Welcome to the Little Meyer Annual Family Newsletter and World Editorial/Commentary

Crazy year… in the span of 5 weeks in mid-May to mid-June, we graduated Alex from college, graduated Rebekah from high school, had Gillian's Bat Mitzvah with all of our family AND welcomed Isaac into our home. This coming a month after Bruce assumed his new job. Just another testimony to Christie's ability to manage complicated logistics and keep us all on the straight and narrow (and maybe some tribute to our entire family's ability to manage stress...)

Whoops, that is right, you caught a new name there. In May, we adopted a (now) 10 month-old baby boy!!! We got called in April by the adoption attorney with whom we had worked on the failed adoption a year ago. This baby had a lumbosacral dermal sinus tract at birth and had spinal surgery right after birth (born 2-8-10). He was in the hospital for about 10 days. The adoptive parents got scared after a couple of days at home and "returned" the baby, who was in foster care. The lawyer had been through his list of clients and none of them were interested. We spent some time looking at operative notes and the MRI and getting opinions. Christie went to Florida to see him and take him to Gainesville to see the neurosurgeon and neurologist that we had identified at U of F. They basically said what we had expected - he should be of normal intelligence and should walk. He may have issues with bladder sensation and bowel sensation (although hard to predict since the dermal sinus tract did not invade through the dura into the spinal column). He has an umbilical hernia that will probably need to be repaired and his laryngeoltracheal malacia seems to have resolved over time (but he does have asthma). So... we took the plunge. We named him Isaac ("G-d laughed" - as that was the gift that Abraham and Sarah received late in life). He is a pretty easy baby - very alert, but does not really like to sleep - that just makes him like all our other kids! Zac (as we call him, ‘cause that gives us children “A” to “Z”) is a beautiful little man, crawling everywhere, standing up (earlier than any of our other kids), smiling and interactive with everyone. He has learned to clap to congratulate himself on standing or other new accomplishments. He is remarkably calm, tolerating being passed around to various family members and friends. We do get some strange looks from folks at the mall. We were fortunate to have Jolene spend the summer with us to help get us readjusted to having a newborn in the house. I am sure that there are those who think we are totally crazy to add to our family at this point in our lives. We just feel that we love raising children and have lots more to give. It has been gratifying and amazing to watch each of the other kids play, teach and bond with him. Even more amazing is how instantly you can give your whole heart to a baby sleeping on the crook of your arm or tugging on your shirt, even without the preparation of being pregnant. Having said that, it is a harder adjustment to being a new parent than we would have thought at this point in our lives; we forgot how much time you have to spend in direct care and feeding and watching that they do not hurt themselves and “child-proofing” (if that can ever be done). This does not mention the additional 15 minutes added to “Meyer time” in terms of being late for EVERYTHING. Lots of joy, but more complicated than ever. We will also admit that you forget the fatigue factor AND how much laundry they create, but we are incredibly happy and feel very blessed. So to each of you we say: Embrace mystery, because the most important things in life cannot be measured – like the connection between parent and child or the joy of being with the ones you love.

Here is what the kids (ringleaders: Alex and Gillian) sent me from a fictitious Santa email address last Christmas:

Ho, Ho, Ho: I regret to inform you that I am unable to leave a present for you this year, due to the reason(s) listed below. As you know, the economy has been hard on Santa and his work shop, thus we had to be more strident in our enforcement of gifting rules. If you wish to appeal any of these reasons you may address your concerns to the North Pole office, where they will be reviewed prior to the next holiday cycle. Fees may apply:

- Your naughty to nice ratio exceeded the 1.5:1 limit that was set during the Kris Kringle Standards and Measurements meeting of 1862.

- Neither cookies nor milk were left, and/or spoiled, stale or otherwise substandard to the Cookie Regulations clearly outlined in the Saint Nicholas Yuletide Manual available at your local CVS, Walgreens or other fine local retailers.

- You're Jewish.

- Stocking contained foreign material including (but not limited to): toe-jam, lint, coal remnants, pet hair and/or aged gingerbread.

 - Advanced SantaScanTM technology detected "Nice List" forgery.

