

## To Eat or Not to Eat - That's a Question?

Written by Alex Baer

Sunday, 28 October 2012 21:10 - Last Updated Sunday, 28 October 2012 21:15

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One drawback to having many interests is the sense of always sampling, but never really eating a full meal -- just wandering around in circles with a tiny appetizer plate that would struggle to accommodate half a grapefruit, looking for odds and ends and bonus grazing spots, trying to avoid being stuffed full of any one thing.

Only rarely does the thought emerge, "You know, I'd like to take a very long time out and not check the news for the next year or two." That's tantamount to treason for the inquisitive, right up there with the infamous "to be or not to be" question. Curiosity -- the hunger to know -- demands sating, even if one has been packed to the gills and overfed on a dish or two.

To paraphrase an ancient joke: "*Take politics and religion -- please!*" Especially the combo platter on those. Tow them away, if you don't mind. Thing is, it's a reach to November 6 -- now more a battered low crawl than a sprint down the ol' home stretch. The urge to grasp is much reduced.

So, politics remains on the menu -- and then, on the 7th, the whole shebang starts up again for the 2016 circus, of course, in the undying search and hope for power, here in the land of the eternal flame and the everlasting campaign.

Religion will likely not jump off the stove and cool down, but keep playing footsie with positioning -- front or back burner, skipping side to side, playing with the heat controls. Religion has yet to be silent on anything, not for more than eleven seconds at any given time, not in all of human history. Not likely to start now.

And, for unhinged glory, there's nothing quite like that marriage made in heaven of the two, politics and religion -- the most unfortunate, if not unlikely, bedfellows one might encounter in *this-here* bed 'n' breakfast, The Deranged Inn of the Daft.

The inmates are always dropping back in, moment to moment in this overpopulated clubhouse, so there's hardly any wait between acts, between bites -- or between biting acts, far as that goes.

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Today's menu, if you're feeling up to it, and not still too queasy from ingesting all that Politics Pie lately, encompasses energy, some on-purpose humor, along with a small side of food. We'll try to keep the civics ingredients down to a dull roar -- dealing only in sprinkles this time, and not the usual, overwrought, over-boiled slabs.

So, if you have your flatware, cloth napkin, bib (and/or bib overalls), miner's helmet with spotlight, entrenching tool, pickaxe, and sluice pan at the ready, we might as well wade in with both eyeballs and/or feet.

With luck, the current will be kind today, so long as we stay out of the uh, *mainstream*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Columnist David Brooks may be many things, but comedy writer is not one that would have immediately leapt to mind. Even though there are humorous moments still in memory from the Friday nights he and Mark Shields would jocularly spar on Lehrer's *NewsHour*; it was more a knowing grin than a threat of laugh-out-loud funny.

I sit corrected. Brooks wrote a very funny portrait in late August on Willard Romney. It may sound like a train wreck, trying to squeeze anything like humor from a right-wing columnist and a whack-job like Romney. However, unlike Romney, Brooks often shows signs of being a human being -- even moments of clear recognition of reality and the absurdity of Republicans and, especially, Romney. (As always, the links are below.)

Meanwhile, Mitt's still trying to pretend he's like us. He's been impressive, trying to push that \$10,000 bet a while ago. Then there was the car elevator, the dancing horse shipped to London for the week, the mansions in which Ann stayed at home with the children and servants, the money squirreled away offshore out of tax reach, the visit to some countries around the world in his memorable Insult-O-Rama Tour...

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A favorite that never fades away is the thought that \$200,000 to a quarter of a million dollars a year represents middle income. That's nearly as good as Ann's "you people" quote, her concerns about Mitt's mind, should he win office, and the sense that it's their turn to be president.

**[Reminder: Close jaw manually, here.]** Oh, well. It's just so hard to stay in touch when the payments you pick up for quick speeches equal more than the \$50,000 median income for 6 or 7 people or so. And those \$50,000-a-plate fundraisers?

*How about that -- it's the country's median income!*

You can almost hear the gears click inside Mitt, and his question start to form:

*Hey, does that count for me being in touch, or is that just a coincidence?*

*Sigh.* If you'd like your laughter to be on the bitter or sharp side, you should check out Richard Eskow's columns at "The Smirking Chimp," starting with the one below, addressing Willard's trip into the *RomneyZone*, his Death Star economics, corporate welfare, and a check on a good working definition of insanity.

If you're a glutton for punishment, probe the details of 8 candidates who Romney fully and completely backs -- all of whom are all certifiably insane regarding the subject of rape, among other things. If that's not depressing enough, check out the biggest lies this latest Republican presidential candidate has told women. The binders are in there, as are promises of equal pay -- you know, that bill Republicans voted on 203 nay, and only 7 yea.

