

April 23, 2012

Some thoughts about the Space Shuttle flying over DC from [Charles Krauthammer](#).
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Who cares, you say? ...

Joel Kotkin, who is in these pages frequently, was the WSJ Interviewee of the week by [Allysia Finley](#).

'California is God's best moment,' says Joel Kotkin. "It's the best place in the world to live." Or at least it used to be.

Mr. Kotkin, one of the nation's premier demographers, left his native New York City in 1971 to enroll at the University of California, Berkeley. The state was a far-out paradise for hipsters who had grown up listening to the Mamas & the Papas' iconic "California Dreamin'" and the Beach Boys' "California Girls." But it also attracted young, ambitious people "who had a lot of dreams, wanted to build big companies." Think Intel, Apple and Hewlett-Packard.

Now, however, the Golden State's fastest-growing entity is government and its biggest product is red tape. The first thing that comes to many American minds when you mention California isn't Hollywood or tanned girls on a beach, but Greece. Many progressives in California take that as a compliment since Greeks are ostensibly happier. But as Mr. Kotkin notes, Californians are increasingly pursuing happiness elsewhere.

Nearly four million more people have left the Golden State in the last two decades than have come from other states. This is a sharp reversal from the 1980s, when 100,000 more Americans were settling in California each year than were leaving. According to Mr. Kotkin, most of those leaving are between the ages of 5 and 14 or 34 to 45. In other words, young families.

The scruffy-looking urban studies professor at Chapman University in Orange, Calif., has been studying and writing on demographic and geographic trends for 30 years. Part of California's dysfunction, he says, stems from state and local government restrictions on development. These policies have artificially limited housing supply and put a premium on real estate in coastal regions.

"Basically, if you don't own a piece of Facebook or Google and you haven't robbed a bank and don't have rich parents, then your chances of being able to buy a house or raise a family in the Bay Area or in most of coastal California is pretty weak," says Mr. Kotkin.

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You'll love what [Mark Steyn](#) does to the guys who should know how to be secretly serviced.

Unlike the government of the United States, I can't claim any hands-on experience with Colombian hookers. But I was impressed by the rates charged by Miss Dania Suarez, and even more impressed by the U.S. Secret Service's response to them.

Cartagena's most famous "escort" costs \$800. For purposes of comparison, you can book Elliot Spitzer's "escort" for \$300. Yet, on the cold, grey fiscally conservative morning after the wild socially liberal night before, Dania's Secret Service agent offered her a mere \$28.

Twenty-eight bucks! What a remarkably precise sum. Thirty dollars, less a federal handling fee? Why isn't this guy Obama's treasury secretary or budget director? Or, at the very least, the head honcho of the General Services Administration, whose previous director has sadly had to step down after the agency's taxpayer-funded, public-servants-gone-wild Bacchanal in Vegas.

All over this dying republic, you couldn't find a single solitary \$28 item that doesn't wind up costing at least 800 bucks by the time it's been sluiced through the federal budgeting process. Yet, in one plucky little corner of the Secret Service, supervisor David Chaney, dog-handler Greg Stokes or one of the other nine agents managed to turn the principles of government procurement on its head. If the same fiscal prudence were applied to the 2011 Obama budget, the \$3.598 trillion splurge would have cost just shy of 126 billion. The feds' half-a-billion to

Solyndra would have been a mere 18 million. The 823-grand GSA conference on government efficiency at the M Resort Spa & Casino would have come in at \$28,805.

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Amazing to hear government agents channeling Dudley Moore in Arthur:

"You're a hooker ...? I thought I was doing so well." It turns out U.S. Secret Service agents are the only men who can walk into a Colombian nightclub and not spot the professionals. Are they really the guys you want protecting the president? ...

Now he tells us! VA senator Jim Webb says Obama did the health care thing all wrong. So where was Webb and the other "independent" VA senator when they could have done some good? Webb didn't have any problem being tough on W. Too bad he declined to run so we won't have the pleasure of throwing this bum out. [Karen Tumulty](#) has the story.

President Obama's new [health-care law](#) will be his greatest liability as he attempts to once again win the critical swing state of Virginia, [Sen. Jim Webb](#) (D-Va.) warned Wednesday.

"I'll be real frank here," Webb said at a breakfast organized by Bloomberg News. "I think that the manner in which the health-care reform issue was put in front of the Congress, the way that the issue was dealt with by the White House, cost Obama a lot of credibility as a leader.

Webb voted for the law, but also for more than a dozen GOP-offered amendments to it.

"If you were going to do something of this magnitude, you have to do it with some clarity, with a clear set of objectives from the White House," added Webb, who opted not to run for a second term this year. "...It should have been done with better direction from the White House." ...

Is there anything it can't do? More wonderful news about aspirin. [Theodore Dalrymple](#) has the story.

