

EDITORIALS • COMMENTS • OPINIONS

Fact Check On Debt Ceiling

By Dr. E. Faye Williams, Esq.
TriceEdneyWire

The first time a debt ceiling was raised was in 1940 when Franklin Roosevelt was President. During that time and until now, the federal debt limit has increased over fifty times, and it was done most of the time previously without much fanfare. The first increase during that time came on June 25th, 1940.

The United States soon entered World War II, and the federal debt limit quickly skyrocketed after the first increase. On April 3rd, 1945, Congress approved a new federal debt limit of \$300 billion dollars, a marked increase from just a few years earlier. This was due to the large expenses involved in the war. We have a similar situation today with two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. During war, increases are normal and expected.

A “debt ceiling” is the maximum amount of debt that a government can take on. In order to spend beyond this ceiling, Congress must agree to raise it. The purpose of the debt ceiling is to try to limit too much spending. Of course, when you look at where the debt is today, it’s easy to see that the desired effect has not been accomplished. The debt skyrocketed in the Administration prior to

President Barack Obama being elected. The United States now has a debt ceiling of more than twelve trillion dollars, but we need to raise the ceiling.

It seems that the Democrats are saying we cannot balance the budget on the backs of those who have the least. The Republicans are saying we must continue to give tax breaks to those who can most afford to pay taxes.

Recently the Legislature in Texas suggested cutting four billion dollars from its education budget. Meanwhile, the University of Texas’ annual football budget is 100 million dollars annually! That budget is untouchable. We have money, but it seems that our problem is prioritizing how to spend the money. When we don’t pay our bills, our credit report is bad—making it difficult for us to borrow for necessities. When our country doesn’t pay its bills, the same thing happens, but on a much larger scale.

President Obama has said that the consequences of the U.S. defaulting on our debt if Congress does not raise the debt ceiling will be both significant and unpredictable. In order to avoid what would likely be severe consequences, the ceiling must be raised by August 2, of this year or the options about which we know are said to run out.

It’s being called a “hard deadline”.

The President went on to say, “We don’t know how capital markets will react if that deadline passes without an agreement to raise the \$14.3 trillion limit”. That’s what is being debated. It is pretty certain the consequences for the U.S. economy will be significant and despite all the efforts to improve our economy, we will lose ground.

I believe this hullabaloo over raising the debt ceiling is just another special Republican ploy to distract the people from knowing how their tax dollars are really spent, and to prevent President Obama from carrying on the business of the nation. Rush Limbaugh said at the beginning of this President’s term, he wants him to fail. Apparently, the same is true for many Republicans whose leaders have walked out of negotiations where attempts were being made to find common ground.

Trying another prank will not be successful. It is in all of our best interest to resolve the matter, so why all the stalling? We should have no fear because raising the debt ceiling will go through.

Dr. E. Faye Williams, Esq. is National Chair of the *National Congress of Black Women*.

Michele Bachmann: The John Wayne Of Political Lies

By George E. Curry
NNPA Columnist

Whether making the round of Sunday morning talk shows, giving the Tea Party response to President Obama’s State of the Union address, or announcing her own presidential candidacy, Michele Bachmann does one thing consistently – lie.

The Republican congresswoman from Minnesota, who has been described as Sarah Palin with a brain, has enjoyed a dramatic rise in public opinion polls following the latest debate among GOP candidates seeking the party’s presidential nomination. But Bachmann’s comments are a reminder of the adage: Figures can lie and liars can figure. Here are some of the most egregious examples:

BACHMANN [CBS “Face the Nation,” June 26]: The Congressional Budget Office estimated Obamacare will cost economy 800,000 jobs, probably the –

HOST BOB SCHIEFFER: Again, that is data that other people would question.

BACHMANN: That’s – well, that’s what the Congressional Budget Office, that’s not Michele Bachmann, that’s Congressional Budget Office figures saying that we’re – we have the potential of losing 800,000 jobs.

FACTS: As Factcheck.org noted, “The CBO didn’t say that. Instead the CBO said that the law would cause a reduction in the amount of labor workers choose to supply. Some Americans would decide to work fewer hours or retire earlier because their ability to get health insurance would be more secure. And low-income workers would receive subsidies to purchase insurance, putting more money into their pockets. Overall, the CBO said the impact on jobs would be ‘small.’”

