSA information.

Did they ever find out who hacked your computers and spied on you?

I don't believe their computer forensics team concluded who spied on me.

Did they ask anybody in the Obama administration if they were the culprits?

Not to my knowledge. Executives discussed with me that they assumed that was the case. And we discussed how to proceed with that information and what we could do about it.

So what did you do about it?

It seemed to fall off the radar after the forensics report was delivered to CBS. And so I hired a — I have a legal and forensics team that began work.

Did they conclude anything yet?

Yes. Her work is still very much active, but they have told me they have evidence of highly sophisticated remote intrusions into my personal and work computers by someone using software proprietary to a government agency.

CBS executives suspect that the government hacked your computer, and CBS computers, but there's been no accountability? CBS just dropped the matter?

As far as I know, although what they told me was they wanted to heavily pursue it and find out who was responsible. I discovered on my own they have a computer security specialist working for CBS ... But nobody ever questioned me, came to my house, checked the security of my system, asked me for more information, or followed up with me.

Do you believe that people working for the president of the United States hacked your computer and spied on you?

The way you phrase the question makes me want to couch it a little bit. I have been told by two computer forensics experts that a highly sophisticated entity using abilities outside non-government resources, using software proprietary either to the DIA, CIA, FBI or NSA made repeat remote intrusions into both my computers over a period of time. And we have evidence of a government computer connection into my computer system.

And why do you think they would target you as opposed to more partisan voices, like Rush Limbaugh or Glenn Beck?

The question carries the assumption that they haven't targeted others. I kind of assume I'm on a list. I don't think I'm the only one, along with James Rosen and the Associated Press, that garnered special attention. There's probably a list of people.

So an enemies list, like in the Nixon administration?

I've been told there is such a list, yes.

And who do you suspect is on that list?

Well, there's an internal email that indicated reporters who were working with leakers in government agencies or perceived as enemies of the White House are being targeted. So I think that's probably accurate — anybody that they perceive as harmful to their agenda or working with leakers and whistle-blowers, which I did a lot of.

Do you have sources who told you the names on that list? Is Rush Limbaugh on that list, for example?

Another reporter told me — I can't remember who — that they thought he was on some sort of target list, but I don't know that to be the case. I have someone who told me the existence of a list but not the names on it.

You're being accused of being a partisan right-winger. Have you reported negative stories about conservatives?

Most of my reporting has not been political in nature. Some of the stories that were politicized, I don't consider political stories, but they were made out to be by people who obviously didn't want them reported, and I would put Fast and Furious and Benghazi in that category. But other stories include the one I won an investigative Emmy Award for last year, which was a series of stories from the time I went undercover to investigate freshmen Republican fundraising. I also did a story that MSNBC's **Rachel Maddow** complimented in a seven-minute long segment, exposing Congressman **Steven Buyer**, a Republican from Indiana, and his possible and allegedly fraudulent charity, which was followed shortly thereafter by his resignation from Congress.

Did your colleagues give you grief about your negative stories on Obama?

Not my reporter colleagues.

But you have said your bosses kind of shut down a lot of your reporting?

Some of them did. It was very complicated. All of them encouraged my reporting initially, and then as time went on some of them encouraged it and some of them discouraged it.

Who were the ones discouraging it?

Nobody ever discouraged it to my face, they just would not run the stories or would have other stories they wanted to put on every time the stories were offered. That was CBS News with **Scott Pelley** and his executive producer **Pat Shevlin** primarily, but there may have been others.

You've said they did this because of liberal bias?

I'm not sure I've ever said that. But I think there was a complex list of reasons why a lot of stories did and didn't make it on the air the last couple of years. But in a general sense, I noticed a tendency to avoid stories that would draw pushback from people they didn't want to have pushback from, whether it's corporations, advertisers or politicians.

Has CBS ever cared about pushback from politicians before, or only under this administration?

I don't know how these same people would have acted under a different administration. They came in shortly after the Obama administration.

Do you think CBS was unlikely to run negative stories about President George W. Bush for fear of pushback?

They might have been just as likely to be fearful of stories that drew controversy or pushback from corporate entities, charities, politicians, whatever the special interest might be.

Since when has CBS ever been afraid to air controversial political stories? It ran those memos claiming Bush was trying to avoid the Vietnam War. That wasn't controversial?