*... Three recent papers in *The Lancet* propose the benefits of low-dose aspirin both in the prevention of certain cancers and in their spread once they have developed. Professor Rothwell, of Oxford University, was the main author of all three papers, but this should not affect their validity or otherwise.*

The first of the papers compared the rates of cancer deaths in those who took part in randomized controlled trials of daily low-dose aspirin to prevent cerebrovascular events (strokes). The risk of cancer death was reduced by something like 15 percent in those who took long-term aspirin. The longer the aspirin was taken, the stronger the protective effect. ...

Washington Post

[Space Shuttle's Last Flight: Farewell, The New Frontier](#)

by Charles Krauthammer

As the space shuttle Discovery flew three times around Washington, a final salute before landing at Dulles airport for retirement in a museum, thousands on the ground gazed upward with marvel and pride. Yet what they were witnessing, for all its elegance, was a funeral march.

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Who cares, you say? What is national greatness, scientific prestige or inspiring the young — legacies of NASA — when we are in economic distress? OK. But if we're talking jobs and growth, science and technology, R&D and innovation — what President Obama insists are the keys to "an economy built to last" — why on earth cancel an incomparably sophisticated, uniquely American technological enterprise?

We lament the decline of American manufacturing, yet we stop production of the most complex machine ever made by man — and cancel the successor meant to return us to orbit.

The result? Abolition of thousands of the most highly advanced aerospace jobs anywhere — its workforce abruptly unemployed and drifting away from space flight, never to be reconstituted.

Well, you say, we can't afford all that in a time of massive deficits.

There are always excuses for putting off strenuous national endeavors: deficits, joblessness, poverty, whatever. But they shall always be with us. We've had exactly five balanced budgets since Alan Shepard rode Freedom 7 in 1961. If we had put off space exploration until these earthbound social and economic conundrums were solved, our rocketry would be about where North Korea's is today.

Moreover, today's deficits are not inevitable, nor even structural. They are partly the result of the 2008 financial panic and recession. Those are over now. The rest is the result of a massive three-year expansion of federal spending.

But there is no reason the federal government has to keep spending 24% of gross domestic product.

The historical postwar average is just over 20% — and those budgets sustained a robust manned space program.

NASA will tell you it has a new program to go way beyond low-Earth orbit and, as per Obama's instructions, land on an asteroid by the mid-2020s. Considering that Constellation did not even last five years between birth and cancellation, don't hold your breath for the asteroid landing.

Nor for the private sector to get us back into orbit, as Obama assumes it will. True, hauling meals up and trash back down could be done by private vehicles.

But manned flight is infinitely more complex and risky, requiring massive redundancy and inevitably larger expenditures.

Can private entities really handle that? And within the next lost decade or two?

Neil Armstrong, James Lovell and Gene Cernan are deeply skeptical. In a 2010 open letter, they called Obama's cancellation of Constellation a "devastating" decision that "destines our nation to become one of second-or even third-rate stature."

Which is why museum visits to the embalmed Discovery will be sad indeed. America rarely retreats from a new frontier.

Yet today we can't even do what John Glenn did in 1962, let alone fly a circa-1980 shuttle.

At least Discovery won't suffer the fate of the Temeraire, the British warship tenderly rendered in Turner's famous painting "The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up, 1838."

Too beautiful for the scrapheap, Discovery will lie intact, a magnificent and melancholy rebuke to constricted horizons.

WSJ

Joel Kotkin: The Great California Exodus

A leading U.S. demographer and 'Truman Democrat' talks about what is driving the middle class out of the Golden State.

by Allysia Finley

'California is God's best moment,' says Joel Kotkin. "It's the best place in the world to live." Or at least it used to be.

Mr. Kotkin, one of the nation's premier demographers, left his native New York City in 1971 to enroll at the University of California, Berkeley. The state was a far-out paradise for hipsters who had grown up listening to the Mamas & the Papas' iconic "California Dreamin'" and the Beach Boys' "California Girls." But it also attracted young, ambitious people "who had a lot of dreams, wanted to build big companies." Think Intel, Apple and Hewlett-Packard.

Now, however, the Golden State's fastest-growing entity is government and its biggest product is red tape. The first thing that comes to many American minds when you mention California isn't Hollywood or tanned girls on a beach, but Greece. Many progressives in California take that as a compliment since Greeks are ostensibly happier. But as Mr. Kotkin notes, Californians are increasingly pursuing happiness elsewhere.

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"Basically, if you don't own a piece of Facebook or Google and you haven't robbed a bank and don't have rich parents, then your chances of being able to buy a house or raise a family in the Bay Area or in most of coastal California is pretty weak," says Mr. Kotkin.

While many middle-class families have moved inland, those regions don't have the same allure or amenities as the coast. People might as well move to Nevada or Texas, where housing and everything else is cheaper and there's no income tax.

