

LINKS, 8/10/11

The HuffPo looks at how the Panama trade deal will just make it easier for rich Americans to dodge taxes.

Bank of America may be insolvent and stealing homes from people, but the police still obey them, rather than Community Organizers, even when the Organizers catch BoA being a deadbeat.

More than three times as many people showed up for free school supplies in Houston over the weekend than showed up for Rick Perry's religious-political revival. (h/t C&L) It sort of makes you wonder how a bunch of purportedly religious people missed the crowds of needy kids.

Apparently, if you want to be on MTV's The Real World, you have to sign a document acknowledging you may be raped, infected with sexually transmitted diseases.

The National Journal reminds us that it took a comedian—Al Franken—to get serious about reforming credit rating agencies.

Apparently, FBI is going to try to make sure its agents appear to know the Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide by making the test of their knowledge easier. This is after a bunch of agents cheated to pass a longer test last year.

DHS says states can't opt out of Secure Communities, the program that, in the name of deporting undocumented people with criminal backgrounds, has instead served to deport others. The decision will likely make cities less safe, as the threat of deportation leads undocumented people to avoid interacting with cops, even if they've experienced crime.m

LINKS, 8/9/11

Our Dying Economy

Update: Reid just named his three picks for SuperCongress: Patty Murray, Max Baucus, and John Kerry. IMO, Kerry is actually a worse choice than Baucus (yeah, that's me saying that), since Kerry was in favor of the 4T bargain but Baucus voted against the Catfood Commission recommendations. And frankly, we're probably better off without Durbin, who was bad on these issues.

All those Republicans (and the President) calling on sucking up to the "job creators" to convince them to maybe, one day, create jobs, have Adam Smith's version of capitalism all wrong.

Jared Bernstein makes an argument that every single Democrat should be making: our problem is not in Medicare, per se. It's in health care costs (and Bush's war and tax cuts). As Bernstein says, "An honest analysis of fiscal sustainability would point toward a larger, not smaller, role for publicly provided health coverage."

A single mother of two from St. Louis rented a plane so she could fly by Wall Street with a banner reading, "Thanks For The Downgrade. You Should All Be Fired."

H&R Block just agreed to modify \$115 million worth of home mortgages in which it discriminated against black and Latino borrowers (presumably meaning it pushed people of color into subprime loans when they qualified for prime). This follows a similar, national settlement from Wells Fargo.

Justice and Injustice

Apparently, you can set out in your F250 after a party, saying, "let's go fuck with some niggers," find the first black man you see, beat him repeatedly, run him over with your full-size

pickup and kill him, and not be charged with a hate crime. Or, if you weren't driving the truck, charged with anything more than assault. (What I want to know is why no one at the motel stopped this before James Craig Anderson got killed.)

Back in 1994, Multiple Choice Mitt believed abortion should be safe and legal. Justin Elliott explains why: because when Mitt was 16, Mitt's sister's husband's sister, Ann Keenan, died from an infection caused by an illegal abortion. She was 21 when she died in 1963. (h/t Susie)

The IRS was going to investigate whether a bunch of rich Republicans were evading gift tax laws by donating to 501(c)(4)s. But Republicans like Orrin Hatch and Dave Camp said "boo." So the IRS backed off its investigation."Boo!"

Our Dying Empire

The Council for Foreign Relations' home journal confirms what we've heard elsewhere—al Qaeda is weaker than we've been led to believe. As it describes, al Qaeda didn't even have the resources to wire Najibullah Zazi any money to buy hydrogen peroxide.

Carol Rosenberg and the Miami Herald have put together a list of everyone left at Gitmo.

LINKS, 8/8/11

Our Dying Economy

Banks are slashing jobs. I guess giving all that free money to "job creators" didn't work out the way it was supposed to.

If Dodd-Frank could do what it was supposed to, the Feds would be busy resolving Bank of America right now—before the many suits, objections to settlements, and put-back claims put it out of

business w/the FDIC stuck holding the depositer's bag.

