
From: Gregory Brown [REDACTED]
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Subject: Greg Brown's Weekend Reading and Other Things.. 1/17/2016

DEAR FRIEND.....

Which Political Party Has the Best Record on the Economy</=pan>

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The=graph above is the work of Economist Steven Stoft of ◆=A0zFacts.com. It shows the average annual rate of private sec=or job creation during each spell that a party held the presidency. =r. Stoft created this data by analyzing 72 years' worth of jobs da=a from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. 72 years was sele=ted as the time frame because each party has controlled the presidency for=36 of those 72 years. During those 36 years each, 58 million jobs ha=e been created under Democratic presidents, but only 26 million jobs under=Republican Presidents. That means that for all of modern American hi=tory, jobs have been created more than twice as fast when we have elected =emocrats to the highest office.

Another way to look at the same data is to consider job growth i= terms of the percentage change in the number of jobs held during the peri=d that each party controls the executive branch:

As on the first graph, the Democrats are cons=stently outperforming the Republicans.

Republi=ans like to tell you that they are the true stewards of the economy, excep= that a study from two respected academic economists concluded that, since=the late 1940s, the economy has consistently performed better under Democr=tic presidents than under Republican ones. =C2◆And the gap is huge and the arithmetic on partisa= differences is actually stunning. <=pan style="font-family:Georgia,serif;font-size:12pt;line-height:17.12000=8392334px">From 1949 to 2013 — a period when the White House was r=ughly split between parties — the economy grew at an average annua= rate of 3.33 percent, but growth under Democratic presidents averaged 4.3= percent and under Republicans, 2.54 percent. Jobs, stocks and living stan=ards all advanced faster under Democrats. <=span>Over the whole period, the economy was in recession for =9 quarters; Democrats held the White House during only eight of those=quarters.

But isn't the story different for the Obama years? Not as much as you think. Yes, the recovery from the Great Recession of 2007/-2009 has been sluggish. Even so, the Obama record compares favorably on a number of indicators with that of George W. Bush. In particular, despite all the talk about "job-killing" policies, private-sector employment is eight million higher than it was when Barack Obama took office, six times the job gains achieved under his predecessor. The same pattern emerges regardless of whether you look at the stock market, GDP growth, income growth, debt as a percentage of GDP or if you compare how the U.S. economy performs under the parties relative to our closest economic peers. The economy simply performs better- much better- under Democratic leadership.

Being a Liberal Democrat, I would like to attribute the superior performance of the economy under Democratic Presidents was mostly due to their liberal policies. But it is actually not totally true as most economists doubt presidents can control the economy. So if presidents didn't do it, who or what did? Blinder and Watson (authors of the study) march through economic studies. Their conclusion: About half of the Democrats' advantage reflected "good luck" — favorable outside events or trends. Three dominate.

Global "oil shocks" — steep increases in prices, which depressed economic growth — were the largest, because they hurt Republicans more than Democrats. They occurred in 1973 (Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford), 1979 (Jimmy Carter but affecting Ronald Reagan's first term) and 2008 (George W. Bush). Statistically, they explain slightly more than a quarter of the Democratic-Republican gap.

Productivity — efficiency — was the next largest contributor. But presidents can't magically raise productivity; it reflects too many forces: research, improved schools, better management, entrepreneurs. Although Bill Clinton benefited from an Internet boom, he didn't invent the Internet. Productivity gains occurred disproportionately under Democratic presidents and accounted for nearly a fifth of the gap, said the report.

War was the final factor. Military buildups for the Korean and Vietnam wars boosted growth in the Truman and Johnson presidencies, respectively. Since the late 1940s, inflation-adjusted defense spending rose 5.9 percent annually under Democrats and only 0.8 percent under Republicans. The buildups accounted for about an eighth of the Democratic advantage.

Recently the Wall Street Journal published an op-ed article by Carly Fiorina titled "Hillary Clinton Flunks Economics," ridiculing Mr. Clinton's assertions that the U.S. economy does better under Democrats. "America," declared Ms. Fiorina, "needs someone in the White House who actually knows how the economy works."

Since President Barack Obama first took office:

- * The economy has added nearly 8.4 million jobs — more than six times the number gained under George W. Bush.
- ♦=A0 The number of job openings doubled, to a record 5.7 million.
- * ♦=A0 Nearly 15 million fewer people lack health insurance coverage.
- * =C2♦ Corporate profits are at record levels; stock prices have more than doubled.
- * However, median household income was down 3 percent as of 2014, and the official poverty rate was 1.6 percentage points higher.
- * ♦=A0 The rate of home ownership has dropped to the lowest point in nearly half a century.
- * =/span>The federal debt owed to the public has more than doubled * up 107 percent.

Republicans talk about economic growth all the time. They attack Democrats for *job*killing* government regulations, they promise great things if elected, they predicate their tax plan on the assumption that growth will soar and raise revenues. Democrats are far more cautious. Yet Mrs. Clinton is completely right about the record: historically, the economy has indeed done better under Democrats. This contrast raises two big questions. First, why has the economy performed better under Democrats? Second, given that record, why are Republicans so much more inclined than Democrats to boast about their ability to deliver growth? Certainly no Democratic candidate would be justified in promising dramatically higher growth if elected. And in fact, Democrats never do.=C2* Republicans, however, always make such claims: Every candidate with a real chance of getting the G.O.P. nomination is claiming that his tax plan would produce a huge growth surge * a claim that has no basis in historical experience. Why?

