

Weekly



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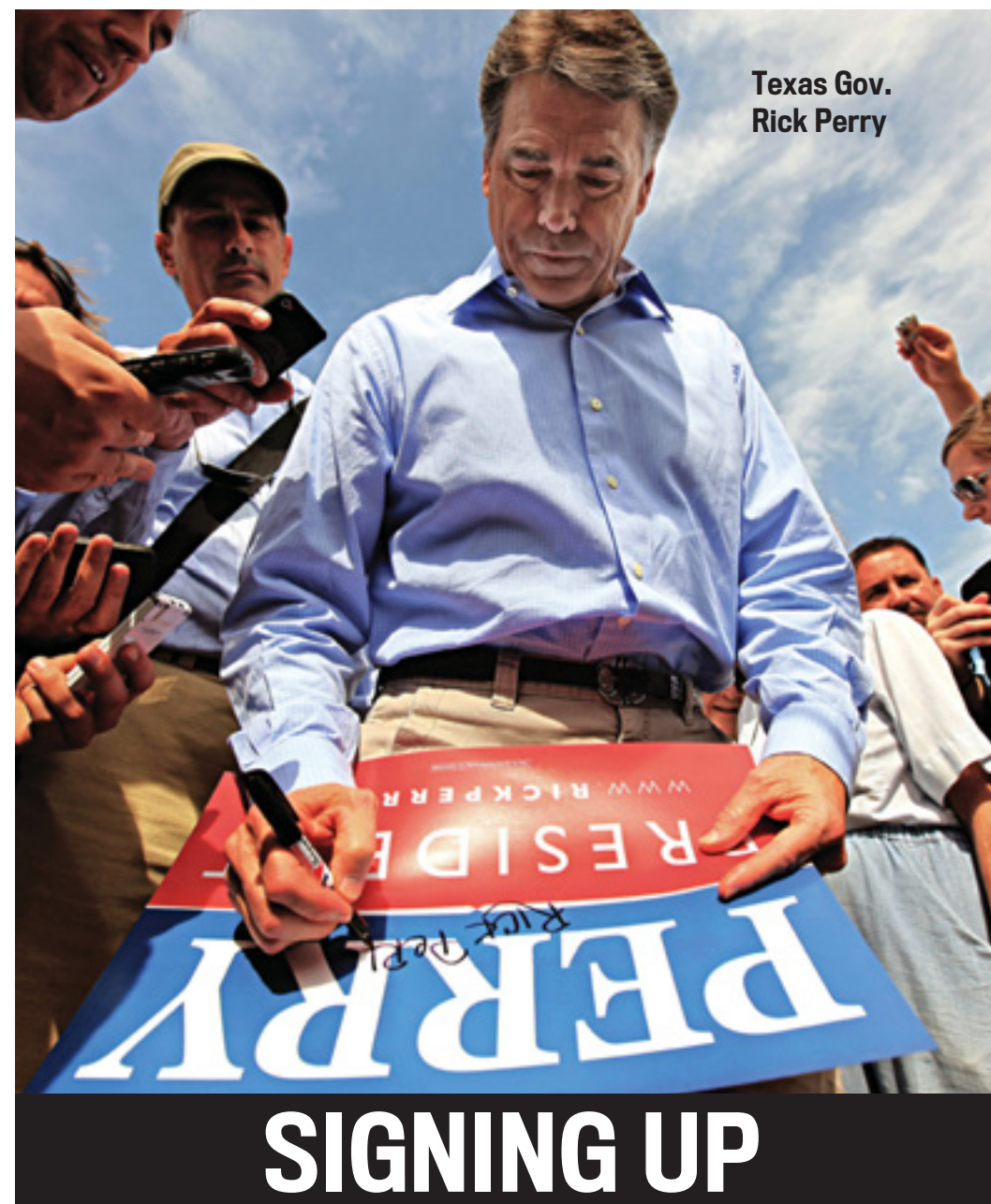
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Palin Flop Has Second Life

The *Undeclared*, the Sarah Palin documentary, isn't what you'd call a summer blockbuster. In fact, the sympathetic biography flopped in theaters, grossing only \$175,000 at the box office. In Iowa, where the former Alaska governor and 2008 GOP vice presidential nominee seems to be laying the groundwork for a presidential bid, just a few have seen the documentary. Says Iowa Palin organizer **Peter Singleton**: "We've done dozens of showings, but less than 100." And, adds Singleton, only a "handful of people" have attended each showing.

For anybody else, that would spell disaster. If former Minnesota governor **Tim Pawlenty** ended his presidential hopes after getting just 2,293 votes in last weekend's Ames Straw Poll, can Palin hang around if even less Iowans have shown up to see her movie? You betcha, says her gang.

"A big theater showing was never the intention," says director **Stephen Bannon**. "My plan was always to get this shown in every nook and cranny in the country." To that end, he's lined up a pay-per-view deal and stores like Walmart are releasing 250,000 DVDs of *The Undeclared*. The goal: Give people a chance to see the real Palin and, should she decide to run, use it as the campaign introduction.

"We're confident she'll run, and we've worked to build that really strong grassroots base that you have to build



NATE BEELER—THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER

The List: 5 Ways Kids Are Better Off Today

From the Census Bureau's newly released indicators of child well-being from 1998 to 2009

- 1. More parents read to their children.** 56 percent of 1- to 2-year-olds.
- 2. More kids are in gifted classes.** 27 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds.
- 3. Growth in families eating together at least seven times a week.** 72 percent.
- 4. Big boost in parents praising kids three or more times a day.** Up to 57 percent.
- 5. More parents play or talk with their kids three or more times daily.** 57 percent.

ABOVE: ILLUSTRATION BY JOE CIARDIELLO FOR USN&WR

for a candidate to be successful just in case she does,” says Singleton, the Iowa “Organize4Palin” representative.

Bannon, writer and director of conservative political documentaries, took on the project after a few of Palin’s aides approached him in 2008 about making videos promoting Palin for YouTube. Bannon proposed the film instead, insisted Palin’s crew stay out of it, and bankrolled the project himself. The film touts Palin’s record as Alaska gov when she tackled ethical issues in her administration, took on Exxon, and negotiated the state’s largest gas pipeline project. “She really has a stellar record of achievement, but the established media didn’t ever cover that,” says Singleton. And, for the record, he says, the McCain-Palin campaign didn’t tell it very well.

Bannon says it’s changed some mainstream reporters’ perceptions of Palin. CBS reporter **Jan Crawford**, for example, says the film debunked the “tired narrative” during the 2008 campaign that Palin couldn’t and didn’t think for herself. Says a long-time GOP campaign operative: “If she runs for president, the movie will be useful as the introduction she never got. It’s a very effective under-the-radar

tool/tactic in gearing up for the Iowa caucuses if she decides to play.”

Record Crop of Obama Honey

At least the White House honey bees are sticking with the president. Sitting next to first lady **Michelle Obama’s** veggie patch, the single South Lawn hive has produced a record 225-1/2 pounds of honey this year. “It’s just craziness,” says White House carpenter and beekeeper **Charlie Brandts**. “They did really well this year.” While it’s common for most hobby hives to produce about 60 pounds, or five gallons of honey, the White House hive has always been an overachiever, giving up 134 pounds the first year and 183 pounds the second. At the White House, honey is bottled for gifts and used to make cookies, salad dressing, and beer.

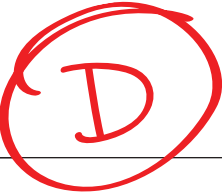
Clinton Urges Healthy Eating

Bill Clinton, who rarely turned down a Big Mac or slice of White House cake, has joined the crusade to put overweight kids on a diet and a treadmill. The former president provides the introduction to a new cartoon book from former New York Mayor **Ed Koch** and his sister **Pat Koch Thaler** that tells the tale of Eddie, a fat and lazy kid whose dream of win-

REPORT CARD



PRESIDENT
OBAMA
Week 135



“Obama promises a post-vacation speech on job creation next month, but one wonders if his words are losing their power with voters. At least he is getting ahead of the curve.”

