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“Your Dead Kids Don’t Trump My Constitutional Rights”?

By Steven Gan



“Your dead kids don’t trump my Constitutional rights.” That was the horribly cruel response from “Joe the Plumber,” a.k.a. Samuel Wurzelbacher, in an open letter to the families of the victims in May 23rd’s shooting rampage near the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Don’t remember Joe the Plumber? Who could forget this character? He gained national attention during the 2008 U.S. presidential election when, during a videotaped campaign stop in Ohio by then-Democratic nominee

Senator Barack Obama, Wurzelbacher asked Obama about his small business tax policy. Obama’s response included the statement, “When you spread the wealth around, it’s good for everybody.” Obama’s response was seized upon by conservative media, as well as by Obama’s rival, Republican nominee Senator John McCain, as an indication that Obama advocated redistribution of wealth and had a socialist’s view of the economy.

Subsequently, Wurzelbacher went on to milk that 15 minutes of fame, being interviewed on several talk shows (Fox News loved this guy) and even running for Congress in 2012. Fortunately for the country, he lost that bid. Unfortunately for the country, he has remained an outspoken conservative nutcase.

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Tenth News

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On Citizenship: Chuck Gutman Helps Reinvigorate the American Dream for Waukegan Students

By Jane Goldenberg

With the odds against even high-achieving students from low-income families ever getting to college—let alone finishing—Chuck Gutman, a counselor at Waukegan High School, feels an imperative to help such students reach their potential.

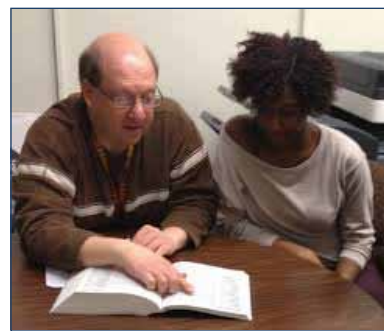
Just going to college seems daunting for many low-income students. “They really need a team of support,” said Gutman, who created Envision Scholars to help deserving students find their way to a college where they can succeed.

“Only about one-third of Waukegan High School seniors say

they have plans to attend four-year college upon graduation from high school,” he said. “High-achieving students from low-income families have about the same odds of attending college as the lowest-achieving students from high-income families, according to a study done by Education Trust,” Gutman added.

That’s why programs like Envision Scholars can make the critical

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★ RAVINIA FUN-RAISER SET FOR SUNDAY, JULY 20. SEE P. 7 FOR DETAILS. ★

THE BRAD BEAT: A Fair Wage for a Hard Day's Work

By Eleonora di Liscia

Many years ago, when I was a teenager, I worked at McDonald's. Even though McDonald's paid \$2.00 per hour when the 1976 minimum wage was \$2.20, they expected unstinting devotion and an unstinting amount of work. The company had slogans like "If you've got time to lean, you've got time to clean." A five-hour shift at McDonald's was more exhausting than any other job I've ever had.

Often, the jobs that pay the least require a disproportionate amount of effort from workers. So isn't compensating people with a fair minimum rate for all that hard work only fair?

Brad Schneider thinks so. He cosponsored the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2014, which raises the federal minimum wage from \$7.15 to \$10.10 per hour. The bill also indexes future annual increases to inflation and gradually increases the minimum wage for tipped employees to 70 percent of the minimum wage for all other workers.

"While our economy continues to show signs of recovery, too many working families are still struggling to make ends meet," Schneider said. "This bill helps ensure that all hard-working Americans receive a living wage that supports themselves and their families."

To emphasize his point, Brad also signed the discharge petition to bring the bill up for an immediate vote which would compel the House to consider the legislation if a majority of members sign the petition.

To further the fight, Brad also recently circulated an email petition demanding that Republicans in Congress raise the minimum wage: "Brad is fed up with the Republican agenda to block any positive action that would bring a better future to those willing to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay," the May 13, 2014 email explained.

In contrast, Brad's opponent this fall, Robert Dold said in a 2010 interview that he favored lowering the minimum wage. Now, he simply waffles on the issue. On May 22, 2014, Dold said the minimum wage should be left to the states. He further disputed a statement that he would oppose any federal wage increase—he just didn't know what that increase should be. Dold's statements came after an event where he was endorsed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a group that strongly opposes raising the minimum wage.

Unlike Dold's, Brad's position on the minimum wage has been clear and unwavering. And Brad is not just some business-phobic, pie-in-the-sky idealist. For more than 20 years as a management consultant, he helped both large and small businesses grow. He knows something about what he's fighting for.



