

May 21, 2015

**Bret Stephens** wonders if Ben Rhodes, deputy national security advisor, actually believes the stuff he's saying.

*Ben Rhodes, President Obama's deputy national security adviser, has been offering a reassuring view of the Iranian nuclear deal in the face of some Arab skepticism. "If you can diplomatically and peacefully resolve the nuclear issue in a way that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon," he told reporters last week, "we believe that will lead to a much more stable region." Mr. Rhodes also contends that with a deal "there will be no need to see [a] regional arms race."*

*So what's more frightening: That Mr. Rhodes believes what he's saying? Or that he does not?*

*Just for Mr. Rhodes's benefit, here's a refresher course on stability and the arms race in the Middle East since April 2, 2015, the day Mr. Obama announced his framework nuclear agreement with Iran.*

*April 2: Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif immediately accuses the U.S. of "spin" and contradicts Mr. Obama's key claims regarding the terms of the deal. ... (etc., etc., etc. . . . . )*

*... I recount these events not just to illustrate the distance between Ben Rhodes's concept of reality and reality itself. It's also a question of speed. The Middle East, along with our position in it, is unraveling at an astonishing pace. Reckless drivers often don't notice how fast they're going until they're about to crash.*

*We are near the point where there will be no walking back the mistakes we have made. No walking away from them, either. It takes a special innocence to imagine that nothing in life is irreversible, that everything can be put right, that fanaticism yields to reason and facts yield to wishes, and that the arc of Mideast history bends toward justice.*

*Ben Rhodes, and the administration he represents and typifies, is special.*

**Craig Pirrong** posts on the military brains in the administration who think special forces ops are a substitute for a strategic vision.

*The administration is hyping an allegedly successful Delta Force attack on an Isis target in Syria. I say "allegedly successful" because even though it appears that at least one high value target was killed, and some intelligence was seized, there are doubts that the raid killed the original target. But even if the raid was successful in that it achieved its objective, it testifies to the broader strategic failure of the American campaign to "counter Isis."*

*One does not win wars by special operations alone. As their name implies, special operations are special, exceptional. They can be an important and very specialized component of a military campaign that uses all elements of combat power to destroy a conventional or semi-conventional enemy force that holds territory: they cannot be the entire campaign, or even the main element of that campaign. Special operations support the main operations. They are not a substitute for infantry, armor, artillery, and airpower: they are a complement. ...*

*... Given the grave risks of these raids, the limited number of operators, and the very high cost of training and retaining these unique personnel, they should not be employed in operationally*

*and strategically barren operations. It is almost certain that the recent raid in Syria will be operationally and strategically barren. It should not have been mounted, and similar operations should not be mounted in the future, except as part of a sound operational plan that utilizes conventional forces to achieve a strategically meaningful objective.*

*Obama is categorically opposed to using conventional forces in Iraq and Syria, but feels that he has to do something, and drones and special forces raids are something, even if they accomplish little or nothing of strategic importance. It is pointless to rely on these instruments of national power, which are only truly useful if joined up with other elements of that power, as the backbone of a campaign against Isis. If there is a more telling testament to the strategic vacuity of Obama's "slow burn" campaign than the daring raid in Syria, I would be hard pressed to name it. So much professional expertise and courage put at grave risk to achieve a glittering tactical victory that will have no effect on the ultimate outcome in Syria and Iraq. One cannot win wars by special operations alone, and it borders on the criminal even to try.*

**WSJ Op Ed** says the fall of Ramadi is a perfect illustration of the emptiness of our strategy.

*In the closing years of the Vietnam War it was often noted sardonically that the "victories" against the Viet Cong were moving steadily closer to Saigon. The same could be said of Baghdad and the victories claimed against Islamic State, or ISIS, in Iraq in the past year. The ISIS takeover of Ramadi in the Anbar province over the weekend exposed the hollowness of the reported progress against ISIS. The U.S.-led bombing campaign in support of Iraqi forces isn't working.*

*Clearly, the Iraqi government needs greater military assistance if it is to defeat what is proving to be a formidable enemy. ISIS in Iraq, the successor of al Qaeda in Iraq, is made up of Iraqi Sunnis and foreign Islamist fighters, similar to those the U.S. Army and Marines fought so hard for so many years. ISIS has routinely defeated other rebel groups in neighboring Syria and claimed large swaths of that country's territory. The militants almost took the Iraqi Kurdish capital city of Erbil in February, despite the fierce resistance of the vaunted fighters of the Kurdish Peshmerga. ...*

*... Like it or not, the U.S. is the only country with the strength and know-how to rid Iraq of ISIS. Iran's proxy forces are on the defensive in Syria and have made no overall progress in Iraq. Some argue that Iran isn't serious in trying to defeat ISIS. It's more likely that Iran isn't capable of doing so. What is needed is decisive U.S. leadership. Without it, the long-term entrenchment of Islamic State in Iraq may become a disturbing reality.*

Turning our attention back to last week's poverty summit, **Thomas Sowell** has some thoughts.

*... Since free speech is guaranteed to everyone by the First Amendment to the Constitution, there is nothing to prevent anybody from asking anything from anybody else. But the federal government does not just "ask" for money. It takes the money it wants in taxes, usually before the people who have earned it see their paychecks.*

*Despite pious rhetoric on the left about "asking" the more fortunate for more money, the government does not "ask" anything. It seizes what it wants by force. If you don't pay up, it can take not only your paycheck, it can seize your bank account, put a lien on your home and/or put you in federal prison.*

*So please don't insult our intelligence by talking piously about "asking."*

*And please don't call the government's pouring trillions of tax dollars down a bottomless pit "investment." Remember the soaring words from Barack Obama, in his early days in the White House, about "investing in the industries of the future"? After Solyndra and other companies in which he "invested" the taxpayers' money went bankrupt, we haven't heard those soaring words so much. ...*

*... When all else fails, redistributionists can say, as Obama did at Georgetown University, that "coldhearted, free-market capitalist types" are people who "pretty much have more than you'll ever be able to use and your family will ever be able to use," so they should let the government take that extra money to help the poor.*

*Slippery use of the word "use" seems to confine it to personal consumption. The real question is whether the investment of wealth is likely to be done better by those who created that wealth in the first place or by politicians. The track record of politicians hardly suggests that turning ever more of a nation's wealth over to them is likely to turn out well.*

*It certainly has not turned out well in the American economy under Barack Obama.*

Income inequality is also the subject of [Richard Epstein's](#) column for the week.