Helicopter Ben Bernanke's Chief International Advisor, Nathan Sheets, has done the bureaucratic equivalent of jumping off a sinking ship: leaving, with apparently no notice, the day before the FOMC meets, in the middle of a massive international crisis. He's cashing out his vacation days so as to give a month's notice without actually have to stick around.

Justice and Injustice

The Merit System Protection Board has upheld a decision by TSA to fire an air marshall who whistleblaw that the government was cutting back air marshall coverage. This is another one of those cases where the government is punishing someone for leaking information that was not even classified (properly).

Our Dying Empire

A McClatchy report notes that the 30 Americans lost over the weekend were fighting in an area where locals, because they're sick of our night raids, now sympathize with the Taliban. The same article notes that more than 50% of our night raids hit the right target—which is another way of saying almost 50% don't hit the right target. Also, it seems we have lost track of the guy we thought was mediating peace talks with the Taliban, which is supposed to be the whole point of these attacks against the Taliban. Remind me again how this is helping us beat the fewer than 100 al Qaeda members in Afghanistan?

An Egyptian court fined Hosni Mubarak and two others for shutting down the InterToobz in a bid to stop protests earlier this year. They responded by saying that others—including the current head of the Army Council, Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, that is running the country right now and longtime US ally Omar Suleiman—were involved in the decision. The judge wants to see the meeting notes to prove that. Those details may be very interesting, not least given the Egyptian military's close ties

to the US.

Carol Rosenberg reports that over half the detainees at Gitmo are choosing not to observe the Ramadan fast this year. The story also notes that we very thoughtfully switch to nighttime feeding schedule for those we force feed to prevent hunger strikes. I'm not sure we can make any conclusions about why prisoners are doing what they're doing given that we talk about religiously observant forced feeding.

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold is back—with the scoop that the Osama bin Laden raid was sourced not to any detainee intelligence, but to a walk-in looking for the \$25 million reward. (h/t CTuttle) Apparently, they were going to use a cover story of a drone strike, but the downed chopper made that impossible. I find the timing of this scoop—along with that of the of the New Yorker puff piece—interesting.

LINKS, 8/5/11

Banana Republic of America

The S&P is reportedly about to downgrade America's credit. So the wingnut hostage-taking will end up costing us about \$100B. [Update: While we are so badly governed we no doubt deserve to be downgraded, it appears we're sufficiently powerful enough to bully the S&P still. S&P is now claiming they made errors in analysis and it's looking like the ~~TeaParty Tax~~ downgrade is off.] Oops, wrong again. S&P pulled the trigger.

The wingnuts who shut down MN's government last month were responsible for laying off 23,000 people. Meanwhile, Congressman John Mica, who was responsible for laying off 74,000 FAA workers, "didn't know it would cause this much consternation. ... People don't have to get so

personal,” he said with a sigh. “A lot of people hate me now and think I’m the worst thing in the world for what I did.

Apparently, TeaParty Nation head Judson Phillips thinks government spending creates jobs, but thinks it should only be spent on war toys, not highways.

Adventures in corporatist denial: Here’s ALEC claiming recent reporting about their corporate-funded hijacking of state governments are nothing to worry about. And here’s the Center for Competitive Politics assuring us we need not worry about a corporation forming and dissolving for the sole purpose of donating \$1 million to Mitt Romney’s Presidential SuperPAC. Meanwhile, two ThinkProgress journalists were violently kicked out of the NOLA Marriott where ALEC is meeting.

The Chamber of Commerce is attempting to prevent the NLRB from ruling against employers that fire employees for talking about work conditions on social media.

While George W Bush was dodging the draft in 1972, Rick Perry was getting a “C” in “Animal Breeding”—a course within his major of Animal Sciences—at Texas A&M. But don’t worry. If he becomes President, I’m sure Vice President Rick Santorum can handle that aspect of the country.

