

Laugh or Cry, Push Reset and Just Reboot

Written by Alex Baer

Friday, 28 December 2012 19:00 - Last Updated Friday, 28 December 2012 20:53

Today's Over-the-Cliff riddle, brought to you by our mutual sponsors at Brinkmanship-M-Us: What's filled with excrement and does whatever it's told by its owners?

(While we wait for everyone to use their allotted 30 seconds to make a guess, I'll wish you a happy, cross-your-fingers reboot, into another year, and hope this one works out and fires up cleanly this time.) *Ding!*

OK, pencils down, everyone. You'll be quickly forgiven if you said something on the order of "our bought and paid-for, corporately-owned Congress." (Not to highlight a technicality too vividly, but corporations and absurdly wealthy individuals can both own politicians nowadays. This is called *Progress*.)

In any case here, award yourself 100 bonus points, and a Congressional "Stay Out of Jail on Your Own Recognizance Free" card, just for playing. Hang on to that thing, too, once you get it. Stash it in with the rest of your stash, in your safety deposit box, down at First Failing Hemisphere MegaBanxCo.

The Congressional Recog Card (hereafter referred to as The Card, per Section IV, Subsection W, para 101 through 163, inclusive) need never leave home to follow you and be in full effect -- everyone knows if you have one or not. Plus, The Card works on just about anything, even DUI -- even if you're a tee-totalist Mormon and conservative Republican from Idaho, don't you know.

The Card also provides you vast opportunities to increase your personal wealth. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, for example, improved his own financial situation, on average, by \$4 million a year on his *meager* government salary of \$193,400. In the six years from 2004 to 2010, McConnell's wealth jumped from \$3.1 million to \$27.2 million -- a whopping 786% and \$24 million gain in that time.

Nice work if you can get it. And, to get such dumbfounding delights, it appears all you have to do is promise to hold one other politician to a 4-year term, no matter if the country slides into a boiling fissure in the earth or not -- and then fail at that one task; meanwhile, you'll have to alternately hold the country and its people hostage during the nation's financial negotiations, or

Laugh or Cry, Push Reset and Just Reboot

Written by Alex Baer

Friday, 28 December 2012 19:00 - Last Updated Friday, 28 December 2012 20:53

else, simply ignore everything, say "no" repeatedly, and perfect your blank, questioning stare and turtle-y pout, slowly gazing about.

Sure. *That* seems worth a \$10,958 **daily** paycheck, for each of the 365 days a year, and for every single year of that six year period of astronomical wealth gain, don't you think?

But, hey, it's an exclusive club. There can, by law, be only 435 members in the House, and fewer still, just 100 in the Senate. Competition among members will be always be keen, especially when the waters have been chummed, but no one goes hungry here, as a casual glance at almost any representative will clearly show.

Rank and file players, however, get \$174,000 in salary from the Community Chest, before perks and expenses, as members of the U.S. House of Representatives or Senate. We probably shouldn't get too sidetracked here with the math -- 535 members, times \$174,000 at the absolute, bare-bones minimum... -- nor, I imagine, should we ask ourselves if we, The People, are getting our money's worth, either.

Better we should work our way through all our stripped gears and go on to provide the answer to today's trivia question instead: No, it's not a politician, but the EcoBotIII, a creation of scientists at the Bristol Robotics Laboratory in the UK.

The robot works off power received from -- *sporks* down for a sec, everyone, for your own good -- human sewage. For the especially curious, it should be noted the 'bot has a fly-trapping hat, a convenience even members of Congress may want to look into, especially on those hot, muggy, summer days when you suspect Washington, D.C. really *was* built on a swamp.

(It wasn't, but, as historian Don Hawkins has been quoted as saying of that myth, "I think it's survived because it's such a useful analogy for the way Congress works." Food for thought, as long as we're speaking of obtaining power from raw sewage.)

Laugh or Cry, Push Reset and Just Reboot

Written by Alex Baer

Friday, 28 December 2012 19:00 - Last Updated Friday, 28 December 2012 20:53

At least the scientists have a good excuse for their machinations. It's hoped the EcoBot project will help improve understanding of the way sewage is treated. That knowledge could help bring down energy costs in dealing with waste, by allowing treatment plants to run on the stuff they're already treating. Almost a nice, little, perpetual motion machine.

(Please add -- or should it be subtract? -- 10 points for suggesting it's a shame the same method couldn't be counted on to run members of Congress more cheaply, and hollow out their care-and-feeding bills, too. On the other hand, let's do the math cliff-style: add and then subtract 10 points 4,219 times in a row. Then, complain very loudly to yourself that the whole, miserable system is broken. *Actually, never mind. ☐ Sorry I brought the whole thing up.*)

And, of the general *financial-cliff-crap* created by bored media types looking for something to ignite, hoping to maintain fiery ratings after the superheated election, we all need to relay to them our icy stares and be cold, wet blankets to such inane, insane natterings- and chatterings-on.