*... One outspoken critic of income inequality is the New York Times' columnist Nicholas Kristof, who in a recent column, "[Inequality is a Choice](#)," made it appear that the issue is more tractable to legislative fixes than is in fact the case.*

*Kristof used as his lightning rod the deplorable state of affairs in Baltimore, Maryland, to explain the urgency of the income inequality crisis. But, as I have already [argued](#), the precarious situation in Baltimore is the necessary outcome of the very economic policies that progressives like Kristof would like to see implemented on a national scale. The simple economic truth is that the prolonged downturn in Baltimore does not trace its roots back, as has often been [claimed](#), to segregation, but to the simple fact that Democrats have [controlled](#) every aspect of the public life in the city from 1963 to the present, during which time crime increased, taxes rose, regulations proliferated, and about one-third the city's population fled. The challenge is to find a set of progressive policies that do not have that combined toxic effect.*

*It is just there that the tired suggestions of Kristof demonstrate the futility of his position. He berates his fellow Americans for not thinking that inequality is the result of conscious social choices. He is surely right about the general point, but wrong in sizing up the situation when he denounces the nation, which has "chosen to prioritize tax shelters over minimum wages, subsidies for private jets over robust services for children to break the cycle of poverty."*

*But his argument breaks down because of two mistakes; the first is the near random juxtaposition of two programs, each of which should be considered separately from the other.*

*The second is the failure to ask which of these proposals will pass muster in an economy that runs on the principles of strong property rights, freedom of contract, and limited government. ...*

While the president goes to poverty conferences, the results of his ruinous ideas continue in Baltimore. [The Washington Post](#) reports on the murders after the riots. Thirty murders in thirty days. Left liberals have supported policies that have made husbands and fathers superfluous and we are reaping the whirlwind as families have been ruined.

*Andre Hunt counseled troubled kids through the Boys and Girls Club. He volunteered at the local NAACP chapter. A barber, he befriended the son of an assistant high school principal, swapping tales of football and life while the boy grew into adulthood under the clips of his shears.*

*“He was like a big brother to my son,” the mother, Karima Carrington, said of her trips to Cut Masters on Liberty Heights Avenue.*

*The 28-year-old Hunt was lured out of the barbershop, according to his attorney, and shot in the back of the head on the afternoon of April 29. He was among more than 30 people slain in Baltimore in 30 days, an alarming number of killings and part of an undercurrent of violence here.*

*Although riots and protests after the death of Freddie Gray, who was injured in police custody, brought national attention to the city, the slayings have attracted little notice. They come as Baltimore works to recover from the unrest, with a police force demoralized by the [arrests of six of its members](#) — three of whom face [murder or manslaughter charges](#) in Gray’s death — and under the scrutiny of the Justice Department.*

*The Rev. Jamal H. Bryant, pastor of the Empowerment Temple and a local activist, said city residents have “almost been anesthetized” to the killings. “In any other community, these numbers would be jaw-dropping.”*

*A month before Gray’s death, Bryant joined Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake (D) at a summit to urge black men to help stop black-on-black killings. African Americans comprised 211 of Baltimore’s 216 homicide victims in 2014. Now Bryant, who eulogized Gray at his funeral, believes in “enlarging the narrative beyond Freddie Gray” to harness the anger and renew the focus on curbing violence. ...*

*... Tessa Hill-Aston, president of the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP, said Hunt volunteered at her office. “He was trying to change his life around,” she said, “and was looking forward to serving his sentence and starting over. I’m so sorry he didn’t have a chance to do that.”*

*Hill-Aston was talking on the phone with a reporter on a recent Monday afternoon. A friend had just called her from a doctor’s office in West Baltimore and told her she dived to the floor when three gunshots went off outside.*

*It was 1:30 in the afternoon, at a place called Walbrook Junction. Another man shot in the head. Another death.*

Hours later would be a funeral for another man killed May 2, the last day of the curfew imposed during the rioting. He was the grandson of a founder of Bible Way Church, oldest son of the church's former bishop, nephew of the bishop-designee.

The shootings and the burials continued their frenzied pace.

"It's almost like there's a war going on," Hill-Aston said.

---

---

---

**WSJ**

**Everything Is Awesome, Mideast Edition**

*It takes a special innocence to imagine that the chaos unfolding in the Middle East can be put right.*

by Bret Stephens



*With National Security Adviser Susan Rice at his side, Deputy National Security Adviser Benjamin Rhodes briefs the press, March 21.*

Ben Rhodes, President Obama's deputy national security adviser, has been offering a reassuring view of the Iranian nuclear deal in the face of some Arab skepticism. "If you can diplomatically and peacefully resolve the nuclear issue in a way that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon," he told reporters last week, "we believe that will lead to a much more stable region." Mr. Rhodes also contends that with a deal "there will be no need to see [a] regional arms race."



So what's more frightening: That Mr. Rhodes believes what he's saying? Or that he does not?

Just for Mr. Rhodes's benefit, here's a refresher course on stability and the arms race in the Middle East since April 2, 2015, the day Mr. Obama announced his framework nuclear agreement with Iran.

April 2: Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif immediately accuses the U.S. of "[spin](#)" and contradicts Mr. Obama's key claims regarding the terms of the deal.

April 12: A Swedish think tank reports that Saudi Arabia registered the [biggest](#) increase in defense spending in the world.

April 13: Moscow [says](#) it will deliver the S-300 air-defense system to Tehran. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei later boasts that the U.S. "can't do a damn thing" militarily against Iran.

April 14: Iran [announces](#) agreements with Russia and China to build additional nuclear reactors.

April 17: Iran dispatches an armed convoy of ships, believed to be destined to resupply pro-Iranian Houthi rebels in Yemen in contravention of a U.N. arms embargo. The convoy turns back after the U.S. deploys an aircraft carrier to the region to shadow the ships.

April 20: Jason Rezaian, the American-born Washington Post reporter imprisoned in Iran since July, is [charged](#) with espionage, "collaborating with hostile governments" and "propaganda against the establishment."

April 20: The British government [informs](#) the U.N. panel monitoring sanctions on Iran that it "is aware of an active Iranian nuclear procurement network" associated with two Iranian companies that are under international sanctions.

April 22: Saudi Arabia resumes airstrikes in Yemen despite administration pressure to maintain a cease fire.

April 28: Iran [seizes](#) the 837-foot long Maersk Tigris, a Marshall Islands flagged cargo ship with 34 sailors aboard, as it transits the Strait of Hormuz along an internationally recognized route. The ship is released a week later after Maersk pays a fine of \$163,000.

