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Op-Ed: Explaining Romney/Ryan to My Mom

by Robert Neil Raper - October 17, 2012

Here's the thing. I love my Mom. She loves me. We both love this country, but one of us looks for news in every nook and cranny of the internet and cable tv and the other looks for news she already agrees with. Now I'm not saying my Mom's closed minded... well yes I am. But, truly, her opinion matters to me and I hate to see her fed a big pile of lies and innuendo that she takes at face value.

We were having dinner the other day and I said that most of the people who justify the lies and distortions of the right will point out lies and exaggerations on the left and say, "look they both do it, it's the same." So I came up.. with what I thought a clever little analogy and said to my mom, "Saying the sky is light blue when it's dark blue is not the same as saying it's pink when it's dark blue, get me."

"No," she said.

Ok, so here's where I try to lay out the Romney/Ryan plan to wash off the camouflage and lay bare some simple truths that I think are wrong for America. That is the America Mom and I live in. Despite the fact that she gets 98.97% of her news from the people that support an America that only 1% of the people live in, I will attempt to set the record straight.

Also I will only take on the domestic portion of Romney/Ryan's 5-point plan for middle class prosperity. Their foreign policy aims (even the economic ones) are some mularkey I'm still sorting through. Besides, mom's foreign policy is they stay over there we stay over here and let the navy and the army keep em out. I'm paraphrasing, naturally. So here's four of the five points according to the Romney/Ryan website:

Energy independence

- Increase access to domestic energy resources
- Streamline permitting for exploration and development
- Eliminate regulations destroying the coal industry

- Approve the Keystone XL pipeline

The skills to succeed

- Give every family access to a great school and quality teachers
- Provide access to affordable and effective higher education options
- Focus job training programs on building valuable skills that align with opportunities
- Attract and retain the best and the brightest from around the world

Cutting the deficit

- Immediately reduce non-security discretionary spending by 5%
- Cap federal spending below 20% of the economy
- Give states responsibility for programs that they can implement more effectively
- Consolidate agencies and align compensation of federal workers with their private-sector counterparts

Championing small businesses

- Reduce taxes on job creation through individual and corporate tax reform
- Stop the increases in regulation that are tangling job creators in red tape
- Protect workers and businesses from strong-arm labor union tactics
- Replace Obamacare with real health care reform that controls cost and improves care

Sigh

Where to begin... Let me funnel all these harmless sounding platitudes into some categories so we can see what lies behind the smokescreen. First there's the **anti-regulation arm** which includes half of the "energy independence" tree and half of the "championing small business." Then there's the **privatize education arm**, the **anti-labor arm**, and the **just fudgin' with fake numbers arm (also known as the lower taxes at any cost mentality.)**

Basically these are the four legs of the far right platform going all the way back to the late seventies championed by such groups as the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, and the brown-shirts of the US Chamber of Commerce – the NFIB.

I guess I'll take the "just fudgin' with numbers" arm first because that doesn't involve my opinion, it's just a straight mis-representation of the facts.

Now, according to this particular set of promises there's no talk of cutting taxes across the board by 20% but Romney has repeatedly defended this assertion as

did Ryan in the presidential debates. Now they claim they can make this a revenue neutral proposition by closing loopholes in the tax code, but continue to promise not close any loopholes for the middle class. This is one hundred percent blatantly outright BS. That's not a political position that's a reality position. If you closed every deduction allowed under current tax code, according to the non-partisan Center for Tax Policy (that includes your mortgage interest deduction) it would be revenue neutral at a 4% cut in taxes across the board.

When pressed on this issue and asked whether he would scrap the plan to cut taxes if he couldn't get the spending cuts he desired Ryan didn't hesitate to say he would support tax cuts.