Media and politicians are each working their own circus angles here, with no education or clarity offered to the public. On the one hand, media have rich owners and ad buyers to please with high ratings and more riches. On the other hand, politicians have rich corporate and individual owner-trainers to please, along with the need to divert some riches their way while maintaining high ratings back home.

Given how this chilly, *Public Interest on Ice* show works, there's almost no information getting out that the whole thing is both hogwash and eyewash, with a little whitewash thrown in for good measure, by money magicians, too.

Corporations and the wealthy don't want info getting out that the real goal here is to prevent taxing -- at even rational, reasonable, historically low levels -- of their favorite charities: *Themse lves*

Media, now owned and steered by most of those same groups of people after decades of consolidation, feel the exact same way -- put upon and beset by nightmares when asked to contribute their fair share.

Obviously, then, the only solution is a public masquerade, in which sins of the Republican's

Laugh or Cry, Push Reset and Just Reboot

Written by Alex Baer

Friday, 28 December 2012 19:00 - Last Updated Friday, 28 December 2012 20:53

Grand Overspending Past (wars, bank bailouts, crony gifts, tax breaks and loopholes galore) are now brought to life as Incredibly Urgent Democratic Problems the Nation Can Solve Only By Taking a Rusty Machete to Social Spending.

(Get ready for another round of Deja Vu, and heart palpitations, when the next debt ceiling conversation has to occur right now, too. Republicans are eager beavers on jacking up the debt ceiling with a Dubya or Reagan at the helm, but are sloth personified, and foot-draggers extraordinaire, when a Democrat's in the Oval Office.)

Coming right up: More pratfalls and deadfalls, more facepalming and forehead smacks with the heel of one's hand -- the Keystone Cops Congress is not quite done with us yet, if their threat to urgently reconvene this weekend is true. If so, there must be some new development in Republican stonewalling that requires a test-drive before their End of the Year Special Delaying Tactic coupon expires.

* * * * *

Ah, how the time gets away from us all, especially as the last days count down and we try to cram in more and more, even later and later in the year, month, and day. Like me.

For example, I'd hoped to get to the study of doomsday dangers to humanity from advanced tech and 'bots -- be they sewage eaters or not -- by what has to be the most chicly named group I've fallen across lately, ever since it was announced the U.N. had no Ambassador for Extraterrestrials after all: *Centre for the Study of Existential Risk*. Artificial life, nanotechnology, biotech advances, climate change -- there's no end to the possible horses and riders of the our latest and greatest, *hotnew ap*
ocalypse, or so it seems.

Then, there was the swimming robot that had a record-breaking swim from San Francisco to Australia, fronted by a fitting-sounding U.S. company called Liquid Robotics. *Splish-splash, I was taking a 9,000-mile bath...*

Laugh or Cry, Push Reset and Just Reboot

Written by Alex Baer

Friday, 28 December 2012 19:00 - Last Updated Friday, 28 December 2012 20:53

There were the radiation-resistant robots developed to give humans a break and help out with hot tasks at the Fukushima nuclear site. There was even a very promising test of a robotic arm guided by a paralyzed person -- said to have been a remarkable achievement and an unprecedented performance, too.

Unfortunately, I've been on autopilot all day -- just going through the motions, clanking along like a robot going back and forth in a trench, redirecting myself only after hitting a wall.

You probably know just what I mean. Especially if you keep up with politics at all.

Oh, crap: <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/12/sen-michael-crapo-arrested-on-dui-charge/>

Sewage power: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/20557508>

Perpetual motion machines: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perpetual_motion

Congressional pay & benefits: <http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/uscongress/a/congresspay.htm>

and: http://library.clerk.house.gov/reference-files/112_20120104_Salary.pdf

Mitch's rich: <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/politics/capitol-assets/member/mitch-mcconnell/>

The useful "swamp" analogy: http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-04-01/local/35451674_1_height-limits-swamp-washington-monument

Laugh or Cry, Push Reset and Just Reboot

Written by Alex Baer

Friday, 28 December 2012 19:00 - Last Updated Friday, 28 December 2012 20:53

The first Keystone bunch: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keystone_Cops

Robot uprisings and CSER: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-20501091>

Take me to your -- what? <http://io9.com/5650039/the-un-has-no-liaison-for-extraterrestrials-after-all>

and: http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/UN_set_to_name_ambassador_to_aliens_999.html

and: <http://news.discovery.com/space/no-un-alien-ambassador-as-the-bets-roll-in.html>

Swimming robot: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-20612140>

Fukushima 'bots: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-20678838>

Robotic arm test: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-20731973>