Next True Perspectives Seminar on May 9, 2011 on State Issues

The next True Perspectives seminar will feature State Senator Buddy Carter and State Representative Ben Watson reporting on current Georgia legislative issues, one of which is immigration law, per House Bill 87, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act of 201. It will require employers with 10 or more employees to ensure new hires are eligible to work in the U.S. It also requires secure and verifiable identification for official purposes and helps local law enforcement agencies handle issues of illegal immigration.

The seminar is at Plantation Ballroom, starting with registration at 9:00 AM. Help yourself to coffee and pastries and take a seat for the sure-to-be-interesting next hour. There is a $5 fee for SIRC members and $10 for guests. Please tube your checks at 2 Foxglove Lane, Jack Kaster, or Tom Sharp, 6 Sedgewater Retreat. To reserve a spot, or for further information, call or email Jack Kaster at 598-7714, or kasjac @ bellsouth.net. Future seminars are planned on ObamaCare and on Tax Reform (the “Fair Tax”).

March 30, 2011 True Perspectives Seminar on Macro Economics

Attendees at this inaugural True Perspectives Seminar were treated to a very relevant array of insights on our economy by Michael Toma, an economics professor at Armstrong Atlantic State University. A summary of his remarks and lively Q & A session appears on page 4, and his slide presentation is on our website at skidawayrepublicanclub.com

County Hotel Building Proposal at Commission Meeting March 11

The long-awaited public session of the County Commission was held on March 11 to unveil County plans for a new hotel on Hutchinson Island. However, instead of allowing public comment, they passed a resolution to try to find private backing for a joint project. Apparently the behind-the-scenes uproar over this controversial use of public funds was so great that they never brought up a proposal to do it alone. Presumably in the next few months we will see the results of this seeking of private backing to go along with their proposed County venture.

The points planned to be made at the March 11 meeting are included on page 3. The Savannah Morning News has not yet printed the letter outlining objections to this whole project.

Membership Dues

Almost all members have paid their 2011 dues. Options were: Regular family membership - $40, Sustaining Member - $100. If you’ve not paid yet, mail a check to SIRC, PO Box 15165, Savannah, GA 31416; or tube the check to Tom Baldacci, 226 Yam Gandy, or pay on line at our website: skidawayrepublicanclub.com.

Key Future Dates

May 9 - True Perspectives Seminar on State Legislation, 9:00am, Plantation Club
August 9 - True Perspectives Seminar on ObamaCare, with U.S. Congressman Tom Price

In this issue…

We Need the Independent Vote

A Skidaway Island independent voter got his letter (shown below) published in the Wall Street Journal several months ago, and it struck me that his thinking is not very far from a conservative viewpoint. So I took the opportunity to find out where there was common ground, because the independents are clearly the key to the 2012 National Election.

Why are independents so important for forwarding the conservative agenda? “Conservatives” still only comprise 40% of voters, while “liberals” are down to 20%. That leaves a pretty big middle ground to attract positive votes for the “best” solutions to America’s problems.

Many independents can easily adopt, or do in fact agree in principle with, the usual precepts of conservative thinking. It may just be fear that some of those precepts pushed to an extreme could cause too stark a turn in the American economy and bring worse results.

For example, “The government that governs least governs best”, while a succinct expression of conservative thinking, can connote an impression of a 19th century “laissez faire” approach to commerce. This invokes images of cartels ruling the economy, and poor workers at the mercy of ruthless industry captains and crony capitalism. True conservatives generally do not object to checks and balances in the form of regulation and anti-trust legislation, but this is a concept that may have, in the past, turned off independents. However, today it seems an increasing number of independents perceive the government has gone too far overboard in constraining the engine of competition, such as the with EPA rulings that carbon dioxide is a noxious substance or CAFE standards that just make cars less safe.

A New Approach

An empathetic consideration of the independents’ point of view could be an effective approach to a thoughtful electorate in the next 18 months: Be reasonable, and let the liberals be bombastic and demagogic.

Based on my experience in arbitration cases, this can help bring independent voters to the right conclusion. In effect, the voters next time are really deciding the ultimate “baseball salary arbitration”. They are not picking an arbitrary middle point between two extremes.

Baseball Salary Arbitration

In the old days, when baseball club management had to settle a dispute on next year’s salary for a star player, an arbitration panel would convene and pick the right number between the two extremes posed by the opposing sides. Then the “reasonable decision rule” was established. This meant the arbitrator could not pick his own “somewhere in the middle” answer. He must choose one or the other. Whoever’s case came closest to the arbitrator’s view of a fair salary got their exact request, without modification.