Now part of the reverse math psychology of cutting taxes to solve a debt crisis they are claiming they can cap spending at 20% of GDP by 2016. For FY 2012 it was 23.2% according to the CBO. Ok, well you'll cut some out of defense then, surely, to achieve such an aggressive goal? Well, no. Actually, Romney/Ryan want to increase defense spending at a rate higher than inflation or current economic growth. Let's pause a minute to digest this little tidbit. We need to cut an additional 3.2% from our current spending levels to achieve this 20% goal, but we're going to decrease revenues by cutting taxes. Well how much of our federal spending is actually discretionary? For FY 2013 13.3% of GDP is already allocated by statute to cover non-discretionary programs such as Social Security and Medicaid.

Alright, good we still have some wiggle room, right? Let's see so 6.7% of our GDP is left under this 20% cap, how much of that is defense? \$1.415 Trillion in defense outlays for 2012 – now this number includes Homeland Security, FBI Counter-terrorism and other defense related items not necessarily under the Dept. of Defense. So with a \$15 Trillion GDP $6.7\% = \$1.005$ Trillion. In 2012 enacted federal outlays should run to \$3.796 Trillion. Now, we're getting somewhere. Let's see $3.796 - 1.415 = 2.381$. Ok so no problem, we just have to basically shave the entire government in half, that actually sounds like a good idea. Oh but wait, how much of that money gets passed through directly to the states? Well this number's a little harder to pin down because one of the ways we've been saving money is not publishing on the internet how it's spent. I suppose Congress figured it was a frivolous use of taxpayer dollars for them to tell us exactly where the money is going. One thing is for certain. Money given to states and localities directly from the federal government is in excess of \$500 Billion. I'm going to take that out of the equation because quite honestly every penny cut there individuals will see in their state income taxes, sales taxes, or property taxes. So basically we have about \$1.7 Trillion in discretionary spending left that we need to cut to \$700 Billion. Incidentally that number is right in line with the 5% cut to non-defense discretionary spending on day one (outlined above as a separate item.) And you thought you highways and bridges were crumbling now, Ha!

I know all this going on with the numbers is mind numbing and boring as hell, but that's my point. Romney/Ryan talk as if they know what they're on about and they've got a plan. We'll slash this and cut that and here's an acronym you never heard of. Just to make it sound like they're competent with the numbers, meanwhile they're saying ooh we won't touch middle class people, we want to increase security, we want to cut taxes. If you cut income taxes across the board by 16% (the revenue neutral 4% from the proposed 20% cut) you'd lose \$183 Billion. So now that's \$883 Billion in cuts. The idea is preposterous. It's not preposterous that we can have an efficient government running well and helping people. It's preposterous to think that you're going to get everybody in the House to cut aid to his district. It's preposterous that such a razor sharp, blinders on look at a tiny part of the budget that affects literally millions of people deserves so much undo scrutiny. Hey look we have deficits of \$1 Trillion a year right now, that's no joke. What is a joke is that these guys have any inkling of a plan to take care of it without completely destroying the federal government. But alas, it's just part of the real **5 point plan to enshrine a stable oligarchy**. Which brings me to wtf are you talking about point number two.

Now this next bit is Romney's baby. He seems to lead off every speech with it and it's just as ridiculous as balancing the budget by cutting taxes. "**North American energy independence within ten years.**" I've heard him say it at least four times. Wow! What a goal! How come no one else is on board with this? Well if we didn't have a Communist foreigner from Nazi Germany as President, we'd already be halfway there...

The latest time I heard him say this was four days ago in Ohio at a factory that makes pumps for natural gas wells. Let's ponder for a moment what energy independence means. By the fact that he's mentioning "North American energy independence." I'm assuming he's adding Canada and Mexico in there, you know since we need all the oil we can get. Thus the above reference to the XL pipeline.

Let's take a brief look at electricity first because as we all know the elephant in the room is our gasoline addiction. Considering the fact that we're slashing so much from federal spending I guess we won't be helping out solar farms or wind farms anymore with low interest loan guarantees and grants. Too bad, we need to save all those subsidies for the oil companies and money's tight...

