



Today's Best

## Five Best Monday Columns

Eric Randall 513 Views 9:29 AM ET

[Sen. Tom Coburn in \*The New York Times\* on Grover Norquist](#) Coburn refutes the narrative that all Congressional Republicans are beholden to Grover Norquist, whose famous anti-tax pledge, opponents say, keeps Republicans from compromising on budget issues. "Senate Republicans -- and many House Republicans -- have repeatedly rejected Mr. Norquist's strict interpretation of his own pledge, a reading that requires them to defend every loophole and spending program hidden in the tax code," he writes. He cites several amendments he proposed to end certain tax earmarks. Norquist said those must be matched with rate reductions, a rule Coburn reports that he and several other Republican senators ignored. "As a result, rather than forcing Republicans to bow to him, Mr. Norquist is the one who is increasingly isolated politically."

[Elizabeth Kolbert in \*The New Yorker\* on climate change](#) Kolbert begins by describing the perfect storm of drought conditions (and the mechanics of "corn sex") in the midwest that will likely lead to soaring corn prices. "Up until fairly recently, it was possible -- which, of course, is not the same as advisable -- to see climate change as a phenomenon that was happening somewhere else," she writes. "The summer of 2012 offers Americans the best chance yet to get their minds around the problem." The convergence of drought conditions, raging fires in the west, and thunderstorms in the east provided a stark example of how climate change is already affecting us. "Along with the heat and the drought and the super *derecho*, the country this summer is also enduring a Presidential campaign. So far, the words 'climate change' have barely been uttered."

[David Lampo in the \*Los Angeles Times\* on Republicans and gay rights](#) "To be sure, anti-gay sentiments still run deep in the GOP," writes Lampo. "Yet if one digs deeper than the conventional wisdom, one finds large, overlooked pockets of gay tolerance among rank-and-file Republicans." Lampo uses polling data to show majority support for the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell among Republicans, dissent among evangelical voters on gay rights and marriage, and differences between the Tea Party and the religious right on LGBT issues. "Now that the campaigns have moved to general election calculus — keeping the party base intact while wooing independent and moderate voters — the Romney campaign, and Republican candidates nationwide, would do well to take heed."

[Albert Hunt in Bloomberg View on the candidates' fiscal specifics](#) "Either Barack Obama or his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, will face a fiscal nightmare: a sluggish economy, a massive tax increase, meat-axe spending reductions, the expiration of extended jobless benefits, and a debt ceiling that imperils the faith and credit of the U.S.," Hunt writes. "Both candidates, though especially Romney, are calculating they can avoid specifics and focus on the other guy's deficiencies." Hunt criticizes Obama for backing away from the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles recommendations, which he solicited in the first place. They should be a starting point for a specific plan. Meanwhile, Romney must outline how he will pay for tax cuts and defense expenditures with specific loopholes he will close.

[Megan McLemore in \*The New York Times\* on protection for sex workers](#) McLemore describes how Human Rights Watch has discovered that public health departments often spend millions to distribute condoms to sex workers even while law enforcement uses those condoms to arrest them on prostitution laws. "An act of the legislature (like [one bill pending in the New York State Assembly](#)), or even a directive from a police chief or district attorney, could end the practice immediately," she writes. Categories of evidence — like testimony regarding the sexual history of rape victims — are excluded as a matter of public policy in many legal systems. In this case, the value of condoms for H.I.V. and disease prevention far outweighs any utility they might have in the enforcement of anti-prostitution laws."

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