April 29: Former Saudi Intelligence Minister Turki al Faisal [tells](#) a conference in Seoul that the kingdom will match Iran's nuclear capabilities with its own. "Whatever the Iranians have, we will have, too." The prince also accuses Mr. Obama of going "behind the backs of the traditional allies to strike the deal."

May 8: Reuters [reports](#) that inspectors have discovered traces of sarin gas at an undeclared military research site near Damascus. The report puts paid to administration boasts that its diplomacy effectively solved the Syrian chemical crisis.

May 11: Saudi Arabia's King Salman withdraws from the Arab summit meeting with Mr. Obama. The king of Bahrain follows suit, preferring instead to [attend](#) a horse show with Britain's Queen Elizabeth.

May 13: Reuters [reports](#) “the Czech Republic blocked an attempted purchase by Iran this year of a large shipment of sensitive technology usable for nuclear enrichment after false documentation raised suspicions.”

May 14: Iranian patrol boats [fire](#) upon a Singapore-flagged oil tanker with machine guns as it transits the Strait of Hormuz. The ship makes it safely to Dubai.

May 17: Citing senior U.S. officials, the Sunday Times [reports](#) that “Saudi Arabia has taken the ‘strategic decision’ to acquire ‘off-the-shelf’ atomic weapons from Pakistan.”

Also on May 17, Islamic State fighters in Iraq seize the city of Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province. This is after Mr. Obama [crowed](#) in February that “our coalition is on the offensive, ISIL is on the defensive, and ISIL is going to lose.” Now the Iraqi government will [turn](#) to Shiite paramilitaries under Iranian control to try to retake the city, further turning the Baghdad government into an Iranian satrap.

I recount these events not just to illustrate the distance between Ben Rhodes’s concept of reality and reality itself. It’s also a question of speed. The Middle East, along with our position in it, is unraveling at an astonishing pace. Reckless drivers often don’t notice how fast they’re going until they’re about to crash.

We are near the point where there will be no walking back the mistakes we have made. No walking away from them, either. It takes a special innocence to imagine that nothing in life is irreversible, that everything can be put right, that fanaticism yields to reason and facts yield to wishes, and that the arc of Mideast history bends toward justice.

Ben Rhodes, and the administration he represents and typifies, is special.

## **Streetwise Professor**

### **[One Does Not Win Wars By Special Operations Alone](#)**

by Craig Pirrong

The administration is hyping an allegedly successful Delta Force attack on an Isis target in Syria. I say “allegedly successful” because even though it appears that at least one high value target was killed, and some intelligence was seized, there are doubts that the raid killed the original target. But even if the raid was successful in that it achieved its objective, it testifies to the broader strategic failure of the American campaign to “counter Isis.”

One does not win wars by special operations alone. As their name implies, special operations are special, exceptional. They can be an important and very specialized *component* of a military campaign that uses all elements of combat power to destroy a conventional or semi-conventional enemy force that holds territory: they cannot be the entire campaign, or even the main element of that campaign. Special operations support the main operations. They are not a substitute for infantry, armor, artillery, and airpower: they are a complement.

One important function that special operations can perform is reconnaissance and intelligence collection. The information provided by special operators can be used to identify enemy

weaknesses and strengths, anticipate enemy movements, and plan main force attacks to destroy enemy units and wrest territory from them.

Even if the Delta operators seized considerable intelligence in the raid, this information will be largely useless in operations against Isis combat power because there is no American or coalition combat force that can use it to devise an effective attack against that power.

Another important task special operation forces can perform is direct action against enemy command, control, and logistics. Such actions can sow confusion in the enemy's ranks and the minds of its commanders; disrupt communications; impede coordination, command and control, thereby reducing the enemy's operational effectiveness; and divert forces that otherwise could be used to attack or defend against one's main forces. But a main force is required to exploit these benefits.

Special operations were employed in these ways during the Iraq War, and in particular in Anbar during the Surge. SEALs and Delta conducted almost daily raids on insurgents and collected significant intelligence that was used by conventional infantry, armor, and air forces in near real time to mount attacks against insurgent targets, and to repel insurgent attacks. The pressure from special operations direct actions attrited the enemy and forced its leadership to devote considerable resources on self-defense. Snipers provided by special operations forces were particularly effective at killing and demoralizing the insurgents.

That is, special operations were a major force multiplier in Iraq, especially in 2007-2008. But that was because there was a force to multiply. Special operations were a key component of a full-spectrum campaign involving conventional American forces and local Sunni tribal auxiliaries. This campaign eventually resulted in a hard-won victory that Obama frittered away in 2011. Today's news that Ramadi, and with it virtually all of Anbar, are in Isis hands shows that the reversal of fortune is all but complete.

But if you multiply nothing by something, even a big something, you still end up with nothing. And it is abundantly clear that in Iraq and Syria, we got nothin' for special forces to multiply. Meaning that the ultimate effect of yesterday's Delta raid, and any other raids to come, will be effectively zero.

Given the grave risks of these raids, the limited number of operators, and the very high cost of training and retaining these unique personnel, they should not be employed in operationally and strategically barren operations. It is almost certain that the recent raid in Syria will be operationally and strategically barren. It should not have been mounted, and similar operations should not be mounted in the future, except as part of a sound operational plan that utilizes conventional forces to achieve a strategically meaningful objective.

Obama is categorically opposed to using conventional forces in Iraq and Syria, but feels that he has to do something, and drones and special forces raids are something, even if they accomplish little or nothing of strategic importance. It is pointless to rely on these instruments of national power, which are only truly useful if joined up with other elements of that power, as the backbone of a campaign against Isis. If there is a more telling testament to the strategic vacuity of Obama's "slow burn" campaign than the daring raid in Syria, I would be hard pressed to name it. So much professional expertise and courage put at grave risk to achieve a glittering tactical victory that will have no effect on the ultimate outcome in Syria and Iraq. One cannot win wars by special operations alone, and it borders on the criminal even to try.



WSJ

## [Islamic State Is Winning in Iraq](#)

***U.S.-led airstrikes are failing to deter the Islamist militants. Here's what must be done to defeat them.***

by Norman Ricklefs and Derek Harvey

In the closing years of the Vietnam War it was often noted sardonically that the “victories” against the Viet Cong were moving steadily closer to Saigon. The same could be said of Baghdad and the victories claimed against Islamic State, or ISIS, in Iraq in the past year. The ISIS takeover of Ramadi in the Anbar province over the weekend exposed the hollowness of the reported progress against ISIS. The U.S.-led bombing campaign in support of Iraqi forces isn't working.