Raising the minimum wage is good not just for families but also for the economy. Demos, a national, nonpartisan policy group, reported that raising the minimum wage would create more than 100,000 new jobs, would lift more than 700,000 workers out of poverty, and would generate \$4 to \$5 billion in additional sales. The cost to consumers would be pennies and the labor costs to employers would be a small fraction of total sales (see <http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/RetailsHiddenPotential.pdf>).

The Congressional Budget Office disagrees on the job creation prediction, projecting job losses of up to 500,000, but the CBO still estimates that 900,000 people would rise above the poverty level and that overall income would rise by \$2 billion.

Besides pushing for a fair minimum wage, Brad has put forward bills to help workers in other ways. Last November, he introduced the Learning Educating Achieving and Retraining for the Nation (LEARN) Act, which would help train and retrain American workers who are looking for work. He also helped introduce the Veterans Entrepreneurs Act, which would reduce fees for veterans looking to open franchises. ■



This November, Vote to Protect Voters

by Eleonora di Liscia

Once upon a time, I lived in Madison, Wisconsin. Madison was a beautiful place, a sunny place, a shining city on the hill in a proudly progressive state.

Then something horrible happened. Governor Scott Walker was elected. Let the voter suppression begin!

Governor Walker immediately passed legislation burdening Wisconsin citizens' right to vote. For example, Wisconsin voters would now have to show ID at the polls.

Why worry? College students could use their college IDs, right? Oh, except that none of Wisconsin's colleges made IDs that met the new law's requirements. Is it possible that the law was designed to keep those young Democrat-leaning voters away from the polls?

Here in Illinois, we don't have to show IDs to vote. As long as our signature matches the one on the registration, we're good.

This fall, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn will attempt to fend off Republican challenger Bruce Rauner. Name one governor Bruce Rauner has said he admires. His answer? Vote-suppressing Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker.

This is precisely why a state constitutional amendment on this November's ballot protecting the right to vote in Illinois is so important. If it can happen in Wisconsin (or Ohio or North Carolina or Texas or Pennsylvania), it can happen here.

And it will happen here if progressives stay home and let Bruce Rauner win.

The proposed Illinois amendment would help prevent the kind of hostile takeover of the Democratic process that has been occurring in several states since the U.S. Supreme Court stripped an important provision out of the 1965 Voting Rights Act last year. The Illinois amendment states: "No person shall be denied the right to register to vote or to cast a ballot in an election based on race, color, ethnicity, status as a member of a language minority, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or income." The Illinois constitution thus would enable challenges to laws such as ID requirements if they disproportionately burden minorities.

I have a new political slogan: "The nasty people win, because the stupid people let them." Every voter's job is not to be one of those stupid people.

That means voting this November. Sitting out the election this time could mean being turned away at the polls next time.

This also means voting for candidates who believe that voting is a right and not just a privilege for the privileged. Candidates like Governor Pat Quinn and Congressman Brad Schneider. You don't have to be in love with them, because they're not proposing marriage. They propose only that they continue in office so that progressive values—including one person, one vote—can flourish.

And, for extra insurance, vote for the constitutional amendment to protect voting rights. Then, no matter who's in office, you can rest assured that your vote will be counted. ■



Congressman Brad Schneider addresses the crowd outside his new Grayslake campaign office.

Congressman Schneider Opens New Campaign Office in Grayslake

On June 8, Congressman Brad Schneider's campaign opened an office in the northwest part of the 10th Congressional District, in Grayslake. Addressing the crowd of supporters who came to help dedicate the new office, Brad talked about winning his seat by the margin of 1.01 percent in 2012 and said that, with the help of volunteers like those gathered that morning, he hoped to double the margin this year.

Then, with a glint in his eye, he talked about this goal from another perspective. He said that he will celebrate his 53rd birthday in August and that it would be great if he got 53 percent of the vote in November. After all, in 2012 he almost had 51 percent of the vote and he had just turned 51. In fact, he said, glint still in his eye, it would be wonderful if he could maintain a trend of coordinating birthdays with electoral margins, winning 55 percent of the vote when he turns 55, and so on.

It was a very interesting take. As the Congressman pointed out, establishing a trend like that could make aging something to look forward to. ■

Congress Watch: Republican Senator Mark Kirk Opposes Paycheck Fairness

Demonstrating once again that he's a far cry from the moderate he pretends to be, Illinois' junior Senator Mark Kirk voted in lockstep with Republican leaders on April 9 to filibuster the Paycheck Fairness Act (PCFA)—a bill aimed at closing the significant wage gap between men and women.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, women who worked full time in 2012 earned, on average, only 77 cents for every dollar men earned. The wage gap is even wider for African-American and Hispanic women, who earned approximately 64 and 54 cents, respectively, for each dollar earned by a white male.