So, electricity... Still the old tried and true Coal Fired power plant is our mainstay in this country. Of course Mitt's also advocating nuclear. Nuclear plants have been safer for decades it's just tough convincing anybody to build one in their neighborhood. Wonder if he'll scare up any federal monies for those guys. I mean they take a decade to build but last 50 years right?

Anyways, back to coal. There seems to be some confusion in the media about Obama's war on coal. I'd prefer to call it a war against pollution, or a war for

worker's safety or something. It's certainly not a war on coal. Yes there's lots of coal still left in this country, but the fellas that don't want to spend money on adequate safety measures tell you the only way to get at it is to completely destroy mountains wholesale and dump the remains into the valleys. Water pollution, soil erosion, effluent from the process all flowing down hill into some of the most beautiful valleys in this country. Now I'm no tree-hugger per se but I don't want to go driving up I-79 on my next trip to Jersey looking at the surface of Mars out the window. It's not that there's no way to get the coal out by traditional methods. It's just "too expensive" *i.e.*: our dividend payments to our shareholders aren't plump enough. And even though we can skimp on regulations and kill a couple workers every couple years we can't just slaughter em wholesale down in the mines, it'd be too expensive from a liability standpoint. Keep working on that tort reform will you? That'll help.

You get my point. After years of rolling back regulations under Bush, Obama has the EPA trying to get creative at stopping the practice of completely destroying the landscapes of WV and KY. I'm on board with that, spend a f***ing dime somebody, jeez.

Also since Romney has pointed out that on day one he would open up every national park to oil production I'm assuming he's also going let somebody cap off Old Faithful for some geothermal, so there's some electricity there. The real deal is that even though he likes to harp on regulative interference (you know like keeping peoples fingers out of the hot dogs you buy) there's no real problem with electricity in terms of our independence. Our dependency problem is with foreign oil. Everybody knows this, I've been saying it for decades and I'm not that old. So let's roll up our sleeves and take a stab at NAFTA oil independence.

First. The Need: (I'm rounding don't yell at me)

US petroleum usage per year: 7.55 Billion bbl

Canadian usage: 360 Million bbl

Mexican usage: 756 Million bbl

So all told let's call it 8.6 Billion bbl a year in total need. Don't know to what extent Romney supports new CAFE standards, you know he's supposed to be a car guy, but we'll just call increased fuel economy inevitable so we'll round down... 8.6 Billion a year, that's a lot of oil. I'm assuming the Canadians are going to be OK with respect to their own electricity so we'll have to figure out a way to pay them for all that tar sands oil from Alberta. Mexico we're in a better bargaining position. We can trade em some coal, wheat, what have you... either way I'm assuming North American dependent is better than Middle East dependent, we'll call that a safe assumption. So wow, how do we supply ourselves with all that oil? The Canadians are doing there part to exploit the tar

sands with us or without us, they know they have a market for it anyway, most likely to us. That will put their total reserves at 179 Billion bbl with current technology. According to the Canadian National Energy Board they estimate to be able to produce as much as 6 million bbl a day by 2035.

Not too shabby, about a third of current US consumption. So the Canadians are doing their part, what can the US do to up it's production. Well in line with Palin's favorite phrase of "drill baby drill" the new mantra will be "drill, frack, and drill sideways." Yes you guessed it, building derricks closer to shore on the continental shelf, which has already started in some areas and the piece de resistance: opening our National Parks to drilling and fracking. According to Romney "one day one" (one of his favorite phrases) he'll open up our National Parks to oil production. The famous ANWR reservation in Alaska is just the tip of the petroleum iceberg so to speak. For instance the so-called Bakken formation under North Dakota and parts of Montana is a 200,000 square mile tract that could be opened up with horizontal drilling and fracking techniques. According to Romney's chief energy advisor this could yield about 24 Billion bbls. Now there's a lot of people who have issues with fracking, I'll leave it to you to do a little research on the pros and cons, my guess is it's like anything else, if done responsibly and in limited scope it's probably not so bad. If it's done with little regulation and oversight in a "get all you can while you can" fashion it's probably really, really bad. My guess is with his disdain for regulation and his promise for energy independence in ten years, the latter will most likely be the implementation we would see. So if we add up all the reserves in Canada(179 B), Mexico(12.4B), and what's attainable in the US by presumably dubious methods we achieve a grand total of 294.7 Billion bbl. Or about 33 years worth at current rates of consumption.