And things will only get worse in the coming years as Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown and his green cadre implement their "smart growth" plans to cram the proletariat into high-density housing. "What I find reprehensible beyond belief is that the people pushing [high-density housing] themselves live in single-family homes and often drive very fancy cars, but want everyone else to live like my grandmother did in Brownsville in Brooklyn in the 1920s," Mr. Kotkin declares.

"The new regime"—his name for progressive apparatchiks who run California's government—"wants to destroy the essential reason why people move to California in order to protect their own lifestyles."

Housing is merely one front of what he calls the "progressive war on the middle class." Another is the cap-and-trade law AB32, which will raise the cost of energy and drive out manufacturing jobs without making even a dent in global carbon emissions. Then there are the renewable portfolio standards, which mandate that a third of the state's energy come from renewable sources like wind and the sun by 2020. California's electricity prices are already 50% higher than the national average.

Oh, and don't forget the \$100 billion bullet train. Mr. Kotkin calls the runaway-cost train "classic California." "Where [Brown] with the state going bankrupt is even thinking about an expenditure like this is beyond comprehension. When the schools are falling apart, when the roads are falling apart, the bridges are unsafe, the state economy is in free fall. We're still doing much worse than the rest of the country, we've got this growing permanent welfare class, and high-speed rail is going to solve this?"

Mr. Kotkin describes himself as an old-fashioned Truman Democrat. In fact, he voted for Mr. Brown—who previously served as governor, secretary of state and attorney general—because he believed Mr. Brown "was interesting and thought outside the box."

But "Jerry's been a big disappointment," Mr. Kotkin says. "I've known Jerry for 35 years, and he's smart, but he just can't seem to be a paradigm breaker. And of course, it's because he really believes in this green stuff."

In the governor's dreams, green jobs will replace all of the "tangible jobs" that the state's losing in agriculture, manufacturing, warehousing and construction. But "green energy doesn't create enough energy!" Mr. Kotkin exclaims. "And it drives up the price of energy, which then drives out other things." Notwithstanding all of the subsidies the state lavishes on renewables, green jobs only make up about 2% of California's private-sector work force—no more than they do in Texas.

Of course, there are plenty of jobs to be had in energy, just not the type the new California regime wants. An estimated 25 billion barrels of oil are sitting untapped in the vast Monterey and Bakersfield shale deposits. "You see the great tragedy of California is that we have all this oil and gas, we won't use it," Mr. Kotkin says. "We have the richest farm land in the world, and we're trying to strangle it." He's referring to how water restrictions aimed at protecting the delta smelt fish are endangering Central Valley farmers.



Meanwhile, taxes are harming the private economy. According to the Tax Foundation, California has the 48th-worst business tax climate. Its income tax is steeply progressive. Millionaires pay a top rate of 10.3%, the third-highest in the country. But middle-class workers—those who earn more than \$48,000—pay a top rate of 9.3%, which is higher than what millionaires pay in 47 states.

And Democrats want to raise taxes even more. Mind you, the November ballot initiative that Mr. Brown is spearheading would primarily hit those whom Democrats call "millionaires" (i.e., people who make more than \$250,000 a year). Some Republicans have warned that it will cause a millionaire march out of the state, but Mr. Kotkin says that "people who are at the very high end of the food chain, they're still going to be in Napa. They're still going to be in Silicon Valley. They're still going to be in West L.A."

That said, "It's really going to hit the small business owners and the young family that's trying to accumulate enough to raise a family, maybe send their kids to private school. It'll kick them in the teeth."

A worker in Wichita might not consider those earning \$250,000 a year middle class, but "if you're a guy working for a Silicon Valley company and you're married and you're thinking about having your first kid, and your family makes 250-k a year, you can't buy a closet in the Bay Area," Mr. Kotkin says. "But for 250-k a year, you can live pretty damn well in Salt Lake City. And you might be able to send your kids to public schools and own a three-bedroom, four-bath house."

According to Mr. Kotkin, these upwardly mobile families are fleeing in droves. As a result, California is turning into a two-and-a-half-class society. On top are the "entrenched incumbents" who inherited their wealth or came to California early and made their money. Then there's a shrunken middle class of public employees and, miles below, a permanent welfare class. As it stands today, about 40% of Californians don't pay any income tax and a quarter are on Medicaid.

It's "a very scary political dynamic," he says. "One day somebody's going to put on the ballot, let's take every penny over \$100,000 a year, and you'll get it through because there's no real restraint. What you've done by exempting people from paying taxes is that they feel no responsibility. That's certainly a big part of it."

And the welfare recipients, he emphasizes, "aren't leaving. Why would they? They get much better benefits in California or New York than if they go to Texas. In Texas the expectation is that people work."

California used to be more like Texas—a jobs magnet. What happened? For one, says the demographer, Californians are now voting more based on social issues and less on fiscal ones than they did when Ronald Reagan was governor 40 years ago. Environmentalists are also more powerful than they used to be. And Mr. Brown facilitated the public-union takeover of the statehouse by allowing state workers to collectively bargain during his first stint as governor in 1977.