With women increasingly serving as their family's principal, if not sole, provider, the gender wage gap is depriving American families of basic life necessities, including food, housing, clothing, and medical care.

The PCFA proposed to amend the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA), an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Practices Act of 1938, making it illegal for employers to pay unequal wages to men and women who perform substantially equal work. Unfortunately, the 1963 law contains weaknesses that for decades have prevented equal-pay activists from closing the wage gap between men and women.

Sponsored by Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), the PCFA sought to strengthen the 1963 law by adding provisions to make it more easily enforceable. It specifically proposed to:

- Require employers to demonstrate that wage differentials are based on factors other than gender.
- Prohibit retaliation against workers who inquire about their employers' wage practices or disclose their own wages.
- Permit reasonable comparisons between employees within clearly-defined geographical areas to determine fair wages.
- Strengthen penalties for equal pay violations.
- Direct the Department of Labor to assist employers and collect wage-related data.
- Authorize additional training for Equal Employment Opportunity Commission staff to better identify and handle wage disputes.

"Had [the PCFA] passed, the bill would have made it illegal for employers to retaliate against a worker who inquires about or discloses her or his wages or the wages of another employee in a



complaint or investigation. It also would make employers liable to civil actions," Wesley Lowery explained in *The Washington Post* on April 9 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2014/04/09/senate-falls-six-votes-short-of-passing-paycheck-fairness-act/>). The bill also would have made the wage gap more transparent by requiring the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to collect pay information.

But thanks to Senate Republicans, including Mark Kirk, the PCFA failed to garner the 60 votes needed to override a filibuster and come up for debate in the Senate. In a straight party-line vote, all Democrats voted to allow the measure to move to a debate, while all Republicans voted against it. Senate majority leader Harry Reid later changed his "yes" vote to "no" in a procedural maneuver that will allow him to reintroduce the bill at a later time.

The PCFA is part of a much larger effort by Democrats to implement policies aimed at strengthening and growing the American middle class and providing a fair shot for all Americans. As demonstrated by the prosperity our nation experienced in the 1960s and 1970s, America does best when everyone has a fair shot and wealth is more evenly distributed.

Unfortunately, today's Republicans, including Mark Kirk, are more interested in protecting the profits of large corporations and wealthy Americans than in promoting the kind of solid economic growth that can create prosperity for all Americans. ■



77 CENTS ON THE DOLLAR?



PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT

Chuck Gutman

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difference.

A 2014 graduate of Waukegan High School, Envision Scholar Kaream Williams says his life changed the day Gutman randomly stopped him in the hallway to ask him about his college plans. Since then, Gutman has been right beside him all the way, Williams said, encouraging him to up his game, work hard, and take advantage of the opportunities available to help him go to college.

"I feel really blessed to know him," says Williams, who plans to attend Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, in the fall. "I've truly gained a mentor and a friend for life."

Williams, who hopes to become a music educator one day, joined Gutman in starting a Men of Vision chapter at Waukegan High School. The program, which now has 30 members, helps prepare young men for collegiate and professional success by exposing them to role models, involving them in community service projects, and teaching them to be accountable, Gutman said.

Gutman, who started at Waukegan High School in 2002 as an ESL (English as a second language) teacher, began in 2008 to teach a national college readiness course called AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). He found himself thinking more about becoming a counselor, since his primary concern as an educator always was "to deeply impact individual lives."

Gutman established the Envision Scholars scholarship program with the 2011 AVID class to provide even more support for the most deserving students, and he became a full-time guidance and college counselor the following fall.

"He will stop [and engage] anyone and everyone," says Abby Polonsky, a former intern who has worked closely with Gutman as a volunteer and begins work as a full colleague this fall.

Since she met him, Gutman has helped three students earn Gates Millennium Scholarships, which provide a full ride to college, Polonsky said. "(Gutman) absolutely was a huge part in my wanting to work at Waukegan High School...the amazing success stories that he played a role in."

Since starting Envision Scholars, Gutman's whole life has been about getting more deserving students to college. "In some ways it's 24/7," he said. "It's very much integral to how I define myself."

After all, how can society close the income inequality gap if the educational gap is allowed to persist? Studies show college graduates significantly outearn workers with only a high school degree.

