

WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Top 10 Liberal Superstitions

The 2014 campaign brings a fresh focus on candidates with fervently held, evidence-free beliefs.

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Oct. 30, 2014

A hallmark of progressive politics is the ability to hold fervent beliefs, in defiance of evidence, that explain how the world works—and why liberal solutions must be adopted. Such political superstitions take on a new prominence during campaign seasons as Democratic candidates trot out applause lines to rally their progressive base and as the electorate considers their voting records. Here's a Top 10 list of liberal superstitions on prominent display during the midterm election campaign:

1. *Spending more money improves education.* The U.S. spent \$12,608 per student in 2010—more than double the figure, in inflation-adjusted dollars, spent in 1970—and spending on public elementary and secondary schools has surpassed \$600 billion. How's that working out? Adjusted state SAT scores have declined on average 3% since the 1970s, as the Cato Institute's Andrew Coulson found in a March report.

No better news in the international rankings: The Program for International Student Assessment reports that in 2012 American 15-year-olds placed in the middle of the pack, alongside peers from Slovakia—which shells out half as much money as the U.S. per student.

Someone might mention this to North Carolina Democratic Sen. Kay Hagan, who is knocking State House Speaker Thom Tillis for cutting \$500 million from schools. Per-pupil K-12 spending has increased every year since Mr. Tillis became speaker in 2011, and most of what Ms. Hagan is selling as "cuts" [came from community colleges and universities](#), not the local middle school. Mr. Coulson's Cato study notes that North Carolina has about doubled per-pupil education spending since 1972, which has done precisely nothing for the state's adjusted SAT scores.

2. *Government spending stimulates the economy.* Case in point is the \$830 billion 2009 stimulus bill, touted by the Obama administration as necessary for keeping unemployment below 8%. Result: four years of average unemployment above 8%. Federal outlays soared in 2009 to \$3.5 trillion—a big enough bump to do the Keynesian trick of boosting aggregate demand—but all we got was this lousy 2% growth and a new costume for Army Corps of Engineers mascot [Bobber the Water Safety Dog](#). Every Senate Democrat voted for the blowout, including the 11 now up for re-election who were in Congress when it passed.

3. Republican candidates always have a big spending advantage over Democrats. Majority Leader [Harry Reid](#) took to the Senate floor recently to deride the Koch brothers as “radical billionaires” who are “attempting to buy our democracy.” Yet the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee has raked in \$127 million this cycle, about \$30 million more than the National Republican Senatorial Committee, and Democrats have aired more TV ads than Republicans in several battleground states, according to analysis by the Center for Public Integrity. Meanwhile, Mr. Reid’s Senate Majority PAC has raised more than \$50 million. As this newspaper has reported, between 2005 and 2011, labor unions—linchpins of the Democratic Party—spent \$4.4 billion on politics, far outstripping any conservative rival.

4. Raising the minimum wage helps the poor. The president wants to increase the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 from \$7.25, with the tagline “Let’s give America a raise.” The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the hike would cost 500,000 jobs, one blow to the low-wage earners it claims to help. Employment aside, only 18% of the earnings benefits of a \$10.10 hike would flow to people living below the poverty line, [according to analysis](#) from University of California-Irvine economist David Neumark. Nearly 30% of the benefits would go to families three times above the poverty line or higher, in part because half of America’s poor families have no wage earners. Minimum-wage increases help some poor families—at the expense of other poor families.

You won’t hear that from Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn, who in September lived on \$79 for a week to show his public-relations solidarity with minimum-wage earners. Keep in mind: Only 4.7% of minimum-wage earners are adults working full-time [trying to support a family](#), and nearly all would be eligible for the earned-income tax credit and other welfare programs.

5. Global warming is causing increasingly violent weather. Tell that to Floridians, who are enjoying the ninth consecutive season without a hurricane landfall. The Atlantic hurricane season in 2013 was the least active in 30 years. Oh, and global temperatures have not increased for 15 years.