For instance every Republican running for the Presidency talks about the bad Obama economy except that the U.S. still has the #1 economy in the world and it is stronger in almost every measure than every other major industrialized country, with the exception of China which is a state-controlled economy that most Americans abhor. Looking at the metrics, (although the U.S. economy is still limping), it isn't nearly as bad as Republicans claim... And here is why:

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Part of the answer is epistemic closure: modern conservatives generally live in a bubble into which inconvenient facts can't penetrate. One constantly hears assertions that Ronald Reagan achieved economic and job growth never matched before or since, when the reality is that Bill Clinton surpassed him on both measures. Right-wing news media trumpet the economic disappointments of the Obama years, while hardly ever mentioning the good news. So the myth of conservative economic superiority goes unchallenged. Beyond that, however, Republicans need to promise economic miracles as a way to sell policies that overwhelmingly favor the donor class.

It would be nice, if even one major G.O.P. candidate would come out against big tax cuts for the 1 percent. And when they suggest that they do, as Trump initially led people to think, we find after reading the small print this is not true. All of the major GOP players have called for cuts that would subtract trillions from revenue. To make up for this lost revenue, it would be necessary to make sharp cuts in big programs — that is, in Social Security and/or Medicare. But Americans overwhelmingly believe that the wealthy pay less than their fair share of taxes, and even Republicans are closely divided on the issue. ♦ And the public wants to see Social Security expanded, not cut. So how can a politician sell the tax cut agenda? The answer is, by promising those miracles, by insisting that tax cuts on high incomes would both pay for themselves and produce wonderful economic gains. <=p>

As Paul Krugman wrote last month in a Washington Post op-ed — Hence the asymmetry between the parties. Democrats can afford to be cautious in their economic promises precisely because their policies can be sold on their merits. Republicans must sell an essentially unpopular agenda by confidently declaring that they have the ultimate recipe for prosperity — and hope that nobody points out their historically poor track record. Also what we do know is that government policies do matter. Cutting food stamp, after school and programs for the elderly can hurt tens of millions of men, women and children. And almost every economist is in an agreement that Reagan inspired supply-side economic tax cuts not only caused the deficit to mushroom it accelerated economic inequality, as well as squeezed the Middle Class. And if this is called being a strong steward of the country's economy..... ♦ it ain't so.... <=i>

THE ONE THING YOU SHOULD KNOW

They Would Have Been Slaughtered

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For the third time in less than two years, a Bundy is at the center of another armed anti-government standoff to protect their fantasy constitution and force the United States to surrender its land to the white anti-government insurgency. First it was a Bundy summoning armed militias to confront federal officers in Nevada to start a second revolutionary war; all because in Bundy-world government land belongs to the insurgency. Then it was the Bundy-clan tearing down gates to trespass and destroy Native American heritage and burial sites in Utah's Recapture Canyon; all because in the Bundy-world sacred Native American and government land belongs to armed insurgents with Gadsden and American flags a-waving; and something about a sheriff determining what is constitutional and what is tyranny.

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Two weeks ago it happened again in Oregon where armed Bundy insurgents broke into and seized a federal building and land because in the rebels' mind that land and property belongs to armed Bundy insurgents. The all-too-typical insurgency began when "the Bundy-ites" protested the conviction of two Oregon ranchers who admitted they committed arson that burned 130 acres in a wildlife refuge on federal government land. The two ranchers have stated they do not want the Bundy insurgents' help and that none of armed militiamen are welcomed or "speak for the Hammond family."

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The insurgency's leader, Ammon Bundy, claims their invasion is to force the "federal government to restore the people's constitutional rights." Bundy says a federally-designated wildlife refuge or government-owned land is "destructive to the people," and the government is doing it specifically "against the people." Now Bundy claims the insurgency invaded Oregon and seized federal property because the government "has to be put in its place because we've

One immediately noticed that law enforcement has not responded to very angry, white, heavily-armed anti-government militias daring the government to show their faces; a completely different kind of response peaceful African American demonstrators see from law enforcement. But according to an anti-government militia expert, there is justification for America's racist criminal justice double-standard.

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As such, law enforcement learned how to handle heavily-armed white criminals as opposed to how they handle peaceful African American protesters. If they are Black, in their neighborhoods, unarmed and pose no violent threat, law enforcement instantly deploys military-vehicles, the National Guard, and heavily-armed police soldiers to literally beat down and force protestors to disperse. It is what law enforcement did in Ferguson and Baltimore with impunity and earned high praise from Republicans, various conservatives, the Ku Klux Klan, and armed Aryan militias.

However, when confronted with heavily-armed white militias who broke into and took over federal property, the best approach according to law enforcement "is to stay away and maybe figure out how to bring a peaceful end to the standoff." The armed militia expert said that law enforcement has learned how best to accommodate armed anti-government insurgents; many of whom are current or past law enforcement.

Remember, none of the Bundy clan or their armed militia supporters have faced any criminal charges for their sedition in Nevada. No Republicans and the conservative patriot movement will not allow it and it is evidently why the insurgency descended on Oregon and invaded a federal refuge without fear of prosecution.

It is noteworthy that, regardless what the Bundy insurgency claims, their motivation is not founded on "restoring the people's constitutional rights;" it is about inciting a revolution against the government the insurgency claims has no legal right to own land. It was the driving force behind the Nevada and Utah incidents and one Republicans serving the interests of the Koch brothers wholly support and condone as patriotic.

One of the Bundy clan admitted the invasion in Oregon is a preview of the insurgency expanding to seize federal land nationwide; a long-sought-after goal of the Koch brothers. Ammon Bundy said, "We will occupy this as long as necessary as a place for individuals across the United States to claim their lands and resources. The American people can't get ahead because the federal government is using the land and if it is continued, it will put the people in poverty."

