

# "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 whupped at the mid-terms?

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

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## **MARK WARNER'S CHOCOLATE FOUNTAIN REMORSE**

Once upon a time in 2006, a dirty fucking hippie blogger had an opportunity to ask aspiring presidential candidate Mark Warner a few questions. Mark Warner had just dedicated part of a speech to talking about how Iran was the biggest WMD threat. So with her questions, the dirty fucking hippie blogger asked Mark Warner how, if the NIE had said Iran was years away from having nukes whereas Pakistan and its al Qaeda favoring Generals and unstable government already had nukes, Iran could be the biggest WMD threat. Warner then listed three reasons why Iran was the biggest WMD threat: its support of Hezbollah and Hamas, its nutty president, and its aspirations for hegemony in the Middle East. "But none of those things are WMD," the blogger said.

Matt Bai, who observed the entire exchange, would later blame the dirty fucking hippie's questions (which, after all, proved correct on several counts and served mostly to highlight to Warner how blindly he had embraced a popular talking point) for single-handedly driving nice moderate Mark Warner from the presidential race and with him potentially the ability to succeed as a party.

The dirty fucking hippie blogger took from that exchange the following: 1) Mark Warner doesn't have the analytic ability to understand what threatens this country 2) Matt Bai tends to spout stupid centrist ideology even when reality proves him wrong.

More than four years have passed since that exchange. In that time, Warner became a centrist Senator. As a Senator, he has been one of those who claimed no one knew the financial crisis was coming. And he was part of a group of centrist Senators that stripped the too-small stimulus bill in early 2009.

In other words, Warner continues to be unable to identify real threats to this country. It's in that context—and specifically in the context of picking a time of almost 10% unemployment to cut the deficit—that Mark Warner chose to equate the “far left” of his own party with the TeaBaggers.

But the question will be will the super-left on my party – the MoveOn crowd in my party – and the Tea Party crowd on the other party, you know, they don't compromise, so you know, I for one am...you know, there were too many times I bit my lip in the first year, or bit my tongue...I'm done...

[snip]

But I think an equal threat to our country's national security is that we don't get our balance sheet in order.

Now, Mark Warner and his friends that maintain the deficit as a bigger threat than a stagnant economy are precisely what we dirty fucking hippie bloggers point to as the problem with the last two years. Because these centrists put their own pet theories ahead of real analysis of what our country needed, the legislation they passed failed to do the job. It's the economy, stupid, and the economy is still so shitty at least partly because deficit scolds like Mark Warner cut the already too-small stimulus

package back when it could do some good.

Which is what Matt Bai fails to understand with his piece trying to refute the theory that Democrats failed because they catered to people like Mark Warner.

The theory here, embraced by a lot of the most prominent liberal bloggers and activists, is that centrist Democrats doomed the party when they blocked liberals in Congress from making good on President Obama's promise of bold change. Specifically, they refused to adopt a more populist stance toward business and opposed greater stimulus spending and a government-run health care plan. As a result, the thinking goes, frustrated voters rejected the party for its timidity.

No, Matt, you misunderstand completely (or simply build another of your favored straw men). The problem is not that "frustrated voters rejected the party for its timidity." Frustrated voters rejected the party because its watered down legislation didn't do the job. And the centrists were the ones that watered down that legislation and made it ineffective.

And the biggest problem both Mark Warner and Matt Bai make is in pretending that they're stuck in an ideology-free zone between two extremist ideologies. Leaving aside the TeaBaggers, whose ideology was very diverse up until the Koch brothers made them a wholly owned but less ideologically consistent subsidiary, this is not about a left ideology and a right ideology and the nice non-ideological centrists in between. Rather, this debate is about progressives who insist that legislation not be compromised by a blindly ideological insistence on things like deficit cutting, all because some think tanker has been paid to claim that issue, like Iran, is a greater threat than millions of Americans losing their jobs and homes. It's about efficacy versus the flabby centrist

ideology that got us into this mess.

What Bai and Warner choose not to understand is that centrism is an ideology even more stubborn than the left or right they love to attack, but an ideology that got us into the mess we're in now, both fiscally and electorally.

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## WACKY GOP HEARINGS IDEAS

Mary, who apparently is not a twit, noticed that those of us who **are** have been brainstorming all the great hearings the GOP will hold now that they control the House. And, in her infinite wisdom, she asked for a thread here so everyone can all join in the fun.

Here were my twitter suggestions:

- Yemen: Should we triple the drone strikes or triple the right-wing owned contractors?
- Drilling in ANWR: Before or after we triple drilling in Gulf deepwater?
- How God wanted us to feel warmer so he just turned up the temperature a little.
- Birth control: the godless socialists' assault on God's plans for women.
- Legislative options to help banks foreclose on deadbeats faster.
- Free Trade Agreements: After Chile, Colombia, and Korea,

where ELSE can we export  
manufacturing jobs?

And some other favorites from Elon James White:

- Jobs in America: Bad Economy or Too Many Mexicans.
- Don't Ask Don't Tell: Can't the gays just chill out already?
- War on Terror: Can we classify Mexicans as Arab?

And Adam Serwer:

- Santa Claus: Threat or Menace?
- What's Eric Holder hiding under that mustache?

What have we missed?

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## REPUBLICANS TRYING TO CAPITALIZE ON HOUSING CRISIS, AGAIN

You may remember how, in 2008, MI's Republicans planned to conduct voter caging at the polls based on foreclosure lists (Democrats went to court to stop this).

It appears the Republicans—this time in Kansas—are trying similar cynical efforts to capitalize on the housing crisis with robocalls telling voters they must own a home to vote.

Kansas Democrats allege that a pro-Republican group is attempting to mislead and intimidate voters with

automated telephone calls claiming the election occurs on Wednesday.

The robo-calls tell voters to bring their voter registration card and proof of home-ownership to the polls on Wednesday, November 3rd.

Voters in Kansas are not required to provide those documents to vote and the election occurs on Tuesday, November 2nd. First-time voters only need to bring proof of their name and address, such as a driver's license.

The Kansas Democratic Party claims to have traced the calls to "an as yet unnamed Republican organization."

In MI, the thwarted attempt to capitalize on the housing crisis was all the more cynical given that the biggest foreclosure mill in the state, Trott and Trott, was shacking up with John McCain's campaign office.

But this effort does seem to suggest that Republicans will look for any way to make their miserable policies an advantage at the voting booth.