Still, something must be done! On Monday, the Hill reported that an internal memo circulating among five environmental groups detailed plans for spending to support candidates “who want to act” to combat climate change. “We are on track to spend more than \$85 million overall including more than \$40 million in just six Senate races,” the memo said. The beneficiaries include Sen. Mark Udall (D., Colo.), who got \$12.1 million, and Rep. Bruce Braley (D., Iowa) with \$7.2 million.

6. Genetically modified food is dangerous. Farmers have been breeding crop seeds for 10,000 years, but the agricultural innovation known as genetic modification makes liberals shudder. Not a single documented illness has resulted from the trillions of meals containing “genetically modified organisms,” or GMOs, that humans have consumed since the mid-1990s. The technology has been declared safe by every regulatory agency from the Food and Drug Administration to the European Commission.

But insisting on labeling food containing GMOs has turned into a liberal cause. The California Democratic Party platform in 2012 added a demand for GMO labeling; more recently the Oregon

Democratic Party climbed aboard. In May 2013, self-described socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont introduced a farm-bill amendment that would allow states to require GMO labeling for food; co-sponsors of the amendment, which failed, included Sens. Mark Begich (D., Ala.) and Jeff Merkley (D., Ore.).

7. Voter ID laws suppress minority turnout. More than 30 states have voter-ID laws, which the left decries as an attempt to disenfranchise minorities who don't have identification and can't pay for it. Yet of the 17 states with the strictest requirements, 16 offer free IDs. The Government Accountability Office this month released an analysis of 10 voter-ID studies: Five showed the laws had no statistically significant effect on turnout, four suggested a decrease in turnout (generally among all ethnic groups, though percentages varied), and one found an *increase* in turnout with voter ID laws in place.

The Democratic Senate candidate in Kentucky, Alison Lundergan Grimes, has nonetheless been running radio ads in urban areas claiming that "Mitch McConnell and the Republicans are trying to take away our right to vote," based on a 2007 voter-ID amendment the minority leader introduced.

8. ObamaCare is gaining popularity. President Obama said in a speech earlier this month that fewer Republicans were running against ObamaCare because "it's working pretty well in the real world." Yet the law's approval rating hovers around 40%, and 27% of people told Gallup this month that the law was hurting them, up from 19% in January, while only 16% reported it was helpful.

Don't even ask doctors about it: 46% of physicians gave the Affordable Care Act a "D" or "F", according to a recent survey by the Physicians Foundation, and less than 4% of respondents gave it an "A." Yet some Democrats are die-hards: 36% of their House candidates have voiced support for ObamaCare on the campaign trail, according to a recent analysis by the Brookings Institution.

9. The Keystone XL pipeline would increase oil spills. Let's check out what President Obama's State Department had to say: In 2013 pipelines with a diameter larger than 12 inches spilled 910,000 gallons. Railroad tankers spilled 1.5 million gallons. Yet pipelines carry *25 times* the oil that tankers do, as environmental analyst Terry Anderson [has noted in these pages](#). Blocking Keystone and forcing more oil to be shipped by rail guarantees more harm to the environment. But on the campaign trail emotion often overrules the facts, and so we have Rick Weiland, the Democratic Senate candidate in South Dakota, adamantly opposing Keystone ("If I lose because of this issue, so be it," he told the Nation magazine last week). Colorado Sen. Mark Udall is running for re-election after having voted against Keystone in the energy committee in June.

10. Women are paid 77 cents on the dollar compared with men. The mother of all liberal superstitions, this figure comes from shoddy math that divides the average earnings of all women working full-time by the average earnings of all full-time men, without considering career field, education or personal choices. When those factors are included, the wage gap disappears. [A 2009 report](#) commissioned by the Labor Department that analyzed more than 50 papers on the topic

found that the so-called pay gap “may be almost entirely” the result of choices both men and women make.

Yet here’s Colorado’s Sen. Udall: “It is simply unacceptable for businesses to pay women less than men doing the same work,” citing his support for the Paycheck Fairness Act, which might be better titled the Trial Lawyer Paycheck Act. One irony: The Washington Free Beacon [did a little number crunching](#) and discovered that women in Sen. Udall’s office earn 86 cents on the dollar compared with men. Whoops.