Mr. Kotkin also notes that demographic changes are playing a role. As progressive policies drive out moderate and conservative members of the middle class, California's politics become even more left-wing. It's a classic case of natural selection, and increasingly the only ones fit to survive in California are the very rich and those who rely on government spending. In a nutshell, "the state is run for the very rich, the very poor, and the public employees."

So if California's no longer the Golden land of opportunity for middle-class dreamers, what is?

Mr. Kotkin lists four "growth corridors": the Gulf Coast, the Great Plains, the Intermountain West, and the Southeast. All of these regions have lower costs of living, lower taxes, relatively relaxed regulatory environments, and critical natural resources such as oil and natural gas.

Take Salt Lake City. "Almost all of the major tech companies have moved stuff to Salt Lake City." That includes Twitter, Adobe, eBay and Oracle.

Then there's Texas, which is on a mission to steal California's tech hegemony. Apple just announced that it's building a \$304 million campus and adding 3,600 jobs in Austin. Facebook established operations there last year, and eBay plans to add 1,000 new jobs there too.

Even Hollywood is doing more of its filming on the Gulf Coast. "New Orleans is supposedly going to pass New York as the second-largest film center. They have great incentives, and New Orleans is the best bargain for urban living in the United States. It's got great food, great music, and it's inexpensive."

What about the Midwest and the Rust Belt? Can they recover from their manufacturing losses?

"What those areas have is they've got a good work ethic," Mr. Kotkin says. "There's an established skill base for industry. They're very affordable, and they've got some nice places to live. Indianapolis has become a very nice city." He concedes that such places will have a hard time eclipsing California or Texas because they're not as well endowed by nature. But as the Golden State is proving, natural endowments do not guarantee permanent prosperity.

Ms. Finley is the assistant editor of OpinionJournal.com and a Journal editorial page writer.

Orange County Register

Hookers bring Secret Service to its knees

by Mark Steyn

Unlike the government of the United States, I can't claim any hands-on experience with Colombian hookers. But I was impressed by the rates charged by Miss Dania Suarez, and even more impressed by the U.S. Secret Service's response to them.

Cartagena's most famous "escort" costs \$800. For purposes of comparison, you can book Elliot Spitzer's "escort" for \$300. Yet, on the cold, grey fiscally conservative morning after the wild socially liberal night before, Dania's Secret Service agent offered her a mere \$28.

Twenty-eight bucks! What a remarkably precise sum. Thirty dollars, less a federal handling fee? Why isn't this guy Obama's treasury secretary or budget director? Or, at the very least, the head honcho of the General Services Administration, whose previous director has sadly had to step down after the agency's taxpayer-funded, public-servants-gone-wild Bacchanal in Vegas.

All over this dying republic, you couldn't find a single solitary \$28 item that doesn't wind up costing at least 800 bucks by the time it's been sluiced through the federal budgeting process. Yet, in one plucky little corner of the Secret Service, supervisor David Chaney, dog-handler Greg Stokes or one of the other nine agents managed to turn the principles of government procurement on its head. If the same fiscal prudence were applied to the 2011 Obama budget, the \$3.598 trillion splurge would have cost just shy of 126 billion. The feds' half-a-billion to Solyndra would have been a mere 18 million. The 823-grand GSA conference on government efficiency at the M Resort Spa & Casino would have come in at \$28,805.

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Alas, young Miss Suarez, just 24 and with a nine-year-old son and a ravenous pimp to feed, didn't care for the cut of her Secret Service man's jib. He made the fairly basic mistake – for an expensively trained government operative – of attempting to pay a prostitute in the hotel corridor and Dania caused an altercation, whose fall-out has brought the Secret Service to its knees; which isn't how these encounters usually go.

What we know so far is this: All 11 Secret Service men and all 10 U.S. military personnel staying at the Hotel Caribe are alleged to have had "escorts" in their rooms that night. All of them. The entire team.

Twenty-one U.S. public servants. Twenty-one Colombian whores. Unless a couple of the senior guys splashed out for the two-girl special. "Some of them were saying they didn't know they were prostitutes," explained Congressman Peter King, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee.

"Some are saying they were women at the bar."

Amazing to hear government agents channeling Dudley Moore in Arthur:

"You're a hooker ...? I thought I was doing so well." It turns out U.S. Secret Service agents are the only men who can walk into a Colombian nightclub and not spot the professionals. Are they really the guys you want protecting the president?

Congress is not happy about this. "It was totally wrong to take a foreign national back to a hotel when the president is about to arrive," said Representative King.

It's wrong to take a "foreign national" up to the room, but it would have been OK if she'd been from Des Moines? We're all in favor of outsourcing, but in compliance with Section 27(e) viii of the Patriot Act, this is the one job Americans *will* do?