Finally, in this *woe-bestruck* section on Mittens, there is the old, dangling story of saying one thing and doing another. That used to be called hypocrisy, way back when people paid attention, and facts actually mattered to the public -- before the invention of teevee. Lots to choose from in this category. This time, it's talking up a good game for the draft and the Vietnam war, while getting a student deferment, and another to be a missionary in France.

*Wow -- danger really IS his business, isn't it folks? ☹ Let's give him a nice hand... (Yeah, one wrapped in a boxing glove.)*

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What to make of news that the U.S. has been booming along in oil production lately, and may soon overtake Saudi Arabia as the world's biggest producer? (Don't feel badly if you experienced some whiplash, from the double-take you did, going back to read that one again.)

So, *uh* -- if that's *true*, why are we still horsing around with the XL pipeline, and transporting toxic sludge from Canada atop the nation's largest aquifer, only to have this gunk land in an export zone and be shipped to others? Far as that goes, why has the first U.S. oil sands mine been green-lighted to start mining in Utah -- before getting a pollution permit or monitoring groundwater quality? *Hello?*

Meanwhile, gas prices could drop, they say? Why? Have Oil company CEOs decided to forego this week's multi-billionaire dollar bonuses -- *each*? Have Wall Street speculators moved on to running-up and rigging the price of some other seldom-used commodity -- *oh, I don't know*

--

*water*

, let's say?

Gas prices have zero to do with supply and demand or anything based in logic. Some oil company advisor should go rogue and write a book about setting global oil prices using only tide tables, a moon ephemeris, and chicken bones -- then, the writer should do the honorable thing, and leap from a great height onto something sharp and hard. Or both.

For humor relief, how about a working oil well in the take-out lane of a Pennsylvania McDonald's? *Sure, you can get a barrel of the light, sweet crude -- but, the downside is you gotta take the soaking-wet fries that come with that.*

\* \* \* \* \*

It's not been much of a week for nuclear boosters and cheerleaders. (Besides, that "*Soooo cheap there'll be noooooo metering!*" chant was getting really, really old. Just ask Reddy Kilowatt, who shorts out, every time

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someone does.)

In Hanford, Washington, the Department of Energy has confirmed radioactive and hazardous chemical leaks from double-walled tanks on the nuclear reservation. Although there's no good way to measure the amount leaking, an employee says it's a "very, very small volume."

If there's no way to measure the amount leaking, why are you so set on assuring us you're certain it's a tiny amount? This one may need a salute for the Double-Talk of the Year awards, if the Darwin Awards don't get there first.

Meanwhile, speaking of leaks: a report by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission -- the apparent support group, appreciation society, and cheerleading pom-pom supplier for the industry -- has slipped out. It shows that Americans have had radioactive smoke blown into their faces, or somewhere else, insofar as flooding threats are concerned around nuclear plants.

And, just so we all remain relaxed and do not panic, that hydrogen leak at the San Onofre plant is really no big deal and there's no danger. Well, good. That means that all those other reports and problems at that troubled plant were all just - what? -- flukes of design, materials, and workmanship, right? *Hang on -- if that was meant as comfort, it didn't take.*

Speaking of discomfort, just when you were wondering why you weren't hearing any more news of the very real possibility of a world-ender, triggered at Fukushima, here comes an update: *No problem, it's all good -- except for the ongoing release of radiation into the ocean, 18 months later.*

As for fracking: So far, it appears this is a very dangerous activity that can poison groundwater, trigger seismic activity, create sinkholes and cave-ins following extractions, and just generally leave everyone in the area and the surroundings a wreck. Doesn't it follow, then, that we should pursue this same activity around a nuclear plant? *You betcha! □ Drill, baby, drill!*

If life were a movie, I would have had a really hard time believing that these news tidbits were cropping up coincidentally around the same time, when I was stumbling over the story of

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Mayak, one of the worst nuclear accidents in history, from 1957, and covered up for many years by the Soviet Union. *Holy Windscale, rad man!*

As much as the nuclear industry has had its share of horror stories, the oil industry's been around longer, and has many of its own. And, if this were a conspiracy thriller, it might have ended the first part of its story with the horrific, confusing, execution-style assassination of an oil industry executive while in a foreign country.

Unfortunately, it has: Nicholas Mockford, age 60, gunned down in front of his wife, outside a restaurant they had just left. Everyone involved is stunned. Nothing adds up. No sense to it. The mystery is continued.

But, for a story with confounding and inexplicable twists and turns, you can't get much better than the GMO food story that's been slowly played out over the years. Anywhere a story appears, there is a nearly-instantaneous posting of comments from every conceivable angle, thought, and belief.

We'll solve and resolve little in a couple wrap-up paragraphs here, especially an issue so fraught with intensely opposing views among people. In many ways, the GMO issue is one in which it is easy to wonder if anything is truly knowable any more, or if every topic under the sun these days comes with hidden agendas, behind-the-scenes conniving and machinations, and a set of beliefs pushed by mega-industries equipped with enough psychologists, lawyers, and marketeers who could make -- *oh, pick something* -- even *nuclear power* seem safe.