BACHMANN [Jan. 25 Tea Party Response to the State of the Union address]: Unfortunately, the president’s strategy for recovery was to spend a trillion dollars on a failed stimulus program, fueled

by borrowed money...Not only did that plan fail to deliver, but within three months the national jobless rate spiked to 9.4 percent. And sadly, it hasn’t been lower for 20 straight months. While the government grew, we lost more than 2 million jobs. Let me show you a chart. Here are unemployment rates over the past 10 years. In October 2001, our national unemployment rate was 5.3 percent. In 2008...it was just 6.6 percent. But, just eight months after President Obama promised lower unemployment, that rate spike to a staggering 10.1 percent.

FACTS: The watchdog group Media Matters, on its politicalcorrection.org site, stated: “From December 2007 to July 2009 – the last year of the Bush second term and the first six months of the Obama presidency, before his policies could affect the economy – private sector employment crashed from 115,574,000 jobs to 107,778,000 jobs. Employment continued to fall, however, for the next six months, reaching a low of 107,107,000 in December of 2009. So, out of 8,467,000 private sector jobs lost in this dismal cycle, 7,796,000 of those jobs or 92 percent were lost on the Republican watch or under their policies. Some 671,000 additional jobs were lost as the stimulus and other moves by the administration kicked in, but 630,000 jobs came back in the following six months. The tally, to date: Mr. Obama can be held accountable for the net loss of 41,000 jobs (671,000-630,000), while the Republicans should be held responsible for the net losses of 7,796,000 jobs.”

BACHMANN [Tea Party State of the Union response]: But instead of cutting, we saw an unprecedented explosion of government spending and debt, unlike anything we have seen in the history of our country. Deficits were unacceptably high under President Bush, but they exploded under President Obama’s direction, growing the national debt by an astounding \$3.1 trillion dollars.

FACTS: The rising debt can be attributed to Bush-era policies and the recession that began before Obama took office. As the

conservative *Washington Times* observed, “The Congressional Budget Office announced a projected fiscal 2009 deficit of \$1.2 trillion even if Congress doesn’t enact any new programs...About the only person who was silent on the deficit projection was Mr. Bush, who took office facing a surplus but who saw spending balloon and the country notch the highest deficits on record.”

BACHMANN [Tea Party response]: We need to start making things again in this country. And we can do that by reducing the tax and regulatory burden on job creators. America will have the highest corporate tax rate in the world. Think about that.

FACTS: Researchers at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities have thought about it and what they realize is that to grasp the corporate tax burden, one needs to look beyond statutory tax rates to the effective tax rate, which takes into account tax deductions. Judging by that standard, the Center notes, “The U.S. corporate tax burden is smaller than average for developed countries. Corporations in 19 of the member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development paid 16.1 percent of their profits in taxes between 2000 and 2005, on average, while corporations in the United States paid 13.4 percent.”

Appearing on Fox News after officially declaring her candidacy for president, Bachmann said on June 27: “What I want them to know is, just like John Wayne is from Waterloo, Iowa, that’s the kind of spirit that I have too.”

John Wayne wasn’t from Waterloo. He was born in Winterset, Iowa and grew up in California. Bachmann apparently got John Wayne mixed up with another John Wayne – John Wayne Gacy, the serial killer who was from Waterloo.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com

Reality Check

Shameless And Cowardly Chicken Hawks

By A. Peter Bailey
TriceEdneyWire

It has long been my observation that the American press corps, especially that based in New York and Washington D.C., has been severely negligent in its coverage of those pundits, politicians and think tankers who consistently express their strong support of the wars of choice in Iraq, Afghanistan and increasingly, Libya.

If members of the press were seriously doing their jobs they would ask repeatedly, until fully answered, three basic questions of the armchair warriors who insist that the national security of the United States is at stake in all three wars. The first is whether that particular armchair warrior has been in the U.S. military on any level. The second is whether any son, daughter, grandchild, brother, sister, nephew, niece of said warriors is in the U.S. military. The third is whether that warrior or any of his family members have ever put or are putting their lives on the line in combat to fights those enemies whom they insist are out to wreak havoc on the United States.