This had a dramatic effect on the requests from each side. No longer could they demean the other side and misrepresent facts. If one side didn’t come close to a reasonable answer, they could lose the whole argument, and cede the high ground to the other side.

It’s much the same with our political discourse. If one side is unreasonable and obfuscating, the voters in the middle will often choose the more reasonable side entirely by voting them in. I submit this is what happened in the 2010 election, when adult conversations generally ruled the day. The independents pretty much endorsed fiscal restraint on a government that they perceived had gone way too far in trying to control everything – from healthcare to “cap and tax” to new financial regulations.

It is recognized that certain segments of voters are too committed to one ideology or the other, so there is nothing said that can change their vote. So this new rational strategy simplifies the approach to ads and talking points. Don’t use negative ones at all. Keep hammering at the fundamentals and the uncommitted voters will get it right almost all of the time.

So far that strategy seems to be working. After Paul Ryan put forth a reasonable and detailed way to start solving our economic problems, the White House chose demagoguery as the first salvo. Perhaps that is why Obama’s approval ratings are about as low as one-term Jimmy Carter’s were at this point in his presidency.

Letter to the Editor, Wall Street Journal (2/18/11)

Charles Blahous's "Nobody Is Proposing to 'Slash' Social Security Benefits" (op-ed, Feb. 3) is an excellent clarification of the real issues necessary to fix Social Security's funding. President Obama is properly criticized for using inflammatory terms in his State of the Union address. His own deficit commission's recommendations of slightly decreasing the cost of living adjustment, raising the retirement age, and raising the wage base limit are the right answers to fixing Social Security.

These incremental changes will barely be noticed except by the "guardians" of Social Security, who leap at any opportunity to frighten politicians into submission. AARP and similar organizations claiming to represent the retired community constantly make false claims that any changes in Social Security will have catastrophic impact on all senior citizens. President Obama is unfortunately the latest example of a politician pandering to their rhetoric.

Fixing Social Security is relatively simple and will have a small financial impact on beneficiaries. On the 100th anniversary of Ronald Reagan's birth, we need the leadership he and Tip O'Neill demonstrated when they fixed Social Security in 1983. Do John Boehner and President Obama have the courage to link arms, agree to a Social Security fix, and explain it to the American people? Let's hope so, for the good of today and tomorrow's Social Security beneficiaries.

Edward H. Conant, Savannah, Ga.

Chatham County in the Hotel Business Redux?

By Mike Walters

The Chatham County Commission on March 11 allowed the hotel developers to present their slick promotional material and why it is good to go to market by this June (to keep costs down). The Commissioners then took turns asking questions of the developer. Three of the four Republican Commissioners were opposed to even allowing a next phase – namely seeking a private sector partner to go in with the County's $50 million investment.

I had a prepared statement to submit, and was about to give my brief oral remarks (see below), when Commissioner Pat Shay suddenly "called the question" – meaning let's vote now without hearing from the public. I immediately jumped up in the audience with a point of order. I asked Chairman Liakakis if this meant there would be no chance for public input on the resolution. This was the very first opportunity for public comment because the two previous Commission meetings had this topic tabled. I conceded that I might be out of order, but I realized that in Robert's Rules of Order, a motion to call the question, if seconded, must be immediately voted on without discussion. (Shay's motion had not yet been seconded.)

I was ruled out of order by Liakakis who said he didn't need public input at this stage, as there would be plenty of time to comment after the next stage of research on a private partner. He did query the audience as to who was opposed to the next study; three raised their hands.

Then amazingly they called for the actual vote, instead of voting on the motion to call the question – a clear violation of Robert's rules, as the "call to question" is a vote on shutting off debate, not a vote on the actual issue. So the actual vote to pursue private funding was not really valid.

This ended the topic and many left the room, with me mentioning vocally that I was shocked to see this approach of not allowing public input. The Savannah Morning News reporter immediately interviewed me about the whole event. I gave her a rough summary of the points I would have made orally and sent her my typed remarks. Her story appeared the next day, but excised of my points and the no public input feature. She did send me a note that because of space limitations, my objections to the project did not get included. However, she encouraged me to submit a letter to the editor (see below). I am still waiting for it to be published.