I’ve long questioned the assertions that giving 1.3 billion Chinese (or even just the 300 million Chinese considered middle class) our American lifestyle was possible. Here’s one reason why: you can never create enough parking spots to affordably match our levels of car ownership. Meanwhile, Moisés Naím has a thoughtful post seeing the source in contemporary turmoil both in the declining middle class in developed countries and increasingly demanding middle class in developing nations.

The city of Central Falls, RI, has just become the municipal equivalent of Ireland. It just declared bankruptcy, but because of a new state

law, bondholders will get paid before pension holders.

Justice and Injustice

Five NOLA cops were found guilty today of trying to cover up their role in shooting people on Danzinger Bridge in the aftermath of Katrina.

More people are using smartphones to collect evidence of what assholes their bosses are being.

The FBI is finally getting around to investigating News Corp's hacking of Floorgraphics, which Chris Christie refused to investigate.

Surveillance Nation

A security consultant hacked the cell phone of MO's Attorney General Chris Koster—it took him less than a minute—to show how easy it is to conduct Murdoch-style scams. Meanwhile, AT&T just committed to making sure its users have passwords to protect against this kind of hacking.

Craig Murray, the former British Ambassador who (as he reminds) was fired for whistleblowing about the British policy of cooperation with torture, asks whether Sir Peter Gibson, who heads the whitewash torture investigation, ever saw the documents the Guardian posted yesterday revealing an official policy of cooperating with torture.

German cops say full body scanners don't work.

Fareed Zakaria calls our defense establishment, "the world's largest socialist economy." To some degree, he's calling on DOD to cut pensions the same way other industries have (which I'm not crazy about). But he's also calling out DOD for being too big to fail.

DOJ has written the 9th Circuit to remind it not to tell any secrets when it hears *Jewel v. National Security Agency* later this month.

LINKS, 8/4/11

As anticipated, the French have just opened an investigation into whether IMF Chief Christine Lagarde intervened in a settlement Bernard Tapie won with a state-owned bank during her tenure as Finance Minister. At the rate we're going, the developing world might just get their demand for a President from one of their countries.

The government has joined on the side of big oil in an anti-fracking lawsuit initiated by Eric Schneiderman. Schneiderman says a project is going forward without required NEPA review; the government says the case is not yet ripe.

Salon says JSOC will be operating in 120 countries by the end of the year. That would mean the US' transnational gang of illegal combatants would be active in 60% of the world's countries. This is another case where we're still insisting on our legal rights as a nation, while leading the push to undermine the nation-state with illegal transnational organizations.

A Boston tax lawyer has helped someone—no one knows whom—form and dissolve a corporation for the sole purpose of funneling \$1 million into Mitt Romney's Presidential race.

Chris Soghoian finally got DOJ to hand over numbers for how many emergency warrantless requests it submitted to ISPs in 2009. Whereas in 2008, they had asked for the information from 17 accounts, in 2009 they asked for communications content from 91 accounts.

The can, on the FAA shutdown, has been kicked. One month down the road.

SEC's Inspector General has reported that one of the guys who missed the Madoff Ponzi scheme in 2005 and 2006 got an award in 2010. Effectively, it seems he got \$1,200 extra for cleaning up the catastrophe he missed the first two times he

reviewed it.

LINKS, 8/3/11

Our Dying Economy

The National Employment Law Project has a report showing how this Depression is hollowing out middle class jobs, with 8.4% of all middle wage jobs gone (and that's on top of a process that had already started before the Depression). One profession that has shown growth among middle wage jobs, though, is "bailiffs, correctional officers, and jailers"—they make up over 81,000 of the news jobs. Sarah Jaffe has more. Meanwhile, ALEC is pushing policies that allow private prisons to employ inmates at less than prevailing wages, effectively undercutting real businesses.

The DC Circuit has shot down an SEC rule that would make it easier to get dissident Directors in corporate board elections. To back it's decision, the panel seems to have badly cherry-picked studies to claim that giving stockholders greater say in corporate governance is a bad thing.

Obama missed an opportunity to blame Republicans for letting Delta's union-busting get in the way of FAA reauthorization—and instead losing billions in the process. Instead, he blamed Congress generally.

