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**Wisconsin Interest** magazine profiles Paul Ryan.

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*And yet there is Paul Ryan, on a CNBC panel out-nerding all the high-paid TV financial analysts. And there is Paul Ryan on the Sunday network talk shows explaining how America is in the midst of a slow-motion federal entitlement catastrophe. And there is Paul Ryan dismantling the health care bill at President Obama's sham "summit," while the president glares at him as if Ryan just told the Obama kids there's no tooth fairy.*

*Ryan is a throwback; he could easily have been a conservative politician in the era before cable news. He has risen to national stardom by taking the path least traveled by modern politicians: He knows a lot of stuff.*

*Few members of Congress have attained Ryan's mind-boggling velocity. Elected to Congress in 1998 at the tender age of 28, he is on everyone's watch list. Fortune has anointed Ryan as President Obama's foremost adversary. Conservative patriarch George Will has Ryan all but penciled in as the GOP vice presidential nominee in 2012. America's Cougar-in-Chief, Sarah Palin, listed Ryan as her favorite presidential candidate in 2012. The London Daily Telegraph ranked Ryan as America's ninth most influential conservative, ahead of Mitt Romney, George W. Bush and Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts.*

*In fact, rarely does Wisconsin's fiscal dreamboat give an interview these days when he's not asked if he's running for president in 2012; he steadfastly maintains that he will not. But why are people so suddenly so excited by a congressman from Janesville, Wisconsin? In other words...*

*What's so damn special about Paul Ryan? ...*

**David Harsanyi** says we don't want any more help.

*... At a Minnesota town hall, for instance, the president offered this **gem**: "You can't just make money on SUVs and trucks. There is a place for SUVs and trucks, but as gas prices keep on going up, you have got to understand the market."*

*If only the common man had such insight into markets. Earlier this month, Ford reported that sport utility vehicle sales had **increased 31 percent** (car sales improved 3.4 percent) from a year earlier. General Motors also "bounced back" on the strength of its worldwide SUV sales. Who knows? If this administration didn't harbor resentment toward useful and affordable energy, Ford could sell even more SUVs.*

*Just an example.*

*Now, considering the failure of Washington to help shake off this prolonged slump, it is no surprise that a recent Washington Post **poll** found that 73 percent of Americans — up from 52 percent last year and 41 percent a decade ago — doubt the ability of government to solve the nation's economic problems.*

*I suppose it's not surprising that this administration refuses to budge a single food stamp away from its faith-based beliefs. But if it really wanted to help, it would stop "helping."*

[Andrew Malcolm](#) says, "On Day 938 of his presidency, Obama says he'll have a jobs plan in a month or so."

*... At his speaking engagements, Obama stressed the need to extend payroll tax cuts and to rebuild the nation's roads, bridges and other union-made infrastructure kinds of stuff. Also some free-trade agreements. This was a repetition of what he had said on the first day of his Grand Ground Tour.*

*On his 938th day in office President Obama also said he would soon have a completed jobs plan. Maybe early fall, something like that. And he complained, "We could do even more if Congress is willing to get in the game."*

*Tomorrow with all this heavy work in his rear-view mirror, the president is scheduled to join his family on Martha's Vineyard for a nine-day vacation.*

[Kathleen Parker](#) doesn't like the bus. You know, the one made in Canada.

*About that bus: What could the White House have been thinking?*

*Here the country is reeling from depression, recession and oppression, and the president decides to take a heartland tour in the visual equivalent of an armored hearse?*

[David Boaz](#) tries to answer the question whether Obama is worse than Carter and Bush. *Conservatives have become so furious with President Obama that they forget just how bad some of his predecessors were. One Jeffrey Kuhner, whose over-the-top op-eds in the Washington Times belie the sober and judicious conservatism you might expect from the president of the "Edmund Burke Institute," [writes](#) most recently:*

*"A possible Great Depression haunts the land. Primarily one man is to blame: President Obama.*

*Mr. Obama has racked up more than \$4 trillion in debt."*

*Yes, he has. And that's almost as much as the \$5 trillion in debt [rung up](#) by his predecessor, George W. Bush. True, on an annual basis Obama is leaving Bush in the dust. But acceleration has been the name of the game: In 190 years, 39 presidents racked up a trillion dollars in debt. The next three presidents ran the debt up to about \$5.73 trillion. Then Bush 43 almost doubled the total public debt, to \$10.7 trillion, in eight years. And now the 44th president has added almost \$4 trillion in two years and seven months. ...*

For those who think the president will be Harry S, Obama, [Michael Barone](#) has a history lesson.

*... Truman's victory was due to two "F factors" -- the farm vote and foreign policy -- the first of which scarcely exists today and the second of which seems unlikely to benefit Obama in the same way.*

*When the nation went to war in the 1940s one out of four Americans still lived on farms. The 1948 electorate still reflected that America. Voter turnout was actually lower than it was in 1940, and the*

*vast postwar demographic changes were not reflected in elections until turnout surged in the contest between Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson in 1952.*

*Truman promised to keep Depression-era farm subsidies in place and charged that Dewey and the Republicans would repeal them. That enabled him to run ahead of Franklin Roosevelt's 1944 showing in 13 states with large farm populations from Indiana to Colorado and Minnesota to Oklahoma.*

*Without that swing in the farm vote Truman would not have won. Dewey, waking up to find that he would not be president as he and almost everyone expected, spotted that immediately the morning after the election.*

*Today only 2 to 3 percent of Americans live on farms. Farm prices are currently running far ahead of subsidy prices. Obama is not going to be re-elected by the farm vote.*

*The second F factor that helped Truman was foreign policy. As Ornstein correctly notes, Truman's Cold War policies -- the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan -- were supported by Republican congressional leaders and by Dewey. Top Dewey advisers were taken into confidence by Truman's foreign policy appointees. It was the golden era of bipartisan foreign policy.*

*But on one policy Truman went further than his top advisers or Dewey's. When the Soviets blocked land access to West Berlin in June 1948, Truman's advisers -- men of the caliber of George Marshall and Omar Bradley -- said that it was impossible to supply food and fuel to Berlin and we should just abandon it.*

*At a crucial meeting in July 1948 Truman listened to this advice. After others finished talking, Truman said simply, "We're not leaving Berlin." ...*

**[The Wall Street Journal](#)** has an interesting article on the many "seasons" stores use to focus on customers needs. The article is strange in that it moves from suggesting retailers spend their time trying to manipulate behavior to one more with more benign motives. Whatever your take, you'll learn something about retailers' efforts.

*... In a suburb of Minneapolis, Supervalu runs a "lab store," a model store not open to the public where the third-largest traditional grocery store company in the U.S. can test how new products look on its shelves and experiment with seasonal displays. Last month, Supervalu employees worked to create the perfect fall endcap, the shelves that anchor the end of the typical grocery store aisle. The goal—easy meals for parents pressed for time at the start of the school year.*

*Problems quickly became apparent. After setting up tuna in pouches, mayonnaise, peanut butter and bread on the lunch endcap, employees saw that the tuna pouches tilted slightly backwards. The tuna "didn't present itself well to customers," says Chris Doeing, a director of merchandising for Supervalu, which owns chains including Albertsons and Cub Foods. Tuna was booted from the endcap to a nearby shelf.*

*On endcaps, best-selling items often go on the larger shelves near the floor to grab people's attention from farther away. Employees experiment with which size and shape products look best together. ...*

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## Wisconsin Interest Magazine

### Rebel Without A Pause

by Christian Schneider

Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan is a verbal machine gun. Silence is the only thing he attacks with more ferocity than government-run health care. But when the topic turns to him, he hesitates.