Letter to the Editor, SMN, Mike Walters, 3/13/2011

On March 11, 2011 the Chatham County Commission held a public hearing on the subject of building a County backed convention hotel on Hutchinson Island. Yet they permitted no input or comment from the public.

Here are the remarks I would have made orally if given two minutes to comment. I had a lengthier written statement I wanted to register in the record, but was not even permitted to submit that.

The County's original written report on building a convention hotel was not very compelling. National conventions were portrayed as just needing a larger hotel on Hutchinson Island for them to now start booking Savannah.

Never mentioned was the major reason why Savannah is hard to book for national conventions: limited airline access from major American cities.

The same report showed that our current convention center was averaging 366 convention days a year! Sounds successful to me. Why the need to build a new hotel?

The report cited other cities as having built convention hotels: Baltimore, Nashville and Austin. These are all four to five times the size of Savannah. The risk of failure was therefore a much smaller percentage of their annual budget. Baltimore's venture is, in fact, now struggling, with less than a 50% occupancy rate. That level of failure in any new hotel here would spell definite lost business at Savannah's other hotels, as only close to 100% occupancy at the new hotel would mean much spillover business for the other hotels.

Portland Oregon just vetoed building a convention hotel, citing the troubled economy. They were also aware that the convention business might have changed forever, as national companies and associations are scaling back on conventions as a means of conveying information and giving perks.

The economy took a major hit with the 2008 financial meltdown and spawned a new threat: huge unfunded public pension liabilities of states and municipalities. Chatham County's own unfunded pension liability is likely to be over $100 million, when recognizing that the stock market returns for the foreseeable future are likely to be much lower than the past 20 or 30 years.

Even worse than in the states and cities is the federal unfunded pension and other entitlement liability. As published by the Social Security Administration, that unfunded liability is over $100 trillion, or more than $300,000 for each person in America today! This is on top of a formal Federal debt of $14 trillion on its way to $20 trillion.

Congress is now beginning to deal with this reality. In trying to scale back expectations for Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid (and remnants of Obamacare), Congress could well lack the stomach to totally solve the problem by drastically cutting those benefits. They would than have to cut even more other programs and, failing that, raise taxes - a lot.

The effect on states and local governments would be devastating. Forget revenue sharing from Washington. And trying to restore some cut Federal services, with limited ability to raise local taxes on top of federal tax increases, would overwhelm local budgets. Local governments need to prepare for more austerity not more programs – like building hotels to compete with the private sector.

The best recommendation is to wait, like Portland, and see if the economic scene in two or three years is any more favorable than today, and also to find out what austerity is imposed by the national fiscal crisis.

Seminar Summary

SIRC True Perspectives, March 30, 2011

The following is a summary of the seminar given by Dr. Michael Toma, economics professor at Armstrong Atlantic State University, with a PhD from George Mason University. The latter is renowned for its modern, free market approach to economic theory in contrast to the Keynesian theories of government control of the economy.

Keynes is Dead

Keynesian theories have been for the most part discredited in the last few decades. Witness the disaster of Japan with its "lost decade" as the government tried to spend its way back to prosperity. In the process Japan has the highest ratio of government debt to gross domestic product for any industrial nation in the entire world – 226%.

Greece's near default stemmed from its total debt ratio of 144%. Ireland (94%) and Portugal (84%) perhaps are next – with annual deficits close to 10%. The U.S. is not that far behind (at 59%), with 10% deficits a year looming into the future. One particularly revealing chart was the gap between federal spending and federal revenues that was ever widening over the next fifty years. With taxes bringing in about 20% of our GDP each year (has been for the last 50 years), it doesn't take much imagination to see where spending 25% to 30% of our GDP by the government will lead us to in the future.

U.S. Debt: a Real Problem - On the Books & Off

Yet countries are still willing to lend Japan money for now, but how long can that last? Similarly the U.S. can still borrow a lot, but is our credit rating about to suffer? There is also the problem of our unfunded pension and entitlement liability. Present value, that number is over $100 trillion!! Or more than 600% of our GDP. Even now, federal payments to individuals take almost 70% of federal spending, versus 15% for national defense (arguably the main function of the federal government).

Dr. Toma felt that the world is still willing to lend the U.S. money because we are the most productive nation on earth still (and maybe they are confident we will solve our fiscal problems by trimming entitlement programs to what we can afford). The U.S. industrial production alone (manufacturing, mining, utilities) is still the largest in the world at 20% of the world's output - dwarfing each of the next two nations – China and Japan.