Reuters reports on reverse mergers, in which companies use dormant shell companies to get listed on US exchanges, while avoiding the scrutiny an IPO would require. Of 122 Chinese companies that used reverse mergers to list on US exchanges, they have lost \$18 billion in market capitalization.

Our Dying Empire

David Axe reports that the arms we're giving to African troops to fight al-Shabaab in Somalia ending up in al-Shabaab's hands; the troops are selling the weapons because their paychecks are withheld from them.

Joshua Foust looks at how a shift of aid—things like USAID—to the Defense budget just as we start talking about cutting big money from national security puts such aid at risk. Meanwhile, Nancy Youssef catches the Republicans doling out an extra \$50 billion to DOD.

In 2009, USA Today reported that retired officers were getting up to \$330/hour to consult with DOD on things like weapon systems as part of a mentor system. So DOD passed rules that required those retirees to reveal their ties to defense contractors. The result? Most of the participants—all but 20 of the 158 mentors in the program when they first identified this gravy train in 2009—have left the program. (h/t POGO) No wonder Republicans are working so hard to prevent Obama from passing an Executive Order requiring transparency on other contracting—because transparency actually works.

Justice and Injustice

Radley Balko writes about Corey Maye's return home after being released from death row.

Rummy's effort to claim qualified immunity in a suit a US citizen filed for the abuse he was subjected to at Camp Cropper has failed. Here's the opinion.

Ron Wyden says he will block the Intelligence Authorizaiton bill over FISA changes and transparency. I hope he keeps his word.

LINKS, 8/2/11

Justice and Injustice

Amanda Terkel describes how the state-level budget cuts are putting courts and justice out of the reach of Americans.

Dahlia Lithwick transcribes highlights of the remarkable panel she moderated over the weekend.

The Whistleblower—the trailer for which is above—opens on Friday. Nick Schwellenbach provides background on the story it tells—how DOD Contractor Dyncorp was involved in human trafficking—here.

The other day I noted that former Director of IS00, Bill Leonard, wanted to file a complaint against those in NSA who improperly classified one of the documents charged in the Thomas Drake case. about which he said, “I’ve never seen a more deliberate and willful example of government officials improperly classifying a document.” Leonard received permission and has now submitted that complaint. In related news, Thomas Drake and Jesselyn Raddack have an op-ed on the Obama Administration’s war on whistleblowers.

Surveillance Nation

The Obama Administration says the guidelines it uses to decide what—in addition to a Muslim’s faith—gets them targeted for FBI infiltration is a state secret. That’s an excellent way to protect the First Amendment, don’t you think?

Not only did Bill Nelson join Republicans in blocking more reporting on FISA, but the entire Intelligence Committee took a voice vote to reject Mark Udall and Ron Wyden’s attempt to make James Clapper tell us they are using our phones to track us.

Josh Gerstein reported last week that TSA was going to roll out Israeli-style behavioral screening at airports. It looks like they’re rolling it out at Boston. The idea in principle might be great (it sure beats stripping granny of her adult diaper); but no one is going to pay TSA workers enough to do this competently, I’m betting. Meanwhile, scanner machines introduced

for airport security in Australia are set off by sweaty armpits.

The US had to relax its guidance on al-Shabaab so that humanitarian groups could work with the terrorist organization to get relief to famine victims. They really ought to just rewrite the law to get rid of the stupid Holder v. Humanitarian Law interpretation.

Jeff Kaye has a story cataloging the range of uses of water in torture by DOD. Some of these pretty clearly fall into descriptions of water dousing (which DOD wasn't authorized to use, either; the others are clearly attempts to simulate drowning, like waterboarding). But I think that shows that the ways the government was stretching whatever guidance it had.

LINKS, 8/1/11

Our dying economy

Hendrik Hertzberg catches Louie Gohmert stealing Leon Trotsky's dustbin.

HSBC is closing a bunch of branches in the US, apparently having decided the US is not longer the land of opportunity for profit.