“Being recognized in public isn’t something I ever really wanted,” Ryan says to me as he takes a sip from his Singha beer. We’re at Washington D.C.’s Talay Thai restaurant, which Ryan can see from his Capitol office window. “It’s really weird to have someone write about your life – it just seems so boring to me,” he says as he picks at his plate of drunken noodles.

“I’m not trying to sell myself as a star,” he says. I note that we could wallpaper the Capitol with the portraits of representatives whose names will never cross the lips of another human being. Ryan says he can only handle 10% of the 50-to-60 press inquiries he receives each day. So why is he getting so much attention?

“I think there’s a vacuum of leadership,” he says. “The Bush-Cheney generation of leaders is gone, and people are hungry for the next generation. They’re hungry for what I call conviction politicians – people who believe in something, stand for it, and are able to articulate it,” he adds.

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And yet there is Paul Ryan, on a CNBC panel out-nerding all the high-paid TV financial analysts. And there is Paul Ryan on the Sunday network talk shows explaining how America is in the midst of a slow-motion federal entitlement catastrophe. And there is Paul Ryan dismantling the health care bill at President Obama’s sham “summit,” while the president glares at him as if Ryan just told the Obama kids there’s no tooth fairy.

Ryan is a throwback; he could easily have been a conservative politician in the era before cable news. He has risen to national stardom by taking the path least traveled by modern politicians: *He knows a lot of stuff.*

Few members of Congress have attained Ryan’s mind-boggling velocity. Elected to Congress in 1998 at the tender age of 28, he is on everyone’s watch list. *Fortune* has anointed Ryan as President Obama’s foremost adversary. Conservative patriarch George Will has Ryan all but penciled in as the GOP vice presidential nominee in 2012. America’s Cougar-in-Chief, Sarah Palin, listed Ryan as her favorite presidential candidate in 2012. The *London Daily Telegraph* ranked Ryan as America’s ninth most influential conservative, ahead of Mitt Romney, George W. Bush and Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts.

In fact, rarely does Wisconsin’s fiscal dreamboat give an interview these days when he’s not asked if he’s running for president in 2012; he steadfastly maintains that he will not. But why are people so suddenly so excited by a congressman from Janesville, Wisconsin? In other words...

*What's so damn special about Paul Ryan?*

**At dinner, I mention to Ryan that he has essentially become** a talisman for Republicans: On the campaign trail, uttering the name “Paul Ryan,” immediately brands you as a serious thinker. Candidates like Senate hopeful Marco Rubio of Florida play up the connection.

“It’s not about me, or my name, it’s about the ideas that I’m pushing,” Ryan protests.

“What I say is what I do, and it’s backed up with the numbers. I feel like it’s a race against time to change the trajectory of the country.

He explains: “If we don’t turn this thing around really fast, we’re going to be a big welfare state. We will lose the American Idea in a nanosecond relative to history if we don’t step up fast and get the American people to help us take this thing back.”

After dinner, we walk back to Ryan’s office to begin a “telephone town hall” with constituents in Rock and Walworth counties. Basically, Ryan stares at a computer that randomly auto-dials numbers and fields any questions the responders have. People can either ask him something or listen to others grill the congressman.

At 8:07 pm, with the Longworth House Office Building virtually empty, he sits down at his desk and slides on his headset. “Good evening, this is Congressman Paul Ryan,” he greets callers, instructing them to hold on the line if they have a question. I wonder if I would even have a question ready if my congresswoman called me. Apparently plenty of people do.



Ryan and Chief of Staff Andy Speth set up his telephone town hall meeting

Ryan rolls through calls, one by one, speaking at lightning speed. It’s almost as if he’s invented a way of breathing while speaking, to eliminate wasteful pauses. All the callers are polite. The final one, who identifies himself as a union worker, urges Ryan to run for president. Ryan answers with his pat

answer: “My head isn’t big enough and my kids are too small.” (Ryan and wife Janna have three children – Liza, 8; Charlie, 6; and Sam, 5.)

When Ryan finishes, the computer says 5,895 constituents have participated. Many callers ask him about his pet issues. Several mention their concern about the national debt. One asks about the looming specter of inflation. It seems far-fetched that these issues are of concern to regular people, unless those regular people have the Prime Minister of the Congressional Nerd Brigade as their representative.

**On the day Paul Davis Ryan was born in 1970, President** Richard Nixon unveiled his record-setting \$200.8 billion federal budget proposal for the upcoming year – a budget that included a large increase in Social Security payments.

Ryan was raised as a fifth-generation Janesville resident. His father practiced law in the same building as future U.S. Senator Russ Feingold’s father. To differentiate Young Paul from Paul Sr., Ryan was nicknamed “P.D.” People often mistook this moniker for “Petey,” which caused Paul to recoil.

One day as a 16 year old, Ryan came upon the lifeless body of his father. Paul Ryan, Sr. had died of a heart attack at age 55, leaving the Janesville Craig High School 10th grader, his three older brothers and sisters and his mother alone. It was Paul who told the family of his father’s death.

With his father’s passing, young Paul collected Social Security benefits until age 18, which he put away for college. To make ends meet, Paul’s mother returned to school to study interior design. His siblings were off at college. Ryan remembers this difficult time bringing him and his mother closer.

Within months, Paul’s maternal grandmother moved into the house. She suffered from Alzheimer’s, and it often fell on young Paul to care for her, including brushing and braiding her hair. Ryan credits his father’s death and the care of his grandmother as giving him first-hand experience as to how social service programs work.

Ryan excelled at school and was voted class president his junior year. He also served as Craig’s school board representative. He ran track and played soccer, but wasn’t good enough to make the Craig basketball team, so he played Catholic league hoops.

Upon graduation, he headed to Oxford, Ohio, to attend Miami University. (Twenty three years later, he would return to give the commencement speech.) His junior year, Ryan took an internship with Wisconsin Sen. Bob Kasten’s foreign affairs advisor. Ryan says he spent more time opening mail than working on the study of Soviet containment, but it got his foot in the door when a real internship with Kasten’s small-business committee opened up over the summer.

Ryan returned to classes in the fall for his senior year. Two weeks in, he got a call from Cesar Conda, Kasten’s staff director. Conda confided that the committee’s staff economist was leaving the following May. Would Ryan take the job after he graduated for one-third of the salary?

Ryan wasn’t sure...until Betty Ryan gave him a tongue-lashing. She feared her son was destined to become a ski bum. The Kasten post led Ryan to a job with two of the GOP smartest thinkers, Jack Kemp and Bill Bennett, at Empower America, then as Senator Sam Brownback’s legislative director.

Ryan cites his time with Kemp and Bennett as the formative years that shaped his political outlook. However, he was homesick most of the time. He wanted to get back home, and he wanted to hunt more.