CBS is hundreds of people and they've changed over the years. It's not a monolithic organization that has one viewpoint, and that's why for everything you try to put into a box there are exceptions. For example, they assigned me to cover Benghazi, that wasn't my idea. And they were very enthusiastic about the story for a period of time. Why they changed on that, I tried to figure out many times and I can't say, I can only say what my experiences were.

You must have a theory as to why, right?

They simply didn't want stories on any controversies, whether that involved corporations, advertisers, charities or other special interests. They were not impossible to get on the air, but very difficult. So we just concluded that there was not the same appetite as there had been in the past.

You're acting like it was a monetary decision on the part of CBS, like it didn't want to risk its advertising. But these were government stories we're talking about.

No, I'm trying to explain to you it wasn't just government stories, although that's what the media tended to focus on.

Okay, then, name the corporations that wanted to kill your stories.

I don't think any corporations killed my stories. I said CBS had a tendency, in the last couple years especially, to appear to want to avoid controversies or stories that they felt would get pushback from certain corporations and politicians and special interests and charities.

Can you tell me the names of these corporations, charities and politicians?

I hate to tick them off because I feel like the story should be told in some context for legal reasons, but I think that you can pull some ideas from the book.

Does CBS go after liberal policies that are failing with as much gusto as they do conservative policies that are failing?

Well, whether something's failing is a matter of somebody's opinion. But I would say, as **Lisa Myers** has observed, as *USA Today* has observed, the media in general has been less enthusiastic about government accountability under the Obama administration. And I concur with those observations.

Why is that the case?

In my view, trying to avoid the pushback, and the fallout, and the headaches that come with doing stories on whatever the topic may be that the powers-that-be don't like.

So, in journalism today, it works to bully the reporters and they'll lay off? 'Speak truth to power' — that saying from the 1960's — that doesn't apply to journalism anymore?

Reporters want to, as you say, 'speak truth to power,' but it's harder to get those types of stories past the gatekeepers.

So what good is CBS News if it's just going to bow down to the bullies who tell them to shut up?

Those were your words, but I think they do a great job on some controversies and investigations.

60 Minutes still does some great work. So I'm not saying there aren't very good journalists and work being done, but on the whole, as many other journalists have observed recently and publicly, the media is not as good at holding the powers that be accountable, for whatever reason.

And that reason has nothing to do with political bias?

It's a complex set of factors involving politics, relationships with corporations and advertisers and, at times, just the idea that they'd rather not have the headache of doing a story that they have to defend.

You seem to be going way out of your way not to label the media biased. But in your book you talk about how one of your bosses insisted on labeling conservative analysts but not labeling the liberal ones, and if they really didn't like an analyst, they'd label him or her 'right-wing.' So if that's not bias, what is it?

I didn't say that nobody is ever biased. I'm not trying to be cagey. It's not one factor at play ... I never told CBS when I wanted to leave that I thought anybody was liberally biased. I never argued that point. People kind of drew that conclusion because it served a certain narrative on both sides. It served the narrative of conservatives who were happy to feel like someone was spilling the family secret and it served the narrative of liberals who didn't like some of my reporting and thought it could be explained away if I were a right-wing conservative. So everybody sort of adopted that line and that's something that I never said.

So whose rule was it at CBS that analysts who were conservative be labeled as such and analysts who are liberal not be labeled?

I'm not going to name her. And it was some time ago, but she did say after I brought it up, she'd think about it, and she agreed that what I brought up was a good point and she changed — at least with me — what she'd been doing.

And who at CBS got mad at you for going on Laura Ingraham's radio show because Ingraham is right wing?

I don't want to say her name, either.

It sounds like you criticize Obama officials by name but you won't say names when you're criticizing CBS. Why the double standard?

I said a lot of names in the book, and I have my reasons why ... I described it in the book as I wished to describe it.

Did anybody at CBS get mad when reporters went on liberal outlets, like MSNBC?

I can only speak for myself. I saw other reporters go on conservative and liberal outlets and I never heard that they received blowback. So I don't know if it was just me. But in my experience, they did tell me to not go on the *Laura Ingraham Show*.

Just the *Laura Ingraham Show* or all conservative shows?

That's a good question. At the time it was, 'just don't ever go on her show again.' And then they denied other interview requests on both liberal and conservative outlets after that — a lot, but not all the time.

Are there any celebrities mentioned in your book?