- At time of sleigh arrival on rooftop, subject was found to be awake. As previously mentioned, the Saint Nicholas Yuletide Manual clearly states that ALL parties participating in Christmas must be in full slumber prior to Santa's landing so that he may deliver packages as scheduled.

- Extensive research has revealed that you no longer believe in Santa, his reindeer or any other mythical entity associated with the holiday, and that you have professed to younger believers that Santa is "not real."

Due the above mentioned violations, your present(s) have been shipped to your on file residence. The following package(s) are scheduled to arrive within the next calendar week:

- One autographed and certified professional baseball Home Plate, featuring

a genuine signature of Sanford "Sandy" Koufax.

Attached you will find a photograph of the aforementioned item(s). We hope you enjoy this holiday season and please remember that we are always monitoring participants in the gifting program and do not appreciate repeat offenders.

Kindest Regards,

Santa and the North Pole Committee for a Better Christmas, Santa Claus, LLC

SO HOW AWESOME IS THAT???

A note on my beloved Red Sox of this summer: just a disappointing washout of injuries and underperformance – on to next year with Adrian G. and Crawford and Pedroia and Youk. But… since this year was a washout for the Sox, we got to experience some great baseball in Texas, including the playoffs and Bruce/Christie/Alex/Gillian’s very first World Series games! Just Awesome! Had a great time, especially watching the Rangers eliminate the Yankees! For those of you still in World Series-Drought Saloon, it's always bittersweet watching one of the regulars leave, so congratulations, Giants Fans -savor the moment. The best thing about baseball? What about 120 years and six generations intersecting over statistics, making every fan a bit of a baseball geek? Unfortunately, the narcissism, chest-pounding and me-first mentality of stars in other sports (read basketball and football players like TO) has, perhaps unfairly, made baseball players seem boring as hell. How can you stand out in 2010's Look At Me Society when you're competing with the Look At Me/Instant Gratification Twitter/Snooki/Lady Gaga generation ... Despite the confusion of the steroid era (witness the collective indifference to A-Rod’s 600th home run this summer) , there is a simple joy in going to a game. On a personal note ... it's difficult to stomach that my single greatest sports moment -- eight straight Sox wins in October 2004 -- now wears the scarlet letter. Having said that, I'd rather have the title. Remember, Sox fans were desperate at the time, and if you can find me a team from 1995 to 2008 that didn't have some chemical help, I'll give you a trillion dollars.

We try not to watch a lot of commercials. We've kept our kids up late for various reasons, but we zip through all the ads for beer, bloody movies and male enhancement pills that have become as ubiquitous as diet coke. This year the November elections brought new lows to the political commercial. Know what we learned? *Everybody* running for office, Republican or Democrat, Tea Party or Green Party, is craven and untrustworthy, a captive of foreign and corporate contributors — and will ship your job to China. None of these were thoughtful or informed with views on taxes, job creation or deficit reduction. No one tells you what they stand *for*, only who or what they stand against. All the commercials were filled with dark lighting, sinister music, grim narration and unsubstantiated assertions. Candidates sign off on such ads — "She snorted a goldfish in college! He dressed up like Rommel for Halloween!" — to reach voters who might not vote for them on issues. The 24-hour news cycle demands that everything is exciting and the only way that happens is through extremism. Unfortunately, it also seems to mean that we only have choices among extremists when we vote as well.

**ALEX:**

Alex accomplished something in May that his father has been unable to do – he graduated from college! We did not all get to attend the ceremony, but we are very proud of what he has accomplished. Sadly, he graduated into the worst economy for jobs in decades. He worked as an intern in the Department of Justice until October and then lost out to the Federal job freeze. He is applying to Law School, a process that we discover seems totally unfair as it is entirely about numbers with not even a single school doing interviews. How can they pick the best people without looking them in the face? We are keeping our fingers crossed tightly. Meanwhile, he remains a thoughtful, generous and maturing adult. This year, he had the seemingly mandatory young adult adventure in Vegas with Cal and Shivpal. He is terrific with Zac, making him laugh with his Scooby Doo voice. He can make a bottle, change a diaper (even a poopy one) and sooth him to sleep when needed – things that reassure us about the future of the world. He makes us all laugh with his running commentary on life, is in multiple fantasy football and baseball leagues and remains the consummate big brother for all his siblings. Sadly, his hairline is trending more toward his father’s, which is a source of both humor and resignation.