In 1998, Ryan's hometown representative, Mark Neumann, was gearing up to challenge Sen. Russ Feingold. He approached Ryan about running for his congressional seat. Ryan wasn't sure. At 27, even he thought he was too young. For advice, he turned to Bennett, who urged him to take the plunge. "I wanted to see if my running for Congress passed the laugh test," Ryan remembers.

**At 9 on Wednesday morning**, Ryan comes bounding into his office like a Labrador. He's wearing his ever-present iPod earbuds, which never leave his head during the five minutes he's here. A warning to reporters: If Ryan doesn't know you well, don't ask what he's listening to – he'll tell you with a straight face, John Tesh.

Highly disciplined, Ryan was up at the crack of dawn performing a grueling fitness routine that requires 200 push-ups. Then, he joined a congressional Bible study group that meets on Wednesday mornings.

At 9:30, Ryan is off to a Fiscal Commission working group that is addressing discretionary spending. He has volunteered to serve on President Obama's newly formed commission to manage government spending and debt, and today is the first meeting.

Back in the Ryan office, his staff fields phone calls and attends to constituents who visit unexpectedly. Tom and Janice of New Berlin drop in, and ask to see "the next president." Since Ryan is still at his meeting, they are given tickets to a Capitol tour and merrily go on their way.



Earlier in the day, I had showed Ryan's staff a copy of their boss' [birth announcement](#) that I had found in the Janesville Gazette. They tell me that they gave Ryan a copy, and that he was impressed. "And that was before he even had a press secretary," one of his staffers cracked.

Ryan returns at 11:30 and heads into his office to make phone calls before his Ways and Means Committee meeting at noon. At 11:36, he bolts from his office and hands me a sheet of paper. It's a breaking-news report from Politico.com that liberal Wisconsin Congressman David Obey has decided to retire.

Obey was first elected to Congress in April 1969 – nine months before Paul Ryan was born. But facing an energetic campaign from Ashland County district attorney and former "Real World" star Sean Duffy, the irascible Obey has decided to call it quits. Later, Ryan would tell me that he heard a rumor two weeks earlier about Obey retiring, but dismissed it as nonsense.

Ryan's press team huddled briefly to discuss what their boss should say regarding Obey's retirement. Regardless of political party affiliation, Wisconsin's congressional delegation is duty-bound to say *something* about Obey's interminable tenure in the House. I suggest they issue a simple one-line statement: "Dave Obey has a beard." I am ignored.

I duck into the Obey press conference to hear him declare that his district ready for a new representative "who won't use an actor's ability to hide the fact that he is willing to gut and privatize Social Security and Medicare and abandon working people to the arbitrary power of America's corporate and economic elite."

Clearly, an unsubtle shot at both Sean Duffy and Paul Ryan.

**Eleven days after his 28th birthday, Paul Ryan announced he** was running for Congress in Wisconsin's 1st District. He began as a heavy underdog to Democrat Lydia Spottswood, who had narrowly lost to Neumann two years before. But Ryan cruised to victory, winning 57.2% of the vote. It would be the last time anyone got that close to Ryan--he won his next five elections averaging almost two-thirds of the vote.

Thinking back on his first election, Ryan believes Wisconsin voters prefer young politicians. "You just can't come across as an arrogant young know-it-all," he says. He tells me that back in those days he made a conscious effort to be overly lugubrious during speeches and debates, to counteract his youthful looks.

Ryan can turn on the humor behind the scenes. An ex-staffer told me of a gift exchange Ryan conducts with cantankerous Wisconsin Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner, who is considered only humorous when compared to an amputation. One year, Sensenbrenner bought Ryan a reindeer that defecated candy – Ryan returned the favor with a pair of nose hair trimmers packed in a Tiffany's box. Sensenbrenner then purchased Ryan some men's hair coloring gel. And on and on it went.

In early 2000, Ryan announced he was engaged to Washington attorney Janna Little, whom he had been dating for a little more than a year. The engagement notice in the local newspaper identified Ryan as a Congressman, but also pointed out that he was "an avid hunter and fisherman who does his own skinning and butchering and makes his own Polish sausage and bratwurst."

Ryan began to garner national attention in 2003, during the debate over President Bush's proposal to expand prescription drug benefits to seniors through Medicare. Ryan is proud of the free market programs he inserted into the final bill (Medicare Advantage, Health Saving Accounts), and believes those are the "seeds" to a future overhaul of federal entitlement programs.

When Ryan gave a well-received speech to the 2004 Republican Convention in New York, the "P" word began popping up. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reporter Katherine Skiba compared Ryan, then 34, favorably to John F. Kennedy. When asked about Ryan in 2004, Bill Bennett, said, "I keep telling him, 'Run for president, run for Senate. Start the plan.'" (Ryan maintains Bennett was joking.)

In 2006, Ryan got another boost when Republicans were hammered at the polls, losing both the U.S. Senate and House. A testy Ryan believed the Republican brand was damaged because of the "bad apples" in his party. "We don't need a feather duster; we need a fire hose," he said about purging the party of those unwilling to advance the Republican Party's core ideals.

Arguing for change, Ryan campaigned among his fellow Republicans to be named the ranking member of the House Budget Committee. He won, beating out a dozen members with more seniority. "If we were going to just keep promoting the next person in line, then what's the point?" he said.

After his promotion, he began codifying his thinking in a policy manifesto called the *Roadmap for America's Future*, saying it took nearly a year and a half to get all the numbers right. His plan boldly calls for reforming the income tax code and would reconfigure two of the sacrosanct programs in American politics--Social Security and Medicare.

It was this plan that President Obama waved over his head on Ryan's 40th birthday, at a House Republican Conference retreat in January. Obama said that he had read Ryan's plan and called it "a serious proposal."



However, Ryan is certain Obama shone the spotlight on his plan only as “a straw man that he could then knock down.” He said he fully expects Democrats to use the *Roadmap* as a “demagogic weapon” during the 2010 campaign season.

Ryan’s most dramatic tête-à-tête with Obama came at the famous “Blair House” health care summit, where both Republican and Democratic members of Congress convened around a table before a national television audience to debate Obama’s proposed health plan. With Obama presiding, Democrats attempted to minimize the differences between the two parties, trying to leave the impression that agreement was close.

By the time Ryan was scheduled to speak, he remembers he had gotten very upset with the Democrats’ attempts to portray the two sides as nearly identical. “They kept rattling off all these incorrect numbers and bogus stuff,” Ryan says. “I think we knew the bill a lot better than they did themselves.”

So when cameras turned to Ryan, he began systematically dismantling the Democrats’ rosy cost estimates. He pointed out that much of the cost was hidden, as it raised taxes for ten years to pay for six years’ worth of spending. He exposed the fact that the \$371 billion “doc fix” (a plan to reimburse doctors more through Medicare) had been separated from the bill and considered as standalone legislation to keep the price tag down. “Hiding spending does not reduce spending,” he said.

As Ryan spoke, the cameras would occasionally make their way back to President Obama, who was glaring icily at Ryan.

“I wanted to throw a match on this thing,” Ryan remembers thinking.