Clearly, the Iraqi government needs greater military assistance if it is to defeat what is proving to be a formidable enemy. ISIS in Iraq, the successor of al Qaeda in Iraq, is made up of Iraqi Sunnis and foreign Islamist fighters, similar to those the U.S. Army and Marines fought so hard for so many years. ISIS has routinely defeated other rebel groups in neighboring Syria and claimed large swaths of that country's territory. The militants almost took the Iraqi Kurdish capital city of Erbil in February, despite the fierce resistance of the vaunted fighters of the Kurdish Peshmerga.

Shiite militias—some armed by Iran and manned by Iranian fighters—haven't performed well against ISIS on the battlefield. After a month of fighting in Tikrit, during which the Iraqi media estimate some 5,000 Shiite militiamen were killed, ISIS abandoned the city once the U.S. and its allies began airstrikes in late March. That is what happens in guerrilla warfare. Having extracted its price in blood, ISIS withdrew rather than endure heavy casualties.

When Iraqi armed forces confronted ISIS in Anbar province in the second week of April, the Islamists responded with the massive counterattack that ultimately took Ramadi, the provincial capital, and they also attacked the Beiji oil refinery. ISIS now effectively controls the refinery, though it is too damaged to operate for now.

We are in communication with members of the Iraqi military, who report that Iraq's special forces performed well against ISIS fighters in Ramadi. The special forces are the only ones with the technical ability to call in accurate airstrikes. But the regular Iraqi army continues to struggle. In a fight in northern Anbar last month, Iraqi soldiers were butchered after they ran out of ammunition, while a convoy of armored Humvees sent to rescue them was ambushed with a senior commander of the Iraqi army among the many killed.

The defense of Ramadi, according to our sources, was largely left to local Sunni tribesman who were small in number and unreliable allies. The Iraqi government may now be responding to the Ramadi challenge—on Monday 3,000 mostly Shiite paramilitary forces were [reported](#) massing outside the city, intent on trying to retake it.

Tens of thousands of refugees from Anbar are now testing the capabilities of Iraq's authorities. It is no coincidence that terrorist bombings in Baghdad, which had enjoyed a prolonged period of relative quiet, have increased as refugees began flooding into the city. Now there are scores of bombings weekly. ISIS has always fomented strife between communities, and no doubt hopes that Shiite militias will retaliate against the Sunnis fleeing Anbar.

U.S.-led airstrikes have allowed the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, a Shiite, to consolidate its power even as it cedes ground to Iranian-backed Shiite militias of questionable motivations. The airstrikes may not have reversed ISIS gains, but the bombing campaign has complicated ISIS recruitment, financing, command and control, logistics and operational capabilities.

But that is not enough. The U.S. needs to play a more robust role against ISIS before conditions in Iraq deteriorate further. The Pentagon should employ more ground operations by Special Operations forces, like the raid in eastern Syria on Friday that took out ISIS commander Abu Sayyaf. More Apache attack helicopters and transport planes are also needed, as is a brigade dedicated to improving operational command and intelligence support.

Moreover, the Pentagon needs to end the “boots on the ground” shell game of relying on temporary deployments to work around the president’s 3,000 personnel cap, which has proved dysfunctional. Most of the U.S. troops currently in Iraq are training and advising Iraqi forces. That is useful, but more need to be embedded with Iraqi units to improve the accuracy of U.S.-led airstrikes.

American logistics assets, whether uniformed or contractor, should be deployed to supply the Iraqi army—the least we can do is ensure that Iraqi soldiers don’t have to worry about running out of ammunition. In addition, the U.S. must return to its role as an honest broker between Iraq’s majority Shiites and minority Sunnis, as it did in 2006-07 with great success.

Like it or not, the U.S. is the only country with the strength and know-how to rid Iraq of ISIS. Iran’s proxy forces are on the defensive in Syria and have made no overall progress in Iraq. Some argue that Iran isn’t serious in trying to defeat ISIS. It’s more likely that Iran isn’t capable of doing so. What is needed is decisive U.S. leadership. Without it, the long-term entrenchment of Islamic State in Iraq may become a disturbing reality.

*Mr. Ricklefs, a former adviser to the Iraqi Minister of Interior, is president of the Iraq Advisory Group, a consultancy firm. Mr. Harvey, a retired U.S. Army colonel, is director of the Global Initiative on Civil Society and Conflict at the University of South Florida.*

## **Jewish World Review**

### **'Just Asking'**

by Thomas Sowell

In a recent panel discussion on poverty at Georgetown University, President Barack Obama gave another demonstration of his mastery of rhetoric — and disregard of reality.

One of the ways of fighting poverty, he proposed, was to "ask from society's lottery winners" that they make a "modest investment" in government programs to help the poor.

Since free speech is guaranteed to everyone by the First Amendment to the Constitution, there is nothing to prevent anybody from asking anything from anybody else. But the federal government does not just "ask" for money. It takes the money it wants in taxes, usually before the people who have earned it see their paychecks.

Despite pious rhetoric on the left about "asking" the more fortunate for more money, the government does not "ask" anything. It seizes what it wants by force. If you don't pay up, it can take not only your paycheck, it can seize your bank account, put a lien on your home and/or put you in federal prison.

So please don't insult our intelligence by talking piously about "asking."

And please don't call the government's pouring trillions of tax dollars down a bottomless pit "investment." Remember the soaring words from Barack Obama, in his early days in the White House, about "investing in the industries of the future"? After Solyndra and other companies in which he "invested" the taxpayers' money went bankrupt, we haven't heard those soaring words so much.

Then there are those who produced the wealth that politicians want to grab. In Obama's rhetoric, these producers are called "society's lottery winners."

Was Bill Gates a lottery winner? Or did he produce and sell a computer operating system that allows billions of people around the world to use computers, without knowing anything about the inner workings of this complex technology?

Was Henry Ford a lottery winner? Or did he revolutionize the production of automobiles, bringing the price down to the point where cars were no longer luxuries of the rich but vehicles that millions of ordinary people could afford, greatly expanding the scope of their lives?

Most people who want to redistribute wealth don't want to talk about how that wealth was produced in the first place. They just want "the rich" to pay their undefined "fair share" of taxes. This "fair share" must remain undefined because all it really means is "more."

Once you have defined it — whether at 30 percent, 60 percent or 90 percent — you wouldn't be able to come back for more.

Obama goes further than other income redistributionists. "You didn't build that!" he declared to those who did. Why? Because those who created additions to the world's wealth used government-built roads or other government-provided services to market their products.