Sheryl Crow and **Sinbad**. I traveled with them on a trip to Bosnia with **Hillary Clinton**. They were entertaining the troops. But First Lady Hillary Clinton and her daughter were on a work trip and I was there covering it. I mention them briefly in light of the fact that I did the story that exposed that Mrs. Clinton's account that we'd been fired at by snipers was not true. I mentioned that Sinbad and Sheryl Crow were on the plane with us.

Was there any pushback on your Hillary-Bosnia report?

No. That sort of highlights the changes that had occurred because that was a different executive producer who, as far as I know, is actually friendly with the Clintons but nonetheless was very gung-ho on the story because he was like most journalists — able to get outside of his own friendships and belief systems and just be a newsman.

Who at CBS did you tender your resignation to?

The first time I tried to leave, a year before I left, I had my agent call CBS president **David Rhodes**.

What was your interaction with David Rhodes like?

Well, for most of my tenure at CBS he was very supportive. We met privately a lot about how he wanted my stories to get exposure.

When did that change?

As I tried to leave, there were some tense times. But it ended up cordial.

Why did you want to leave?

The bottom line is, the last couple of years it was clear for me that there was nothing meaningful left for me to do at CBS, and I just wanted to move on. They had plenty of talented reporters but, for what I did, investigative and original reporting, there was no appetite for that.

What are your politics personally?

I don't talk about my politics, but I would say I'm like a lot of Americans. I'm mixed. I can honestly see two valid sides of a debate. That's not to say I don't have positions and thoughts on things, of course I do, but I don't let those things get in the way of my work.

The primary issues in your book are Benghazi, Fast and Furious, the alleged green energy scandals and Obamacare. Which of those four needs further reporting?

Wow. There's a great deal of reporting to be done on all of them. I can't pick one. At CBS, I would have continued on all of them, if I was able to.

It sounds like you've been telling me that journalists at CBS who don't toe a certain line have something to fear there. Is that the case at other networks, too?

I'm not sure we have anything to fear, it's just that if you want to keep working there, you may not be doing what you want to do. In my case it was not being willing to do what they wanted me to do, or disagreeing with it so much that I just would rather move on. I don't think reporters are fearful, per se, but I think they will tell you at the other networks that it's getting more difficult to get original and hard-nosed stories on, especially if they don't fit with the narrative that the gatekeepers in New York are trying to portray.

You were accused by some at CBS of agenda-driven news stories against Obama. Has anyone at CBS ever accused a reporter of agenda-driven stories against Sarah Palin, or George W Bush, or anyone prominent on the right?

When I did stories that clearly were not positive toward Republicans, I was never accused of being a crazy liberal or having an agenda. That only happened when I did stories that were perceived as being negative toward Democrats.

Did your executive producer, Patricia Shevlin, accuse you of not being supportive enough of green energy because of your stories about taxpayer money given to Solyndra before it went bankrupt?

She never told me that — that was her answer to another executive who raised the question: 'Shouldn't we be doing these stories on evening news?'

Why is that anecdote about Shevlin significant?

She is a well-known liberal ideologue who let that get in the way of her decisions and judgment. Whether people will say that to you or not, that was the consensus. That was discussed sometimes daily at CBS.

You also said somebody hacked your TV. How would you know? Why would someone want to hack someone's TV?

I didn't say that. What I said was the anomalies that were occurring in my house all seemed to be associated with my FIOS line ... I think that the work that they were doing to get into my computer system may have interfered with the other systems in the house.

The progressive watchdog group Media Matters for America is leading the charge against you, it seems.

Media Matters has acknowledged targeting me, yes. Not with a computer intrusion, just with trying to discredit the stories I did as much as possible.

Do you think they were paid to do so?

They said they weren't, but the question has certainly crossed my mind.

Do you know of any occasions where Media Matters was given money earmarked to targeting somebody?

David Folkenflik of NPR told me they were paid to target Rush Limbaugh. He may have misspoken on that, because someone told me it may have been Glenn Beck. He gave me two instances in which they were paid to target. He also said that they were paid to target Fox News. I'm not sure if that's correct. It was just another reporter relaying that information to me.

(David Folkenflik did not respond to a request for comment. Media Matters president **Bradley Beychok** told THR: "Media Matters has never taken a dime to target Sharyl Attkisson.").