**There are plenty of reasons to suspect** that Ryan’s future may not be as bright as his boosters think. For one, Ryan is essentially Patient Zero when it comes to entitlement reform. No one really knows how a national audience would treat his bold proposals.

Ryan’s critics have been hammering at a provision of his *Roadmap* that would fundamentally alter Medicare by injecting market forces into the program. Ryan would provide individuals under the age of 55 with a voucher worth \$11,000 per year when fully phased in. The voucher would then be indexed to inflation and be increased for those with lower incomes.

White House budget director Peter Orszag, while acknowledging Ryan’s plan would address the nation’s long-term fiscal problem, argues that health care costs will rise faster than the value of the voucher. Saying Ryan’s plan only saves money by “shifting a lot of the risk and expected cost onto individuals and their families,” Orszag believes too many policymakers—Republicans as well as Democrats--will find that solution objectionable.

Ryan calls this the most “fair and accurate” criticism of his plan, but says that it’s impossible to keep funding health care expenditures at the current rate of increase. He says the Obama plan deals with the problem by rationing care. “My plan gives individuals control to put market pressure on providers to compete,” he says.

Unrestrained health care spending, he warns, will “kill our economy – it crashes the system.” So the choice, he says, is either “the Obama method of rationing care down, or doing a...consumer-directed system.”

Given how suspicious seniors are to any changes in Medicare and Social Security, this is a politically risky idea for Ryan to advance. We already know how rank-and-file Republicans react to Ryan's plan – and it's not entirely positive.

When President Obama made an issue of the *Roadmap*, Republican House Minority Leader John Boehner emerged from his tanning bed long enough to deny he had ever heard of this "Paul Ryan" fellow.

Furthermore, so far the *Roadmap* only has 12 House co-sponsors – all from below the Mason-Dixon line, save for Rep. Cynthia Lummis from Wyoming. No Senate companion bill has been offered. It is clear that most Republicans believe that to explain Paul Ryan's plan, you actually have to *be* Paul Ryan.

Ryan has also caught flak from the right on some high-profile votes. Ryan voted "yes" on such toxic bills as the bank and auto bailouts. He defends these votes by saying they prevented an economic collapse, which in turn would have prompted even more heavy-handed government regulation.

Whatever Ryan's problems are with Republicans, he more than makes up for in crossover appeal with Democrats. In many ways, Ryan's tenure in the House has mirrored that of his mentor, Jack Kemp.

Kemp represented the blue-collar southtown area near Buffalo; Ryan's district includes heavily unionized Janesville, Racine and Kenosha. In 2008, while Obama was pulling 66% of the vote in Kenosha, 67% in Janesville, and 70% in Racine, Ryan received a solid 52%, 59%, and 45%, respectively, in those same cities.

The conventional wisdom holds that a member of the House doesn't have enough stature to make a serious run at the presidency. But the conventional wisdom also held that voters would never elect an African-American president. Now it seems anything is possible.

How can you rule out a well-liked 42-year old candidate from the House? Can anyone say with certainty that the next president isn't currently a member of the Black Eyed Peas? I can't. I won't.

## **The Blaze**

### **[For the love of God, please stop "helping"](#)**

by David Harsanyi

The Obama administration is finally going to focus on jobs — again. Jobs, jobs, jobs. And nothing says jobs like food stamps, unemployment insurance and a shiny new federal department of ... yes, jobs!

Some of you may find President Barack Obama's three-day campaign bus tour through Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois a considerable downer. Not that it's the president's fault. If it weren't for Japanese earthquakes, unpatriotic Republicans, Arab springs, European welfare states collapsing, market fluctuations, Lady Luck's being a complete witch — you know, *existence* — this mess could have been squared away months ago.

Now, granted, before long our attention will be appropriately focused on the antics of some extreme Christian [dominionist](#) or some [C-plus-average](#) state-school graduate. The press will soon gut and fillet

these interlopers for the good of the nation. In the interim, though, it's becoming tough to conceal the administration's ideological rigidity and lack of ideas.

This week, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack was ready to "[announce something that's never happened in this country](#)" (never?!). If anyone had actually been paying attention, people might have imagined for a moment that a rogue idea had somehow bubbled up in a corner of the federal behemoth. Perhaps a great leap forward in genetic engineering? Or some new advance in nanotechnology?

Food stamps. The administration's announcement was to tout a new program expanding "economic stimulus" through food stamps. An idea Americans had "never" heard ... this week. Then again, considering the nation is awash in food stamps, this must portend a colossal recovery. So that's certainly good news.

Similarly, when a Wall Street Journal reporter recently asked the White House press secretary to explain the administration's contention that extending unemployment benefits would be an economic stimulus, Jay Carney [answered](#), "Oh, uh, it is by, um, I would expect a reporter from The Wall Street Journal would know this as part of the entrance exam."

Remember, in Washington there's no such thing as a stupid question, only dissembling flacks who can't answer tough ones.

According to BSU graduate Carney, all educated folk understand that dependency is stimulative, so perhaps the problem is in the way government delivers. Word from [The New York Times](#) is that the administration is chewing over a proposal that would merge the Department of Commerce, the Office of the United States Trade Representative and economic divisions of the State Department to form a tremendously useless department, possibly named the Department of Jobs or maybe the Department of Competitiveness.

That's what the economy needs, the lecturer in chief meting out economic advice. At a Minnesota town hall, for instance, the president offered this [gem](#): "You can't just make money on SUVs and trucks. There is a place for SUVs and trucks, but as gas prices keep on going up, you have got to understand the market."

If only the common man had such insight into markets. Earlier this month, Ford reported that sport utility vehicle sales had [increased 31 percent](#) (car sales improved 3.4 percent) from a year earlier. General Motors also "bounced back" on the strength of its worldwide SUV sales. Who knows? If this administration didn't harbor resentment toward useful and affordable energy, Ford could sell even more SUVs.

Just an example.

Now, considering the failure of Washington to help shake off this prolonged slump, it is no surprise that a recent Washington Post [poll](#) found that 73 percent of Americans — up from 52 percent last year and 41 percent a decade ago — doubt the ability of government to solve the nation's economic problems.

I suppose it's not surprising that this administration refuses to budge a single food stamp away from its faith-based beliefs. But if it really wanted to help, it would stop "helping."

LA Times

[On Day 938 of his presidency, Obama says he'll have a jobs plan in a month or so](#)

by Andrew Malcolm



OK, let's see if we can sort out this White House jobs package hocus-pocus because President Obama is counting on us not to. And no one wants to fail to disappoint him:

Last winter in his State of the Union address, oblivious to the gathering storm over the nation's national debt, the Democrat proposed massive new spending and loan programs -- he calls it investments -- to extend unemployment benefits and payroll tax cuts and to rebuild the nation's roads, bridges and other union-made infrastructure kinds of stuff. He had a plan he would share soon.

When in trouble, give a speech. Say, early September. Before all this Rick Perry 40% of the nation's jobs come from Texas stuff really gets going.

The president has mentioned the plan often, despite widespread skepticism due to the lack of stimulus that came from spending \$787 billion in stimulus money that was for sure going to hold national unemployment at 8%, but it's now 9.1%.



So, perhaps another such plan might work.