Yves Smith argues that Liz Warren would be better of primarying Obama than running for Senate. I think her analysis is spot on.

Bruce Levine looks at the 8 ways our society has undermined the traditional rebelliousness of youth, from medications to No Child Left Behind to student loan debt.

Free birth control! At least we have some good news.

Surveillance Nation

The Senate Intelligence Authorization extends FISA past the 2012 election; if it passes, Obama

will never be held responsibly for his past flip-flop on FISA and his promises to fix it.

The House Judiciary Committee passed their Internet-surveillance-posing-as-Porn-law on Tuesday, even managing to make it worse. I like John Cole's approach to this: to make this into an issue about the DNC, since DNC Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz is one of the original co-sponsors. Next time the DNC hits you up for money, tell them no, and it's DWS' fault.

The Brits botched the redaction of a FOIA response, thereby revealing cooperation between Capita and ISPs.

The British torture inquiry is actually planning on going to Gitmo to interview detainees about events they may have witnessed. This is far more than I expected from this inquiry, though it's still safe to assume it'll be a whitewash.

Obama has finally found nominated someone (another Harvard JD) to replace Glenn Fine, who as DOJ Inspector General found a lot of the abuses the FBI committed under the PATRIOT Act. I'll have to do more research, but I am skeptical about a former prosecutor taking this job.

LINKS, 07/29/11

bmaz is working on trash. Here's a highlight of what I'll be talking about.

Justice and Injustice

Two developments in the Thomas Drake case. First, Josh Gerstein has posted the excerpt from the transcript where Judge Richard Bennett laid into William Welch about the three year delay after raiding Drake's house. Also, Steven Aftergood reports that Drake's lawyers are trying to get one of the charged documents

declassified so former IS00 head William Leonard (who would have been the Defense's expert witness had the case gone to trial), can complain about its improper classification in the first place. Ultimately, we're going to learn the government pursued Drake for years over a document that was improperly overclassified.

The company that holds a patent on the breast cancer genes BRCA1 and BRCA2 won an Appeals Court ruling, allowing it to sustain its patent. One of our own smart rulers explained what this means to me some years back—I'm not at high risk for BRCA, but may be at risk for another genetic issue. But no scientist will study the other possible genetic condition unless I have first disqualified being a BRCA holder—at a cost of thousands.

Pam Bondi, FL's AG who fired the two women doing some of the best investigation in foreclosure fraud, was getting donations from Lender Processing Services and Provest while investigating them.

Update: Here's Judge Leonie Brinkema's order requiring James Risen to testify at the Jeffrey Sterling trial, but with strict limits. I'm betting William Welch either appeals—or starts getting cold feet.

Your Daily Murdoch

Three days after Louise Mensch questioned the Murdochs and Rebekah Brooks, she received what is basically a threat to expose her past drug use. She took it in stride, admitting, "Although I do not remember the specific incident, this sounds highly probable."

The MPs leading inquiries into the Murdoch scandal have called on Gordon Taylor to testify to the judge leading the other inquiry. The settlement—and gag—Taylor made with NotW is at the center of charges that James Murdoch lied to Parliament.

Our Dying Empire

Former Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair and Deputy National Security Advisor Douglas Lute have gotten into a pissing match over whether we should use drones or not in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It's worth emphasizing, though, that Lute cedes Blair's argument that we should be cooperating more closely with Pakistan, even while saying we've got to make an exception now because we have a chance to take out al Qaeda.

"Most" of Saudi Arabia's troops are being withdrawn from Bahrain.

Our Dying Economy

As part of the devastating GDP numbers today, they revised GDP downward for the last two years to admit that we're still not back to where we were before the crash. Now that the Village has data showing what the rest of us already knew—that the Great Recession never ended, at least not for the little people—maybe some of them will remember that jobs are more important than austerity.

The Emergency Financial Manager for Detroit's Public School system, Roy Roberts is the first to modify an existing contract using his powers: he just cut both union and non-union salaries by 10%. This is on top of a big wage concession last year, not to mention huge student-teacher ratios.