Bundy's proposal is to marshal as many "armed patriots" as possible to come and live in a "Bundy-proclaimed" self-rule zone independent of federal authority he, like his father, claim have no authority; especially over federal land. As a Bundy lieutenant claimed, the insurgency's hope is that the invasion and occupation in Oregon is just the beginning of a nation-wide movement. Blane Cooper said the insurgents have "had enough tyranny" and that their illegal actions "will not stop here. The hope is this spreads through the whole country, the whole United States."

Obviously no-one wants violence or bloodshed, except of course the Bundy insurgency. One of the Bundy brothers, Ryan, said the insurgents "are willing to kill and be killed in necessary;" likely to spark the 2nd revolutionary war promised during the Bundy ranch standoff in Nevada. However, the Bundy insurgents know they will never be killed, or confronted, or investigated, and certainly not charged with a crime.

This event, like the two previous attempts to incite a rebellion, will never be prosecuted because the rebels are white and hate the federal government. What nearly every American alive today knows if that the insurgents were people of color, Hispanics or Muslims, law enforcement would already have swooped in and slaughtered them not with extreme prejudice. But because they are white, heavily armed, hate the government and claim to oppose tyranny the insurgency will continue unabated and Republicans will hail them as patriots.

In 1981, the black liberation group MOVE had relocated itself into a row house in West Philadelphia. MOVE soon faced complaints from neighbors about its boisterous political activities, which included loudly airing political messages during all times of the day. By 1985, a number of MOVE members faced arrest warrants for charges including parole violations and illegal possession of firearms, and Philadelphia police moved to evict the group from their building and arrest their members. MOVE resisted the arrest, and refused to leave their row house.

Police responded with tear gas, and some in MOVE retaliated by firing at police. This was when Philadelphia police commissioner Gregore Sambor made a radical call: he ordered a helicopter to drop an explosive device on top of the building to blow open the bunker at the top. The bomb set off a fire that quickly spread, eventually burning down 61 homes and leaving 250 people homeless. 11 people in the MOVE row-house died, including five children.

After seizing government property in an armed insurrection, with the goal of inciting an armed rebellion, let's see how this latest Bundy incident plays out and if they are even arrested, put in jail, fined and/or given lengthy prison sentences. As such, please understand that in America today, there definitely is a double standard based on race and religion. Because the one thing that we know, if these same people were Black, Hispanic or Muslim they would be dead by now.

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Something Is Fishy With This Story

Maddow: Pentagon's captured sailor story 'a pile of bull'

<http://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow/watch/pentagon-s-iran-incident-story-doesn-t-add-up-601512003829>

Like many Americans I really didn't grasp the story about the two US military vessels that were taken hostage by the Iranian military off the coast, other than it happened on the same day of President Obama's last State of the Union address. Despite the fact that 10 American sailors were being in Iranian custody, President Barack Obama stuck to his State of the Union script last and made no mention of the incident, instead touting his nuclear deal with Tehran. Press reports said that one of the vessels experienced a mechanical problem, losing propulsion and drifting into Iranian territorial waters and that the other Navy boat would not leave those sailors behind and they were picked up by Iran's Revolutionary Guard. Iranian officials immediately acknowledged that all ten sailors were safe, treated accordingly, would be released and allowed to continue up to Bahrain.

Arizona Sen. John McCain, once Obama's GOP challenger for the presidency, blasted the speech for not including any reference to the incident in the Persian Gulf. "Ten American sailors have been taken into custody in Iran," he said in a statement. "But President Obama completely omitted this latest example of Iran's provocative behavior so as not to interfere with his delusional talking points about his dangerous nuclear deal with Iran." House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy also slammed the omission. "I was very concerned that he's missing where the challenge of the world is with security -- he sits and talks positively about Iran when they just took 10 of our Navy sailors," he said after the speech. Secretary of State John Kerry told CNN's Dana Bash that he expected the sailors to be released "very soon" but would not be more specific. He was speaking at the Capitol ahead of the start of Obama's speech. Why the GOP

Presidential contenders said to a man/woman that this incident showed the weakness of President Obama and his failed Iranian policies.

To make matters more embarrassing Iranian State Television showed one of the U.S. sailors, "It was a mistake that was our fault and we apologize for our mistake," "It was a misunderstanding. We did not mean to go into Iranian territorial waters. The Iranian behavior was fantastic while we were here. We thank you very much for your hospitality and your assistance." In the same Iranian television interview, the sailor said, "The Iranian patrol boat came out when we were having engine issues and had weapons drawn, so we tried to talk to them until more boats came out and took us in."

As promised, the sailors, weapons and vessels were released the next day and Secretary of State John Kerry credited diplomatic strength and newly developed ties with Iran in helping secure the quick and safe release of the sailors. "These are always situations as everybody here knows which have an ability, if not properly guided, to get out of control," Kerry said in a speech at the National Defense University. "I'm appreciative for the quick and appropriate response of the Iranian authorities." He said that "all indications suggest or tell us that our sailors were well taken care of, provided with blankets and food and assisted with their return to the fleet earlier today." While Iranian official said that the incident was a learning moment. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, who has maintained open lines with Kerry and U.S. officials, made no mention of an apology in a tweet he sent after the sailors were released. "Happy to see dialog and respect, not threats and impetuosity, swiftly resolved the #sailors episode. Let's learn from this latest example," Zarif wrote.

But as Rachel Maddow pointed out, that now that this incident is over, obviously the good news is that all ten sailors are safe and that the Administration was able to get them freed quickly. And this is credited to that there are now direct lines of communications between U.S. and Iranian diplomats, as well as the good-will generated during the Iranian nuclear negotiations. This is clearly a good positive. And yes, the release of the photos of U.S. sailors kneeling in surrender and videos of them eating on the floor could be distasteful to some. But what is more controversial is, how on earth did this happen.