Do you think Media Matters has libeled you?

That's a good question. I haven't had a legal review of what they've said. I actually read little to zero of what they write. They have definitely said many, many, false things. But I'm not sure it qualifies as libel under the law.

They're a media watchdog. They tell the truth about what the media is reporting, right?

I don't think they have an obligation to, no. Anyone can say they're a media watchdog and then give their opinions ... most people understand it's a propaganda blog. They are very close to the Obama administration, Hillary Clinton and Democratic interests.

What does the press think of Media Matters?

Like anybody that reaches out to us, we may take under consideration an idea that they propose. But I never get asked about their conservative counterparts, such as Media Research Center or Accuracy in Media. In my experience, no one ever takes their criticism as if it is something legitimate to be answered, but when Media Matters says something, many people in the media almost treat them as a neutral journalism organization.

Is that biased?

That probably is the result of an unintentional bias.

As we're talking, I got an email from Media Matters that says a video you released of your computer being hacked is probably just a stuck backspace key.

It's what I would call a video anecdote, something that happened along the way. It has nothing to do with the forensic evidence and the analysis. It's just something interesting, a punctuation mark of things that were happening. And, certainly, I expect Media Matters to say that the backspace key was held down.

What story were you working on when your backspace key started operating by itself?

I was preparing questions for my interview with Ambassador **Thomas Pickering** about Benghazi and the Accountability Review Board.

So of all the stories you did that were seen as negative against Obama, Benghazi was the one that really irritated them?

I think green energy got under their skin first, and the remote intrusions into my computer predated Benghazi.

From what you told me thus far, it sounds like you're accusing CBS of cowardice more than liberal bias. Is that correct?

I haven't used that word, ever. CBS is hundreds of people. It's not a monolithic organization. That's the hard part about trying to make a statement or draw conclusions. I would use the word 'fearful,' rather than 'cowardice.' Some people in the decision-making process, not necessarily reporters at the ground level, but some of those deciding what goes on television have become very fearful of the sponsors and would just prefer to avoid conflict and controversy, which means you're not going to do a lot of original investigative reporting.

You mentioned your former boss David Rhodes. His brother is Ben Rhodes, a security adviser to the president. Is there at least an appearance of a conflict of interest there when he's telling you to lay off Benghazi while his brother works for the president?

David didn't tell me to lay off Benghazi, and I don't really have an opinion of his relationship with his brother, and how that might have affected things.

Did anyone tell you to lay off Benghazi, or did they just stop using your stories on TV?

They started not using my stories. I don't know what goes on in the decision-making process, but in general the shows' producers and managing editors and so on would be the ones that decide what goes on the broadcasts and what doesn't. I certainly had people joining me at CBS and pushing for stories to get on television that didn't get on. And they were stopped, as far as I was concerned, somewhere in New York.

What reasons did they give you for not airing your stories?

They would just say — and they didn't talk to me personally, this was to senior producers — they would just say things like, 'There is no time on the show for it tonight;' 'That's a great story but maybe we'll get to it tomorrow;' 'Not today, but tell us when there are other developments, we'll consider it again.'

Why would the administration blame the murders in Benghazi on a YouTube video if that was untrue?

Some of the information the administration is withholding from public release involves a meeting or meetings that occurred in which this was presumably discussed. So, we can only wonder, but the body of evidence that's come out in the two years since would lead a reasonable person to conclude they wanted to steer the public's direction away from the idea that this was definitely an act of terror, technically on U.S. soil if it was U.S. property overseas. It occurred on the president's watch, very close to an election, at a time when he had claimed Al Qaeda was on the run.

But that reason sounds fairly pathetic and unworthy of such a huge lie. Doesn't it?

From whose viewpoint? I mean, it's apparently important enough for them to deflect opinion, and I'm not sure if that is indeed why they did it, that's just the best reason most of us can come up with, looking at the evidence that has come out since. Maybe there is a better reason why they did it, I don't know. I have a feeling we won't ever have the full story.

What news network do you think you'll land with next?

I certainly haven't decided I'll ever work at another network or even necessarily work full-time again. When I decided to leave CBS, the discussion I had with my husband was, I have to be prepared to walk out and not work anywhere ever again, and we were fine with that.

Have you had offers?

Yes, but I don't want to discuss them.

Media Matters and others say that you're pushing a media-is-biased narrative to curry favor with conservatives.

