



Like the Devil Hates Holy Water, the Health Benefits of Tetris, and Food and the Nanny State (Around the Web for November 11)

Michael Levy - November 11th, 2010

Here are a few stories that caught my eye on this Veterans Day. (If you haven't caught our [picture of the day essay](#), you should.)

- **Like the Devil Hates Holy Water:** Good luck getting a bill through that **provokes such an outburst** from the #2 Democrat in the U.S. Senate (**Richard Durbin**). Yesterday, Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson, the chairmen of the **deficit commission** created by Pres. Barack Obama last February, released a **draft report** [PDF] of suggestions to get the United States's fiscal house in order. As the *New York Times's* Jackie Calmes reports, while it **called for a reduction in the levels of personal income taxation** (to 8% for low income earners, down from 10%, and to 23% for the highest income earners, down from 35%), it also would bring a whole litany of changes that will upset just about every taxpayer in some way, from the elimination of the mortgage interest deduction, to an increase in the federal gas tax, to raising the retirement age, to reducing Medicare payments to doctors, to major cuts in spending, including on the military. Surprisingly, some conservatives are starting to come out in support of **cutting the once sacrosanct military budget**, as Christopher Preble does at the Cato Institute. The *Washington Post's* Dan Eggen has an **interesting piece out on the staffers of the commission**, noting that the commission has come under fire "for its unusual approach to staffing," whereby "about one in four commission staffers is paid by outside entities, many of which have strong ideological points of view about how to tackle the deficit." Over on *Pajamas Media*, Bryan Preston zeroed in on perhaps the **two most contentious pieces** of the draft "trial balloon," calling "horrible" the notion that the gas tax should be raised and that the mortgage interest deduction should be eliminated, since the latter would result in the "killing off [of] the biggest...incentive to buy in the first place." *Newsweek's* Ben Adler referred said the **plan met conservative goals**, as "[m]ost of the savings come from spending cuts rather than increases in tax revenue." The final report of the panel is due December 1, and 14 of the 18 commissioners will need to sign on to the report for the proposals to go to Congress, where liberals and conservatives will likely team up to kill it. President **Obama weighed in by reiterating** that the commission was created "precisely because I am prepared to make some tough decisions." Oh, but isn't that what Congress isn't all about?
- **The Health Benefits of Tetris:** If you're like me, at some point in your life you became addicted to the video game **Tetris** (here's a **primer from eHow** on how to break that addiction), with the game even pervading your dreams. But, now,



according to [researchers at Oxford University](#), Tetris may help with PTSD, writing that "Tetris may offer a 'cognitive vaccine' against flashback development after trauma exposure." LiveScience's Charles Q. Choi tries to [explain the science behind it](#), saying that the "curious effect might have to do with how the shapes in the game compete with images of a traumatic scene when it comes to getting stored in one's memory." BTW, for you Tetris addicts, here's a piece from *Wired* in 1994, which looks at the [pharmatronic effects of the game](#).

- **Adoption, Sea Lion Style:** Challenging previous assertions, *Wired* reports on [research that has found](#) that "[u]p to 17 percent of California sea lion females in populations off the coast of Mexico will take in an orphaned pup and raise it as their own." Marine biologist Romana Flatz "thinks an evolution-backed maternal drive is responsible for the behavior." And, the pictures associated with the story win the "Awww, ain't that cute award" for today.
- **The Little Mosque on the Tundra Opens:** The CBC reported yesterday on the [opening of the the most northerly mosque](#) in North America, in Inuvik in the Northwest Territories of Canada, what they dub "the little mosque on the tundra." The mosque had been relocated 4,000 km from Manitoba at a cost of \$300,000. No reports on protests that the mosque was too close to Ground Zero.
- **Afghanistan 2011...2014:** Stephen Walt, [writing in Foreign Policy](#), discusses the Obama administration's U-turn in the [Afghanistan war](#), which had been reported earlier this week. *McClatchy's* Nancy Youssef [reported on November 9](#) that the "Obama administration has decided to begin publicly walking away from what it once touted as key deadlines in the war in Afghanistan," and in the [New York Times yesterday](#), Elisabeth Bumiller notes that all the major U.S. players have "cited 2014 this week as the key date for handing over the defense of Afghanistan to the Afghans themselves." Though Walt says that "reasonable people can disagree about whether Obama's decision to escalate in Afghanistan was the right one (I think it wasn't)... Obama's straddle on this issue is one reason why some of his most enthusiastic supporters have become disenchanted." He wonders also if this 2014 date may well be a mirage, saying that Obama or his Republican successor will face the same choice in 2014 that they face today. Derrick Crowe, writing in the *Huffington Post*, says such a move would be "[political and policy suicide](#)," while the [headline to Matthew Hoh's](#) piece in the *Huffington Post* puts it bluntly, "Say it Ain't So."
- **The Coming Tea Party Ear War:** [John Boehner](#) hasn't even taken the gavel yet and incoming legislators haven't taken their seats, but a "[civil war is brewing](#)" in the Republican Party over earmarks, writes Siddhartha Mahanta in *Mother Jones*. Jesse Zwick, over at the *Washington Independent*, also has a piece out on earmarks, saying that [Tea Party](#) organizers are putting heavy pressure on Republicans over earmarks, with Tea Party darling and titular leader Jim DeMint calling for a "vote to place a year-long moratorium on the practice of earmarking at the upcoming Republican Conference meeting among Republicans." Says Mark Meckler, of the Tea Party Patriots, "I think [Senator Republican leader Mitch] [McConnell's](#) a perfect example of what's wrong with the GOP and has been wrong for a long time. Following the election, he has a chance to be a hero and he's being a zero." Over at *RedState.com*, Brian Darling believes that [Obama is "praying"](#) that the Republicans will not adopt DeMint's no earmark plan so that they can "portray themselves as to the right of the Senate Republican Conference on wasteful earmarks," in what he calls the "Obama Earmark Trap."
- **Call of Duty Panned in Cuba:** A Cuban Web site, [CubaDebate](#), has recently decried the release of [Call of Duty: Black Ops](#), which calls for players to attempt to assassinate a young [Fidel Castro](#). The *Guradian's* Adam Gabbatt [reports on the outrage](#) by the Cuban government, which said "What the United States government did not achieve in more than 50 years, it now tries to do virtually...This new video game is doubly perverse. On the one hand, it glorifies the illegal assassination attempts the United States government planned against the Cuban leader ... and on the other, it stimulates sociopathic attitudes in North American children and