Remember the initial explanation from the Pentagon, "is that at least one of the boats suffered mechanical problems" that caused them to drift into Iranian waters. Okay.... But did both of them breakdown? Later in the week Defense officials said, "The Navy has ruled out engine or propulsion failure as reason the boats entered Iranian waters." And since the sailors were put back on the same boats and sailed away on the same boats, it is easy to conclude that there was nothing mechanically wrong with the boats.... Unless the Iranian ships spent all night repairing them.... Which is highly unlikely.... The Washington Post gets word that maybe the vessels ran out of gas.... Really.... And both boats?

None of the explanations make sense, so what were the U.S. sailors doing out there and why didn't they run, at least back into international waters, as these boats are faster than anything that the Iranians have. So we don't know why they were where they were. And how the hell did they get caught...

Is Contaminated Drinking Water The New Norm?

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On January 19, 2016 Michigan's Governor Rick Snyder declared a state of emergency regarding the water crisis in Flint, Michigan where, due to deliberately careless resource management, the number of kids with dangerous levels of lead in their blood doubled in 2015. Snyder's announcement follows Flint Mayor Karen Weaver's state of emergency declaration: she called the lead poisoning crisis a "man-made disaster" in December. In 2014, Flint changed its water source from Detroit's mess of a water system to the nearby Flint River to save money. By April, residents began complaining of cloudy, foul-smelling water, but were assured by local authorities that the water was fine. It wasn't.

Financially, Snyder's declaration means Michigan state funds and recovery organizations will work with those in Flint to help out, according to Time, but exactly how the state will do so is unclear. Lead poisoning is no joke; neither are the side effects, which include skin lesions, hair loss, chemical-induced hypertension, vision loss, depression and anxiety. Elsewhere, the Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") is working with federal prosecutors to investigate the decisions that led to Flint's public health emergency. Flint citizens have filed a civil suit. The plaintiffs, on behalf of victims of high levels of lead, filed the suit against Gov. Rick Snyder, the city of Flint, and members of management of the Flint water authority.

In November, Gov. Snyder, the state of Michigan, the city of Flint and 13 additional public officials were named in a lawsuit brought by Flint residents say they knew about the lead poisoning but distributed the water anyway. Michigan's lead environmental regulator quit, and Snyder has apologized. At this point, apologies don't matter. Problems began when the people began getting water from the Flint River instead of getting it from Lake Huron via Detroit's water system. The move was announced as a temporary, cost-cutting measure until Flint could get Great Lakes water on its own, according to details in the class-action lawsuit. But then came residents' complaints about strangely colored tap water. This was followed by studies showing that lead piping elevated lead levels 10 times higher than they had previously measured. A local hospital discovered that the percentage of Flint children with elevated lead levels nearly doubled after the switch, according to CNN affiliate WDI.

Flint is the largest city and county seat of Genesee County, Michigan. Located along the Flint River, 66 miles (106 km) northwest of Detroit, it is the largest city in the Flint/Tri-Cities region of Michigan. According to the 2010 census, Flint has a population of 102,434 and was founded as a village by fur trader Jacob Smith in 1819, Flint became a major lumbering area on the historic Saginaw Trail during the 19th century, and incorporated as a city in 1855. It later became a leading manufacturer of carriages and other vehicles earning it the nickname "Vehicle City". In 1908 William C. Durant formed General Motors in Flint and after World War II, Flint became an automobile manufacturing powerhouse for GM's Buick and Chevrolet divisions, both of which were also founded in Flint. But when GM left Flint the city during the 2008 recession.

Federal officials began investigating the lead contamination of drinking water in Flint, Michigan, after the financially strapped city was under the control of a state-appointed emergency manager when it switched its source of tap water to the nearby Flint River in April 2014 from Detroit's water system to save money. Flint, about 60 miles (100 km) northwest of Detroit, returned to Detroit water in October after tests found some children had elevated levels of lead in their blood and lead was found in higher-than-acceptable levels in the water. Lead poisoning can cause learning disabilities and at high levels can lead to seizures and death, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Flint citizens have filed a civil suit. The plaintiffs, on behalf of victims of high levels of lead, filed the suit against Gov. Rick Snyder, the city of Flint, and members of management of the Flint water authority.

The complaints prompted a host of actions to address what was labeled a public health emergency. For instance, the city ordered public schools stop running water for taps and water fountains, according to WEYI, another CNN affiliate. Government agencies passed out over 6,000 water filters, said Michigan Department of Community Health Director Nick Lyon. The situation could affect the city for many years. In the city's state of emergency declaration, Flint Mayor Karen Weaver indicated that more funding will be needed for special education services because lead "can cause effects to a child's IQ, which will result in learning disabilities." She also indicated that more funding will be needed for mental health services, "an increase in the juvenile justice system," and that there would be a greater need for adoptive and foster parents "as a result of social services needed due to the detrimental effects of the high blood lead levels."

Water pollution in America is not just limited to the city of Flint, state of Michigan or the Mid-West. Water pollution is the invasion of pollutants into any body of water two different means: point and non-point sources. Point sources are those pollutants that come from a single, recognizable source, such as chemicals dumped through a drainage pipe or a specific landfill. Non-point sources are pollutants that may not be traceable to any one particular source, but a collection of pollutants that collectively cause contamination. These sources are many, from sewage from households, nutrients from agriculture, radioactive waste and oil from industry, as well as biological sediment that builds in lakes, rivers and streams.

There are more than 54,700 water systems in the United States according to the EPA and since 2004 it is estimated that water provided to 9 million people has contained illegal concentrations of chemicals arsenic or radioactive substances like uranium as well as dangerous bacteria often found in sewage. Regulators were informed of each of those violations as they occurred. Regulatory records show that fewer than 6% of the water systems that broke the law were fined or punished by state or federal officials, including those of the EPA, which has ultimate responsibility for

enforcing standards. Studies indicate that drinking water contaminants are linked to millions of instances of illness with them United States each year. Some incidences, drinking water violations one-time events, and probably pose little rest but for hundreds of other systems, illegal combination persisted for years, records show. But the bottom line is that if we are not diligent, instead of being the exception, contaminated municipal drinking water could become the norm.