In fact, on a constant dollar GDP per capita basis, while growing rapidly now, China has not yet reached where the U.S. was in 1880!

Will the Dollar Be Replaced?

As for fears that the U.S. currency might be replaced by another competitor, Dr. Toma was quite confident that it wouldn't be a risk for decades to come. China's currency is still at the whim of a communist dictatorship, and no one would risk their wealth on what that country could do unilaterally.

As for the euro replacing the dollar as the world's standard currency, one only need to review the stress that the euro has come under in the last few years to know that it is the essence of instability right now. In addition the eurozone has too much rigidity in its labor markets and a shrinking population problem which can affect future productive capacity.

As for a third world nation source? Not a chance. Gold? Likewise. The U.S. is still recognized as the most stable economy on the face of the earth, as our production of goods and services far outstrips any other country for the near term future.

This is not to say that we couldn't morph into a very troubled economy if we don't take care of serious fiscal matters fairly soon.

U.S. Economy Damaged But Resilient

As for the "near Depression" we fell into the last few years, as portrayed by the press, one wonders what economic data they were looking at. In terms of GDP loss, the 2007-2009 recession was more severe than those in the 1970s and early 1980s, but not by a huge margin, and nowhere near the economic dislocation of the Great Depression. Was there a lot of demagoguery by politicians and mainstream media? They surely didn't check with their economists, or look at the data objectively.

Was there a need to calm the country from the credit crisis? Of course. And will the recovery be slow? Yes, because real estate rebound usually helps in most recoveries, but won't in this one because of the huge overstock of housing from the building bubble and foreclosures being rampant. Yet there are other things pushing the economy back slowly, as the American economy is very resilient.

Unleash the Economy - Don't Strangle it

Could Congress help even more? Yes, by removing a major stumbling block of uncertainty in taxes and regulations. Long term what's needed is a certain and measurable reduction in tax rates. It is recognized that a short term boost can be given by reducing payroll taxes because middle class Americans can stimulate consumption by putting that extra short term cash to use in spending.

Fix Entitlements Soon

Any long term solution must also include a reduction in entitlement spending. Tax cuts could spur economic activity and growth, but will not be sufficient to solve the entitlement problem. Tackling entitlement excesses will involve painful choices that this country will have to make. Most likely, they will play out eventually in the form of both tax increases (rather than cuts) and entitlement spending reductions.

The Obama Growth Discount

By Phil Gramm, April 15, 2011, WSJ.com, abridged

Policy matters. If Barack Obama matched Ronald Reagan's post-recession recovery rate, 15.7 million more Americans would have jobs.

Had the U.S. economy recovered from the current recession the way it bounced back from the other 10 recessions since World War II, our per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) would be $3,553 higher than it is today, and 11.9 million more Americans would be employed.

Those startling figures are based on the average recovery rate of real GDP and jobs three years after the beginning of each postwar recession. Some apologists suggest that the current recovery is so weak because the recession was so deep. But the totality of our experience in the postwar period is exactly the opposite—the bigger the bust, the bigger the boom that follows.

On average, three years after the four deepest previous recessions started, real GDP was 7.6% higher than the pre-recession level. During the Obama recovery, real GDP is up only 0.1%. Forty months after the start of the 1953, 1957, 1973 and 1981 recessions, total employment was on average 4.7% higher than the pre-recession peaks, while total employment today is still down 4.7%—that's a total employment gap of 13.9 million jobs.

The problem is not just the weak recovery but increasing evidence that the economy is now on a growth path far different from the previous 25 years. Despite the largest monetary and fiscal stimuli in American history, in 2009 the capital stock of the nation actually shrank for the first time in the postwar period. Our current economic underperformance seems so likely to continue that many economists have difficulty visualizing an America of tomorrow that looks like the America of the past 50 years.

Nothing economic is better documented than the principle that the economic system of a nation is the primary determinant of its success. In America, changes in economic policy have generally been so gradual that recessions and ensuing recoveries have simply brought the economy back to the same growth trend line. But there are exceptions. Can anyone deny that Reagan's policies in the 1980s had such an effect on economic growth and employment that they changed the growth trend line?

In 1982, unemployment reached 10.8% as the Fed tightened monetary policy to control inflation. Conditions were not conducive to recovery, yet the strong, sustained recovery that followed is now considered the good old days.