How much is a flashback to the tobacco industry here, where we will find in 50 or more years, that everyone's ears will fall off, say, at GMO ingestion + 50, ala -- *No, no, these are perfectly safe for you, as confirmed in all our doctor testimonials featured prominently in our magazine ads...*

California's been *wrassling* with these food demons for some time now in Prop 37, and the result may set the trend for the nation. The request seems innocent enough: If there are GMO products in the food, include that information on the label. *Duh* -- easily understandable, no doctorate needed.

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Thing is, if GMO foods are so (*yawn*) safe, as the makers say, why is a Who's Who list of agri-food giants, like Monsanto and DuPont, opposing the inclusion of such boringly simple info on food labels? Why is a healthy list of "healthier" companies, as they've been known -- like Nature's Path and Dr. Bronner's -- supporting the listing of those 3 letters on a food label when it applies?

Part Two of the question: Why are the big agri-food groups only opposing it here, in the U.S. -- when the same requirement, when it came up in Europe, sailed through without so much as a micron of fuss?

You can spend days and weeks sifting info on GMOs, trying to deduce levels of relative safety or hazard, and feel as if you've fallen down Alice's rabbit hole. There are lots of finger-wagging, hands-on-hips articles and pieces around, and they will do just that -- spin you round and round.

If I were a Californian, I'd sure want to know why the agri-giants are battling a simple, honest, truth-in-advertising-and-production requirement -- why it's worth so many millions of dollars to halt listing GMO ingredients inside products when GMO ingredients are used.

Three letters, they take up so little space on a label -- so the "expensive label redesign" argument holds no water. Besides, if the label design cost issues were really so costly, you could take \$5 million out of the *fight-GMO-labelling campaigns* at all your agri-business companies to get the redesign actually done, rather than fighting it tooth and nail.

Well, we could talk more politics into this whole mess, but I have no more stomach for it, not here at the end. Not only that, my appetite's really quite *off*.

Probably the same for you, in New York, and along much of the Eastern seaboard. This is a good moment to call a time out and regroup in a bit. Maybe by then, we'll all feel more like getting a bite -- or biting something back.

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Brooks on Romney: <http://www.timesunion.com/default/article/Brooks-I-know-the-real-Mitt-Romney-3819569.php>

Romney, knower of middle income:

<http://www.nationalmemo.com/lol-of-the-week-mitt-romney-psychic-fact-checker/>

RomneyZone:

<http://smirkingchimp.com/thread/richard-eskow/46152/welcome-to-the-romneyzone-foreign-policy-economic-home-front>

Romney's backing of 8 rape-crazed Senate runners:

<http://www.alternet.org/election-2012/meet-8-romney-backed-senate-candidates-who-would-for-rape-victims-have-their-rape>

Romney's whoppers to women:

<http://www.alternet.org/election-2012/top-6-lies-romney-has-told-women-election-season-full-whoppers>

Romney's say one thing, do another policy:

<http://www.truth-out.org/buzzflash/commentary/item/17591-mitt-romney-avoided-military-service-while-he-supported-vietnam-war-and-draft>

Oil production booming:

[http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US\\_OIL\\_BOOM?SITE=FLTAM&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_OIL_BOOM?SITE=FLTAM&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT)

Utah oil sands: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-10-26/first-u-s-oil-sands-mine-proceeds-without-pollution-permit.html>

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Gas prices: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/10/20/gasoline-prices/1641935/>

McDonald's oil: <http://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2012/10/19/you-want-oil-with-that/>

Reddy the K, via Google, and here: <http://www.reddykilowatt.org/>

Hanford nuclear leak reservations: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/10/23/172287/dept-of-energy-confirms-tank-leak.html>

and: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanford\\_Site](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanford_Site)

Darwin Awards: <http://www.darwinawards.com/darwin/>

Flood threat to nuke plants:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/19/nuclear-plant-flood-threat-leak\\_n\\_1983005.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/19/nuclear-plant-flood-threat-leak_n_1983005.html)

San Onofre: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/10/hydrogen-leak-san-onofre.html>

Fukushima update:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/10/25/172641/radiation-still-leaking-into-nearby.html>

Fracking around nuke plants: <http://ecowatch.org/2012/fracking-fukushima-batman/>

Mayak: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayak>

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Windscale: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windscale\\_fire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windscale_fire)

Mockford:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/belgium/9634530/British-ExxonMobil-oil-chief-assassinated-in-Brussels-street.html>

GMO: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/26/prop-37-opponents\\_n\\_2023719.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/26/prop-37-opponents_n_2023719.html)

The big storm's NY shutdown: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-20117005>