U.S. Economy Adds 292,000 Jobs In December, Unemployment Steady At 5%

American employers added a strong 292,000 jobs in December, suggesting that the U.S. economy is so far defying global trends and growing at a solid pace. The Labor Department says the unemployment rate remained 5 percent for a third straight month. More Americans started looking for work and most found jobs. The government also said employers added a combined 50,000 more jobs in October and November than it had previously estimated. Hiring averaged 284,000 a month in the fourth quarter, the best three-month pace in a year. The strong figures underscore the resilience of the U.S. economy at a time of global turmoil stemming from China's slowing economy and plummeting stock market. Most economists expect solid U.S. consumer spending will offset any overseas drag, though many forecast only modest growth.

For months, U.S. employers have steadily added jobs even as global growth has flagged and financial markets have sunk. Stronger customer demand has given most businesses confidence to hire even though some sectors — notably manufacturing and oil and gas drilling — are struggling. If employers continue to hire steadily and to raise wages consistently, consumers are expected to keep spending and to support U.S. economic growth even if foreign economies struggle.

Still, stumbling growth in countries like China, the world's second-largest economy, and financial market turmoil could pose long-term challenges for the U.S. economy. A strong dollar and faltering global growth have cut into exports of factory goods. The dollar has climbed about 10 percent in value in the past year compared with overseas currencies. That has made U.S. goods more expensive globally while lowering the price of imported products.

In November, exports fell to their lowest level in nearly four years and helped shaved about 0.6 percentage point from the economy's growth in 2015, according to Goldman Sachs. Most analysts estimate that the economy expanded at a modest pace 2.5 percent last year. Another blow to manufacturing has been oil prices, which fell to their lowest level in 12 years Thursday. Oil and gas drillers have responded by slashing payrolls and sharply cutting spending on steel pipes and other drilling equipment.

Manufacturers added just 17,000 jobs last year through November. Yet manufacturing makes up just 10 percent of the U.S. economy and oil and gas drilling even less. Consumer spending accounts for roughly 70 percent. For now, Americans are confident enough to buy more homes. Sales of newly built homes jumped nearly 15 percent in 2015 and helped spur building and construction hiring: Construction companies added 215,000 jobs last year, a 3.4 percent gain.

In another sign of consumer health, auto sales rose to a record high last year as cheap gas and low interest rates led to booming sales of SUVs and pickup trucks. Lower gas prices may have hurt the oil patch, but they should benefit consumers by cutting their gas bills. Chris Christopher, an economist at IHS, a forecasting firm, estimates that American households saved, on average, \$722 last year from cheaper gas. He expects them to save an additional \$217 in 2016 given the continuing drop in oil prices.

5 Taxpayer Handouts the Bundys Receive While Railing Against Government "Tyranny"

Nearly every part of the Bundy family's business is funded by government welfare programs.

The armed militiamen currently occupying the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon have attempted to portray an image of themselves as rugged, independent Americans rejecting government interference in their businesses. But nearly every part of their existence as ranchers is made possible by government welfare programs — even the building they're depending on for shelter from the cold was built by federal tax dollars as part of the New Deal program. Here are just a few ways taxpayers are subsidizing the livelihoods of cattle ranchers like the Bundy family:

1. Ammon Bundy's 1990s loan from the Small Business Administration

The Small Business Administration (SBA) offers a loan guarantee program for businesses that don't qualify for assistance in the private credit market. As Mother Jones reported, Ammon Bundy — the ringleader of the Malheur takeover bemoaning federal overreach — got a \$530,000 loan from the SBA in 2010 for his truck maintenance business in Arizona, costing taxpayers over \$22,000. What the loan was used for or whether or not Bundy repaid it is not listed in public records.

2. The US government charges 93 percent less for cattle grazing than private landowners

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One of the biggest gripes from cattle ranchers like Cliven Bundy and other Western cattlemen is that the federal government is bleeding ranchers dry with overpriced cattle grazing fees. But the opposite is true. In 2012, it cost roughly \$1.35 a month for each cow to graze on federal land, as opposed to the average \$20 per month charged by private landowners for cattle grazing. FiveThirtyEight.com illustrated the price difference in a graph:

If anybody is getting the raw end of the deal from the federal government's cattle grazing prices, it's the federal government. As of 2014, grazing fees only accounted for 15 percent of the total cost incurred for the Bureau of Land Management to manage land for cattle grazing. The other 85 percent comes from We The Taxpayers.

5. Ranchers depend on big government assistance to keep livestock safe

The Bundys and other ranchers would have very little livestock to feed if it weren't for the "animal damage control" program, in which federal employees kill off the nearby predators that present a danger to cattle. The Atlantic's study of this program found that, again, Western ranchers are responsible for a disproportionate amount of taxpayer subsidies compared to the other 39 states:

In 1994 this program cost \$55.9 million nationwide, of which roughly \$22 million was spent on western livestock operations. The animals killed nationwide with this money included 163 black bears, 293 mountain lions, 1,928 bobcats, 8,973 foxes, and 85,571 coyotes.

If the Bundy family really wanted the "independence" from government they claim to stand for, their businesses would be underwater. Ammon Bundy and his gang should thank their lucky stars to benefit from so much government assistance.

Minimum wage rises in 14 states and several cities

With federal minimum wage flat for more than six years, states and cities are moving forward with their own increases

Countries with higher wages than U.S.