And who paid for those roads and other government-provided services if not the taxpayers? Since all other taxpayers, as well as non-taxpayers, also use government facilities, why are those who created private wealth not to use them also, since they are taxpayers as well?

The fact that most of the rhetorical ploys used by Barack Obama and other redistributionists will not stand up under scrutiny means very little politically. After all, how many people who come out of our schools and colleges today are capable of critical scrutiny?

When all else fails, redistributionists can say, as Obama did at Georgetown University, that "coldhearted, free-market capitalist types" are people who "pretty much have more than you'll ever be able to use and your family will ever be able to use," so they should let the government take that extra money to help the poor.

Slippery use of the word "use" seems to confine it to personal consumption. The real question is whether the investment of wealth is likely to be done better by those who created that wealth in the first place or by politicians. The track record of politicians hardly suggests that turning ever more of a nation's wealth over to them is likely to turn out well.

It certainly has not turned out well in the American economy under Barack Obama.

## Hoover Institution

### The "Income Inequality" Warriors

by Richard Epstein

The critical [political struggle](#) of the 2016 presidential election may well be the redistribution of wealth. How that issue plays out is likely to depend on whether it is cast in terms of economic growth or income inequality. If the Republicans successfully push the growth agenda, then the Democrats will be on the defensive. If the Democrats drive home the theme of income inequality, then the Republicans will squirm. This is a contest that the Republicans should win if they play their cards correctly.

Let's start with this fundamental observation: It is possible to reduce income inequality in one of two ways: lower the income at the top or raise it at the bottom. Indeed, it is possible, but only by extreme measures, to eliminate all inequality by spreading the wealth of the richest individuals around so that everyone has the same income. Yet none of the critics of income inequality will go that far, because they realize that that strategy will depress the income of the poor as well as the rich. So instead these critics moderate their demands: they are willing to sacrifice some measure of overall social welfare to obtain greater benefits at the bottom. Their theoretical position is that the substantial gains in utility for the poor will override the relatively small losses in personal satisfaction and living standards that the top income earners will experience as a result of redistribution.

Pity is, they have no idea how to steer this middle course. Politics is a very imperfect science to say the least, so that it is all too easy for these progressive policies to overshoot the mark, as it is much easier to lower levels of wealth than it is to raise them. Put simply, it is an intellectual fantasy to think that it is possible to address questions of inequality without taking into account any productivity losses that these proposals may take. Those difficulties do not arise if the first emphasis is placed instead upon the creation of wealth. Indeed it is altogether possible to improve the position of the worst off in society by a set of productive measures that *widen* the income gap between rich and poor.

Assume that we have just two groups in society, one of whose members all have wealth at the level of 10 and the second, far smaller, have wealth at the level of 1,000. A change in legal position that increases the wealth of the bottom group from 10 to 15 and the top group from 1,000 to 1,200 will increase absolute inequality even as it improves the position of the people at the bottom. Ironically, it will also give larger percentage increases to those at the bottom. Indeed, many social changes do produce gains across the board. But it is typically beyond the capacity of any social planner to steer productive activity in ways that ensure that whatever growth does take place will result in a reduction of any income gap by any system of state taxation and regulation.

This line of reasoning has not, of course, stopped the champions of income equality in the Democratic Party from pushing its front-running candidate, Hillary Clinton, into putting the inequality issue front and center during the current campaign. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find policy prescriptions that can achieve the lofty goal of producing a sustainable version of income equality. One outspoken critic of income inequality is the New York Times' columnist Nicholas

Kristof, who in a recent column, "[Inequality is a Choice](#)," made it appear that the issue is more tractable to legislative fixes than is in fact the case.

Kristof used as his lightning rod the deplorable state of affairs in Baltimore, Maryland, to explain the urgency of the income inequality crisis. But, as I have already [argued](#), the precarious situation in Baltimore is the necessary outcome of the very economic policies that progressives like Kristof would like to see implemented on a national scale. The simple economic truth is that the prolonged downturn in Baltimore does not trace its roots back, as has often been [claimed](#), to segregation, but to the simple fact that Democrats have [controlled](#) every aspect of the public life in the city from 1963 to the present, during which time crime increased, taxes rose, regulations proliferated, and about one-third the city's population fled. The challenge is to find a set of progressive policies that do not have that combined toxic effect.

It is just there that the tired suggestions of Kristof demonstrate the futility of his position. He berates his fellow Americans for not thinking that inequality is the result of conscious social choices. He is surely right about the general point, but wrong in sizing up the situation when he denounces the nation, which has "chosen to prioritize tax shelters over minimum wages, subsidies for private jets over robust services for children to break the cycle of poverty."

But his argument breaks down because of two mistakes; the first is the near random juxtaposition of two programs, each of which should be considered separately from the other. The second is the failure to ask which of these proposals will pass muster in an economy that runs on the principles of strong property rights, freedom of contract, and limited government.

Within a classical liberal position, all subsidies to any groups should generally be regarded with suspicion. In this case, the condemnation of tax shelters is high on the list of classical liberal targets. Tax subsidies, whether for the rich or the poor, lead to a misallocation of resources. The subsidized activity now takes place past the point where marginal revenues exceed marginal cost, and thus leads to social losses. For these purposes, it does not matter whether the subsidy comes from general revenues or from specific levies against other particular lines of business. Both should be rejected. Tax shelters to the rich do not pass the test under any theory of limited government.

But why couple tax shelters with the [minimum wage](#), which does not help the poor even if tax subsidies for the rich were reduced today? In his column, Kristof bemoans Utah Senator Mike Lee for lamenting the lack of equality of opportunity in the United States. But Lee has the better of this argument. The minimum wage laws kill opportunities for the least well-off in society by making it too costly for firms to hire marginal workers. In so doing, it cuts them out of the working economy, and makes them ever more dependent on a set of transfer payments that do nothing to increase their skill sets, self-sufficiency, or sense of self-respect. It is one thing for an employer to give workers raises as a spur to, or recognition of, greater productivity. But when government imposes those obligations from without, it hurts the very individuals whom it wants to help.

Knocking out any tax subsidies for corporate jets is likewise a no-brainer for the same reason. But it is a much harder position to think of how best to provide those "robust services" to get children out of poverty. On this score, the standard progressive line is to favor stronger unions within the framework of an overall public school system. But that system works for the benefits of the unions, and not for the benefit of the children who are denied access to charter schools, which provide better education to the children that they teach than ordinary public schools.

