

MERRY CHRISTMAS

I was going to post on boring depressing things. But instead I'm kibbitzing as my cousins play Fable 3. They suggested I post this YouTube instead.

Maybe I'll get around to those boring depressing posts after Santa comes.

In the meantime, Merry Christmas to you all! Thanks for being such an integral part of this joint all year.

“AUSTERITY” MERRIAM- WEBSTER’S WORD OF 2010

Merriam-Webster has made “austerity” it’s word of the year for 2010.

Topping the list is *austerity*, defined as “enforced or extreme economy.” Lookups for *austerity* peaked dramatically several times throughout the year, as people’s attention was drawn to global economic conditions and the debt crises in Europe, but lookups also remained strong throughout the year, reflecting widespread use of the word in many contexts. “*Austerity* clearly resonates with many people,” said Peter Sokolowski, Editor at Large at Merriam-Webster, who monitors online dictionary searches. “We often hear it used in the context of government measures, but we also apply it to our own personal finances and what is sometimes called the new normal.”

I'm so cynical my first response was to wonder whether Pete Peterson had bought off the dictionary company like he did the Washington Post. But M-W says the list is based off of top online dictionary searches. Which is why some of the other words are perhaps more interesting:

- 4) socialism
- 5) bigot
- 7) shellacking
- 9) dissident

Remember, these reflect actual searches of the online dictionary. That suggests a significant proportion of the people still inclined to actually look things up in the dictionary chose (or needed) to refer to the dictionary to figure out what socialism actually is. And did Obama's use of the term "shellacking" send journalists and Obama fans to the dictionary to find out just how badly Democrats got whopped at the mid-terms?

Use this thread to predict what words will make up next year's list.

TEH GAY ARE STEALING THE RAINBOWS! WHO WILL PROTECT RICHIE BLACKMORE?

Do dogmatic conservative religious nutjobs ever stop to think how insane they sound? No. Now they are whining that teh gay are stealing the rainbows.

WAL-MART HIKES TOY PRICES JUST AS CONGRESS GIVES THE WALTONS HUGE TAX BREAKS

If there was ever any illusion that the super-rich would start acting nicer after Congress gave them both income and estate tax breaks, I present Wal-Mart's thanks for Congress' willingness to make the Walton family even richer: (h/t Consumerist)

Wal-Mart managers in the U.S. received instructions to mark up an average of 1,800 types of toys per store, according to a company e-mail dated Nov. 30 obtained by Bloomberg News. The e-mail didn't disclose specific increases.

[snip]

"In previous years Wal-Mart has come out and hammered everyone with unbelievably low toy prices," said Eric Johnson, director of the Center for Digital Strategies at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth in Hanover, New Hampshire. "They stepped away from that this year, and after Thanksgiving their prices have crept back up."

In a year when kids keep begging Santa for bare necessities for Christmas, the Walton family has been made even richer by Obama and Congress. And the thanks Congress and the American people get is higher prices for toys.

PERRY V. SCHWARZENEGGER 9TH CIRCUIT ORAL ARGUMENT LIVEBLOG PRIMER

Today is oral argument in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in the groundbreaking marriage equality civil rights case of Perry v. Schwarzenegger; join us for a live blog and discussion of the proceedings which are being televised live on CSPAN and numerous other networks and internet feeds.

THE CHICKEN SHIT IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

 Like Mark Bittman, I have rather obsessively been playing with this interactive map, showing where all the factory farms are in this country, broken out by county. In my case, the interest is personal. I moved from the hippie-Ag area around Ann Arbor, MI, to west MI, where much of the bigger Ag is located (the biggest skyscraper in the area is a soy processing plant). I've driven a lot in the backroads around here and seen lots of blueberry plantations, some diverse crop farms, and the long sheds housing some kind of unhappy industrially raised animals. This map provides a census of those unhappy animals.

I learned, for example, that there are 2.6 million egg-laying hens in the county, second only in the state to Allegan County, just south

of here, which has 3.6 million layers.

It's overcast today. Which means when I walked the dog in the beautiful snowy day, the smell of chickenshit (from the farms some distance to the east) hung in the air. It's the first I noticed it so close to town, though there's one gorgeous park where the adjoining chickenshit farm (which is upriver of town) makes the park pretty unusable.

Anyway, have "fun" with the map (and related factoids). Let us know in comments what kind of shit farm you're living downriver from!