National pollster John Zogby
for Washington Whispers

ning at dodge ball prompts him to swap cookies for carrots and to start jogging. “I’m delighted to see books like *Eddie Shapes Up* encouraging children to embrace wellness at an early age. After undergoing two heart surgeries, I knew I would have to change my lifestyle in order to stay well,” pens Clinton. “I only wish I had started on this adventure as a young man.”

For Obama, the Buzz is Gone

The Internet buzz about **President Obama**, who once had the Web cooing over his inspiring promises of hope and change, has died, according to a firm

that mines 200 million blogs, tweets, message boards, and social media for Obama buzz. Worse: While the words “hope” and “change” used to be associated with Obama, now the dominant words are “challenge,” “disapprove,” and “crisis,” according to Zeta Interactive. CEO **Al DiGuido** tells Whispers: “President Obama has reached a defining moment in his presidency; the president’s positive tonal ranking has sunk to its lowest level, currently at 41 percent positive ranking.”

‘Walmart County’ Backs Perry

Texas Gov. **Rick Perry**, the newest candidate to join the 2012 GOP presidential race, is debuting with a big and symbolic endorsement from “Walmart County.” As Perry announced his bid for the White House last weekend, three Arkansas Republican Party county chairs came out to back him, including the boss of Benton County, home to Bentonville’s Walmart. “Often county chairs don’t endorse this early and during primaries,” says state Rep. **David Sanders**, who heads Arkansans for Perry. “But they recognize Gov. Perry’s strengths, especially in job creation in Texas so they decided to go ahead and join up.” | *With Lauren Fox and Suzi Parker*

No Clarity in the GOP Race

The Republican presidential field is in flux as one drops out and one gets in

By Susan Milligan

A Republican governor, discouraged by a poor showing in Iowa, bailed out. Another Republican governor, emboldened, jumped in. President Obama took off the gloves, chastising his potential GOP foes for refusing to even consider raising taxes to address the nation's deficit and debt.

The 2012 presidential campaign has officially begun. And judging by the increasingly heated rhetoric of the candidates, the contest is shaping up as a confrontational one, complete with angry voters, an under-fire incumbent, and a GOP slate battling it out to claim the soul of the party.

While the GOP field is unified in its adamant desire to defeat Obama next year, no one has emerged as the likely nominee. Still, early signs show strength on the conservative side of the slate. Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann, a Tea Party favorite whose candidacy was largely dismissed months ago as an overly ambitious quest by a niche contender, won the Ames straw poll in Iowa. While the win does not necessarily translate into a victory in January's Iowa caucuses, it showed that Bachmann's appeal is strong among the conservative wing of her party (who tend to be most motivated to show up for the straw poll). It also displayed Bachmann's organizational skills; candidates with poor on-the-ground operations typically do not show well in the straw poll.

Bachmann's success also pushed a fellow Minnesotan, former governor Tim Pawlenty, out of the race even before an official vote was cast. Pawlenty, political analysts agree, had to win the Iowa caucuses next year to stay viable in the



RICHARD SHIRO—AP

GOP field. But his third-place showing in the nonbinding straw poll made it clear he would never be able to raise the cash needed to make a serious run, says Timothy Hagle, associate political science professor at the University of Iowa. "It's not surprising to see someone drop out. It's surprising to me that he did it so quickly," Hagle says.

Texas Rep. Ron Paul finished an astonishing close second to Bachmann—a reflection of Paul's devoted following, particularly among young people. But it was also a sign that Pawlenty wasn't going to be able to steal a sufficient share

Rep. Michele Bachmann speaks to supporters in South Carolina.

of the conservative base to stay alive in a protracted GOP primary.

Even as Pawlenty was bowing out, swashbuckling Texas Gov. Rick Perry was getting in. While Perry hadn't even campaigned in Iowa (he announced the day of the Iowa straw poll, stealing a bit of the spotlight from Bachmann), he still managed to get 718 write-in votes in the poll. It amounted to a paltry 3.62 percent but still put him a notch ahead of former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney and established an immediate top-tier rivalry between the two men for the nomination.

With a little more than five months to go before the Iowa caucuses, the GOP field stands at nine: Romney, Perry, Bachmann, Paul, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick San-

torum, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, pizza magnate Herman Cain, former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, and Michigan Rep. Thad McCotter. And that's without considering the possible entry of former Alaska governor Sarah Palin or the efforts to draft Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan or former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Obama, meanwhile, has begun going on the offensive against the Republican pack and has focused his speeches on jobs, likely to be his biggest vulnerability next year.

Who will face Obama, however, is still very much in question. While Romney has long been presumed to be the man to beat in the primary, the strong showings of candidates like Bachmann, Paul, and Perry suggest the primary electorate wants someone a bit more fiery and reliably anti-government. Romney claims solid business credentials, but his signature on a Massachusetts healthcare law that served as a template for the federal statute clings to him like a gang tattoo. And while Romney is arguably better po-

sitioned to win over independents and some Democrats in a general election campaign, his more staid manner may not satisfy rank-and-file Republicans searching for a nominee in a fighting mood. "The voters are mad as hell, and they want a candidate who's mad as hell, too," says Andrew Smith, director of the New Hampshire Survey Center.

While in 2008 the winners of the Iowa caucuses—Obama and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee—were talking about hope and reconciliation, voters this year are back on the warpath, Hagle says.

Perry, however, has already stumbled with his blunt, Texas-justice approach. He suggested that a quantitative easing of the currency—a technique the Federal Reserve uses to ease the money supply—would be politically motivated and said that if Fed chairman Ben Bernanke did so it would be "almost ... treasonous." The remark was roundly derided, even by Republicans such as former George W. Bush adviser Karl Rove, but Perry re-

fused to back off the comment.

Romney deliberately didn't compete in Iowa ahead of the straw poll, instead focusing his attention on New Hampshire. There he has a strong advantage, Smith says, not because he's from the region, but because candidates like Bachmann, Perry, and Paul will split the conservative GOP vote, positioning Romney to capture a strong majority of the centrist GOP primary vote. That group, which is socially liberal or libertarian but fiscally conservative, is about 60 percent of New Hampshire's GOP primary vote, Smith says.

Republican consultant Ron Christie says the general election will be a fundamental referendum on the role Americans want the government to have in their lives, with the eventual GOP nominee arguing for less regulation and lower taxes. The Republican primary, Christie says, is going to come down to a choice between an establishment candidate or one who can rile up the base. "At the end of the day, I think it will be a two-person race between Romney and Perry—the no-holds-barred approach of Perry versus the more restrained, refined approach of Mitt Romney," Christie predicts. "That, to me, is going to be fascinating." And if primary voters continue to be so divided, it could be a long process as well. |

What Do You Think? The Ames straw poll didn't lend much clarity to the GOP field. Who will emerge as the victor? E-mail your thoughts to letters@usnews.com.

heart.org/quality



Obama's Jobs Turn

The president's push for legislation will likely face stiff resistance

By Alex M. Parker

Now that the debt ceiling fight is firmly behind him, President Obama is continuing his promised “pivot” away from budget issues and towards the troubled economy, with pledges to confront Congress and push for legislation to create jobs. The Obama administration has said it will unveil new economic plans in September, and officials told the Associated Press that Obama's plan would include a new construction program and tax cuts for the middle class. The proposals will face steep, maybe impossible hurdles in Congress, where opposition to Obama and any new spending remains high. But for the president, having nothing to lose in this fight may be the point.

In the past, Obama's style has been to focus on the results of legislation, no matter how ugly the sausage-making process gets. In his push for healthcare reform and the stimulus package, he accepted painful compromises with Republicans and conservative Democrats to enact the laws.



Obama used his bus tour to talk about jobs.

In standoffs with Republicans over tax cuts, the budget, and the debt ceiling, the president agreed to GOP demands which left his own party howling. Even when he came up short—for instance, with the defunct cap-and-trade bill—Obama focused on a pragmatic approach which accepted political realities.

