

LINKS, AUGUST 25, 2011

I got really behind on these for a few days, so some of these are dated.

A senior military officer claims they've finally "got our arms around" contracting to Afghan contractors. But if that doesn't work, a senior congressional staffer says, they're going to have "to reduce the [U.S.] footprint in Afghanistan."

Japan has reintroduced lessons on radioactivity into their middle school curriculum. "The nature of radiation" had been taught until reforms during the 1980s dropped the subject.

We had a heated debate about the canard that half the country doesn't pay taxes last week. Corey Robin makes a point that I and others also made in the thread: that the real problem with that stat is that it means half of the people who work in this country are paid terrible wages. I agree with him; we'd be better focusing on the low wages here than engaging on the nonsensical claim that these people are deadbeats solely because they're paid so poorly.

Iran-Contra spook Clair George died of a heart attack on August 11. He was so old (81), he lived at a time when DOJ actually prosecuted Executive Branch figures who lie to Congress. Of course, that was in the era when we didn't claim the Executive Branch could investigate the Executive Branch. Ah, those were good times.

Jared Bernstein thinks that the collapse in approval of Obama's treatment of the economy has to do with the focus on the debt ceiling. I'd love to see someone like Nate Silver do more nuanced analysis on this point. In particular, I'd like to see whether people even understand that the "debt ceiling" is related to the "deficit" that polls show, in abstract, concerns people.

The BATF says the supervisors involved in Operation Fast and Furious were not, in fact,

promoted, but just moved from a operational to an administrative function. The LAT's sources stand by the interpretation that these were promotions.

Part of this article about rising levels of drinking in China talks about how important drinking is to doing business, which certainly is consistent with what I experienced when I was doing business there. But it doesn't consider what that means for gender equality. I would have to explicitly invite women to events (even lunches) that might involve drinking and even there it was generally assumed they wouldn't drink (I guess, as a heathen I was excepted from that expectation). And I got a real sense that this meant the women were left back at dealers running the business with an "Associate Manager" title while their colleagues with full "Manager" titles were out at drinking lunches with the boss.

SEC whistleblower Gary Aguirre points outs that apologists for the SEC's document destruction policy—who claim the SEC didn't violate any existing understanding with the National Archives with their policy—are ignoring a 1992 agreement and pretending a mere name change gimmick changed the rules.

An inquest into the death of the GCHQ spy who was killed and left in a duffel bag last year, Gareth Williams, is scheduled to happen this year.

Detroit says an increasing number of squatters are taking over vacant homes; It seems our state laws make it hard to get rid of them. They should just do what they banks do: pretend they own it. The Registers, after all, can do nothing when they see something out of order on such paperwork.

National Security Archives' Nate Jones notes that DOD has centralized all FOIA responses for requests on the Osama bin Laden to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He notes that, while OSD has one of the better records on FOIA

response at DOD, this might be an attempt to keep the bin Laden photos from Judicial Watch. I'd add, too, that there's tension between the Army and Navy over this raid, so by centralizing it, you might avoid selective leaks.

China just came out in support of a Palestinian plan to bid for statehood at the UN.