Anyone who knows much of anything about me knows that I don't curry favor with people. Period.

Being targeted, allegedly, by the Obama administration, and your stories allegedly being shunned at CBS — were those ultimately good things for you?

I don't think those were pleasant things, but where I sit today I would say, 'fine, I'm exactly where I ought to be.' And I will tell you, before all this stuff happened, I did hope to, and thought I would, work the rest of my career at CBS doing as much as I had been doing over most of the last 20 years. It didn't work out that way, but I'm not sorrowful over it ... I think there is a cultural change in journalism that's going on — a turn away from the kind of reporting that just holds the powers-that-be accountable. It's not just a CBS thing.

The major news networks are just afraid of the powerful all of a sudden?

Well, when you put it that way, it makes it sound silly, and that's what I've written about in the book. I don't think there was a sudden switch.

Nobody was saying that the media was afraid of George W. Bush, now all of a sudden they are afraid of Barack Obama?

There were times when people said that — inside CBS, after Rather-Gate.

Were there some depressing days for you at CBS toward the end?

I was very disheartened when my producer and I would have great stories, and in some cases, whistleblowers we convinced to go out on a limb and tell their story, only to then have to go back to them and say nobody's interested. So, we've had to do that more times in the past few years than I've had to do in the previous 30.

An Obama spokesman called you "unreasonable." Are you?

I'm probably one of the most reasonable reporters out there. But their definition of unreasonable is when they answer a question, if it doesn't make sense or if it contradicts other facts, I don't just accept it and go away. What have I not asked you about yet that you deem important?

What haven't I asked you about that you think is important to mention?

A couple people have told me that CBS News has started a whisper campaign to say that I'm paranoid, crazy, and a liar?

Are you paranoid?

I'd like to think not. It's just a good word they use to discredit and "controversialize" reporters and stories they don't like.

Assuming this whisper campaign against you is true, who is orchestrating it?

I was told that Chris Isham, the bureau chief in Washington, was a part of it.

Slate's Explainer

When Did Ghosts Start Saying "Boo"?

Plus: Is boo a scary word in other languages, too?

by Forrest Wickman

Everyone knows that ghosts say "boo," but when did they first start using that scary word? And what about ghosts in other parts of the world—do they have their own version of *boo*?

Ghosts were saying "boo!" by the middle of the 19th century, though the exclamation had been used to frighten English-speaking children for at least 100 years before that. Perhaps the first appearance of *boo* in print comes from the book-length polemic *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence Display'd* (1738), in which author Gilbert Crockatt defines it as , "[a word that's used in the north of Scotland to frighten crying children](#)." (It's not clear why people in Scotland would want to frighten a crying child.) The verbal tactic had been adopted by [proper ghosts](#)—and [people with sheets on their heads](#)—by the 1820s at the latest.

Variations of the word *boo*—including *bo* and *boh*—have been found in books as published as far back as 500 years ago. While the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes the similarity between *bo* and the Latin *boāre* and the Greek *βοᾶν*, both meaning "to cry aloud, roar, shout," it's unlikely that *bo* and *boo*—as nonsensical exclamations—derived from these words. An etymological dictionary of Scottish from 1808 notes that the sound might denote "[a sound in imitation of the cry of a calf](#)," or be related to menacing creatures like the bu-kow and the bu-man (a possible ancestor of the modern [bogeyman](#)).

The combination of the voiced, plosive *b*- and the roaring *-oo* sounds makes *boo* a particularly startling word. Some linguists argue that the "ooh" or "oh" sounds can be pronounced at a higher volume than other vowel sounds, such as the "ee" in "wheel." Since *boo* is a monosyllable, it can also be said very quickly, which may add to its scariness.

If you want to frighten someone in Spain, you can say *uuh* (pronounced like *ooh* in English), and in France you can say *hou*. A Czech ghost might say *baf*. In most European languages, including non-Romance languages like Polish, the sound *boo* is also understood as an attempt to scare someone, but it comes in different spellings.* For example, the Spanish version is written as *¡bú!*

The use of the word *boo* for jeering doesn't seem to have come about [until the 19th century](#). *Boo* is now used in slang to mean boyfriend or girlfriend (the term appears to derive from *beau*, meaning lover), and in the 1950s it was hipster slang for marijuana—but these usages seem to be unrelated.