But now the political reality, at least as many in Washington, D.C. see it, is that Republicans are unlikely to accept any new jobs legislation from the president. Opposition to the stimulus spending was one of the core principles of the Tea Party movement which swept the Republicans back into power in 2010, and no amount of deal-making will change freshmen Republicans' minds. And many believe that Obama's name is so toxic among Republicans that any plan he pushes, even if it seems favorable to conservatives, will likely be met with stiff resistance.

The situation has left many liberal observers hoping that Obama will use this as a chance to draw a firm contrast with Republicans and paint them as opponents to economic recovery. “I think the point of it is to demonstrate to both the American people and to the markets that there's someone trying to get us out of the economic hole that we're in,” says Michael Ettlinger, an economic analyst

with the left-leaning Center for American Progress. “Not from a political, ‘who's going to win, who's going to lose’ standpoint, but from the standpoint of letting the voters have a say in whether we're going to take the measures we need to get job creation or not.”

Obama's jobs plan will most likely be a mix of long-time proposals and fresh ideas. The Obama administration has already promoted patent reform and several free trade agreements as potential job creation measures. The president will most likely continue his push to extend the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance benefits through 2012. In the past, he's pushed for the creation of an “infrastructure bank” to fund construction projects with help from private dollars, and his new proposal may include it as part of a larger plan to beef up construction projects across the country.

The conventional wisdom in Washington is that while infrastructure spending won't sell with Republicans, some type of payroll tax cut expansion or extension might. But even that would be an uphill climb. The Obama administration will need to weigh economic concerns against public sentiment and what Republicans may be willing to yield on. But win or lose, this could be a chance for Obama to finally let everyone know where he stands. |



MARK RALSTON—GETTY IMAGES

In the Hot Seat?

Vice President Biden must answer economic questions on his trip to China

By Kira Zalan

Right now everyone is chastising the U.S. government for the debt debacle, and the Chinese won't be left out. As Vice President Joe Biden visits China this week, he faces pointed questions about America's debt, the future of the economy, and the apparent dysfunction of the political process witnessed last month. But when the trip was planned in January, the United States had a broader agenda, which included pressing China on issues of security, democracy, and human rights. Experts say that recent events have turned the tables by putting the United States in the hot seat, but the codependent nature of U.S.-China relations means neither party has the upper hand.

As the U.S. economy took a beating after the Standard & Poor's credit rating downgrade, editorial statements released by the Chinese government-run news agency accused the United States of "debt addiction," called for "international supervision over the issue of U.S. dollars,"

The Chinese accused the United States of having a "debt addiction" and called the debt ceiling standoff "ridiculous."

and proposed a "new, stable and secured global reserve currency." They also called last month's political stand-off in Congress "ridiculous."

Experts say that China, the largest foreign holder of U.S. debt, has reasonable concerns over the U.S. economy. Both depreciation and inflation of the U.S. dollar directly result in losses for the Chinese—whether in worth of their holdings or in purchasing power. Nonetheless, the Chinese are limited to sharp rhetoric because they have no alternatives to the large and liquid U.S. debt market.

"We are not going to see a massive withdrawal by the Chinese because they would lose a tremendous amount of money and they have nowhere else to go. It's not even a realistic threat to consider," says Kenneth Lieberthal, director of the Brookings Institution's China Center. "The euro is down, the Japanese yen is down, and the U.S. debt market is the only one large enough. The Chinese are in a position where they have to continue to invest."

Nicholas Lardy, senior fellow at the

Peterson Institute for International Economics, put it his way: "They save too much and we consume too much. They lend us the money that allows us to keep consuming."

The new U.S. ambassador to China, Gary Locke, made his first public remarks to reassure the Chinese that the United States won't default on its debt, another concern for the Chinese. At a press conference, Locke said the U.S. government has mapped out a "path ensuring fiscal integrity of the United States."

Locke's collegial response didn't match the hot rhetoric coming from the Chinese, including: "The U.S. government has to come to terms with the painful fact that the good old days when it could just borrow its way out of messes of its own making are finally gone."

While in reality China will go on lending America money, the dynamics for Biden's visit are not favorable to U.S. interests, says Yukon Huang, senior associate in the Carnegie Endowment Asia Program. "The Chinese primary interest will be what the United States is going to do about its economic situation," he says. "Biden is now on the defensive. It's hard to push issues when on the defensive." So for now, the long planned agenda will have to take a backseat. |

For Syria's Assad, It's Time to Go

President Obama called on the Syrian leader to step down

By Jessica Rettig



LUIS M. ALVAREZ—AP

Secretary of State Clinton talks about Syria's Assad.

It's time for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to go, President Obama and other world leaders declared this week. After months of condemning the Syrian regime's violent and deadly attacks against its own people, the Obama administration, as part of an international coalition, increased pressure by explicitly calling for Assad to step aside. "We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside," Obama said in a statement released yesterday.

In his statement, Obama repeated what members of the administration have said since the start of the Arab Spring uprisings earlier this year: that the future of Syria is up to its own people. The administration has argued that unlike with the opposition to ruler Muammar Qadhafi in Libya, the Syrian people have had "a

strong desire" that foreign nations like the United States not intervene. "The United States cannot and will not impose this transition upon Syria. It is up to the Syrian people to choose their own leaders," Obama said. "What the United States will support is an effort to bring about a Syria that is democratic, just, and inclusive for all Syrians."

Senior administration officials, on a call with reporters, said the administration is "certain that Assad is on his way out," in part due to the increasing strength of the Syrian people. "They're not afraid anymore, and that's when regimes start to crumble," a top administration official said.

"The balance has shifted within Syria. The Syrian people will not accept his rule anymore," said another official.

In addition to sanctions already imposed upon Assad and members of his regime since mid-March when the crackdown against protesters began, Obama also issued an executive order to block property of the Syrian government, to ban American citizens from investing in or exporting services to Syria, and to ban imports of, or any transaction related to, Syrian petroleum. The administration says these are the toughest sanctions issued yet against Syria, and perhaps

against any country.

Thursday's rhetorical move by the Obama administration is significant since, along with the stronger sanctions, it's considered one of the only options left for the United States to put pressure on the Assad regime to end his brutal crackdowns against the Syrian people. Syrian-American activists and human-rights groups have long been pushing Obama to call for Assad to step down, but before yesterday's announcement, the administration only went so far as to condemn the violence and state that Assad has "lost his legitimacy" as a leader.

Obama's most recent statement comes alongside similar declarations from the leaders of France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Canada, to name a few. U.S. administration officials say that they expect other international powers to impose stricter financial sanctions on Syria as well, in order to further isolate Assad's regime.

According to media reports on Wednesday, Assad told United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon that the crackdowns by his regime had stopped. Nevertheless, according to administration officials, there could be struggles ahead for the Syrian people before Assad forfeits his power. |

CHIP SOMODEVILLA—GETTY IMAGES



Time to Invest in the United States

By Kira Zalan

Even with the recent debt debate, the gyrating stock market, and Obama's speeches on job creation, there are still many, if not more, questions about the economy. Lawrence Mishel, president of the Washington D.C.-based Economic Policy Institute, says that this is a good time for the federal government to invest in America's infrastructure. Mishel holds a Ph.D. in economics and for the last decade has been president of EPI, a left-leaning think tank that focuses on the economic interests of low- and middle-income Americans. An expert on labor markets, income distribution, and unions, Mishel has testified before Congress and describes him-

self as an economic "generalist." Mishel recently spoke with *U.S. News* about the state of the U.S. economy and the policies decision-makers in Washington are currently debating. Excerpts:

The word "recession" is in news reports every day. Is the United States actually in a recession?

Economists label recessions as periods when the economy is shrinking, and so technically we're not. But to any human being, this is certainly a recession. It would take many years of economics education to believe we're not in a recession. We've been locked into 9 percent unemployment or more since the spring of 2009. And that's higher unemployment than we got to at the worst moments of the last two recessions.

Some economists say the country needs inflation in order to recover. Do you agree?

A bit more inflation would be useful because it would help individuals trying to work through their overload of debt. Inflation helps debtors because you pay back your debts in cheaper dollars than you borrowed.

And what is the effect of individual or private debt on the economy?