Kristof then cites the work of the British economist Antony B. Atkinson, whose new [book](#) *Inequality: What Can Be Done?* only illustrates the massive progressive confusion on this subject. To be sure, both Atkinson and Kristof are right to insist that government take concern with competition and monopoly policy. But the pro-competition program is an integral part of the classical liberal tradition. So the key question is exactly how to implement the program. My own view is that the stress should be on horizontal cartels that reduce output, raise prices, and reduce social welfare. The [great danger](#) in this area is that competition policy can attack successful companies like Google and Microsoft, not because they have engaged in monopolistic behavior, but because their wealth as foreign companies makes them ready targets for redistribution in Europe or China.

It is not enough therefore for egalitarians to state their ultimate objective. It is equally necessary that their proposals can implement that objective correctly. Yet that cannot be done on matters of monopoly and competition, if in the next breath comes a plea that unions be strengthened. That plea is wholly ironic since the success of large industrial unions depends on their ability to exert monopoly power over employers in both the public and private sector. Put simply, Kristof's second recommendation is inconsistent with the first, and depends on the wholly unsupportable claim that the monopoly power of labor unions is somehow different from that possessed by firms when in fact the same principles apply to both.

Ironically, therefore, one useful reform that might improve management labor relations is to remove the bar in the National Labor Relations Act that prevents the formation of [company unions](#). That one reform could allow workers to have a collective voice within the firm, without organizing industry-wide strikes that can idle a nation with large negative consequences to the overall economy. But the notion that industry-wide unions can help redress income inequality is wholly misconceived. Unions bargain for the advantage of their members, and the only way that they can keep wages above the competitive level is to cut job opportunities to lower paid workers in the effort to obtain higher wages, which in turn will result in higher consumer prices for poor and rich alike.

The rest of the Atkinson/Kristof program is also a recipe for economic disaster. There is no way to organize a system of public service jobs at minimum wage that is capable of supplying services that are needed. The proposal will typically result in make-work positions that will reduce the number of workers who can obtain private sector jobs. Likewise, there is little merit in thinking that much relief could come from raising marginal tax rates to 65 percent. Putting that reform is moving into uncharted waters, where it is likely that reducing private investment capital will cut the demand for labor, lowering overall wage levels. A [tax reduction](#) is on balance, more likely, to result in overall improvements, which is why states that favor low taxation policies typically outperform their high-taxation rivals.

Sensible policies to combat inequality follow from a consistent classical liberal position, which seeks to promote competition in the private market and in the provision of public education. The rest of the egalitarian program is counterproductive insofar as it keeps the poor worse while leaving the rich worse off as well. That is a strategy for dual ruin that will only deepen the current economic malaise.



## Washington Post

### [After rioters burned Baltimore, killings pile up largely under the radar](#)

by Peter Hermann

BALTIMORE — Andre Hunt counseled troubled kids through the Boys and Girls Club. He volunteered at the local NAACP chapter. A barber, he befriended the son of an assistant high school principal, swapping tales of football and life while the boy grew into adulthood under the clips of his shears.

“He was like a big brother to my son,” the mother, Karima Carrington, said of her trips to Cut Masters on Liberty Heights Avenue.

The 28-year-old Hunt was lured out of the barbershop, according to his attorney, and shot in the back of the head on the afternoon of April 29. He was among more than 30 people slain in Baltimore in 30 days, an alarming number of killings and part of an undercurrent of violence here.

Although riots and protests after the death of Freddie Gray, who was injured in police custody, brought national attention to the city, the slayings have attracted little notice. They come as Baltimore works to recover from the unrest, with a police force demoralized by the [arrests of six of its members](#) — three of whom face [murder or manslaughter charges](#) in Gray’s death — and under the scrutiny of the Justice Department.

The Rev. Jamal H. Bryant, pastor of the Empowerment Temple and a local activist, said city residents have “almost been anesthetized” to the killings. “In any other community, these numbers would be jaw-dropping.”

A month before Gray’s death, Bryant joined Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake (D) at a summit to urge black men to help stop black-on-black killings. African Americans comprised 211 of Baltimore’s 216 homicide victims in 2014. Now Bryant, who eulogized Gray at his funeral, believes in “enlarging the narrative beyond Freddie Gray” to harness the anger and renew the focus on curbing violence.

“The young people are engaged,” the pastor said. “Now there has to be a clear conversation on the contributing factors to murder — lack of jobs, lack of opportunity, hopelessness. All have contributed to the downsizing of life. . . . Young people don’t fear death. They’ve almost embraced it as part of life in Baltimore.”

Hunt’s killing remains unsolved. His attorney describes it as a daylight execution along the dilapidated commercial strip a little more than a mile from where the riots first erupted at Mondawmin Mall. Hunt’s friends believe the barber’s death is linked to his former position as a middleman in this city’s lucrative heroin trade. He was shot a month after he was sentenced to three years in federal prison for distributing drugs in Gray’s neighborhood, and 10 days before his attorney said he planned to report to serve his term.

Hunt’s roles as youth mentor, legitimate wage earner and drug dealer are part of the dysfunction and paradox of surviving in troubled neighborhoods, where narcotics are an integral part of commerce and as common as the [vacant rowhouses that dominate the landscape](#). Hunt bought heroin wholesale and sold to street-level pushers working West Baltimore’s Gilmore Homes and its isolated courtyards between strips of drab public housing. This is the part of the [Sandtown-](#)

[Winchester](#) neighborhood where Gray grew up and where he was arrested before he died April 19, after having been shackled and put without a buckled seat belt in the back of a police van.

## Upsurge in homicides

The protests and riots that roiled this city in the aftermath of Gray's death quieted after the police officers were charged. But even as shops were looted and burned and 3,200 Maryland National Guard troops came to restore order, another type of violence was consuming Baltimore.

From mid-April to mid-May, 31 people were killed, and 39 others were wounded by gunfire. Twice, 10 people were shot on a single day. As of Friday, the deadly burst has pushed the city's homicide count to 91, 21 above last year at the same time. In the District, 40 people had been slain as of Friday, not including four people found dead Thursday in cases police said are being investigated as homicides but are awaiting a ruling by the medical examiner.

Baltimore has historically been a violent city, earning a moniker of "Mob Town" during gang riots of the 1850s. Homicides topped 300 for 10 consecutive years in the 1990s. Although the annual figure has fallen to the low 200s, the city remains among the top tier in per capita murders, ranking fifth in 2013, behind Detroit, New Orleans, Newark and St. Louis.

The past few weeks have been rough on rank-and-file cops who, according to their union representatives, feel distrusted by the citizenry, vilified by the media and alienated by prosecutors. "Officers are coming up to me and saying, 'I'm afraid to do my job,'" said Lt. Kenneth Butler, a 29-year veteran and president of a group for black officers. He said officers, black and white, are "equally upset, their morale is low."