If we had the 1982 recovery rate today, annual per-capita income would be $4,154 higher than pre-recession -- or an extra $16,600 for a family of four. And 15.7 million more would have jobs. That's enough to employ 100% of the 13.5 million Americans currently classified as unemployed. In addition, we would have jobs for 30% of both the 2.4 million marginally attached workers and 4.8 million who have totally dropped out of the work force.

Reagan's tax cuts, Social Security reforms, regulatory reforms, and limits on the growth and power of the federal government not only helped the economy shake off the malaise of the 1970s but generated an economic growth premium that bore dividends for Americans until 2007.

If Reagan's policies were sufficiently different from those of the previous decade to generate a growth *premium*, the policies of Obama are sufficiently different from those of the previous quarter-century to alter the growth trend and impose a growth *discount*.

Under Obama's policies, federal spending exploded like never before. His 2011 budget would have increased outstanding federal debt more than all previous presidents combined. Government control of the health-care and financial systems has been greatly expanded. Obama also supported last year's failed "card check" legislation, an attempt at the most dramatic expansion of organized labor power since the Great Depression He launched diatribes against wealth accumulation, undertook a massive expansion in government regulatory power, and proposed the largest tax increases in American history. Those tax increases were aimed almost exclusively at America's entrepreneurs, risk takers and small businesses.

Obama arrived in Washington with a perceived mandate from voters in one hand and a blank check from Congress in the other. How convenient to *assume* that government could take over the health-care system, raise taxes, expand regulatory power and unleash a deficit spending orgy without producing a significant deviation in the growth trend of the previous quarter century. *Apparently, Obama failed to notice that Bill Clinton saw his strongest period of economic growth only after defeat of his health-care takeover and stimulus bills, welfare rolls e pared, capital gains tax cut, and the budget balanced.*

The recovery is being stifled by the unprecedented policy changes undertaken by this administration and the previous Congress. Whether in absolute or relative terms, whether in comparison to our own experience or the performance of our competitors, America's wealth-producing ability has been diminished.

Until last year's elections and compromises in the lame-duck Congress, marginal tax rates on income/dividends/capital gains would have risen dramatically. Those election results gave business the confidence that Obama's policies were ending and the economy began to show improvement. In short, the 2010 elections imposed a cap on the downside risk associated with the administration's policies and slightly reduced the Obama growth discount.

Elections do have consequences. But many Americans who voted for Obama did not realize that the price paid for big government would be 15.7 million fewer jobs and $4,154 less in per-capita income. Big government costs more than higher taxes. It is paid for with diminished freedom and less opportunity. You can't have unlimited opportunity and unlimited government.

Mr. Gramm is a former U.S. Senator from Texas and former professor of economics at Texas A&M University.

Who Pays For Government?

by John Hayward, 04/15/2011, HumanEvents.com

It's Tax Day, a time when Americans briefly think about how much their government costs, instead of daydreaming about all the wonderful things it promises to do for them.

Who pays for government? The Evil Rich provide the lion's share of the income taxes. According to the Tax Foundation, the top 5 percent of income earners bring home about 35% of the nation's income, but pay 59% of federal income tax. The Super Evil Rich – people who earn over $6 million per year, a new category the IRS has been tracking recently - earn 10% of the income, but pay 18.5% of income taxes. Meanwhile, the bottom half of earners account for roughly 13% of our national income, but pay only 3% of the federal income tax.

We are constantly told none of this is "fair," because the Evil Rich need to pay more than 59% of the income tax. Liberals never tell us what a truly "fair" percentage would be – they always just complain that the current rates are too low, and persist in the absurd and easily debunked belief that taxing the heck out of rich people can fund their insane government spending. Perhaps if the Evil Rich paid 70%, which would be double the 35% of national income they take in, we would achieve "fairness?" You already know the answer to that.

Don't worry, because even if you're in the lower half of wage earners, you still pay plenty for government. For one thing, you might be anticipating a nice tax refund this year. That's all money you loaned the government interest-free. This is not just sour grapes, for you could have earned interest on that money by investing it, or placing it in a savings account. Perhaps more importantly, you could have used it to pay down your own debts. If you get a $1000 refund from the IRS, that's a thousand dollars you could have knocked off your credit card balances this year. What interest rate did you pay Visa or Discover on that thousand bucks?