Unfortunately, in recent years a lot of household consumption was based on taking on more debt rather than earning more. Debt on credit cards, on people's houses, and so on. That debt now is weighing people down, especially housing. So, we're not going to get the consumption growth we need until people have their debts in a better place.

What's behind the extreme ups and downs of the market?

It's a fool's game to believe that one can speak for the

"We've been locked into 9 percent unemployment or more since the spring of 2009. And that's higher unemployment than we got to at the worst moments of the last two recessions."

markets on a daily basis. But the general downward trend reflects disappointing growth in the first half and disappointing prospects for growth in the United States and Europe.

Did the Standard & Poor's credit rating downgrade play any role?

The S&P downgrade was interpreted as tightening the momentum towards budget cuts which, in my view, worries investors because it'll slow growth and weaken profitability. And we know that it is not because of the fear of the deficit because the price of government bonds went up and the interest rates to sell bonds went substantially down, to the lowest level since the "oh my God period" in 2008.

Should people panic over retirement savings invested in the market?

I think panic is not warranted. The stock market has done very well over the last few years, but this is not to say it's going to do well over the next two. People worried about their investments should support government policies that are pro-growth and pro-jobs with their voting behavior.

The deficit has been blamed for the nation's economic woes. Should it be?

We have a large deficit primarily because we have high unemployment, with people not earning money and paying taxes. The first step to getting

the deficit under control is actually to create jobs. Our deficit problem over the next ten years is primarily a lack of revenues due to tax cutting in the past. Our deficit problem more than ten years from now primarily is about accelerating healthcare costs in both the public and private sectors.

How can the government create jobs?

Our problem is that we have people that want to work in facilities that are underutilized, meaning there is too much supply. We need a greater market for our goods and services, which we're not getting because consumers are weighed down by debt and unemployment and mortgage problems. And businesses won't invest unless they see more business opportunities. This is why the federal government needs to support the demand for goods and services.

How can the government do that?

By doing activities like infrastructure spending, providing support to the unemployed who will spend that money. By the payroll tax holiday, which supports greater spending. But this necessarily requires tolerating higher deficits for the next few years. If you spend on

the one hand to increase demand for goods and services, but cut spending or raise taxes on the other, you're not really further ahead.

How can tax policy stimulate growth?

Lowering taxes can help stimulate demand by giving people more money. But that is a weaker method than government spending because people also save and buy imports. The notion that tax rates are what matter is, at best, something that affects the long-term growth. But our focus, in my view, should be on what are we doing to move the unemployment rate down over the next 18 months? And anything about tax rates as incentives for people to work and invest have very little to do with that.

Can you explain the differing positions on tax policy?

You essentially have a "supply-side view" component to what can happen if you mess with taxes and a "Keynesian" component. The Keynesian component is giving people money, then they spend it. The supply-siders really believe that lower tax rates stimulate more work and more investment. That latter effect, which I think is very weak, has nothing to do with getting us out of the recession and getting unem-

ployment down in the next year and a half. **Does the economy need additional stimulus spending?**

We absolutely do. We need to do things that are effective for jobs. With interest rates low, this is a wonderful time to borrow and invest in things that we need, like education, improve our schools, build roads and bridges, invest in energy efficiency. Hire people to do things we need, which should be done for the next two years and not lock in a higher deficit over the longer term.

Are jobs going to be the big issue during this election?

I hope so. My advice to voters is, ask the politicians what are they doing that will create jobs that lower the unemployment rate markedly over the next 18 months. Don't let anyone sell you a jobs program which is about how many jobs there are going to be in 2020. The politicians are not clear on these issues, including the president. For instance, patent reform and trade treaties have nothing to do with jobs that can be achieved over the next year and a half, even if you think they are good things. And it should not be in the same discussion as building roads and bridges, fixing schools, and providing unemployment benefits and a payroll tax holiday. |

Does the economy need more stimulus to recover? Weigh in at letters@usnews.com.



There's No Escaping a Crisis



August is often the cruelest month for presidents on vacation. Their holidays are often interrupted by crises at home or abroad, and no matter how much they need a break, sometimes they can't find solace or escape from the demands of the

world's toughest job.

As he begins his family holiday at Martha's Vineyard, President Obama is hoping to spend a calm, restful 10 days with his wife Michelle and their daughters Malia and Sasha. But history shows that many presidential vacations have been star-crossed.

In 1983, Reagan was forced to shorten his holiday at his Santa Barbara, California ranch after a Soviet missile downed a Korean airliner precipitating a superpower crisis. In 1985, Ronald Reagan canceled a trip to his ranch after 39 Americans were taken hostage in Beirut, Lebanon. Obama has already experienced such crisis moments. This year, Obama canceled visits to Montana and Williamsburg, Virginia to preside over crucial budget negotiations that were going off course in Washington.

But it was George W. Bush who suffered one of the worst fates of any president on vacation when he mishandled the federal response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. His job-approval rating was already sinking because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and his seeming disconnection from the public. Bush cut a vacation at his Texas ranch at bit short, but by then the damage to his image was done. The public thought he was out of touch and insensitive to the plight of the hurricane's victims along the Gulf Coast, especially New Orleans.

OLIVIER DOULIERY—GETTY IMAGES / POOL



The Obamas will spend 10 days on Martha's Vineyard.



PLAY

George H. W. Bush, his father, repeatedly had to deal with crises when he was at his family estate in Kennebunkport, Maine. In August 1990, Saddam Hussein's Iraq invaded Kuwait, precipitating the worst crisis of Bush's presidency. Bush handled the crisis from his seaside home, although with all the meetings, briefings, and phone calls, it was far from a relaxing holiday. Bush's vacation was similarly disrupted in August 1991 when hardliners almost succeeded in deposing Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Bush handled the start of the crisis from Kennebunkport, but finally agreed to return to Washington early when a hurricane began bearing down on the region and aides told Bush that the storm could disrupt essen-

tial communications. During that same vacation, Bush was criticized for getting away from Washington while the nation was mired in recession—a similar situation to where Obama is now. But Bush announced that he would not change his routine, and defiantly told reporters that he planned to play “a good deal of golf...a good deal of tennis, a good deal of horse-shoes, a good deal of fishing, a good deal

Bill Clinton spent what was likely one of the worst weeks of his life on vacation at Martha’s Vineyard.

of running—and some reading. I have to throw that in for the intellectuals out there.”

In August 1998, Bill Clinton spent what was likely one of the worst weeks of his life on vacation at Martha’s Vineyard, but the reason had nothing to do with policy, recession, or world crises. On August 17, he gave sworn testimony to lawyers from Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr’s office about his affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky. That evening, Clinton delivered a four-minute nationally televised address in which he confessed to a relationship that was “not

appropriate” and “wrong.” The next morning, August 18, Clinton and his wife Hillary and their daughter Chelsea flew to Martha’s Vineyard for a long-planned family holiday. Understandably, the president had a miserable time. Chelsea spent many hours with college friends who were also vacationing there, and Bill and Hillary scarcely talked. The president slept on a couch in their rented house. Work intruded as Clinton on August 20 gave the go-ahead for air strikes against terrorist camps being used by Osama bin Laden and his network of terrorists in Afghanistan and Sudan. Even though he could have managed the situation from the Vineyard, Clinton took a respite from his marital strife and flew back to Washington to oversee the operation. He returned to Martha’s Vineyard the next day, August 21, where the marital atmosphere remained tense.

As I pointed out in my 2005 book *From Mount Vernon to Crawford: A History of the Presidents and Their Retreats*, presidents are like anyone else in needing some R&R. But sometimes it’s just not possible. Reality intrudes, and, unlike the rest of us, a president can’t ignore the call of duty when something goes very wrong. |

Through Rain, Snow, or Sleet

1. Who was the first postmaster general, appointed by the Continental Congress?

- A. George Washington
- B. Benjamin Franklin
- C. Samuel Adams
- D. James Madison

2. About how many pieces of mail were processed by the U.S. Postal Service in 2010?

- A. 148 million
- B. 800 million
- C. 7 billion
- D. 171 billion

3. In what year did the Postal Service begin using ZIP codes?

- A. 1889
- B. 1904
- C. 1963
- D. 1980

4. What is the most common post office name?

- A. Clinton
- B. Madison
- C. Johnson
- D. Washington

5. The Postal Service still uses mules to deliver mail to American Indians in the

Grand Canyon.