A study recently reported in *The New York Times* showed a distinct advantage at colleges for students from families with higher income. For those students from families in the top quartile of income, 82 percent with an SAT score between 1200 and 1600 earn a four-year college degree by the age of 24. By contrast, only 44 percent of students with the same SAT scores, but with family income in the lowest quartile, earn their degree by the age of 24. Even worse, only eight percent of low-income students who score between 800 and 999 earn their degree by age 24, compared to 52 percent of high-income students (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/magazine/who-gets-to-graduate.html?_r=0).

Gutman offers a stark analogy to swimming—if you don't

learn proficiency, you drown. "Without an education, it's like asphyxiation or death...In a lot of ways, we're a lifeline," he said.

Gutman views Envision Scholars as being about more than helping each year's seniors achieve college admission and obtain financial aid. The goal is to make "a deep and transformative, multigenerational impact on specific students and the Waukegan community itself," Gutman said. "We invest in students who can then be ambassadors to help other students." This year, the program accepted 12 students from among 37 applicants.

The Envision Scholars program requires that students have a minimum 2.5 unweighted GPA and that they have taken some honors or Advanced Placement classes. Students also must show some of the intangible factors that help kids succeed: grit, determination, leadership potential, and a desire to contribute. Gutman said that those who evaluate scholarship applications like to see students "overcoming obstacles, so Waukegan can be a place to launch successful futures."

Gutman, 46, said he was inspired to help these students by his own background. A graduate of New Trier High School, with degrees from Oberlin College and Harvard and Stanford universities, he says his going to college was inevitable from the day he was born. "There is no inevitability in Waukegan."

This discrepancy runs counter to the American Dream, the idea that with hard work and academic achievement anyone can realize his or her life goals. Too often this is not true. And, as Gutman is quick to point out, it's not about intelligence, motivation, or talent. What's missing too often is the financial wherewithal, as well as the savvy that comes from having parents who are college graduates.

Envision Scholars receives some money from donations—though not enough to close the gap. It also recruits adults who serve as mentors and provide one-on-one support to the young scholars.

Gutman has developed a trove of volunteers and donors and he's always looking for more help to deepen and widen the impact on these young lives. He has had a longstanding relationship with Tenth Dems and also with the College of Lake County, where he runs College Application Boot Camp each summer at its Waukegan site. Two years ago he forged a partnership with Congregation Solel in Highland Park, which hosts a day-long event at which adult mentors help students polish the essays they write to apply for Gates Millennium and other competitive scholarships.

Gutman is now experiencing a great personal challenge of his own, and many of the people he has done so much for have stepped up to try to pay it forward. In the final stages of renal failure and in need of a new kidney, Gutman said that many of his former students have volunteered to be tested as possible donors.

If ever there was a lesson in community-building, Gutman shows us the power of investing yourself in people and living to reap the rewards. The larger society wins, as well as the individual student, as we gain more educated, involved citizens working to help their friends and so, improve the world.

Anyone interested in being tested as a possible kidney donor can go to <http://www.uchospitals.edu/specialties/transplant/kidney/donate.html> or contact Chuck directly at chuckgutman@gmail.com. To donate to or volunteer for Envision Scholars, go to envisionscholars.org, or email Chuck. ■

“My Constitutional Rights”

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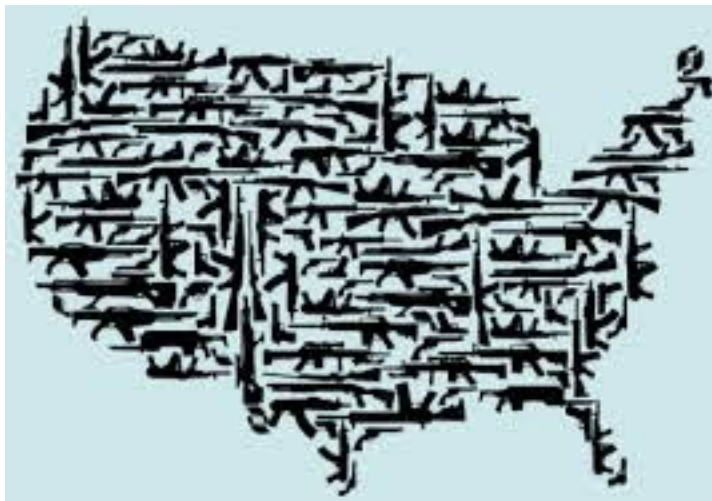
Wurzelbacher’s open letter was published on Barbwire.com (<http://barbwire.com/2014/05/27/open-letter-parents-victims-murdered-elliott-rodger/>) on Monday, May 27th, days after one shooting victim’s father, Richard Martinez, blamed “craven, irresponsible politicians” and the National Rifle Association (NRA) for his 20-year-old son Christopher’s death. Martinez said, “They talk about gun rights. What about Chris’s right to live?”