PROP 8 JUDGE TELLS H8TERS TO GET LOST; DENIES MOTION TO DISQUALIFY

Judge Stephen Reinhardt has denied the spurious motion to disqualify the hating Proponents of Proposition 8 filed against him in the 9th Circuit appeal on Perry v Schwarzenegger.

CRIST'S MORRISON PARDON: 21ST CENTURY FOX IN A LIZARD KING'S HENHOUSE

Charlie Crist makes noises about freeing the soul of Jim Morrison. He should do it.

THE OBAMA DISCONNECT: ARLINGTON, KOREA AND CATFOOD

Barack Obama is in Korea lecturing Americans to suck it up and embrace the catfood at the same time Biden was left to represent the WH at the Arlington National Cemetery ceremony to honor America's Veterans; all so Obama could sell out American labor via a Korean free trade agreement. Dumbest politics ever.

THE WAR ON EFFICIENT TRASH COLLECTION

Normally, I wouldn't get into a shouting match between John Cole and his poster ED Kain. John started it when he objected to a revolt against a city council decision to contract with just one trash collector.

Our entire nation has collectively lost its shit:

A Valley community's decision to change the way trash is picked up provided further proof of how deeply the nation's anti-government, "tea party"-fueled sentiment is running. A decision by the Fountain Hills Town Council to hire a single trash hauler and begin a curbside recycling program has been met with angry protests from

residents who accuse town leaders of overstepping their bounds and taking a leap toward socialism.

Some even likened it to “Obamacare” for garbage, calling it “trashcare.”

[snip]

This is how the American empire will end. With us rioting in the streets over the right to choose a trash collector, while the top 5% laugh all the way to the bank.

Followed by Kain hailing choice.

Naturally, I disagree entirely with John’s argument on trash collection. It may be a small issue – so long as your trash is collected, it doesn’t really matter *that much* who picks it up – but the Tea Partiers are right this time: having choice is a *good* thing, even for trash collection. If the government came in and said “You can only buy Dell computers from now on” people would be unhappy. We want to be able to choose what kind of computer we buy – and not just because maybe we prefer Apple, but because we know that competition keeps innovation up and prices down. Now, in trash collection you probably won’t see too much innovation, but competition will keep prices down and quality of service high. If you don’t like the people picking up your trash, or the containers they provide, or the driver is rude, or whatever – you can switch.

Once the government has granted a monopoly, however, you’re stuck. It doesn’t matter what level of service you receive, whether prices go up – you have no choice. Many of us already have no

choice when it comes to trash collection, so this is sort of a foreign concept. And that's also why this isn't really that big of a deal. Trash is basically a public utility in many places, and it works pretty well that way.

But I'm going to wade into this trash debate because it's something I've been thinking a lot about lately. As you probably know, I recently moved from an idyllic left wing small city to an idyllic right wing small city. Both are great places to raise a family, both have charming downtowns, and both support diverse local businesses. One big difference, I've come to learn, is that the left wing city provides high quality public services—including single stream curbside recycling, best-in-state public schools, and well-developed social services, whereas the right wing city has privatized those same functions, with “choice” in trash collection, a significant reliance on religious schools (this is one of the hotbeds of voucher activism), and church groups providing many of the social services.

Now, as it happens, I still live in a complex with dumpsters; I've got no choice in trash collection because my landlord chose a collector for me. Which means I've got to pay a yearly fee with the county for the privilege of driving my recycling to a dumpster a few miles away. Which also means I can't speak to this wondrous choice that Kain says we might have in trash collection firsthand.

But I will say this. First, it is a significant pain in the ass, on trash day, to have 4 different sets of trash collectors holding up traffic four different times on the same damn roads, because four different companies are picking up trash in the same area. This is not a dense area, which means you've got miles and miles and miles of duplicated truck routes, all in the name of this glorious “choice.” Each of those duplicative four truck routes cost money

(and of course none of them have the automated pick up that might be affordable if a city awarded a monopoly for the pickup), which I presume makes the cost to consumer much higher. Of course, the way to avoid all this duplication in an idyllic right wing small city, is to push everyone into developments with CCRs, so the development can band together and offer a monopoly to one trash collector, thereby avoiding the four sets of trash trucks, but not the potential for corruption. Choice is not all it's made up to be, particularly for services with a huge upside on efficiency.

As for me, I have honestly studied which townships offer trash collection—and particularly whether they offer curbside recycling. Because I've discovered out here that the real choice you've got—certainly the choice to have some kind of efficiency in trash collecting—comes when you select your house, because once you've picked, you're locked into inefficiency.

(And don't even get me started on sidewalks.)