- True
- False

6. In the third quarter of fiscal year 2011, the Postal Service suffered a net loss of how much?

- A. \$1.3 million
- B. \$7.1 million
- C. \$3.1 billion
- D. \$4.5 billion

7. The Postal Service receives half of its operating budget from tax dollars.

- True
- False

8. The smallest post office in the country is located in Ochopee, Fla. How many square feet is it?

- A. 25.6
- B. 61.3
- C. 100.2
- D. 105.3

9. Who is the current postmaster general of the United States?

- A. Kenneth L. Salazar
- B. Bill Daley
- C. Eric H. Holder, Jr.
- D. Patrick R. Donahoe

ANSWERS ON PAGE 20 >>

SPECIAL REPORT

The Mystery of the Dying Bees

Critical to agriculture, honey bees are rapidly declining, and scientists must find out why

By Keith Sinzinger

Since antiquity, honey bees have provided humans with a valuable service, a unique product, and seemingly endless inspiration. By turning nectar into honey, they produce a pure source of culinary pleasure (sometimes called liquid gold) that is also revered for its healing properties, from antibacterial agents to its ability to soothe sore throats.

In recent years, though, the bees have gone into rapid decline in many parts of the world, particularly the United States. A 2007 National Research Council study found “demonstrably downward” long-term population trends for honey bees



A honey bee colony

and several wild bee species (notably bumble bees) in North America. Managed honey bee colonies in the United States have dropped by about half since shortly after World War II, and a parasitic mite that arrived in the late 1980s virtually eliminated feral colonies. Though normal attrition of hives over the winter was once about 5 percent, the die-off of honey bees has been around 30 percent each year from 2007 through 2010, according to Agriculture Department surveys.

This decline is happening as bees are facing unprecedented pressures to increase their economic contributions. Though they've always been prized for their honey, their role as pollinators is worth about a hundred times as much, adding up to \$20 billion a year to the value of U.S. agriculture and making possible about a third of the food on the American plate. Some crops, such as almonds and blueberries, couldn't exist without them; others, like apples and broccoli, wouldn't exist in the fullness that consumers take for granted. But as their habitat is being destroyed, degraded, or fragmented by development and modern farming, bees are also struggling against a powerful assortment of new and old pests, pathogens, and pesticides.

Add to this the stress of being taken on the road to follow the blooms. While migratory beekeeping isn't new—using managed colonies for pollination dates back at least to an-



ERIC LOWENBACH—GETTY IMAGES

In recent years, honey bees have gone into rapid decline in many parts of the world, particularly the United States.

As pollinators, honey bees add up to \$20 billion to the value of U.S. agriculture each year.

cient Egypt—its modern scale has proved to be an immense challenge to bee health. The most prominent example of the honey bee's productivity and peril takes place each February in the almond groves of California. About half the colonies in the United States—upwards of 1.5 million hives, or some 75 billion bees—are trucked in from across the country for the brief pollination season. Almonds have become the state's most valuable export commodity, at about \$2 billion,

and productive acreage has grown 50 percent since 2004 to meet rising consumer demand. Large commercial beekeepers, meanwhile, rely on hive rentals for their livelihood, and they may collect up to \$200 for each colony they bring to California for several weeks of work. But they scramble to keep pace.

Once the colonies finish their work on the almonds, they may be sent on to the Pacific Northwest to pollinate apples; eastward for sunflowers,

canola, blueberries, or pumpkins; or south for citrus. This means laboring in fields with only one crop, though bees tend to be healthier when they can pollinate a variety of flowers. In addition, these migrant workers become exposed to maladies harbored by other colonies. “It’s a circuit,” says Kim Flottum, editor of the monthly journal *Bee Culture* and author of several books on beekeeping. “When bees are that close together for pretty much all season,” if any of them “sneeze, everybody’s gonna catch it.”

Given the economic impact, as well as implications for the broader environment, scientists and beekeepers are exploring various and multifaceted approaches to keeping bees healthy. The task remains difficult, however, and the recent phenomenon known as Colony Collapse Disorder or CCD—in which most of the hive’s workers uncharacteristically disappear, leaving their queen and her brood to perish—has only added to the challenge. Bees are “really complex creatures,” says May Berenbaum, head of the entomology department at the University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign. “Studying bees is like studying people. There

are so many variables.” But the fact that they’ve been around for millions of years, she says, indicates “a really sound genetic plan, with plenty of room for tweaking.”

Archaeologists have found evidence that bees spread, since the age of dinosaurs, in tandem with the development of flowering plants. Of the 20,000 bee species thought now to exist (about 4,000 in North America), some are solitary and a few are specialists. But the so-called European or Western honey bee (*Apis mellifera*), a native of Africa brought to America by the early colonists, is not just a versatile generalist, feeding on a large variety of plants, it’s also an intensely social insect—a factor that helps explain both its value and its vulnerability.

Rather than a collection of individuals or an extended family, a honey bee colony is more like an organism in constant motion. It can number 50,000 or more at its summer peak, and its complex division of labor—the all-female workforce includes nurses, builders, foragers, and guards—relies on a sophisticated communication system involving pheromones and motion, coupled with navigation

and memory skills. Workers returning to the colony, after flying up to seven miles, employ a variety of wiggles and waggles—dance steps—to tell their sisters what they’ve encountered in the hunt for food. They are able to provide an impressive level of detail including direction, distance, and food quality.

Experts suspect, however, that key elements of this coordinated behavior are being disrupted, leaving colonies unable to function properly, leading almost inevitably to collapse. A blend of factors may be pushing the bees’ naturally weak immune system past its limit, and the growing scientific consensus is that there is no single cause. “We don’t know if it’s the same group of factors in every outbreak,” says Kim Kaplan of the USDA Agricultural Research Service.

Increasingly, scientists are focusing on the effects and interactions of various pesticides used by growers (to protect their crops from harmful insects, fungi, and the like) and by beekeepers (usually to protect their bees from mites, in particular the aptly named *Varroa destructor*, their most direct threat). In recent

Some crops couldn’t exist without them; others wouldn’t exist in the fullness that consumers take for granted.

heart.org/quality



GET WITH THE GUIDELINES.

years, growers have been using seeds treated with a class of pesticides called neonicotinoids, which kill insects by attacking their nervous systems. As a “systemic” poison, these chemicals spread throughout plants, including their flowers and pollen. Though testing required by the Environmental Protection Agency found the treatment sublethal to bees in normal use, some scientists strongly suspect that these neurotoxins are acting synergistically with other poisons, multiplying their effects while accumulating in the colonies’ pollen and wax. Some European countries have banned or restricted the use of neonicotinoids, and the EPA is re-examining its testing requirements.

The sequencing of the honey bee genome in 2006 gave scientists an important new diagnostic and research tool, and has encouraged the search for stronger genetic lines, better able to fight off disease or poisoning. One leader in the field, Marla Spivak, professor of entomology at the University of Minnesota, has developed a strain known as Minnesota Hygienic, which emphasizes the bees’ natural tendency to keep the colony clean of parasites and disease. The recipient of a \$500,000 MacArthur Foundation fellowship in 2010, Spivak is working with beekeepers and breeders “to help them select for this trait” from among their commercial stocks as an alternative to fighting the pests with chemicals. Another focus of her research is the antimicrobial qualities of propolis, which

bees produce from plant resins to solidify their nests, but which also may give them a sort of “social immunity,” or colony-level defense. “The long-term solution is going to be breeding bees that are resistant to varroa and also these other viruses and pathogens,” says Norman Gary, professor emeritus at the University of California–Davis and a specialist in bee behavior. “This will take time.”

Spivak and many others in the field also emphasize the need for diversity in what bees eat, for their own health, and that of the planet. “Bees need sufficient floral resources surrounding the crop that provide pollen and nectar and that bloom consecutively throughout the growing season,” Spivak says. This would give them “good nutrition, which in turn boosts their immune systems.”