As this administration sees reality, those Republican tea party terrorists kind of hijacked the marathon talks about raising the national debt ceiling, stubbornly and unreasonably making the debt negotiations over reducing the debt and spending rather than over spending spending.

As a result, it's all their fault that Standard & Poor's lowered the federal government's credit rating for the first time because the rating agency didn't see sufficient cuts.

[The next day after the spending cuts agreement, with his obedient cabinet in attendance](#) as witnesses, Obama said, yes, spending cuts were important as long as they didn't affect vast investments for the future to extend unemployment benefits and payroll tax cuts and to rebuild the nation's roads, bridges and other union-made infrastructure kinds of stuff.

[Other Democrats are designing](#) job plans costing *\$200 billion per year*.

Because the country hasn't heard enough of Obama calling on Congress to do things and his job approval touched a new low of 39%, he laid on a three-day campaign swing through Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois this week at taxpayer-expense because the White House declared it an official trip.

Because Obama wanted to hear from regular Americans, he's encased in an armored Darth Vader bus with heavily-tinted windows so no one can see him looking out at regular Americans.

And as the commander-in-chief meanders through the Heartland in this black vehicle, the entire road in both directions is cleared of regular Americans for the president's entourage and motorcade to pass by safely.

The bus is reported to cost about \$1 million, which works out to about \$333,000 per day for this foray among regular Americans.

On its second day out Tuesday Obama's bus made a couple of stops to chat with high school athletes and to acquire healthy presidential provisions -- one for ice cream cones (POTUS got vanilla) and another to load several bags of popcorn.

At his speaking engagements, Obama stressed the need to extend payroll tax cuts and to rebuild the nation's roads, bridges and other union-made infrastructure kinds of stuff. Also some free-trade agreements. This was a repetition of what he had said on the first day of his Grand Ground Tour.

On his 938th day in office President Obama also said he would soon have a completed jobs plan. Maybe early fall, something like that. And he complained, "We could do even more if Congress is willing to get in the game."

Tomorrow with all this heavy work in his rear-view mirror, the president is scheduled to join his family on Martha's Vineyard for a nine-day vacation.

## **Post Partisan from WaPo**

### **[Not the merry pranksters](#)**

By Kathleen Parker

About that bus: What *could* the White House have been thinking?

Here the country is reeling from depression, recession and oppression, and the president decides to take a heartland tour in the visual equivalent of an armored hearse?

The infamous black bus that has been toting Barack Obama around for stump speeches designed to distract from the Republican hoedown in Iowa couldn't be less effective — unless you're Darth Vader. As the ship of state rumbles through the American countryside like a land shark from Mordor, Dick Cheney suddenly looks like Howdy Doody.

It's incomprehensible.



A bus tour itself is not a bad idea when your aim is to reconnect with everyday people, but this one is ill-timed and looks desperate. If you're confident in your presidency, you ignore the impotent opposition while they slug it out.

"Who, them? I'm busy."

Otherwise, the bus is a stab in the heartland. We're a red, white and blue nation, colors of optimism and hope. Or, thanks to Obama's own rhetoric, we're at least a purple nation. Lavender polka dots would have been better than a black mass that penetrates amber waves of grain like an armada of doom.

No doubt there are mighty good reasons for the color and construction of the presidential mega-hearse, but as political symbolism, the vehicle looks like a creation out of Batman and the president appears as Paul Revere of the Apocalypse.

Whoever came up with the black bus had best be looking for a job, preferably not in public relations.

## Reason

### [Is Obama Worse Than Carter and Bush?](#)

by David Boaz

Conservatives have become so furious with President Obama that they forget just how bad some of his predecessors were. One Jeffrey Kuhner, whose over-the-top op-eds in the Washington Times belie the sober and judicious conservatism you might expect from the president of the “Edmund Burke Institute,” [writes](#) most recently:

"A possible Great Depression haunts the land. Primarily one man is to blame: President Obama.

Mr. Obama has racked up more than \$4 trillion in debt."

Yes, he has. And that's almost as much as the \$5 trillion in debt [rung up](#) by his predecessor, George W. Bush. True, on an annual basis Obama is leaving Bush in the dust. But acceleration has been the name of the game: In 190 years, 39 presidents racked up a trillion dollars in debt. The next three presidents ran the debt up to about \$5.73 trillion. Then Bush 43 almost doubled the total public debt, to \$10.7 trillion, in eight years. And now the 44th president has added almost \$4 trillion in two years and seven months. (Here's an [online video](#) depicting each president's debt accumulation as driving speed.) So Obama is winning the debt war, but it's not like he caused the debt crisis or the unemployment crisis all by himself.

And then, trying to prove that Obama is even worse than Jimmy Carter — *even worse than Jimmy Carter!* — Kuhner makes this curious claim:

Most importantly, Mr. Carter had respect for the dignity and integrity of the presidency. He never trashed his opponents the way Mr. Obama does.

Really? Maybe Mr. Kuhner is too young to remember Carter, and didn't bother to check his claim, or maybe he just got carried away. But I can remember October 1980, when President Carter repeatedly said that the election of Ronald Reagan would be “a catastrophe” that would mean an America

separated, black from white, Jew from Christian, North from South, rural from urban.

Liberal columnist Anthony Lewis asked in the New York Times, “Has there ever been a campaign as vacuous, as negative, as whiny? Probably so — somewhere back in the mists of the American Presidency. But it would take a good deal of research to come up with anything like Jimmy Carter's performance in the campaign of 1980.” The venerable Hugh Sidey [wrote](#) in Time magazine, “The wrath that escapes Carter's lips about racism and hatred when he prays and poses as the epitome of Christian charity leads even his supporters to protest his meanness.”

Obama is a big spender who portrays himself as a “beyond left and right” above-the-fray president trying to work with everyone while demonizing his opponents. But let's not forget the meanness of Jimmy Carter and the spendthrift record of George W. Bush in seeking to establish Obama's uniqueness.

## Washington Examiner

### Harry S. Obama?

by Michael Barone

Pundits have lately been comparing Barack Obama to Jimmy Carter, suggesting he is a likely loser in 2012. But my American Enterprise Institute colleague Norman Ornstein, writing in the New Republic, compares Obama to Harry Truman, suggesting he might outperform the polls and win.

It's always helpful to be reminded that early polls may not be predictive and that opinion can change, as was the case when Truman won in 1948 and when Carter lost in 1980. But we should keep in mind that today's polls are better and more frequent than they were 63 years ago.

Gallup's last 1948 poll was taken between Oct. 15 and 25 and showed Thomas Dewey leading Truman by only 5 points. No contemporary pollster would quit eight days before the election after getting that result.

There are in fact major differences between Truman's standing in 1947-48 and Obama's standing today. Contrary to Truman's "do-nothing" characterization of the Republican 80th Congress, it in fact did a lot. It repealed wartime wage and price controls, cut taxes deeply and passed the Taft-Hartley Act limiting the powers of labor unions.

None of those actions was reversed by the Democratic Congress elected with Truman in 1948. Many congressional Democrats in those days were anti-New Deal conservatives. Truman won many votes from Democrats still upset about the Civil War. Few such votes are available to Obama or congressional Democrats in 2012.

