



In Defense Of The 47%

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.
Tribune Media Services

Sharkara Peters is a 35-year-old single mother of two. She works 34 hours a week at a fast-food restaurant. A few months back, she was hospitalized with a blood clot in her lung. Then, one of her daughters needed surgery. As a result, Peters lost about three weeks of work, and could not muster her \$335 monthly rent. When I met her last month while in Charlotte reporting on poverty on the eve of the Democratic National Convention, she was facing eviction.

I asked Peters what President Obama should do for people in her economic situation and she answered without hesitation. Obama, she said, needs to do something about girls on welfare that just sit up and have baby after baby and never try to better themselves.

You see, nobody likes freeloaders. The point is made for the benefit of Mitt Romney. Of course, he'd likely consider Peters herself a freeloader. I've not seen her W-2, but it seems a safe bet that, working less than full time for fast-food wages, she doesn't pay much if anything in federal income taxes. Romney was heard last week in a secretly-recorded video disparaging the 47 percent of Americans — low-income earners like Peters, Social Security recipients and others — that he says pay no taxes. Last May, speaking before a room full of well-heeled donors in Boca Raton, Fla., who had paid \$50,000 a plate for some face time with him, the Republican presidential nominee described those non-taxpayers with contempt as people "who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims ..."

In the video, posted online by the liberal magazine Mother Jones, Romney says it'd be a waste of time pitching his campaign to those moochers: "I'll never convince them that they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives."

Sharkara Peters does not need Mitt Romney's lectures about personal responsibility. Nor does George Farmer, 61, who became homeless when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer and



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could no longer drive his truck. Nor does Michelle, an unemployed appliance repair technician trying to raise four girls on \$694 a month plus food stamps. Nor do most of the invisible poor, the cashiers and servers, floor moppers and burger flippers whose annual income probably wouldn't cover maintenance on one of Romney's car elevators.

If the gaffe concretizes the caricature of an out-of-touch rich guy, a cognac-swilling peer of Thurston Howell III, Charles Emerson Winchester and Charles Montgomery Burns, it's important to remember that Romney is hardly alone in his sentiments. No, he spoke against a backdrop of vitriol against the have-nots in our society. They are called animals by Ann Coulter, takers by Michelle Malkin, accused of laziness by Rush Limbaugh. Fox "News" person Charles Payne laments the "entitlement mentality" under which they fail to even be properly "embarrassed" by their poverty.

For the record, I gave you no surname for Michelle, the single mother referenced above, precisely because she was too embarrassed to let me use it.

Romney's remarks, then, are of a piece with a narrative — poverty as character defect — favored by many who know exactly jack about the reality of poverty, but who have discovered that demonizing the faceless poor, giving us someone new to resent and blame, is good politics. They wrap their attacks in rags of righteousness and pretensions of pragmatism, but there is something viscerally wrong, morally shrunken, in a nation where the most fortunate are encouraged to treat the least fortunate as some enemy race.

So the big story here is not about what damage Romney did to his campaign. Yes, the fact that he used condemnation of the poor as a lever of political advantage shames him.

But the very fact that the lever exists shames us all.

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The Gas Price Blame Game

BY STEVE YETIV
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With average gas prices approaching \$4 nationally and already above that in California, American consumers are watching their hard-earned dollars go down the gas tank. For President Obama, that's not great news because voters hate high gasoline prices.

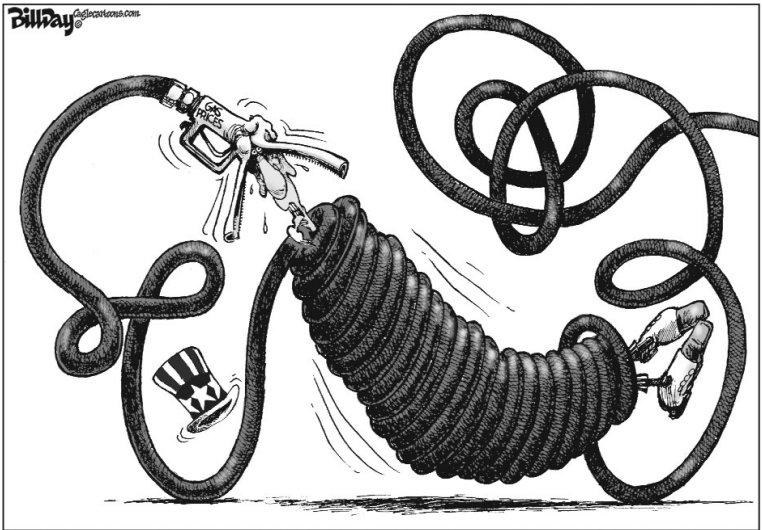
According to a Reuters/Ipsos survey conducted in March, when prices were about where they are now, 68 percent of Americans disapproved of Obama's handling of gas prices.

Republicans have since pounced, arguing that gasoline prices have more than doubled under his leadership. Obama has responded that Republicans like bad economic news for political reasons and are happy when Americans pay more at the pump; other Democratic leaders, such as Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer, say that blaming the president for gas prices is "baloney."