Despite all their benefits, bees also inspire fear in people because of their stings. But the risk is high only for a few: those people highly sensitive to the venom (one or two out of 1,000, who can carry epinephrine to counter severe, possibly fatal allergic reactions) and unsuspecting passersby who might disturb a nest of aggressive Africanized or “killer” bees, found in some areas of the American South. In general, the chance that a honey bee will sting a human is minimal, while the price for the bee is death. “Bees get a lot of bad press due to the behavior of their relatives, wasps and hornets. For the most part, they sting only in defense

of their colony,” says Berenbaum.

Amid the troubling trends for bees, the public is showing encouraging interest. “There’s been an incredible influx of new beekeepers in the last couple of years, especially in urban areas,” says Flottum. And, he adds, they do well in cities: “There’s very little competition from other bees. There’s always water, always plants blooming.” Even the White House has a hive now to pollinate first lady Michelle Obama’s vegetable garden. Last year it produced an impressive 160 pounds of honey.

Many of those relatively new to the hobby are trying to build strong colonies adapted to local conditions. “I don’t use chemicals and a lot of people I know try not to use the chemicals,” says Steve Hanlon, who keeps two hives in his suburban backyard in Anne Arundel County, Md. He hasn’t heard a single complaint about his colonies, he says, but rather quite the opposite; one neighbor was pleasantly surprised to find fruit on her tree for the first time. And as for that first taste from his and his bees’ hard work, Hanlon says, it was “the sweetest honey ever.” |



This story is excerpted from Amazing Animals, a U.S. News & World Report special edition. You can order it at www.usnews.com/animalsbook or by calling 1-800-836-6397.

Despite all their benefits, bees also inspire fear in people because of their stings. But the risk is high only for a few.

The GOP Needs to Escape the GOP



The Republican Party needs a Sister Souljah it can call its own. Or more precisely, the GOP needs a “Sister Souljah moment.”

Back in the summer of 1992, then-Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton criticized rapper Sister Souljah after she made offensive remarks about blacks killing whites instead of each other. The moment quickly entered the political lexicon as shorthand for a politician rebuking an extremist in his or her base in order to demonstrate to independents that they are not beholden to the party’s core special interests.

And judging by the disintegrating GOP brand, the party’s standard bearer will need such a moment once the candidate clears the primaries. However, none seems capable of executing such a pivot.

But boy do they need to. According to a recent CNN/Opinion Research poll, 33 percent of Americans view the GOP favorably, as compared to 59 percent who view it unfavorably. As recently as March, the party was at 44-48; and just before the 2010 midterms, they stood at 44-43. This is a stunning collapse—and a historic one. Since CNN started polling such things, the GOP has only once been 26 points underwater, in December 1998, when the party impeached President Clinton even

after a public rebuke in that year’s midterms. The party was only 14 points in the negative (38-52) in November 2006 and only 16 points upside down (38-54) when President Obama was elected in 2008.

And the CNN poll isn’t an outlier. A recent Gallup poll showed Democrats

The collapse of the Republican Party’s brand has been stunning—and historic.

with a 7 percent edge in the generic congressional ballot. One element likely driving the GOP’s numbers downward is the concurrent cratering of the Tea Party’s ratings. CNN’s poll, for example, pegs the movement’s disapproval rating at 51 percent, almost double its 26 percent level from January (before, you know, they started actually governing). Similarly, a recent *New York Times*/CBS poll found that the movement’s disapproval rating has gone from 29 percent in April to 40 percent this month.

But wait, conservative readers are no doubt saying, Congress’s approval rating is at a historic low (13 percent, according to Gallup) so surely public anger has tarred the Democratic brand as well.

After all, a fell tide sinks all boats. Not so much. According to CNN, the Democrats retain 47 percent approval and 47 percent disapproval, a level it has basically hung around at since January of last year.

The reason for this is clear: The GOP deliberately created a debt crisis which endangered and ultimately harmed the nation’s creditworthiness. Despite overwhelming evidence that the public prefers to solve the deficit and debt issues with a combination of tax increases and spending cuts, the GOP has stubbornly refused to even consider revenue hikes. And that is perhaps the GOP’s most fundamental problem. Poll after poll shows that independent voters prefer leaders who compromise over politicians who refuse to move from their positions. But the same polls show that Tea Party supporters have a diametrically opposite view. So GOPers, mindful of the incumbent seats the conservative fringe collected in primary challenges last year, have disdained compromise as a dirty word.

That’s why Obama (whose 41 percent approval looks grand next to Congress’s rating) is gearing up for a Truman-esque run against Congress and its stubborn gridlock. If Congress doesn’t act on the jobs plan he will unveil in September, he

said this week, “then we’ll be running against a Congress that’s not doing anything for the American people, and the choice will be very stark and will be very clear.” In keeping with his post-partisan brand, the president is hitting the Congress as a whole rather than just House Republicans. But he does so knowing that the GOP has taken the bulk of the damage from anti-Congress sentiment.

And you can be sure that Obama will do everything he can to pin the toxic Congress on the GOP nominee. Which brings us back to the question of a GOP Sister Souljah moment. Can we expect Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry, or Mitt Romney to publicly disassociate him or herself from the party’s toxic brand?

Take them one at a time. The embodiment of the no-compromise style the public disdains, Bachmann seems congenitally incapable of such a move unless it’s a reverse Sister Souljah moment, where she castigates her party for being insufficiently beholden to its base.

Then there is the newest contestant, Texas Gov. Rick Perry. While the last Lone Star governor to run for president couched his conservatism as compassion-

ate and cast himself as a “uniter, not a divider,” Perry has a history of being a rhetorical bomb-thrower who relishes a fight, and not someone given to apologize for taking hard lines. His lunatic comments about Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke’s efforts to stimulate the economy being potentially “treasonous” are classic Perry. He has shown some willingness to buck conservatives on immigration. But he seems an unlikely candidate for a stand against movement orthodoxy, especially because he seems to be positioning himself as the thorough-going, unwavering conservative in the race, in contrast to the abject flip-flopper Romney.

The former Massachusetts governor, ironically, seems perfectly capable of a Sister Souljah moment, but he is also ideally positioned for it to backfire. Clinton’s rebuke of Souljah was a logical step in a long-term effort to move his party to the center. Romney, by contrast, has spent most of the last decade trying to burnish his conservative bona fides. Publicly breaking with the right after securing the nomination would only reinforce his reputation as a transparently say-anything politician. |

Does the GOP need a “Sister Souljah” moment? Weigh in at letters@usnews.com

The Military Way

By Jessica Rettig



Rather than civilians and diplomats, the United States is increasingly being represented overseas by men and women in uniform. According to long-time foreign correspondent Stephen Glain, America has become an empirical power—and a militarized one at that. In his new book, *State vs. Defense: The Battle to Define America’s Empire*, Glain, who is also a blogger for *U.S. News*, explains how the United States has put increasing emphasis on preserving its military presence in the world, putting American lives and its economic well-being in peril. He recently talked with *U.S. News* about how the United States shifted toward militarism and how difficult it would be to reverse course. Excerpts: **Was there a turning point where the country began to favor militarism over diplomacy?**

I interpret the inflection point as the Truman Doctrine. Militarists in the Truman administration took this and waved it about as a manifesto for a major U.S. offensive response to the “Soviet threat.” Now, fast forward to 1992, in the twilight of the George Herbert Walker Bush administration, and the Defense Department produced a document called the Defense Planning Guidance. This document makes it very specific that it is the policy of the United States to pre-empt any regional power that may compete with the United States for influence abroad.

The title of your book suggests a battle between the State Department and the Pentagon. Is it that polarized?

The title is really smart, but it tends to—as the publishing industry does—imply that it’s diplomats versus the military, and that’s not the case. Far from being the lead agency in

the militarization of the foreign policy, the Pentagon, by law, has to do what civilians tell it to do. And of the many personalities who I characterize as militarists, only two are from the military. The rest are all civilians. These are people who interpret the world as a dangerous place, and interpret the United States as being perennially surrounded by some kind of threat. That assumption is totally erroneous.