In addition, Truman's victory was due to two "F factors" -- the farm vote and foreign policy -- the first of which scarcely exists today and the second of which seems unlikely to benefit Obama in the same way.

When the nation went to war in the 1940s one out of four Americans still lived on farms. The 1948 electorate still reflected that America. Voter turnout was actually lower than it was in 1940, and the vast postwar demographic changes were not reflected in elections until turnout surged in the contest between Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson in 1952.

Truman promised to keep Depression-era farm subsidies in place and charged that Dewey and the Republicans would repeal them. That enabled him to run ahead of Franklin Roosevelt's 1944 showing in 13 states with large farm populations from Indiana to Colorado and Minnesota to Oklahoma.

Without that swing in the farm vote Truman would not have won. Dewey, waking up to find that he would not be president as he and almost everyone expected, spotted that immediately the morning after the election.

Today only 2 to 3 percent of Americans live on farms. Farm prices are currently running far ahead of subsidy prices. Obama is not going to be re-elected by the farm vote.

The second F factor that helped Truman was foreign policy. As Ornstein correctly notes, Truman's Cold War policies -- the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan -- were supported by Republican congressional leaders and by Dewey. Top Dewey advisers were taken into confidence by Truman's foreign policy appointees. It was the golden era of bipartisan foreign policy.



But on one policy Truman went further than his top advisers or Dewey's. When the Soviets blocked land access to West Berlin in June 1948, Truman's advisers -- men of the caliber of George Marshall and Omar Bradley -- said that it was impossible to supply food and fuel to Berlin and we should just abandon it.

At a crucial meeting in July 1948 Truman listened to this advice. After others finished talking, Truman said simply, "We're not leaving Berlin." Gen. Lucius Clay, our proconsul in Germany, set about organizing what became the Berlin airlift.

Gen. William Tunner, who had run the wartime airlift from Burma to China, made the Berlin airlift work. Vast quantities of food and coal -- far more than experts had estimated -- were brought into Tempelhof Airport on planes landing in foul weather every 90 seconds. The pilots took to throwing out pieces of candy to the hungry kids lining the runways.

Andrei Cherny, now chairman of the Arizona Democratic Party, tells the story in his book "The Candy Bombers." He argues persuasively that the Berlin airlift -- an example of American strength, determination, technological prowess and generosity -- played a key role in re-electing Truman.

Truman's tough stand against communist aggression played a key part in his upset victory in 1948. Will Barack Obama have a similar accomplishment? Or will he be seen as impotent against our enemies, as was Jimmy Carter?

**WSJ**

### **A Season (or 13) for Shopping**

***Stores Create More Holidays; Tissues Made for Summer, Pink Irons for Fall***

by Sarah Nassauer



The number of impulse purchases fell to 15% of purchases in 2010, from 29% in 2008, according to market-research firm NPD Group.

Spring, summer, fall, winter... storage and organization? Most shoppers see the seasons change four times a year. Retailers see anywhere from 13 to 20 and all those seasons are designed to get shoppers into their stores.

## JANUARY

### Organization and Storage

As shoppers try to keep their New Year's resolutions, Target gives prime space to exercise equipment, vitamins and organizing bins.



## JANUARY/FEBRUARY

### Big Game



Gearing up for Super Bowl parties, Sam's Club prominently features grills, TVs and barbecue-friendly foods.

## APRIL

### Lawn and Garden



During Lawn and Garden season at Wal-Mart, the store displays patio sets, gardening tools, fertilizer.

## MAY/JUNE

### Summer



Tissue sales usually drop in the summer. Kleenex's summer, ice-cream-themed boxes in Meijer stores and elsewhere led to a big boost in summer sales.

## JULY/AUGUST

### Back to School/College



Brightly colored George Foreman grills were made specifically to match Target's preferred colors for its display aimed at college students.

## OCTOBER

### Pink/Women's Health



Tied to Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Sam's Club displays rows of pink clothes, electronics and cosmetics and offers women's osteoporosis and other health screenings.

## OCTOBER

### Halloween



It coincides with Cough, Cold and Flu season at Supervalu, which highlights products like cough drops, medicine and orange juice during this time.

## NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

### Holiday Baking Season



Feeding any yearning for pies and cakes, SuperValu stores feature items like Karo syrup. It sells 57% of the Karo syrup it will sell in a year in this season.

## DECEMBER

### Holidays



As shoppers finish buying gifts for their kids, more products like last-minute gifts and stocking stuffers take prominence in Wal-Mart's displays.



You might think there are four seasons a year. But your local grocery or big-box store knows there are really 13 -- and 13 opportunities to get you to buy. Sarah Nassauer explains.

"Storage and Organization" comes the first weeks in January at Target Corp. It's a chance to display products that might appeal to shoppers' New Year's resolutions like exercise equipment. Sam's Club, part of Wal-Mart Stores Inc., celebrates "Fall Gatherings" in October with displays of rakes, sweaters and comfort food. Late fall at Supervalu brings the less-than-celebratory "Cough, Cold and Flu" season, not to be confused with late spring's "Allergy Season." In stores now: "Back to School/Back to College."

A key goal is to get people to buy impulsively, something they do less of these days. The number of impulse purchases fell to 15% of purchases in 2010, from 29% in 2008, according to market-research firm NPD Group.

The average shopper visits a big-box store once every two to three weeks, NPD says. Shoppers go to the grocery store, by contrast, every seven to 10 days. By adding grocery items prominently, stores are trying to get people to make more frequent shopping trips.

## 'Tis the Season

To get shoppers to make frequent trips to their stores, retailers create additional seasons beyond the calendar usuals.

The goal of the additional seasons is to get people to buy impulsively.

## Supervalu

- Post-New Year's** (January/February)
- Super Bowl** (January/February)
- Allergy Season**  
(March/April)
- Back to School/College** (September/October)

- **Cough, Cold and Flu seasons.**

(September/October)

- **Baking Season** (November/December)

## **Wal-Mart**

- **Superbowl or New Year's Resolutions or other themes** (January)
- **Lawn and Garden or related theme** (April)
- **Back to School/College**(July through August)
- **Gifts for children; early entertaining** décor (October, November)
- **Last-minute gifts, stocking stuffers, food/entertaining** (December)

## **Sam's Club**

- **Health and Wellness** January features exercise equipment, supplements and vitamins, items tied to shoppers' New Year's resolutions.
- **Big Game**Late January to February features Super Bowl party products.
- **Spring**March to May, includes Easter, Graduation Day, Mother's Day, Spring Gardening—all at the same time.
- **Back to College/Back to School**(July and August)
- **Pink/Women's Health** October includes displays of pink products and stores offer women's health screenings.
- **Fall Gatherings** (Late September through November)
- **Date** Stands for 'the day after Thanksgiving event,' aka Black Friday. Includes gifts and splurge items. (November)
- **Holiday Entertaining and Gifting** (November, begins the day after Date, see above.)

## **Target**

- **Organization and Storage**(January)
- **Back to School/College** (July/August)

*A display at Target in Minneapolis holds shopping lists. Stores compile 'Back to School' shopping lists from local schools.*



The true art of the seasonal display is to trick out products that don't seem like obvious impulse buys—like vacuum cleaners or tissue boxes—in a way that makes shoppers grab first and think later. People are usually willing to spend more during special seasons, retailers and manufacturers say, especially if they are spending on their children.