Minimum Wage

Annual Average Wage

As the United States marks more than six years without an increase in the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, 14 states and several cities are moving forward with their own increases, with most having taken effect January 1, 2016. California and Massachusetts are highest among the states, both increasing from \$9 to \$10 an hour, according to an analysis by the National Conference of State Legislatures. At the low end is Arkansas, where the minimum wage is increasing from \$7.50 to \$8. The smallest increase, a nickel, comes in South Dakota, where the hourly minimum is now \$8.55.

The increases come in the wake of a series of "living wage" protests across the country, including a November campaign in which thousands of protesters in 70 cities marched in support of a \$15-an-hour minimum wage and union rights for fast food workers. Food service workers make up the largest group of minimum-wage earners, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. With Jan. 1, increases, the new average minimum wage across the 14 affected states rises from \$8.50 an hour to just over \$9. Several cities are going even higher. Seattle is setting a sliding hourly minimum between \$10.50 and \$13 on Jan. 1, and Los Angeles and San Francisco are enacting similar increases in July, en route to \$15 an hour phased in over six years. Backers say a higher minimum wage helps combat poverty, but opponents worry about the potential impact on employment and company profits.

In 2014, a Democratic-backed congressional proposal to increase the federal minimum wage for the first time since 2009 to \$10.10 stalled, as have subsequent efforts by President Obama. More recent proposals by some lawmakers call for a federal minimum wage of up to \$15 an hour. Alan Krueger, an economics professor at Princeton University and former chairman of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, said a federal minimum wage of up to \$12 an hour, phased in over five years or so, "would not have a noticeable effect on employment."

Some employers may cut jobs in response to a minimum-wage increase, Krueger said, while others may find hikes allow them to fill job vacancies and reduce turnover, lifting employment but lowering profits. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office estimated the 2014 federal proposal would have raised the wages of 16.5 million Americans and lifted 900,000 of them out of poverty but would have cost as many as 1 million jobs.

Currently, 29 states plus the District of Columbia and about two dozen cities and counties have their minimum wage at levels higher than the federal minimum. Many are now in the midst of multi-year phase-in plans that will ultimately take them to between \$10 and \$15 an hour. The 14 states where increases took effect Jan. 1 are: Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont and West Virginia.

Why I Will Never Vote For Donald Trump

(Aside from being the must unqualified candidate running he is a)

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Beginning with Ronald Reagan, I have voted Republican in every presidential election since I first became eligible to vote in 1980. I worked in the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations and in the White House for George W. Bush as a speechwriter and adviser. I have also worked for Republican presidential campaigns, although not this time around.

Despite this history, and in important ways because of it, I will not vote for Donald Trump if he wins the Republican nomination.

I should add that neither could I vote in good conscience for Hillary Clinton or any of the other Democrats running for president, since they oppose many of the things I have stood for in my career as a conservative and, in the case of Mrs. Clinton, because I consider her an ethical wreck. If Mr. Trump and Mrs. Clinton were the Republican and Democratic nominees, I would prefer to vote for a responsible third-party alternative; absent that option, I would simply not cast a ballot for president. A lot of Republicans, I suspect, would do the same.

There are many reasons to abstain from voting for Mr. Trump if he is nominated, starting with the fact that he would be the most unqualified president in American history. Every one of our 44 presidents has had either government or military experience before being sworn in. Mr. Trump, a real estate mogul and former reality-television star, hasn't served a day in public office or the armed forces.

During the course of this campaign he has repeatedly revealed his ignorance on basic matters of national interest — the three ways the United States is capable of firing nuclear weapons (by land, sea and air), the difference between the Quds Force in Iran and the Kurds to their west, North Korea's nuclear tests, the causes of autism, the effects of his tax plan on the deficit and much besides.

Mr. Trump has no desire to acquaint himself with most issues, let alone master them. He has admitted that he doesn't prepare for debates or study briefing books; he believes such things get in the way of a good performance. No major presidential candidate has ever been quite as disdainful of knowledge, as indifferent to facts, as untroubled by his benightedness.

It is little surprise, then, that many of Mr. Trump's most celebrated pronouncements and promises — to quickly and "expel 11 million illegal immigrants, to force Mexico to pay for the wall he will build on our southern border, to defeat the Islamic State "very quickly" while as a bonus taking its oil, to bar Muslims from immigrating to the United States — are nativistic pipe dreams and public relations stunts.

Even more disqualifying is Mr. Trump's temperament. He is erratic, inconsistent and unprincipled. He possesses a streak of crudity and cruelty that manifested itself in how he physically mocked a Times journalist with a disability, ridiculed Senator John McCain for being a P.O.W., made a reference to "blood" intended to degrade a female journalist and compared one of his opponents to a child molester.

Mr. Trump's legendary narcissism would be comical were it not dangerous in someone seeking the nation's highest office — as he demonstrated when he showered praise on the brutal, anti-American president of Russia, Vladimir V. Putin, responding to Mr. Putin's expression of admiration for Mr. Trump.

"It is always a great honor," Mr. Trump said last month, "to be so nicely complimented by a man so highly respected within his own country and beyond."

Mr. Trump's virulent combination of ignorance, emotional instability, demagoguery, solipsism and vindictiveness would do more than result in a failed presidency; it could very well lead to national catastrophe. The prospect of Donald Trump as commander in chief should send a chill down the spine of every American.

For Republicans, there is an additional reason not to vote for Mr. Trump. His nomination would pose a profound threat to the Republican Party and conservatism, in ways that Hillary Clinton never could. For while Mrs. Clinton could inflict a defeat on the Republican Party, she could not redefine it. But Mr. Trump, if he were the Republican nominee, would.