It seems like there's almost a self-fulfilling prophecy in the militaristic mind-set.

Yes. If you embrace as your policy control of what the Pentagon calls the global commons, which is an artful and euphemistic way of saying the world, then you're going to get bloody one way or another.

You say in the book that President George W. Bush should have acknowledged the September 11 attacks as "the tragic but incidental price of American foreign policy."

What did you mean by that?

[Bush] was being extremely disingenuous when he implied that the attacks were about our way of life. As he put it, it was about who we are, not what we do. All you have to do is Google "bin Laden fatwa" and you'll get the full text of his 1996 manifesto. [Bin Laden] makes it very clear that he is waging war against the United States for its support of Israel, for its deploy-

ment of 5,000 troops in Saudi Arabia, for its support of what he regards as apostate regimes. His grievances against the United States which provoked the attack were secular in nature, not religious. A statesmanlike response would have been for the president to say, "Yes, we were attacked for our policies, but these policies are just,

"I've also been saying that some kind of conflict with China is inevitable over the next several decades."

these are the policies of our country, and no attack of any kind will make us waver in support of them." So, acknowledge the motivation, acknowledge the costs, and then make the declaration that these are costs worth paying. Now, personally, I don't think they are worth the price.

Do you think that defense spending cuts will reverse this militaristic trend?

I hear a lot about cuts, but I don't hear much about the need to re-examine our commitments overseas. Until we start asking ourselves why we are spending an enormous amount of money maintaining huge military deployments on behalf of

Korea, Japan, and the European states which are the richest countries in the world, we're still going to be in the position of trying to keep something going that's unsustainable.

But if these deployments aren't sustainable, how will they go on?

They're sustainable for as long as the Pentagon insists they're necessary, against all evidence to the contrary. It's just going to be harder to maintain. So, it is sustainable at a very high cost and self-sacrifice.

Can the trend be reversed?

When you look at this military buildup that is going on in China, and the assets we already have in place, I don't see how you can reconcile any sort of demilitarization with something like that, even with the budget cuts. The likely scenario is that they're going to maintain the empire with lesser sources. They're going to have to take that out of the hide of our people in uniform and American taxpayers. I just see a bad situation getting worse. I hope I'm wrong. I've also been saying that some kind of conflict with China is inevitable over the next several decades, and I hope I'm wrong about that too. |

Is the United States too focused on the military? Weigh in at letters@usnews.com.



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Answers to Quiz

1. **B.** Benjamin Franklin
2. **D.** 171 billion pieces of mail
3. **C.** 1963
4. **A.** Clinton
5. **True.** Mules still bring mail, food, and other supplies to the people.
6. **C.** \$3.1 billion
7. **False.**
8. **B.** 61.3 square feet
9. **D.** Patrick R. Donahoe

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Recent chatter from the Thomas Jefferson Street bloggers, who weigh in on current events at usnews.com

BRAD BANNON

The Tea Party Makes a Train Wreck of the GOP



The car wreck President Obama saw on the side of the road on his bus trip in Iowa was what was left of the GOP presidential race after the Tea Party's demolition derby in Ames. Watching the Tea Party's presidential nomination campaign is repulsive, but you can't take your eyes off it. The religious right believes Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann is God's gift to the GOP. Actually, the congresswoman is God's gift to a beleaguered Obama. And even though she says she's not running for president, ex-Alaska governor Sarah Palin showed up in Iowa. She may want to listen to the country music classic "How Can I Miss You If You Won't Go Away?" Former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney said last week that corporations are people too. His net worth shows that he is a corporation, so you can understand his confusion. Speaking of corporations, the Republican Party is now a wholly owned subsidiary of the Tea Party. The GOP is now the POT, the Party of Tea.

LAURA CHAPIN

Perry's Texas Gained from Federal 'Overspending'



On Monday, Texas Gov. Rick Perry issued a veiled threat against Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke. Perry's spokesman didn't disavow the statement, claiming that it was an expression of frustration with overspending in Washington. But without that Washington spending, Perry's home county would probably go under. From 1996 to 2010, Haskell County, Texas, got more than \$232 million in taxpayer-funded farm subsidies from the federal government. At just under 6,000 residents, that comes to around \$40,000 per person. The Lone Star State is the No. 1 recipient of taxpayer-funded farm subsidies in the country, with more than \$24.4 billion in subsidies in that same period. Add to that more than a quarter of Haskell County residents are over 65 and eligible for Social Security and Medicare, and it's evident that Washington is pretty consequential in the lives of people there.

DOUG HEYE

New York Times Hit Piece Takes Aim at Issa



California Rep. Darrell Issa's strident criticisms of the Obama administration and his steady presence on cable news over the past few years have put him in the spotlight. Now, with the gavel of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, where he leads multiple investigations of the Obama administration, Issa has become a target. Which makes the 2,700-word piece critical of the California Republican in Monday's *New York Times* hardly surprising. In devoting so much space to Issa, the *Times* is on the attack, doing work no doubt pleasing to Democratic leaders. Insinuation after insinuation is lobbed, but there's little, if anything, in the way of substance. During slow August recesses, such stories can spread like wildfire. It's too early to know if the "paper of record" will truly correct the record.

JAMIE STIEHM

Obama Needs a Serious Jobs Agenda



There's a phrase the wordmeister-in-chief should use more often. The first word is jobs, followed by an action word: agenda, program, plan, or even creation. President Obama still seems reluctant to confront the plague of his presidency: joblessness. Extending unemployment benefits or the payroll tax break don't cut it as a serious jobs agenda. Republican presidential contender Mitt Romney, for one, is doing just the opposite. If a Republican challenger can seize the FDR/New Deal ground from a Democratic president, then the irony will run rich indeed. Obama mentioned "jobs" about a dozen times this month in speeches and remarks, but his gifts as an orator seem silenced on this topic. A word of advice to a president who will face voters in 2012: While hanging out on the Vineyard, remember jobs are the only thing back on the mainland.

More wit and insight from Thomas Jefferson Street are at www.usnews.com/opinion.

Who Won the Debate?

I didn't watch the entire debate and I should have ["Editor's Note," Aug. 12]. The small portion I watched concerned the 10th amendment to the Constitution. I thought Ms. Bachman was shrill and rude, Mr. Romney elusive, and the moderators had little control of the event. They all seemed intent on bashing the president, and I did not see any signs of leadership. It's unfortunately become standard fare. The system is broke and the only way to fix it, in my opinion, is to vote out all incumbents. I would include all state and local offices as well. The president has very little control of events, and the leadership in Congress is non-existent.

GEORGE GIESER, III *Spokane, Wash.*

Government of the People

Let's not kid ourselves ["The Bickering and Brinkmanship Must Stop," Aug. 12].



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL—GETTY IMAGES / POOL

Washington reflects us, because we voted them into office. Look, we've known for decades that Social Security in all its forms was on a collision course. We've discussed for years how likely "the young" were to want to support "the old" when the Baby Boom tipping point came. We taught those very same "less amenable to sacrifice, less patient" what to value, as we stuffed them with Game Boys and iPods, and drove them everywhere they wanted to go. We fiddled while the small

fires were lit, and ignored the smoke as it started to drift, and now that we are nearly engulfed, we want to blame the government? Remember civics? "Government" in a republic like ours, is just us. It behaves no better nor worse than we require. Isn't looking for a scapegoat just a little lame? If we want to face where the buck stops, take a good look in the nearest mirror. Nations always rise or fall according to the true character of its people. That would be us.

SUSAN STEPHENS *Midland, Mich.*

The Straw Poll Circus

One of the major reasons that the straw poll is held is to raise money for the Republicans (they candidly admit it). The votes are bought and paid for at this "circus." It costs 30 bucks to attend and vote. How many people can afford to attend a circus?