Lt. Victor Gearhart, with 33 years of experience, said officers are second-guessing themselves, tamping down aggressive policing. "Now they have to think, 'What happens if this turns bad? What is going to happen to me?'"

During the rioting and protests, Baltimore police disclosed the killings on the department's Twitter feed amid tallies of looting, fires and rock throwing. But shootings did not become a topic except when police assured they were not linked to the unrest. The day after the rioting began, and as the National Guard deployed, the police commissioner declared on TV: "The citizens are safe. The city is stable."

Andre Hunt was killed the next afternoon.

## Intersecting lives

Hunt was trying to escape the drug life.

He graduated in 2004 from a high school in Milford Mill, a suburb of Baltimore. He got his barber's license and started cutting hair. He had two cousins in the drug trade, and his attorney, Richard C.B. Woods, blames them for luring him into illicit dealing.

One cousin, Sean Wilson, 46, was sentenced in February to 11 years in federal prison for working with a heroin dealer in New Orleans. When police raided his house in suburban

Baltimore, they found 10 kilograms of heroin and \$464,000 in cash. An additional \$89,000 was found stuffed into the pipes of a Ford D-250 pickup.

This was the atmosphere in which Hunt found himself, Woods said, and, starting in 2012, he joined with another cousin to sell heroin. Hunt's nickname was "Cousin," due to the family connections that put him in easy reach of large amounts of drugs. He worked out of a stash house in Reservoir Hill, a neighborhood just above the intersection of Pennsylvania and North avenues that was the epicenter of the riots.

In his plea agreement in federal court, Hunt admitted they poured drugs into Gilmore Homes. Business was brisk. In one car stop of Hunt, police reported finding 50,000 empty yellow zip-top bags typically used to package drugs for street sales. Inside the Reservoir Hill house, police found 1.6 kilograms of heroin and a .357 Magnum revolver.

Hunt and others were arrested in October 2013. He pleaded guilty in May 2014 but wasn't sentenced until in March 17, 2015. A federal judge allowed him until May to surrender for prison.

But just two weeks after Hunt entered his guilty plea, Wilson, who had not yet been arrested, heard that his cousin was going away for just three years, while others got much more time, according to court filings. Wilson talked to his New Orleans supplier on a call bugged by the FBI.

"I don't know how the [expletive] that happened," Wilson said, according to a court affidavit. "I'm still trying to get to the bottom of it."

The Maryland U.S. attorney's office declined to comment. Woods said his client was spared a long prison term because he had no prior convictions and appeared to be trying to turn his life around.

"He was hard-working," the lawyer said. "He mentored young people. That's unusual. Most people in drug-distribution rings don't care anything about anything but their money. He was a good young man who got roped into this."

Karima Carrington, the assistant principal of the Academy for College and Career Exploration, a city high school, said she met Hunt a decade ago while he was cutting hair at Cut Masters.

She took her sons to his shop. The youngest was then 12. Hunt and the youth talked sports and jobs, and Hunt attended the boy's football games. Carrington said of Hunt's death: "Absolutely it had something to do with what he was doing on the street. No one would want to hurt him other than someone in that life."

Carrington said that after Hunt was arrested, he confessed to her about selling drugs. "He was remorseful," she said. "He was ashamed. He really was trying to get out of the life he had led."

Tessa Hill-Aston, president of the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP, said Hunt volunteered at her office. "He was trying to change his life around," she said, "and was looking forward to serving his sentence and starting over. I'm so sorry he didn't have a chance to do that."

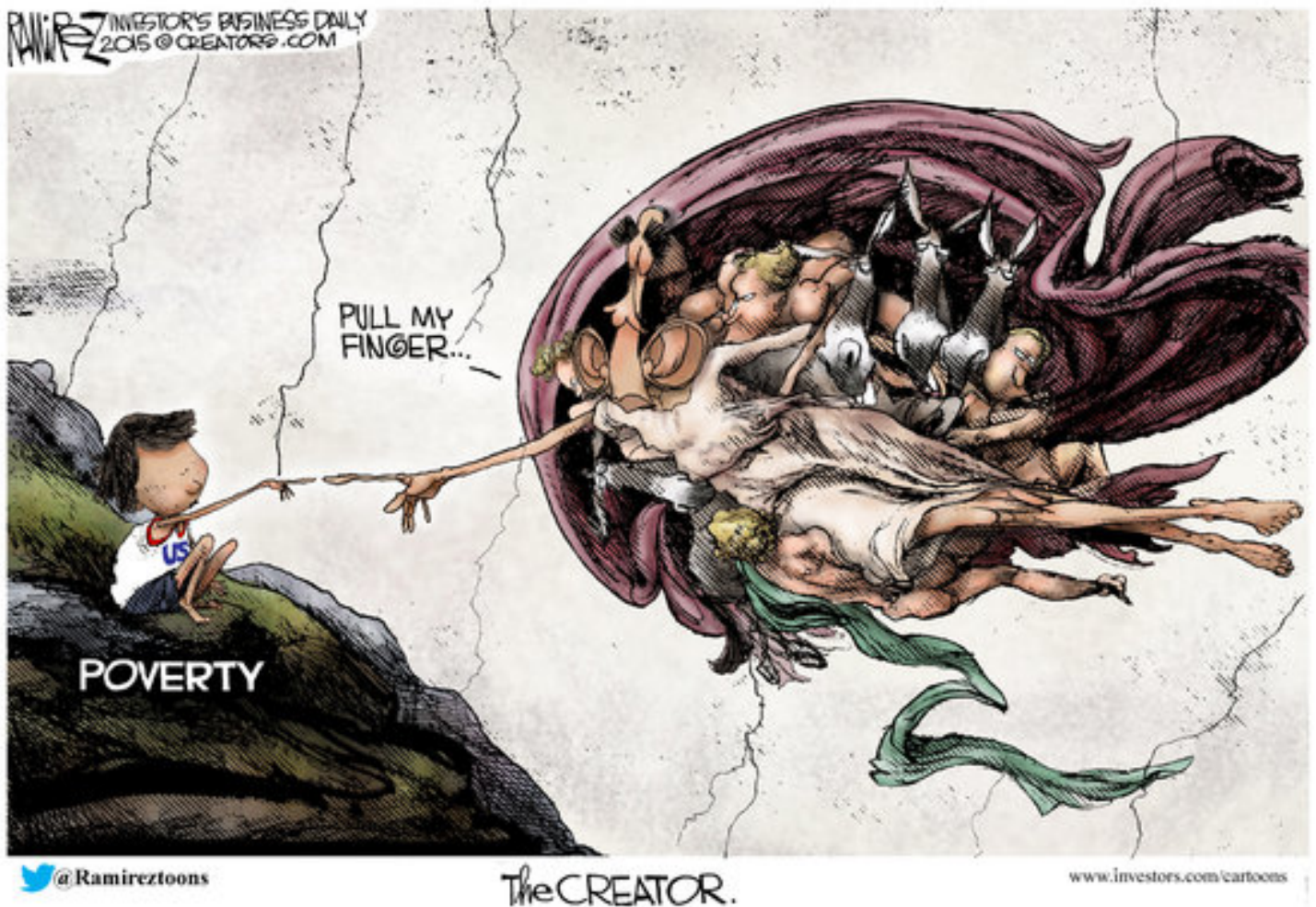
Hill-Aston was talking on the phone with a reporter on a recent Monday afternoon. A friend had just called her from a doctor's office in West Baltimore and told her she dived to the floor when three gunshots went off outside.