But why have oil prices risen from about \$36 a barrel in December 2008 to more than \$90 now? And will they come down before the presidential election?

To understand oil prices, you need to understand something basic: They are determined mainly by the combined behavior of oil traders on markets such as the New York Mercantile Exchange. When oil traders believe that oil prices will rise, they buy oil futures in hopes of selling them later for a profit. Such buying increases oil prices and, eventually, the price of derivatives, such as gasoline and heating oil.

The good news is that oil prices have risen partly because traders increasingly believe that the U.S. economy will not face a double-dip recession. And, for now, Europe seems to be addressing its debt crisis, or at least decreasing the chances that major countries will default and banks will go under Lehman Bros.-style. That's making it less likely that Europe will drag



down the global economy.

The Iran nuclear crisis is also in play. Oil traders figure that Iran may well stonewall the international community, leading to an Israeli or U.S. attack on its nuclear sites and a conflict that will disrupt oil supplies.

Of course, the Arab Spring and recent riots over an anti-Muslim video have also put the markets on edge, creating concern that such instability may cause oil delivery disruptions.

And let's not forget the relatively weak dollar. As long as the Federal Reserve keeps interest rates low to bolster the economy, the dollar is not likely to rally. Because oil is traded mainly in dollars, that raises its price.

Another factor is that oil prices were four to five times higher in the last decade than in the mid-1980s through the 1990s. That indicates possible higher speculation. In that type of market, traders buy oil futures to make a quick sale rather than to actually possess oil. Such speculation arguably has periodically driven prices higher.

Will oil prices come down before the election? Perhaps, but probably not by a lot.

Politically, the wild card is Iran. A diplomatic or military resolution would lower oil prices. Saudi Ara-

bia's extra oil capacity, which otherwise is being held in reserve to defray any loss of oil from Iran during a war, could also be freed for other potential crises, calming markets. But the chances of a resolution before Nov. 6 appear slim.

For its part, oil speculation will probably continue unless significant curbs are placed on speculators, which may or may not work depending on how they are implemented. There have been no serious moves in that direction, despite the president's prodding.

Economically, oil prices will surely drop if the U.S., European and Chinese economies weaken, despite efforts to stimulate them, but that is unlikely to be very clear before the election. Nor are serious changes in the strength of the dollar very likely.

So Obama may well be blamed for high gasoline prices, even though presidents have little control over them, contrary to what many think.

Steve Yetiv is a professor of international studies at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va., and the author of "Crude Awakenings" and "The Petroleum Triangle." He wrote this for the Los Angeles Times.

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Class Warfare Meets Monday Night Football?

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH (Sept. 26): We interrupt the presidential campaign, every other political campaign, the looming "fiscal cliff," Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and the rollout of the iPhone5 to note that on Tuesday, the biggest story in America was that the Green Bay Packers lost a "Monday Night Football" game to the Seattle Seahawks because a replacement official blew a call.

Oh, the humanity. There's actually a lot to like in this story, unless you're a Packers fan and/or you had some of the \$250 million reportedly bet on the Packers on Monday night. Wisconsin's union-busting Gov. Scott Walker took to his Twitter account Tuesday morning to demand the return of locked-out union referees.

Oh, the irony. Then there's the unfortunate Lance Easley, a vice president of small business banking at Bank of America in Santa Maria, Calif. In his spare time, Mr. Easley referees junior college and high school football and basketball. When the NFL locked out its officials this summer, Mr. Easley decided to move up in class. He was the side judge who blew the call Monday night.

Bankers don't cause all of the nation's problems. Just this one. And a few others.

The 121 members of the National Football League Referees Association have been locked out since their collective bargaining agreement expired this year. They're part-timers who are paid very well — beginning at about \$70,000 for 20 weekends of work. Senior officials make well into six figures.

Money isn't the big issue, though. As with firefighters, cops and teachers, the big issue is pensions.

Unlike public employees, the refs' employer, thanks to a socialistic business model that divides TV revenue, has lots and lots of money. The NFL has been paying into a "defined benefit" pension plan for the refs since 1974. A referee who is fully vested will receive at least \$100,000 a year when he retires.

But the league wants to do away with pensions and go to the less expensive (for the owners) 401(k) plan. As NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell put it, "About 10 percent of the country has (a defined benefit plan). Yours truly doesn't have that."

Of course, his truly makes \$10 million a year running the league office, which, by the way is organized as a not-for-profit corporation, because he has valuable skills that referees don't.

You turn on "Monday Night Football," and suddenly class warfare breaks out. At least maybe this way people will pay attention.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Thursday, Sept. 27, the 271st day of 2012. There are 95 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Sept. 27, 1962, "Silent Spring," Rachel Carson's groundbreaking as well as controversial study on the effects of pesticides on the environment, was published in book form by Houghton Mifflin.

On this date: In 1540, Pope Paul III issued a papal bull establishing the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, as a religious order.