Products that may seem neither impulsive nor seasonal are finding ways to be both in order to be part of the prominent displays in stores.

This summer Kleenex introduced boxes that look like ice cream cones. Shoppers could find the ice cream Kleenex in the actual ice cream aisle of Meijer Inc. stores, says a spokesman for Meijer, a Midwestern retail chain selling groceries and other goods.

The Kimberly-Clark Corp. brand was following its cake slice-shaped boxes made for winter holidays and playing off success of triangle-shaped watermelon, lemon and orange Kleenex boxes last year. Those boxes found their way into summer displays and elsewhere beyond the paper products aisle in stores, says Christine Mau, director of design for the company. Kleenex sales typically drop in the summer when people have fewer colds.

The company asked its design team, "what can you do design-wise to get us to the front of the store in the summer?" says Ms. Mau. After researching "what summer means to people," the company realized watermelon resonated with people who think of summer as picnics, family gatherings, and fruity drinks, Ms. Mau says.

Putting together a seasonal display is a high-stakes effort. If a customer can't find something, "she is probably going to walk," says Stacia Andersen, Target senior vice president of merchandising, following the consumer goods industry's habit of referring to all consumers as 'she' because women make the majority of purchases.

And making sure that one big-box store doesn't look like the next big box is key. Target plans seasonal displays with product manufactures about a year in advance.

A product's color can make a difference. Target told TTI Floor Care North America, Inc. that if it wanted to get its typically red Dirt Devil vacuum cleaners into the retailer's prime "Back to College" seasonal displays, it need to make hot pink, teal and black versions. Meanwhile, Jarden Corp., which makes small household appliances among other items, created hot pink and teal Sunbeam irons and toasters for the displays.

Internal research at Target showed that college kids want to personalize their dorm rooms with bright colors. Fitting into the marketing scheme is worth it, says Stephanie Begley, associate marketing manager for Dirt Devil. Target's college displays "hit our market" of first-time home owners and young adults on their own for the first time, she says.

To slice the calendar into as many seasons as possible, retailers create sub-seasons. At Sam's Club, the calendar reaches about 20 seasons with some overlapping.

At Wal-Mart, the Christmas shopping season starts the day after Thanksgiving with children's gifts and holiday home décor getting prime space. By December, stocking stuffers will get more prominent placement, along with holiday entertaining food and last-minute gift ideas, says Tara Raddohl, a company spokeswoman.

"We aim to be where our customer mindset is," so they don't head to the competition, she says.

In a suburb of Minneapolis, Supervalu runs a "lab store," a model store not open to the public where the third-largest traditional grocery store company in the U.S. can test how new products look on its shelves and experiment with seasonal displays. Last month, Supervalu employees worked to create the perfect fall endcap, the shelves that anchor the end of the typical grocery store aisle. The goal—easy meals for parents pressed for time at the start of the school year.



*Sophia Bauer, 9 years old, and mother Laura check a shopping list and budget at Target in Richfield, Minn., Monday.*

Problems quickly became apparent. After setting up tuna in pouches, mayonnaise, peanut butter and bread on the lunch endcap, employees saw that the tuna pouches tilted slightly backwards. The tuna "didn't present itself well to customers," says Chris Doeing, a director of merchandising for Supervalu,

which owns chains including Albertsons and Cub Foods. Tuna was booted from the endcap to a nearby shelf.

On endcaps, best-selling items often go on the larger shelves near the floor to grab people's attention from farther away. Employees experiment with which size and shape products look best together.



*Dirt Devil vacuums were made in pink to get in Target's prominent 'Back to College' display.*

When a product sits on an endcap its sales can increase three-fold, says Tom Lofland, Supervalu director of sales and promotions.

Currently, back-to-school is at the forefront of the display battle. This year Wal-Mart is putting more seasonal products in one place to make shopping easier. In the past, for example, customers may have found that the "Back to School" section didn't feature enough of the store's selection of backpacks, says Ms. Raddohl, a spokeswoman for Wal-Mart. For the first time, this year Procter & Gamble Co. is grouping many of its personal-care products like deodorant, shampoo and razors into "Back to College"-themed bins in Wal-Mart.

At Target, local store managers are responsible for tracking down the supply lists that local schools give parents of items their children must bring. Managers send them to headquarters. Regional variations—one school might require kids to have composition notebooks, another spiral—affect what goes on shelves.

"We have become more focused on 'the list,'" Ms. Andersen says.

## English Russia

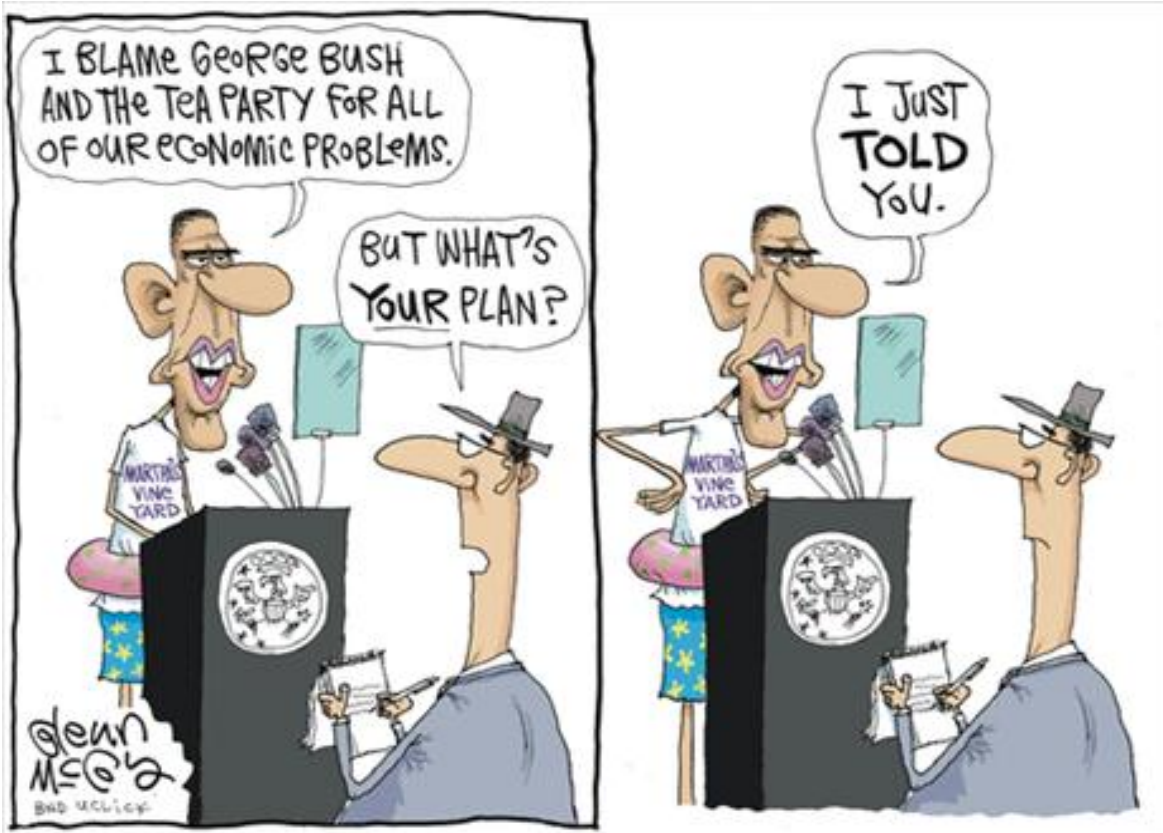
**Cool post on an electric generating plant in the Urals that has been running for 100 years.**