You're also paying for government every time you fill your gas tank. As you may have noticed, that costs a lot of money these days. Much of this goes to the government, in the form of gas taxes. The federal gas tax is 18.4 cents per gallon. States add an average of 20.6 cents to that total. More significantly, the high cost of gas is a direct result of deliberate Obama policies, including a refusal to allow the exploration of American oil resources.

You are funding this exercise in environmentalist ideology, and you pay for even more of it through EPA regulations that increase the cost of energy generation. The EPA has been working to quietly enforce the "cap and trade" concept – defeated by the representatives of American voters in the Congress. It already imposes fantastically expensive "climate change" ideology on Americans, many of whom correctly see "climate change" as an international fraud. Regardless of your income level, you pay for all that.

These energy policies contribute to the rising cost of almost all goods, as do high corporate tax rates. Corporations do not pay taxes. They pass them along to their customers. You'll have a hard time finding an example of an industry whose profit margins were reduced in equal proportion to rising taxes and regulatory costs. They correctly, and ethically, view rising taxes as an increase in the cost of goods, and recover most of that cost through rising prices or diminished quality.

You pay for government through the cost of opportunities it forecloses, and jobs it eliminates. Obviously the vast ranks of the unemployed are paying most directly. True, they receive unemployment benefits – which cost the rest of us a fortune to fund, as the government keeps expanding them – but these benefits are a fraction of what they could be earning in their chosen professions. Further, the people who are still employed suffer from lost advancement opportunities. When your company hires people, your chances for promotion are increased. The reverse is equally true when staff is downsized.

And, of course, don't forget about all the money government is sucking out of your paycheck, before you ever receive it. The entire point of the exercise is to prevent you from noticing the extraction of these funds. You're pouring a lot of your regular paycheck into a Social Security fund that absolutely will not be there when you retire – President Obama and the Democrat Party work tirelessly to thwart any real attempt to save it. That money is not being put into some kind of "lockbox." The government spends it immediately.

Rest assured, we are all paying for government. Few of us will ever really know exactly how much we paid. As the size of government increases, and the termite State burrows into every inch of our economy, its true cost becomes harder to account for. You don't know exactly how much you're paying, any more than you know exactly what Washington does with all the money. This is by design.

John Hayward is a staff writer for *Human Events*, and author of the recently published *Doctor Zero: Year One*

Dictating is Easy; Leading is Hard

By Jon Sanders, 4/16/2011, Townhall.com

They were happier times. Headier times. President Barack Obama and his Democrats held strong majorities in both the House and Senate. Dreams of "fundamentally transforming the United States of America" were at hand.

Best of all, nobody could stop them, and they reveled in it. Look, they said, we can pass this yard-thick bill to take over healthcare -- without even reading it! What are you going to do? Think we should pass a budget bill this year? Think again! Worried about the national debt? Then watch this: WHOOSH!

Fun times, fun times. But they're over now. The American people responded as Americans do, the Tea Party movement arose, and when November came they flipped the House to the GOP and left the Democrats barely hanging onto control in the Senate. It was just enough change in the overall power structure to quell the hijinks.

And don't think the cutups aren't missing their capers. The president is especially glum. The American people -- and worse for him, his own party -- expect him to lead, a rather daunting prospect that includes convincing Republicans to follow. Becoming such a leader cuts strongly against his natural inclinations to vote "present" and say Republicans like to starve Grandma.

Obama took his self-pity public after surveying his present situation and comparing it with that of Hu Jintao. The New York Times reported last month that "Mr. Obama has told people that it would be so much easier to be the president of China."

So much easier. Plus he'd hold the wicked awesome title of "Paramount Leader." How cool would that look on ESPN!

These Republicans, well, they might be inclined to some fun (how much gimmickry is in the continuing resolution to avoid a government shutdown is up for debate), but just when a president starts to hope, the GOP brings out that wet blanket of a representative from Wisconsin with his serious long-term budget cutting proposal.

Sheesh. And "trillions" used to be such a fun word.

Now the president is heaving sighs for anonymity. "I just miss -- I miss being anonymous," he told Hearst Magazine executives in the White House State Dining Room. "I miss Saturday morning, rolling out of bed, not shaving, getting into my car with my girls, driving to the supermarket, squeezing the fruit, getting my car washed, taking walks. I can't take a walk." No one within earshot assumed he meant because he was tired of being thronged by grateful Americans tearfully thanking him for each and every newly uncovered Obamacare imposition.

Ironically -- for the first time since early '09, it seems -- the president has found something on which he and a majority of Americans agree. He'd like just to take a walk. They'd like to tell him to take a hike. Kum ba yah.