With respect to the congressman, sometimes it helps to step back and consider the bigger picture. Why were 21 officials of the United States government able to enjoy a night of pleasure with 21 prostitutes, whether "foreign nationals" or all-American? The answer isn't difficult. Indeed, one retired agent spelled it out:

"They just didn't have anything to do."

So they did Dania Suarez and her friends instead.

The 21 dedicated public servants jetted in on the so-called "car-planes," the big transports flying in the tinted-windowed black Suburbans for the presidential motorcade. The "car-plane" guys show up a few days in advance, but usually two weeks or so after the *really* advanced advance team has hit the ground. And there was nothing for them to do. There is no reason for them to be there.

So instead they went to the Pleyclub [SIC].

As I understand it, the 21 public servants did not technically bill U.S. taxpayers for their "escorts." But you suckers paid for them to fly to Cartagena, and they were enjoying those women on your time. On foreign trips, aside from the 40 or so armored limousines, there are usually 200 Secret Service agents plus a couple of dozen sniffer dogs. Did the latter take any Colombian bitches back to their kennels? Or are they just the entrée for Obama's embassy banquet?

I've written before about the U.S. government's motorcade culture. Just last month, it cost U.S. taxpayers half-a-million bucks to fly Obama and David Cameron to Dayton, Ohio to pretend to enjoy a basketball game. I've attended previous "Summits of the Americas" and G7 meetings and other international confabs, and always heard the same story wearily retailed by representatives of the host nation – that the money-no-object Yanks are flying in a bigger and more disruptive presidential entourage than everybody else put together. At this point, the local official usually rolls his eyes, and mostly, but not always, leaves the thought unspoken:

"Americans! What do you expect?" The Queen routinely turns down requests from visiting U.S. presidents to reinforce the garden walls and replace the windows of Buckingham Palace – for an overnight stay. When the U.S. was the richest country on earth, the mad excess used to impress in a crude kind of way: If you've got it, flaunt it. Now it's the Brokest Nation in History: America hasn't got it, but still flaunts it; which is kind of pathetic.

Does more equal better? No. All 11 Secret Service johns had their "security clearances" canceled. That still leaves over four million Americans (or about two percent of the adult population) with "security clearances," and, according to the Director of National Intelligence last October, just under 1.5 million federal employees with "top secret" clearances. Which helps explain why one army private was able singlehandedly to download bazillions of (admittedly mostly worthless) "secrets" for Wikileaks. Imagine the entire population of New Zealand with security clearances, and the entire population of Philadelphia or Phoenix with "top secret" clearances.

And yet, the more guys on the payroll, the less anyone does. For all the hooker-cavorting among a bored entourage with time on its hands, there was no one to proofread President Obama's speech. So he stood up in public and attempted to pander to the Latins by referring to the sovereign British territory of the Falkland Islands by the designation of its temporary Argentine usurpers 30 years ago: "Las Malvinas." Except that his writers got it wrong. So the president of the United States called it "the Maldives," an entirely different bit of British Commonwealth real estate half a world away in the Indian Ocean. Were the speechwriting staff also face down in the hooker bar? "Jush a minute, baby. Hic. The preshhhiduh wansh a couple rewrites. 'I call on London to return British Columbia to Colombia.' Thash should do it. Lesh go back to my room and I'll show you my prompter."

It's not just the entitlements. Everywhere you look in the bloated federal leviathan, all is waste, all is excess. But the absurd imperial presidency is a good place to start. The next citizen-executive of this republic would be sending a right message were he to halve the motorcade, halve the security detail, halve the hookers.

Otherwise, America's foreign creditors will start to figure out that another half-decade of U.S. spendaholism and they're likely to wind up like Dania Suarez: You loan the U.S. Government \$800 billion, and come the due day the treasury secretary reaches in his pocket and says: "So how about we call it 28 bucks even?"

Washington Post

[Jim Webb: Health-care law represents a leadership failure for Obama](#)

by Karen Tumulty

President Obama's new [health-care law](#) will be his greatest liability as he attempts to once again win the critical swing state of Virginia, [Sen. Jim Webb](#) (D-Va.) warned Wednesday.

"I'll be real frank here," Webb said at a breakfast organized by Bloomberg News. "I think that the manner in which the health-care reform issue was put in front of the Congress, the way that the issue was dealt with by the White House, cost Obama a lot of credibility as a leader."



U.S. Democratic Sen. Jim Webb gestures while talking to journalists during a press conference at the U.S. Embassy Wednesday, April 11, 2012, in Yangon, Myanmar.

Webb voted for the law, but also for more than a dozen GOP-offered amendments to it.

“If you were going to do something of this magnitude, you have to do it with some clarity, with a clear set of objectives from the White House,” added Webb, who opted not to run for a second term this year. “...It should have been done with better direction from the White House.”