Mr. Trump's presence in the 2016 race has already had pernicious effects, but they're nothing compared with what would happen if he were the Republican standard-bearer. The nominee, after all, is the leader of the party; he gives it shape and definition. If Mr. Trump heads the Republican Party, it will no longer be a conservative party; it will be an angry, bigoted, populist one. Mr. Trump would represent a dramatic break with and a fundamental assault on the party's best traditions.

The Republican Party's best traditions, of course, have not always been evident. (The same is true of the Democratic Party, by the way.) Over the years we have seen antecedents of today's Trumpism both on issues and in style — for example, in Pat Buchanan's presidential campaign in the 1990s, in Sarah Palin's rise in the party, in the reckless rhetoric of some on the right like Ann Coulter.

The sentiments animating these individuals have had influence in the party, and in recent years growing influence. But they have not been dominant and they have certainly never been in control. Mr. Trump's securing the Republican nomination would change all that. ♦ Whatever problems one might be tempted to lay at the feet of the Republican Party, Donald Trump is in a different and more destructive category.

In these pages in July 1980, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Democratic senator from New York, declared, "Of a sudden, the G.O.P. has become a party of ideas." If Mr. Trump wins the nomination, the G.O.P. will become the party of anti-reason.

Peter Wehner — New York Times — January 14, 2016

10 Foods For A Happier Stomach

Making room in your diet for these fiber-rich eats will help you reach the recommended 25 grams per day.

1. Artichokes or Artichoke Hearts

The Fiber: 10.3 grams for a medium artichoke, 7.2 grams for a half-cup of artichoke hearts

Try These: Grilled artichokes, or roast chicken with green beans and artichokes

2. Black Beans

The Fiber: 7.5 grams in a ½ cup

Try These: Quinoa black-bean chili, or chicken, black bean and arugula salad

3. Raspberries

The Fiber: 4 grams i= 1/2 cup

=span style="font-family:Georgia,serif">Try These: Sprinkle over Greek yogurt, or treat yourself to a raspberry buckle for dessert

<=> Pearled Barley

</=pan>

The Fiber: 6 grams i= 1 cup, cooked

Try This: Vegetable==arley potpies

Try These: A small handful raw or roasted, a side dish of rice with spinach and pistachi=s, or a roasted beet salad with arugula, pistachios and goat cheese

=p class="MsoNormal" style="margin-left:0.25in">

6. Brussels Sprouts

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The Fiber: 3 grams i= 3/4 cup

=span style="font-family:Georgia,serif">Try These: Roasted Brussels sprouts chips, pan-roasted Brussels sprouts with chorizo, or roast=d Brussels sprouts with Asian vinaigrette

7. =C2◆ Pears

The Fiber: 5.5 grams=in 1 medium pear

Try These: Sliced fo= a snack, or a dessert of roasted pears with ricotta and honey

=p style="margin-left:0.75in">8. Chickpeas

The Fiber: 6.2 grams=in ½ cup

Try This: Quick and =asy roasted garbanzo beans

<= style="margin-left:0.75in">9. Sunflower Seeds

<=span>

The Fiber: 3.6 grams=in ¼ cup, roasted

Tomato bas=l sunflower seed pate.

10. Blackberries

The Fiber: 3.8 grams=in ½ cup

Try This: Pop 'e= as is, or try these skillet-roasted apricots and blackberries

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Emma Haak= – OPRAH.com – January 6, 2016

<=iv>

I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism=and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will h=ve the final word.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

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THIS IS BRILLIANT

How did he do this and the other tricks....<=span>

Web Link: <https://w=w.facebook.com/video.php?v=881743798599874>
<<https://ww.facebook.com/video.php?v=881743798599874>>

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=HINK ABOUT THIS

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BEST VIDEO OF THE WEEK

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The Greatest=/span>

Happy 74th Birthday My O=d Friend

=p class="MsoNormal" align="center">

Float Like A Butterfly and Sting Like A Bee

Web Link:=C2◆ <https://youtu.be/F30t-weDqko> <<https://youtu.be/F30t-weDqko>> and https://youtu.be/d_b7fW5T5Z0
<https://youtu.be/d_b7fW5T5Z0>

=p class="MsoNormal" align="center">

Web Link: <= href="https://youtu.be/C_fElVwjrew" target="_blank">https://youtu.be/C_fElVwjrew and
<https://youtu.be/jkhpZoPOfZI>

Please enjoy these videos because they will never be anyone like Muhammad Ali again◆=80◆

THIS WEEK's MUSIC

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(David Robert Jones) who died last Sunday after an 18-month struggle against cancer. David Bowie wh= had just celebrated both his 69th birthday and released his 25th album/recording t=o days earlier was an English singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, reco=d producer, arranger, painter and actor. He was a figure in popular music for

over four decades, and was considered by critics and other musicians as an innovator, particularly for his work in the 1970s. His androgynous appearance was an iconic element of his image, principally in the 1970s and 1980s.

Bowie combined his rock career with appearances in films. His acting career took off with his performance in Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, followed by roles in films such as *Labyrinth*, *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Absolute Beginners*. More recently, he appeared as himself in the film *Zoolander*. His portrayal of John Merrick in the Broadway play, *The Elephant Man*, Bowie displayed the ability to project a complex character with just the mastery of movement and of vocal projection, creating a stirring performance. He also produced albums for Lou Reed and Iggy Pop, as well as writing *All the Young Dudes*, which he gave to Mott the Hoople who had a massive hit with it. In the late 1970s he produced a three-album collaboration with Brian Eno, known as the Berlin trilogy.