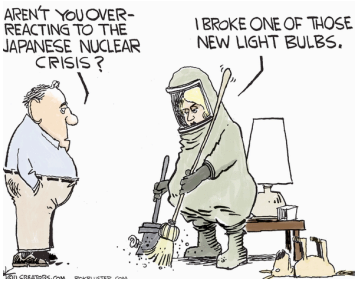
Obama's woe is shared by former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. She fretted before an audience at Tufts University that "elections shouldn't matter as much as they do." That's a steep step down for someone who once hailed the outcome of the 2006 midterm elections as a moment for which women have been waiting for over 200 years.

Vice President Joe Biden has been more sanguine about things. But then he likes to check out of the president's more blatantly demagogic speeches to visit the peaceful climes of Blinken and Nod.

Biden was lulled into just such a working vacation during Obama's vitriolic and alternative-free response to Rep. Paul Ryan's budget. The speech was remarkable for many things, though none of them reflect positively on Obama as a leader. As for the reason for the speech, the president who was hosanna'd into office on the promises of fundamental change was reduced to warning that Ryan's plan "would lead to a fundamentally different America than the one we've known certainly in my lifetime."

Yes, the fun is over. Now he hopes we don't change.

Jon Sanders is associate director of research at the John Locke Foundation in Raleigh, N.C.



SIRC MEMBERSHIP - SUSTAINING MEMBERS (LIFETIME MEMBERS in BOLD)

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Daggett, Allen & Judy	**Larsen, Ken & Nancy**	Otto, Martin & Doris	Strickland, Bill
Davis, Jerry and Sandy	Lasker, Mark & Sybil	Overton, Scott & Marolyn	Stryker, Howard & Audry
Dawson, Patricia	Lavish, Ed & Johanna	Parrott, Dave & Carol	**Stuhlreyer, Eileen**
Dobransky, Joe & Mary	Laughinghouse, Gary & Sandy	**Paull, John & Barbara**	Suelflow, Ray & Marcia
Dolson, Tom & Judie	**Lindholm, Cliff & Karen**	Peer, George	Sweat, Kay
Duffie, Ed & Onnie	**Loupee, Jerry & Bonnie**	Persons, Will & Chris	**Sweers, Jack & Judy**
Duncan, Max & Trilby	**Luck, Carolyn**	Peterson, Russ & Louise	Tate, Marc & Carol
Duren, John& Carol	Lutton, James D.	Pierce, Joan	Trice, Bill & Sandy
Eckels, Jim	Marley, David & Sara	Platte, John & Louise	**Ulmer, Bill & Patty**
Eckburg, Dick & Judy	Maugh, Roger & Judy	Potterfield, Tom & Ruth	**Vestal, Joseph**
Emery, Jim & Melissa	**McAlpin, Morgan & Liz**	Powell, Donald & Phyllis	Walker, W.R. & Judy
Faircloth, Bob & Jean	McEachern, John & Lisa	Protz, Jane	Walters, Mike & MaryAnne
Forssell, Mark & Shirley	**McKenzie, Herb & Joan**	Reinhard, Bob & Jane	Weber, Robert & Bobbie
Friday, Marc & Laura	McCain, Bill & Susan	Rhea, Bud & Dorothy	Wentworth, Will & Priss
Guira, Alex & Anne	**McLaughlin, Sam & Barbara**	Robey, Lee & Betty	**Wettengel, Phillip & Sue**
Gilliam, Joe & Laura	Meeker, Jack & Jean	Robinson, Mack & Lois	White, Don & Beverly
Glass, Curt & Sandy	Meng, Bob & Beverly	**Rosefield, Sara**	White, Tom & Hazel
Goldman, Jerry & Suzy	Methfesssel, Herm & Joan	Sapp, Greg & Theresa	Witsell, Edward & Ethel
Goldsmith, Bill & Barbara	Meyer, Darby & Renee	Schirmacher, Paul & Gerri	Wiebe, John & Linda
Haase, Tom & Kate	Miller, Dick & Ann	Schoenecker, John & Kathy	Wilson, Frederick
Hamlet, Joe & Barbara	**Moore, Mark & Inge**	Scott, John & Yvonne	**Winnert, Ken & Mary Lee**
Hanlon, Dan & Donna	Moore, Robert & Joan	Seaver, Jeanne	**Wisenbaker, Gary & Jeannie**