Brian Schweitzer—who would win a race easily—said at a presser yesterday he's not going to run, because the system is broken. I suspect he's just one of many good candidates who will pass on DC until it becomes functional.

Terrorists and CyberHacks

Charles Johnson has caught Pam Geller in an interesting attempt to bury the past. Just a few days ago, she removed the following line from an email "from an Atlas reader in Norway" "We are stockpiling weapons, ammunition and equipment. This is going to happen fast." She admitted in comments to posting this anonymously to prevent

his arrest. In his Manifesto, right wing Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik complained about Johnson's past criticism of Geller.

HBGary has prevented its former CEO, Aaron Barr, from appearing on a panel on Anonymous at Defcon. They cited his separation agreement in their threat to file an injunction against his appearance.

LINKS, 7/27/11



Apparently, the ducks that live in the Grand River think we should "Give peace a chance." McCaffrey the MilleniaLab and I saw this on our walk this morning.

Justice and Injustice

All my complaints that DOJ won't indict banksters? Well, they won't indict American banksters. They did, however, indict a handfull of Credit Suisse banksters last week for helping Americans shield their loot from taxes.

Victory for Joe Nocera! Apparently DOJ has now revealed it is investigating Wells Fargo for the criminal discrimination alleged in the Fed settlement it signed last week. Note, however, that all this appears to be headed for yet another settlement; can we please have a criminal prosecution, DOJ?

Our National Security State

Both Jason's story on the Air Force using the New Testament and the comments of Wernher Von Braun to teach missile officers the ethics of nuclear war, and Spencer's story on the FBI using Orientalist trash to teach agents on Islamic culture are nauseating by themselves. But read together, they say our national security establishment propagates the ideology of Crusade in our fight against terrorism. Here's the Air Force and the FBI PowerPoints used to spew such propaganda; it's nice to see we've got our propaganda bureaucratized on PowerPoint.

The US forced a Mexican flight to stop short of US airspace because a human rights activist, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, was on the flight. This is at least the third human rights activist the government has tried to keep out of—or even away from—this country.

Claiming (falsely) that there's no evidence that Anders Behring Breivik is linked to U.S. groups, Peter King has refused Democratic requests that he expand his terror hearings to include the far right. Of course, given that the US rightwinger inspired Breivik, rather than the reverse, this is consistent with King's earlier support for US-sponsored terrorism in Ireland. I guess for King, terrorism is okay so long as the US exports it.

The CIA says the Russians bombed our embassy in Georgia last September. Congress wants to suggest that means Russia can't be trusted with a defense agreement. I don't remember them saying that when we bombed the Chinese embassy in Serbia.

In a post deservedly taking a victory lap for his case that the secret PATRIOT powers relate to geolocation, Julian Sanchez notes a change in Ron Wyden's legislation designed to limit the government's use of geolocation. Whereas it used to modify FISA, it now includes an exception to permit geolocation. It seems—though this is just

a guess—that the bill is now trying to force the government to use a higher standard before using geolocation.

As part of its effort to raise attention to DOJ's new investigative guidelines, the Brennan Center has fact checked the claims DOJ officials made before the last round of DIOG changes, finding that they misled what those changes would entail as they were trying to gain support for them.

NSA made a big deal out of declassifying a 200-year old document on cryptography. Only, the document was never classified, and has been available in digital format for several years.

It looks like DOJ is using its relaxed approach to Miranda with white alleged terrorists, too, in this case with the accused MLK Day bomber. They're just lucky this isn't going to endanger their prosecution here. (h/t scribe)

Our Dying Economy

Shorter Stephen Roach: By using the myth of bond vigilantes to create an unnecessary debt ceiling crisis, we have pushed China to become bond vigilantes.

Free for All

Reasons why my brain is probably shrinking: years of acute back pain, Internet—uh—enjoyment, and chronic insomnia. (I consider my wine drinking to wash out with my beer drinking.)
Reasons why my brain is not shrinking: meat, lots of sunlight, no more pot-smoking, very lapsed Catholicism.