Bowie's innovative songs and stagecraft brought a new dimension to popular music in the early 1970s, strongly influencing both its immediate forms and its subsequent development. A pioneer of glam rock, Bowie has joint responsibility with Marc Bolan for creating the genre. At the same time, he inspired the innovators of the punk rock music movement — historian Michael Campbell calls him "one of punk's seminal influences". While punk musicians trashed the conventions of pop stardom, Bowie moved on again into a more abstract style of music making that in turn became a transforming influence. Bowie brought sophistication to rock music", and critical reviews frequently acknowledge the intellectual depth of his work and influence.

Bowie was both star and icon. One could say that his vast body of work he help created one of the biggest cultural shifts in modern popular culture. Throughout his career he sold an estimated 140 million albums. In the United Kingdom, he was awarded 9 Platinum, 11 Gold and 8 Silver albums, and in the United States, 5 Platinum and 7 Gold. In the BBC's 2002 poll of the 100 Greatest Britons, he was ranked 29. In 2004, Rolling Stone magazine ranked him 39th on their list of the 100 Greatest Rock Artists of All Time. Bowie was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on 17 January 1996 and named a member of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame in June 2013. The spider Heteropoda davidbowie is named in his honor. And in 2015, he was named one of GQ's 50 Best Dressed British Men.

Through perpetual reinvention, he has seen his influence continue to broaden and extend: music reviewer Brad Fillicky writes that over the decade, "Bowie has become known as a musical chameleon, changing and dictating trends as much as he has altered his style to fit, influencing fashion and pop culture." Biographer Thomas Forster adds, "Because he has succeeded in so many different styles of music, it is almost impossible to find a popular artist today that has not been influenced by David Bowie."

David Bowie was both a chameleon and shape-shifter who pushed his music relentlessly forward while reinventing himself as many personas from Davie Jones, a young rhythm and blues singer from the London neighborhood of Brixton, to the interplanetary pop star Ziggy Stardust and the dapper hedonist the Thin White Duke while laying bare his demons for his audience. He explored androgyny and otherworldliness, and sampled cultures from different continents (and galaxies) as his musical and visual palettes continued to evolve, always theatrical and deeply layered until his focus turned to his own looming end.

My favorite moment with Bowie was back in the late 1980s when with Quincy Jones, he and Phil Ramone joined us at Columbus Restaurant on the Upper Westside of Manhattan where we drank and shared stories until almost 7am. He innocently asked me how had we not met and I responded that I had hung out with him and his wife at the time Angie in London a number of times in the early 1970s but we were first introduced when he first came to my personal favorite haunts Max's Kansas City (the most famous watering hole for counter-culture in the late 1960s/early 70s in NYC) – and that I thought that his orange/reddish mane of hair, monkey fur collar purple jacket, skin-tight pants and six inch platform boots, coupled with his English accent and aloof mannerisms, he was one of the weirdest people whom I had ever met at the time. His response was to say that he was just playing a role and that real weird was Iggy Pop, who he had come to meet. By then he was no longer the pretender dealing with demons or the knucklehead in the 1970s and 80s that most people have chosen to ignore, but a great guy who could be smart, witty, fun, with a sense of introspection.

Still, I was actually surprised by the out-pouring of sadness and affection by fans and friends around the world reminiscing and grappling with his loss and the thought about what his music and his life meant to them. David Bowie was the Salvatore Dali of music. And like Dali, Bowie was a cultural icon for the bizarre and surreal with a genius for self-promotion combined with unquestionable talent. Bazaar and outlandish while at the same time quietly elegant, David Bowie inspired a generation of artists and non-artists to reach beyond the frame of the painting in search of new realities and if not, make great music that people can dance to and images that are remembered.... With this, you are again invited to enjoy the music of rock icon in the Pantheon of Music, Mr. David Bowie....

David Bowie – Space Oddity -- <https://youtu.be/o16TIBBInQw> and <https://youtu.be/bHzqrOjmanE>

David Bowie – Fame -- https://youtu.be/wFlmjufN_2I

David Bowie – Golden Years -- https://youtu.be/Shnrnqx_wsY

DAVID BOWIE – Ashes To Ashes -- <https://youtu.be/INqo0kIR-TU>

David Bowie – Heroes -- <https://youtu.be/bsYp9q3QNaQ>

David Bowie – Modern Love -- <https://youtu.be/1hDbpF4Mvkw>

David Bowie – Absolute Beginners -- https://youtu.be/r8NZa9wYZ_U

David Bowie – China Girl -- https://youtu.be/E_8IXx4tsus

David Bowie – Changes – <https://youtu.be/pl3vxEudif8>

David Bowie – Ziggy Stardust -- <https://youtu.be/XXq5VvYAI1Q>

David Bowie – Life On Mars? -- <https://youtu.be/v--lqqusnNQ>

David Bowie – Rebel Rebel -- https://youtu.be/U16Xg_rQZkA

David Bowie – Starman -- <https://youtu.be/4B5zmDz4vR4> <<https://youtu.be/4B5zmDz4vR4>> and https://youtu.be/brrdk_VIXUA

David Bowie – Young American -- <https://youtu.be/ydLcs4VrjZQ>

David Bowie & Tina Turner – Let’s Dance --
<https://www.facebook.com/musicaundregroundoscura/videos/473535296167370/>
<<https://www.facebook.com/musicaundregroundoscura/videos/473535296167370/>>

Queen & David Bowie – C2 – Under Pressure -- https://youtu.be/YoDh_gHDvkk <https://youtu.be/YoDh_gHDvkk>

David Bowie & Mick Jagger – A0 – Dancing In The Street -- <https://youtu.be/9G4jnaznUoQ>
<<https://youtu.be/9G4jnaznUoQ>>

I hope that you have enjoyed this week’s offerings and wish you and yours a great Dr. Martin Luther King holiday and week....<=p>

<=b>

Sincerely,=/span>

<=p style="font-size:10pt;line-height:107%;font-family:Georgia,serif">Greg Brown=/b>

<=span>

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