In 1779, John Adams was named by Congress to negotiate the Revolutionary War's peace terms with Britain.

In 1854, the first great disaster involving an Atlantic Ocean passenger vessel occurred when the steamship *SS Arctic* sank off Newfoundland; of the more than 400 people on board, only 86 survived.

In 1862, during the Civil War, the Union Army's first all-black regiment, the self-described "Chasseurs d'Afrique" (Hunters of Africa), was formed in New Orleans (which was then under Northern control).

In 1928, the United States said it was recognizing the Nationalist Chinese government.

In 1939, Warsaw, Poland, surrendered after weeks of resistance to invading forces from Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during World War II.

In 1941, the United States launched 14 rapidly built "Liberty" military cargo vessels. In 1942, Glenn Miller and his Orchestra performed together for the last time, at the Central Theater in Passaic, N.J., prior to Miller's entry into the Army.

In 1954, "Tonight," hosted by Steve Allen, made its debut on NBC-TV.

In 1964, the government publicly released the report of the Warren Commission, which found that Lee Harvey Oswald had acted alone in assassinating President John F. Kennedy.

In 1979, Congress gave its final approval to forming the U.S. Department of Education.

In 1994, more than 350 Republican congressional candidates gathered on the steps of the U.S. Capitol to sign the "Contract with America," a 10-point platform they pledged to enact if voters sent a GOP majority to the House.

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush said the United Nations should have a chance to force Saddam Hussein to give up his weapons of mass destruction before the United States acted on its own against Iraq, but told a Republican fundraising event in Denver that action had to come quickly.

Five years ago: Soldiers fired into crowds of anti-government demonstrators in Yangon, Myanmar; Kenji Nagai, 50, a video journalist for Japan's APF News, was shot and killed. President George W. Bush promised to take steps to reduce air traffic congestion and long delays that were leaving travelers grounded.

One year ago: Opening statements in the Los Angeles trial of Michael Jackson's personal physician, Dr. Conrad Murray, took place as prosecutors accused Murray of killing the superstar through irresponsible use of the anesthetic propofol, and the defense maintaining Jackson had caused his own death. (Murray was later convicted of felony involuntary manslaughter.) Israel gave the go-ahead for construction of 1,100 new Jewish housing units in east Jerusalem; the announcement met with swift criticism from the United States and the European Union.

Today's Birthdays: Actress Jayne Meadows is 92. Actress Kathleen Nolan is 79. Actor Wilford Brimley is 78. Actor Claude Jarman Jr. is 78. Author Barbara Howar is 78. World Golf Hall of Famer Kathy Whitworth is 73. Singer-musician Randy Bachman (Bachman-Turner Overdrive) is 69. Rock singer Meat Loaf is 65. Actress Liz Torres is 65. Actor A Martinez is 64. Baseball Hall of Famer Mike Schmidt is 63. Actor Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa is 62. Singer Shaun Cassidy is 54. Rock singer Stephan Jenkins (Third Eye Blind) is 48. Actor Patrick Muldoon is 44. Singer Mark Calderon is 42. Actress Amanda Detmer is 41. Actress Gwyneth Paltrow is 40. Rock singer Brad Arnold (3 Doors Down) is 34. Christian rock musician Grant Brandell (Underoath) is 31. Rapper Lil' Wayne is 30. Singer Avril Lavigne is 28.

Thought for Today: "God loved the birds and invented trees. Man loved the birds and invented cages." — Jacques Deval, French writer, director and actor (1895-1972).

FROM THE BIBLE

As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. Psalm 103:12. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Who They Are

Fernande Colette Bitsos, Yankton
Let me praise first Robert F. Lyons, of Kennebunkport, Maine. His letter (*Press & Dakotan*, Sept. 21) made lots of sense compared to some bloggers. The 47 percent that Mr. Romney claims not caring about are made up of REPUBLICANS, Democrats and independents, which include seniors, widows, unemployed, part-time workers, disabled or unemployed veterans, single mothers (divorced or widowed), retired volunteers (Meals on Wheels, Senior Companions) who do pay taxes, and students working part-time to pay for their college education.

Mr. Romney is one of those participants who used bankruptcy to close their plants, not forgetting to pocket their "benefits," while throwing workers in the street, losing all the benefits that they had la-

bored for so many years. Outsourcing was his tax-less plan of making overseas millions to store in the Cayman's, Switzerland, Luxembourg coffers.

Yes, Mr. Lyons wrote to reminisce about the Ireland of his ancestors, the potato famine and deaths of hunger under the British Empire, closing the soup kitchens and food depots. I've read about this part of Irish history, where those "PEOPLE" (as depicted by Romney) sold whatever little they owned to pay for spots in the bowels of a ship to come to the USA. It would be interesting to know the reasons why some of our bloggers' ancestors left their birth countries to come to the USA. I'm sure it was not just to come here to pay taxes, but we did have soup kitchens here and shelters for the arriving homeless.

Mr. Romney's ancestors must have crossed the same ocean, too, for there were no jets then.

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