Barbwire is one of thousands of political sites out in the blogosphere. It is exceedingly right-wing, with several contributors couching their opinions within their religious belief systems. When Wurzelbacher’s letter to Martinez was eventually picked up by mainstream social media, most of us cringed at the complete insensitivity shown by this unlicensed plumber.

Wurzelbacher said that Martinez’ words “will be exploited by gun-grab extremists as are all tragedies involving gun violence and the mentally ill by the anti-Second Amendment Left.” Wurzelbacher told Martinez to “back off.”

Whichever of Martinez’ words Wurzelbacher was talking about, one word that caught my eye was “craven,” which means cowardly and chicken-hearted. I think this is a very appropriate word to describe all the politicians in Congress who fear retribution by the NRA should they vote for legislation making background checks mandatory for all gun sales. Or, for that matter, any kind of gun control measure that would contribute on any minuscule level to strengthening the safety of our society.

Wurzelbacher went on to state, “I am sorry you lost your child. I myself have a son and daughter and the one thing I never want to go through is what you are going through now. But: As harsh



as this sounds—your dead kids don’t trump my Constitutional rights.”

Wurzelbacher acknowledged his comments were “harsh” but claimed that pro-gun control activists “don’t care about your family or your dead children at all.”

Now, let me clarify one thing. It really turns my stomach to even talk about Wurzelbacher in print, because in doing so I’m giving him and his unconscionable comments a certain amount of attention they don’t deserve. At the same time, I actually fear this guy and perhaps so should anyone who is sick and tired of endless gun-related deaths and the ability of just about anyone who wants one to get a gun.

Wurzelbacher is far from alone in this country in the belief that even if your child or loved one gets killed by a gun, the right to bear arms is ultimately more important than keeping our children and society safe. He is part of a subculture of people who passionately feel that all the senseless killings by guns is the price we must pay for having what they view as God-given Second Amendment rights.

Like every other compassionate human being, I was heartbroken watching Mr. Martinez choking up about his son’s death. Through immense anguish and pain he stated, “We don’t have to live like this. Too many have died. We should say to ourselves, ‘Not one more.’”

The sad and sorry reality is that with craven politicians unwilling to face down the NRA, and crazies like Wurzelbacher who elevate the “right to bear arms” over the right to live, there undoubtedly will be many, many more. ■

March with Dems on Independence Day

Rain or shine, communities within the 10th Congressional District once again will be sponsoring Independence Day parades, and Democratic elected officials and candidates will be marching in as many of these parades as they can, greeting constituents and voters. As we do every Fourth, Tenth Dems will be marching right along with them.

Join the parade. Dig out your most comfy shoes, and plan to come out on the Fourth and show your support for Democrats.

If you’d like information about start times and locations of parades, contact us at volunteers@tenthdems.org. ■





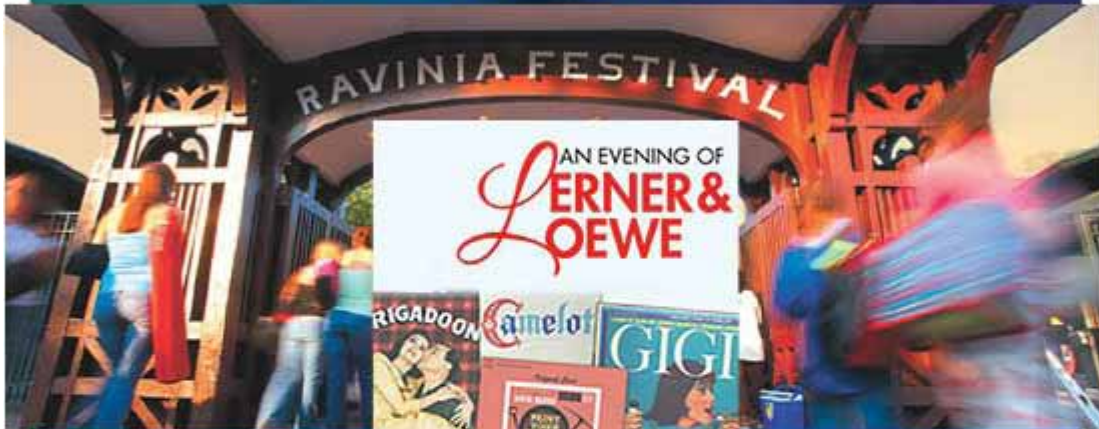
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