He faulted Obama for playing too passive a role in shaping the legislation. Taking a lesson from Bill Clinton’s failed 1994 health-care overhaul effort--which was faulted for its micromanagement of the details of the bill--Obama opted to spell out a broad set of goals, and let Congress work out the details.

What happened in the end, Webb said, “was five different congressional committees voted out their version of health-care reform, and so you had 7,000 pages of contradictory information. Everybody got confused. ... From that point forward, Obama’s had a difficult time selling himself as a decisive leader.”

Webb also said that if Obama had opted for a smaller measure, he would have stood a chance of winning the support of a significant number of Republicans on Capitol Hill.

The White House had no immediate comment on Webb’s statement.

Webb added that he believes most [Virginia voters](#)--outside the staunchest partisans--have not yet begun to focus on former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, the all-but-certain Republican presidential nominee.

"People are getting ready to pay attention to his message, the average person, rather than the nominating base," Webb said. "Romney has a case to make. He has to make his case."

Pajamas Media

[Aspirin: The Elixir of Life?](#)

by Theodore Dalrymple

At last we have found the elixir of life, more or less. It is called aspirin.

Previous elixirs of life have, of course, proved illusory; the historian of Chinese science, and Maoist fellow-traveler, Joseph Needham, published a list of emperors who died poisoned by their supposed elixirs. Indeed, Maoism itself was once supposed to be an elixir of life. Here, for example, is something published during the Cultural Revolution:

"Under the guidance of the great thought of Mao Tse-tung, the Mao Tse-tung's thought medical team of the Chinese P.L.A. Unit 3125 treated 105 students of the Fuhsien School for Deaf-Mutes in Liaoning Province, enabling all of them to recover their hearing and speaking faculties. Now everyone of them can cheer "Long live Chairman Mao!" and recite quotations from Chairman Mao. After some training many can already sing The East Is Red and recite Chairman Mao's "good old three" articles. This is a tremendous achievement gained in the upsurge of struggle-criticism/transformation of the great proletarian cultural revolution."

It turns out that the elixir of Maoism killed incomparably more people than the old superstitious emperors' elixirs; so that now we are more modest in our hopes.

Three recent papers in *The Lancet* propose the benefits of low-dose aspirin both in the prevention of certain cancers and in their spread once they have developed. Professor Rothwell, of Oxford University, was the main author of all three papers, but this should not affect their validity or otherwise.

The first of the papers compared the rates of cancer deaths in those who took part in randomized controlled trials of daily low-dose aspirin to prevent cerebrovascular events (strokes). The risk of cancer death was reduced by something like 15 percent in those who took long-term aspirin. The longer the aspirin was taken, the stronger the protective effect.

In the second of the papers, the authors analyzed the effect of low dose aspirin on cancer metastasis (the spreading of cancer beyond its original site). The aspirin was also given in controlled trials to see whether it reduced the incidence of stroke; among those who were given aspirin and subsequently developed cancer, the chances of metastasis — a leading cause of death from cancer — was 36 percent lower than among those given a placebo and who subsequently developed cancer

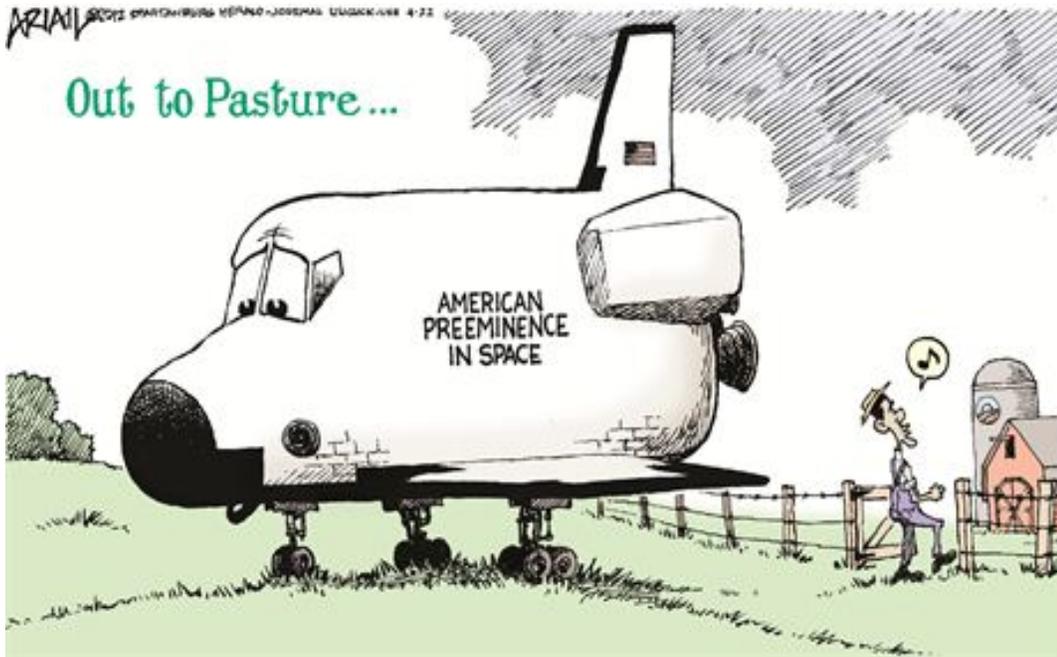
In the last of the papers, the authors used a case control study to demonstrate that those who took low-dose aspirin (but not in controlled trials) were at lower risk of developing colorectal cancer than those who did not; aspirin also protected against the development of esophageal and stomach cancers.