It was 1:30 in the afternoon, at a place called Walbrook Junction. Another man shot in the head. Another death.

Hours later would be a funeral for another man killed May 2, the last day of the curfew imposed during the rioting. He was the grandson of a founder of Bible Way Church, oldest son of the church's former bishop, nephew of the bishop-designee.

The shootings and the burials continued their frenzied pace.

"It's almost like there's a war going on," Hill-Aston said.



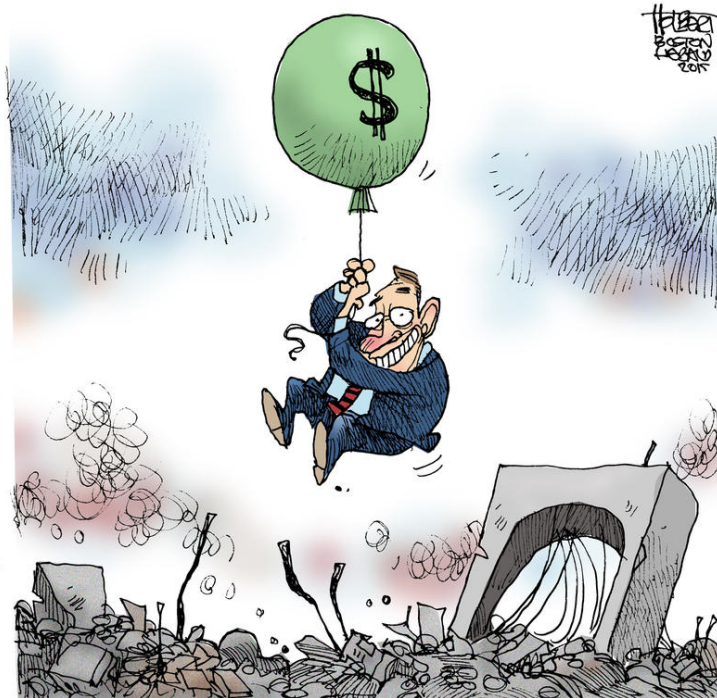




@Ramireztoons

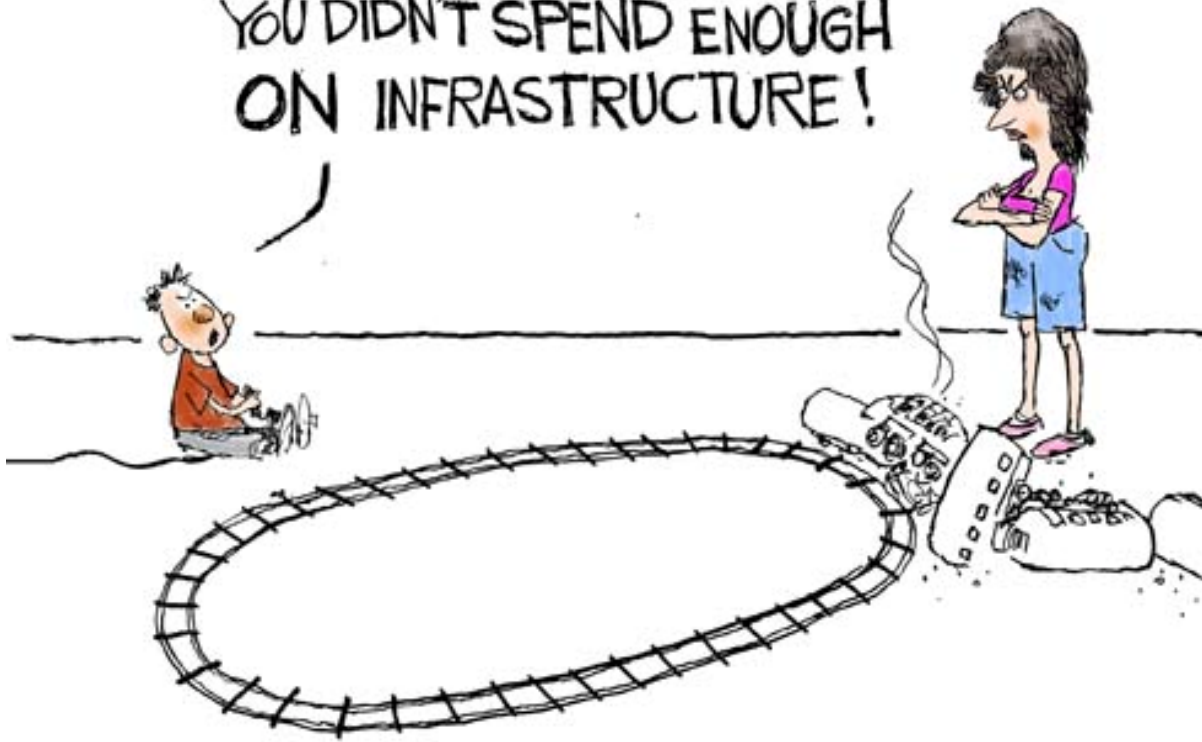
www.investors.com/cartoons







YOU DIDN'T SPEND ENOUGH  
ON INFRASTRUCTURE!



BUT...  
WHAT HAPPENED  
TO THE HIGHWAY  
TRUST FUND  
MONEY?

WE SPENT IT.  
ON BIKE PATHS,  
ON SIDEWALKS  
and on  
THESE NIFTY  
SMILEY STICKERS.



©2015 CREATORS.COM  
GORRELLAET.COM  
GORRELL



B.B. KING - THE THRILL IS GONE