Well 33 years of freedom from foreign oil is certainly worth destroying large portions of our National forests and potentially polluting enormous underground aquifers, is it not? I mean it's not like we have a fresh water shortage in this country right? Oh... we do.... well shit... do it any way we need jobs and we need em now. It's funny but that's pretty much how Romney pitched his plan to these factory workers in Ohio. Telling them within two years there would be millions of new jobs in this country extracting vitally needed resources to rid us of our dependence on foreign oil. I don't know if maybe he was thinking about millions of new jobs for volunteers trying to put injunctions on all this or millions of new lawyers to litigate it. Or maybe millions of new lobbyists to grease the palms of truculent Congressmen not wanting to jump on board for free. Either way, the idea that within his potential administration there'd be a single gallon of gas to come out of a National Park is certainly a stretch. I think rather the whole thing is just another bludgeon to beat down the government structure. Regulations on groundwater are keeping us addicted to crazy Middle East dictators... blah blah blah

Look, like I've said I believe in energy independence and we supported it way too late and with way too little. I love the bio diesel idea. I'm a big fan of electric vehicles. But I've always thought we should think more comprehensively about our energy needs and have localized solutions. Wind in Maine, Pa, Montana, solar, and solar-hydraulic in Arizona, NM, parts of TX and California. Hell look at California, look how diverse. In places solar, in places wind, in places geothermal, etc. We need flexible solutions with flexible funding there is no one size fits all for the nation or even for most of the states. That's what the federal government was made for. Not for presiding over the dinner table of resources like an over-bearing mother deciding we eat beef every day because that's what her favorite son likes.

You can't really stick Romney's energy policy on any particular arm of the far right agenda because it runs the full sweep. Reducing regulation, promoting monopoly, certainly running fast and loose with the numbers, and although it's not expressly laid out, undermining labor is implied every time he takes a swipe at Obama for having a "war on coal."

The far right agenda wants to keep your tax dollars flowing into everything it's done before because that's where their revenue streams are. End social security preserve corporate welfare. Destroy parks and natural beauty and profit the shareholders. Romney's no entrepreneur, he's not the idea man. He's the manager/analytics guy. Look who's trying to hire him and what for and you'll see where we're going. Undermine and de-fund the federal government, put people at the mercy of business interests, and leave them unregulated to have their way with the American people. My biggest fear if he's elected is that he's as good a manager as he says he is.

Coming Soon: Part two – the end of education as we know it and undermining labor while making sure you're qualified for nothing more.

Robert Neil Raper writes the blog [Lasserita](#). Mr. Raper was born in New Orleans, La in 1970 – at the end of America's golden age of the middle class just before the beginning of the destruction of its social contract. He is member of the first generation not to do as well financially as his parents and the first generation with a computer in every home.

As a young man he was a fan of William F. Buckley and read all of the idealistic sounding arguments of the far-right, but, came of age with the realization that it was all lies and hypocrisy – a proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing. After surviving for 20 yrs. as a printing press operator and pre-press specialist he has witnessed the destruction of manufacturers in the US and the culling of decent blue collar jobs.

He is studying for a degree in Economics, hoping to reverse the current trend in American politics of blaming the poor for our economic woes. He is a fan of animals and long sentences, but thankfully only allergic to the former.