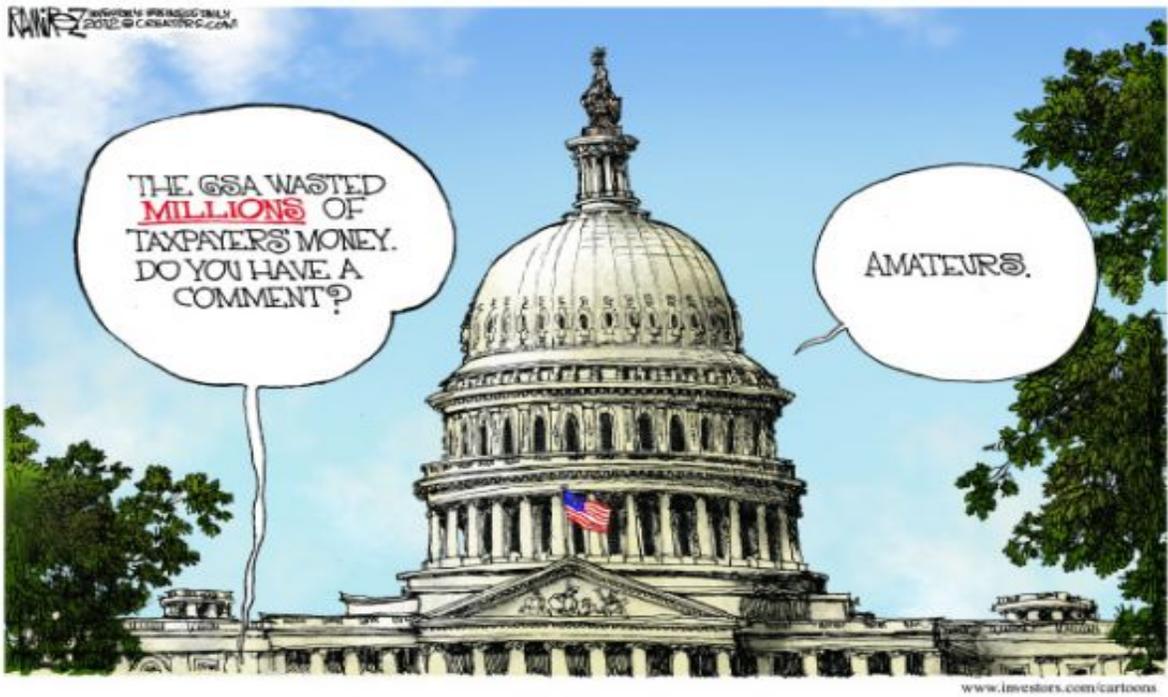
Does this mean that those of us who have reached the age of cancer — the incidence of cancer rises with age — should all be taking low-dose aspirin prophylactically? There is no indubitably correct answer to this question, and it all depends on your scale of values. In the first trial, about 35,000 people had to take aspirin for five years in order that 100 cancer deaths were avoided. Would you take a pill daily for five years for a 1 in 350 chance of saving your life?