adolescents." Of course, as Gabbatt points out, the reviews have mostly glossed over the game, with his own paper's Keith Stuart **giving the game 5 stars**. Granted, it's in poor taste for a video game to have players attempt to kill living people in general (though I doubt that most people would raise a brow if it had been Osama bin Laden), but my question: do most of the people playing the game even know who Fidel Castro even is?

- **Food and the Nanny State, part I:** Louise Gray writes in the the *Telegraph* that British MPs **will debate legislation** this week "designed to transform the nation's diet." Among the elements of the **Sustainable Livestock Bill**, which has garnered support from several leading British restaurants, would be to "promote a more vegetarian diet by educating children to eat less meat and providing less meat in schools, hospitals and prisons."
- **Food and the (Erroneous) Nanny State, part II:** Politco's Andy Barr had a piece out last night on **Sarah Palin's bringing cookies to a speech** "amid news reports — since **retracted** — that Pennsylvania's State Board of Education is looking at ways to limit sweets at classroom parties." Well, even if the **reports aren't true**, Palin's stunt kinda looked cool.
- **Sajak's Olbermann Lament:** Pat Sajack, of Wheel of Fortune fame (and, yeah, he hosted a show once called the Pat Sajack Show), is calling for a mulligan, apologizing in a piece on *Ricochet* for **introducing the world to Keith Olbermann**, one time sports reporter and now MSNBC liberal firebrand. Says Sajack, "I'm not sure how he morphed into the bitter-sounding, hate-mongering name-caller he's become." Maybe **Olbermann** will bring back his Worst Person in the World segment one more time. For those of you who want to reminisce, it was two years ago this month that **Ben Affleck** did a **spot-on impersonation of Olbermann**.
- **Astronomy Tourism:** Over on IBTraveler.com, Sanskrity Sinha has a **nice little piece** on where you can go on vacation to get the best views of the sky. Tops are the Canary Islands, Chile, and South Africa. As Sinha notes, "There are hotels that offer telescopes and other means for star gazing in the night sky and then there are observatories on some exclusive locations of the earth that help tourists delve deep into a world outside their world."

Other posts by Michael Levy:

- **Urinating on Your Phone, Mystery Alaska, a California Conspiracy, and the Coming Chocopalypse (Around the Web for November 10)**
- **George W.'s Memoir, Outsourcing to Michigan, No Kimono Obama, AutoCorrect Tragedies, and Breaking Up for the Holidays (Around the Web for November 9)**
- **The Ethics and Morality of the Circus**
- **Obama's Excellent Indian Adventure, Before They Were Stars (Dictator Edition), and the Facebooking Queen (+ More): Around the Web for November 8**
- **An Angry, Divided, Pessimistic, Older, White Electorate: What the 2010 Exit Polls Tell Us**
- **The Early Read: Glee for Republicans, Democratic Doldrums, and America's Strange Voters (Around the Web Midterms 2010 Edition for November 3)**
- **The Chilean Marathoner, Political Sexism 101, Jury Duty 101, NATO's Arcade Fire, and Sesame Streeting Apple (Around the Web for November 2)**
- **The Attack of Jellyfish, The Attack Ads of 1800, Blago, Goodbye Newspapers,**