ROGER CRAWFORD *Stony Run, Pa.*

EDITOR'S NOTE By Brian Kelly



Do you think President Obama has a vacation problem? Even before he headed off to

Martha's Vineyard this week, the chorus of criticism grew deafening. And there are, to be sure, a few unsolved problems on his desk. It's also true that heckling a president for taking time off—and where he takes that time—is an honored tradition. Crises have coincided with presidential retreats from the republic's founding. Is there anything different about Obama? Some might argue that it's more about perception than reality, that Obama's vacations highlight a sense that he's not engaged with the nation's problems. What do you think? Are the critics petty? Or is there a problem with the president and his family hitting the beach? Please share your thoughts at editor@usnews.com.

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Why We Need to Reform the Tax Code Now



The drumbeat of default began quietly. First the housing bubble burst and housing prices began to turn down for the first time since the end of World War II. People fell behind with their mortgages or abandoned them, and this hammered the mortgage-backed securities industry which had grown without anyone—including the rating agencies—bothering to scrutinize it. The failures there unraveled as a series of collapses in various financial assets. The crescendo was a financial crisis that presented us with what we now call the Great Recession.

The federal government intervened in ways that seemed unprecedented, first to save the banking system with the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP, and then with a stimulus intended to get the economic engine going again. The financial tsunami had created a \$3 trillion hole in the economy, and the \$787 billion “stimulus” of 2009 was never going to do the trick. What’s more, it was a rushed, badly designed, and poorly sustained package. The stimulus ended the danger of a Great Depression panic, it succeeded in saving Chrysler and GM, and somewhat restrained the growth in unemployment. But clearly it failed to cre-

ate the dynamic cycle of growing sales, profits, and employment feeding off and compounding each other, and eventually leading to increased federal revenues from putting people back to work.

Half measures (quarter measures!) may be worse than nothing at all, since the result was widespread public disillusionment over the productivity of fiscal stimulus. Instead of jobs and growth, the deficit took center stage. The president shelved the sensible report of the bipartisan Bowles-Simpson deficit commission he had ordered up. For three consecutive years, deficits have exceeded a trillion dollars a year, causing national debt as a percentage of GDP to grow from 40 percent in 2008 to approximately 72 percent by the end of the next fiscal year. Our debt now exceeds \$14.3 trillion, and in this fiscal year alone, the budget deficit is projected at a staggering \$1.645 trillion. Even at this level, the Congressional Budget Office found that the budget overestimated revenues and under-estimated costs. During this fiscal year, we are accumulating over \$4.5 billion of debt every day or over \$3 million every minute. Federal revenues will have declined to about 15 percent of GDP while spending is approaching 25 percent of GDP, a

10 point gap that is unsustainable. In this fiscal year, mandatory spending alone will exceed all federal receipts. Yet the prospects are that government spending will continue to soar into the future as baby boomers retire and draw more heavily on Medicare and Social Security. Just think, in 1960 there were five workers to support every person over age 65. By 2040, there will be only two workers to foot that bill.

Further, we are looking at larger U.S. budget deficits than previously estimated because our economic growth forecasts have deteriorated. A half-point reduction in growth averaged over 10 years can add as much as another trillion dollars to the national debt. Nor will the recent bill agreed to by the president and the congressional leadership make a substantial difference. It merely confirms the spending levels already negotiated for 2011 through 2013. In this so-called debt crisis deal, the actual cut to the 2012 budget—the last budget over which this Congress has control—was only \$21 billion in real reductions out of a total expenditure of \$3.7 trillion. After that, everything is susceptible to changes by a future Congress. Indeed all the caps and sequesters in the current debt-limit leg-

islation can be reformulated in 2013 to reflect the will of future Congresses on discretionary spending. The additional \$1.5 trillion supposedly to be agreed to by the so-called super-committee comes without any agreement on what the baseline is from which that figure is to be subtracted. This deficit reduction bill kicked the tough choices down the road. So why should we be surprised when Standard & Poor's reduced the credit rating of the United States from AAA to AA+, an event which shocked the financial world.

Current national debt levels are only one part of the way to measure our finances, for it is focused only on the past. Looking to the future and reviewing the nation's projected revenue and expenses over the next generation, as an aging population turns a generation of workers into a generation of beneficiaries, we are looking at dramatically growing deficits. The fundamental drivers here are the entitlements, especially Medicare and Medicaid, and there is no reason to believe that the Obama administration will expend an ounce of energy on entitlement reform, which is critical to addressing our fiscal crisis.

When Republicans took control of the House, they made it clear they were not going to wave through an increase in

the debt ceiling as Congress typically has done in the past. They believed America's deficits were unsustainable and exploited their ability to block a hike in the debt ceiling with the objective of making the point that, as Speaker of the House John Boehner put it, "We should be talking about cuts of trillions, not just billions."

The recent debt-ceiling crisis shows how hard it will be to get our deficits under control. Say what you will about the legislation's theoretical \$2.1 trillion in spending cuts, a good portion comes from winding down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that was already in the cards. This must be seen in the context of the current projections of the House Budget Committee: After the debt-ceiling deal, federal outlays over the next decade will still exceed revenues by approximately \$7.8 trillion, which would raise our total national debt to over \$22 trillion.

The debt-ceiling fight poisoned an already toxic atmosphere in Washington. What made a grand bargain so difficult is that both sides made it a matter of principle, making it much more difficult to split any differences. Democrats remain unyielding on cuts to entitlement programs.

Republicans have crystallized behind a no-tax agenda and a wish to see a vastly smaller government constrained by lower taxes. Yet to address the gap, we need both cuts to entitlement programs and greater revenues from taxes. And what has the world witnessed? It has seen incompetent American leadership that seems to be un-

The political games confirmed the worst of suspicions about our system: It is utterly dysfunctional.

able to conceive and implement a sensible fiscal policy. Filibusters, late-night cliffhangers, and presidential vetoes may look good on TV, but they play havoc with the image of a country needing to act in its best interests.

The result is public dismay. Raising the debt ceiling was inescapable. Failure to raise the debt limit would have meant the federal government couldn't pay its bills, which may have undermined the nation's creditworthiness and might well have plunged the economy into a much deeper recession. But the political games surrounding the agreement simply con-

firmed the worst of suspicions about our political system: To wit, that it is utterly dysfunctional.

It is hard to see how our slowing growth will provide the revenues we need—not when the real unemployment rate exceeds 18 percent, reflecting huge numbers of Americans unemployed, underemployed or not even looking for work. The University of Michigan consumer sentiment survey dropped to 54.9 in August from 63.7 in July, the lowest level since Jimmy Carter was president. During recessions, the index typically clocks in at 74. Consumers are still burdened by the debts they have run up. Businesses are reluctant to invest with their huge cash reserves because consumer spending is stalled. Some people now suspect that we are so becalmed there is at least a one in three chance the economy will fall back into a recession.

In effect then, as Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke noted, the "economy still needs a good deal of support." But, in an era of deficits in excess of \$1.5 trillion, nobody gets very far pitching another round of federal spending or pro-growth tax rate cuts. The only hope on that score seems to be the Obama administration's willingness at last to get behind the idea of an infrastructure bank—to "pivot"

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on jobs is the way it is put. It is a good idea. I wrote about such a bank longer ago than I care to remember. It is supported by a broad base of officials such as former governors Ed Rendell and Arnold Schwarzenegger and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Another approach that deserves serious attention is tax reform, again long-canvassed. Both the Bowles-Simpson commission and the bipartisan

Rivlin-Domenici commission put forth proposals to reduce and flatten personal income taxes by reforming the tax code. Its size and complexity currently forces Americans to spend a combined eight billion hours complying with it annually, and its provisions discourage the working, saving, investing, and entrepreneurship that are vital to growth and prosperity.

The value of trading in all of those un-

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deserved special tax benefits for a much lower tax rate in the range of 25 percent would be enormously positive and help grow the economy. This might be the

most feasible way to cope with deficits and to generate the funds to deal with our third-world level of infrastructure, our third-tier educational system, and the enormous gaps in the preparedness of our workforce in the new era of technological change.

So what are we waiting for? As Winston Churchill used to write on his memos, "Action This Day!" |

THE BIG PICTURE

Washington National Cathedral