[Click Here](#)

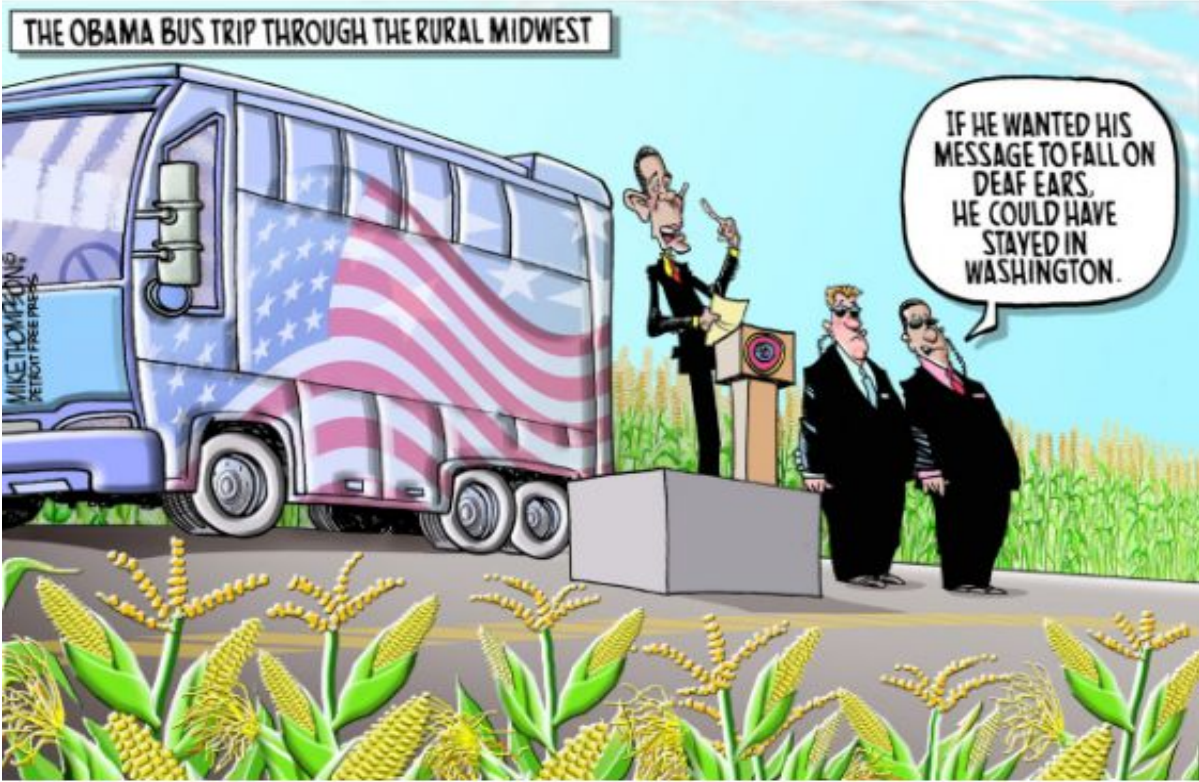
This is a site I never fail to check daily. The posts are photo essays of events in Russia. The captions are written in newly acquired English like this one;

*The intake pipe. Thanks to Russian enthusiasts the death of the plant was postponed. But the state support is needed to carry out capital repair. The museum is of greater interest because it is in working condition. Anyone would feel like touching mechanisms that has been operating for 100 years and never broke.*

One of the neat things about this post is the pictures from the middle of the Ural mountains that form the border between European Russia and Siberia. Normally when we see mountains from Russia it is the snow-covered raw wild peaks of the Caucasus. But the Urals are more like the Appalachian chain as it runs thru Virginia; i.e. the Blue Ridge Mountains. <http://englishrussia.com/2011/08/16/a-100-year-old-power-plant/>





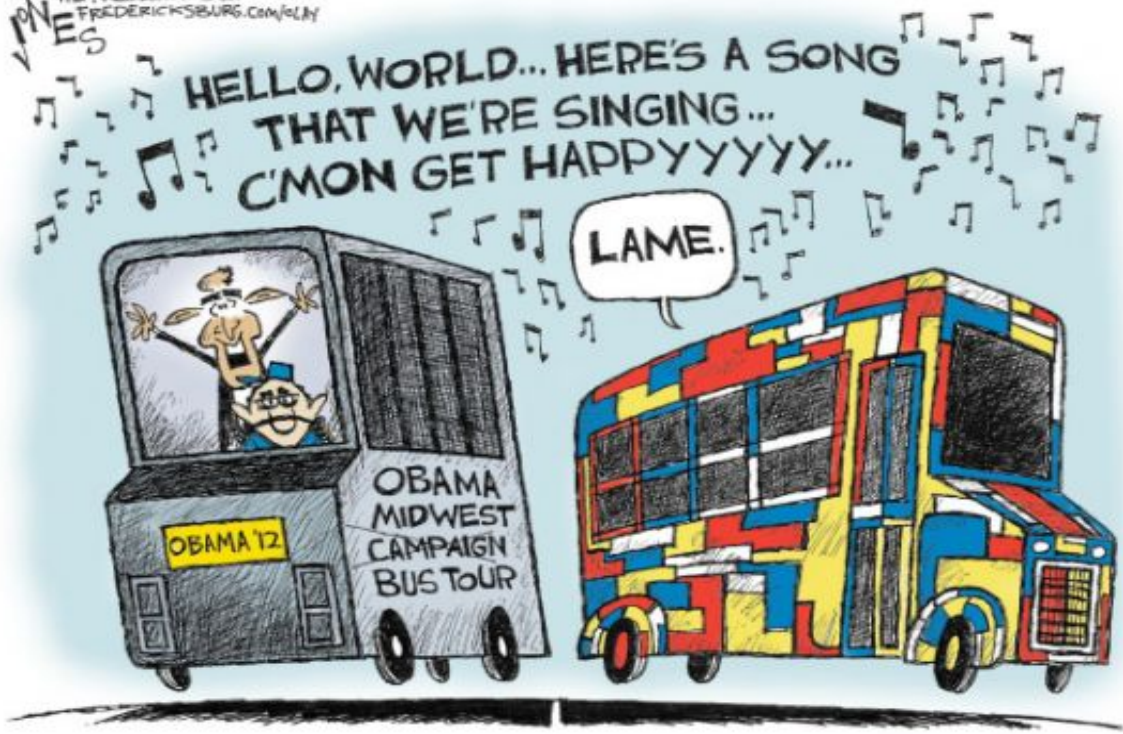




THE OBAMA BACK OF THE BUS TOUR.

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