If not, why not. If, as they declare daily, the country’s national

security is at stake, they should be among the first to sign up to confront the enemy. If they don’t do so, it is not being unreasonable to conclude that they don’t believe this is the case. Or that they do believe it, yet are not prepared to put their lives and the lives of their family members on line to destroy the haters of “freedom and liberty.”

Instead of backing up their patriotic rhetoric with concrete action by joining the military to fight the enemy, Bill Kristol, Paul Wolfowitz, Sean Hannity, Charles Krauthammer, Rush Limbaugh and their cohorts are perfectly satisfied with sending children from low income and working class families to be killed or maimed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya while they and their families enjoy their ultra-comfortable homes and offices, celebrate holidays, partake in happy hour at the local bar, go on vacations, write books and articles about what “we” must do to protect the national interest.

One of the most insidious of the armchair warriors is Bill Kristol, editor of the *Weekly Standard* and frequent commentator on Fox News Sunday. The smug Mr. Kristol usually has a smirk on his face

as he pontificates on why it is absolutely crucial that “we” fight these wars of choice because of threats from dangerous and evil enemies. Yet it seemingly never occurs to Kristol that if the threat is so huge that the best way he can help is to either join the military himself or urge young Kristol family members to put their lives on the line in combat.

Otherwise he and his friends and colleague are blowing smoke and shamelessly sending children of low income and working families off to sometimes three or four tours of combat in Iraq, Afghanistan and possibly Libya. They share responsibility for the over 6000 American military personnel killed and the many thousands wounded in the wars they so ardently support but refuse to fight in. That is despicable the press and the parents of those young men and some women need to call them out as the cowardly chicken hawks they are.

Journalist/Lecturer A. Peter Bailey, a former associate editor of Ebony, is currently editor of Vital Issues: The Journal of African American Speeches.

To Break The NFL Lockout, The Fans Need To Get Mobilized

By Bill Fletcher, Jr.
NNPA Columnist

After constant attention on negotiations in the National Football League and the subsequent lockout [where the employers refuse to let the employees work] by the owners, there has been something close to silence. Recent court rulings have permitted the owners to go forward with their lockout, at least for now. And, the rest of us just sit back and watch the calendar slowly approach the beginning of the next season.

The gist of the dispute, as I have discussed in earlier commentaries, has been the greed of the owners. There is really no other way to put it. They are seeking concessions from the player, including an extension of the football season, in a situation where the owners cannot demonstrate any economic need for such givebacks. The only logical conclusion as to why the owners have pushed this dispute to the point of a lockout is so that they can destroy the union of the players—the *NFL Players Association*—and achieve total dominance over the players and the sport.

The Players Association, under its relatively new Executive Director DeMaurice Smith, has been doing a great job of fighting the

good fight. In fact, sports writers and fans have expressed significant support for the Players and have, correctly, identified the greed on the part of the owners as the major source of this conflict. Yet the owners see no particular reason to back down. Conservative court decisions in their favor, along with a national political climate that promotes the destruction of labor unions, encourages their arrogance.

What the owners seem to be counting upon is passivity on the part of the fans. The owners actually do not care whether the fans support them or not. What they are concerned with, however, is what the fans do. It is for this reason that the fans of football need to become motivated and active if we want justice to be won by the players. Here are a few ideas:

1. There needs to be a highly visible organization of the fans, something like “*We stand with the Players*” or something like that. This needs to be more than a couple of people setting up a website. There need to be thousands of active members who sign up to participate.
2. This organization of fans needs to ensure that governmental bodies, particularly municipalities, that have been considering or negotiating any deals that concern new stadiums, put such talks on

hold. Not only do most sports stadiums NOT bring economic advancement to locales, but they almost always involve major financial concessions by cities and counties, that is, by the taxpayers. Let’s temper the greed of the owners by putting a freeze on further talks for the moment.

3. Few fans, except the most tried and true, have any idea who the actual owners are. So, let’s go visit them and introduce ourselves. Let’s have large delegations of fans show up at the offices of the owners and make clear, non-violently, our concern about their greed. Perhaps we should have massive vigils to pray for the souls of the owners.

This is a start. It is not a complete list but it is enough to get us running. Time to get away from the television and the sports bars and into the streets. Let’s get the voices of the fans heard and put the owners on the hot seats.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a Senior Scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum, and the co-author of Solidarity Divided.