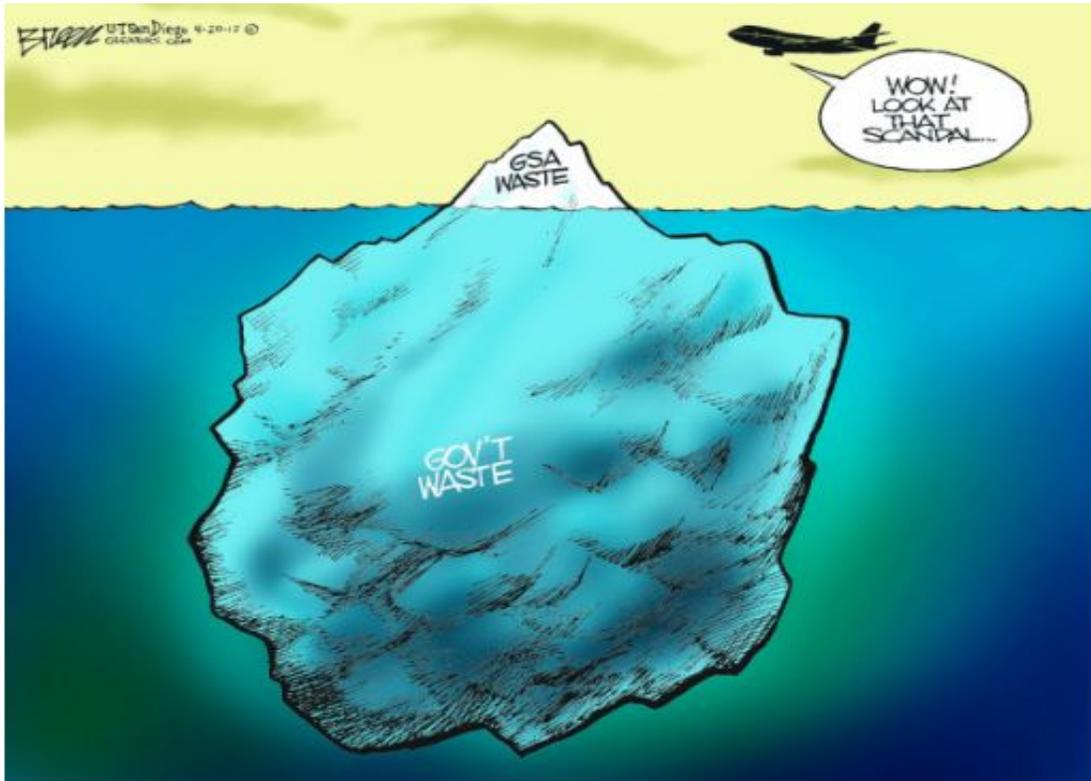
True, the tablet is a small one, but the papers did not set out to answer the question whether taking it daily for a long time resulted in any bad outcomes other than stroke and cancer. I, alas, shall not be taking it, though for purely personal and psychological reasons. I so detested the taste of aspirin as a child that I have only to think of aspirin to make myself feel really sick. My best friend, on the other hand, adores the taste of aspirin. Perhaps he is lucky. And aspirin is very cheap.



Out to Pasture...





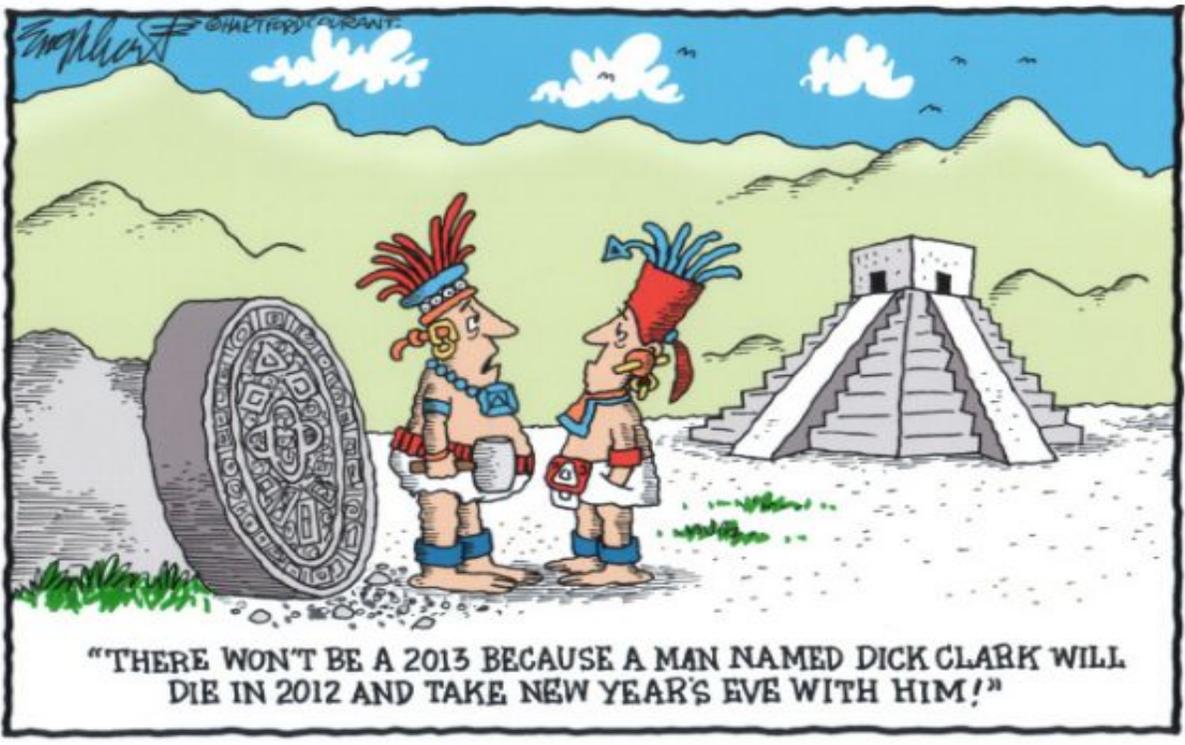


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