**CAITE:**

Caite is happy as a Cornell senior, on track to graduate in the spring. Still enjoys science (and she has learned stuff in college that we never got taught in medical school – she is majoring in Human Biology, Heath and Society with a minor in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (wow). She is still with Mike (after 5 plus years), who puts up with her sharp elbows and with the “Puffy” (her version of the velveteen rabbit that is now 21 years old). Caite has been wonderful with the baby – he laughs and giggles at her antics, including when she entertains Zac (and the resting of use) with her "interpretive dance" entitled 'Dancing Phalanges” – she wiggles her fingers and sings - hysterical! Sometimes it is the smallest things that make us the happiest. She does an absolutely hysterical imitation of the Gru character from *Despicable Me*. Last summer she worked in the lab doing western blots in situ hybridization and dissected brains – she loved it! We think that she is taking a year out next year to do research in that lab here in Dallas and then apply to medical school. We will be happy to have her home for a while – maybe we can even regain “date night” for Bruce and Christie. It was a momentous year in one small way - she finally quit biting her fingernails this year – we are very proud.

**REBEKAH:**

Bekah had a massively busy senior year at The Hockaday School, culminated by the formal graduation ceremony, which included the usual speeches and family gathering. But at Hockaday, it also includes formal white dresses, huge floppy white sun hats fully decorated with fresh flowers and more than the average pomp and circumstance. The hard work paid off with this fall’s matriculation at George Washington University, where she is flourishing as a Dean’s Scholar in Shakespeare. It has been a remarkably easy transition for her, and a tough one for those of us remaining in Dallas. The house is growing quieter and quieter (even though Zac has added to the noise factor in his own way. We miss her calm rational demeanor, her bright crowd of friends, her infectious giggle and the way that she brings sunshine into every day. She had a busy late spring with a week in San Francisco working with Aunt Eve (and hanging out with cousin Gabe), graduating, spending a week in Hawaii with her friends (graduation gift from one of her friends), driving immediately to Winedale for camp Shakespeare as assistant director, returning for the Bat Mitzvah and turning around again with Gillian to go back for more camp Shakespeare before she finally got some downtime in late July before heading off to college. She is taking advantage of all the opportunities available to her at GW, including attending rallies in DC. She is a student tour guide, athlete (playing underwater hockey! the greatest sport you’ve never heard of), and she is still involved in theater. She just got cast in a large role in *Comedy of Errors* (the only freshman in the cast) at GWU. She wasted no time getting involved and we are so proud.

**GILLIAN:**

Gillie Bean, the Sweet Pea, 4 of (now) 6, Gillian is a pretty typical teen – angsty, moody, sometimes sweet – she is working very hard at school and doing well – loves the sciences, reads a ton, but doesn’t seem to love writing and has a certain gritty determination (much like her mother). She joined the cross country team, working out at 0600 regularly, and then the soccer team for after school workouts every day. She may not be the best player, but she shows up and gives her best every time. Gillian's Bat Mitzvah was a wonderful celebration with so many family and friends gathered. She did an awesome job - just extraordinarily composed. Her Dvar Torah was pretty cool (done entirely on her own) and talked about generational leadership and why Moses may have been the right leader for Exodus, but not the right leader for Numbers (the time that followed). Gillian pointed out that, God being an astute executive manager, knew Moses was a man who could best lead in one situation, but would be a poor leader in another. Thus, Mr. Spock and the Vulcan doctrine kicked in – ‘the good of the many outweigh the good of the few.’ We had never considered the story of Moses in this light. Thanks to Gillian, it makes more sense now. Pretty impressive all around for a not-quite 13-year-old who still loves Harry Potter (lined up at 3 PM for the midnight opening of part I of the Deathly Hallows with her Mom and friends) and is a self-proclaimed geek who has seem every episode of *Mythbusters* at least twice. Right after the ceremony, she turned into a tiny almost-teenager and danced the night away with her friends! Last year she conquered the seven-sided Rubik's cube. This year the dodecahedron "mega-minx" when down to her nimble mind and equally nimble fingers. - unbelievable! Gillian followed her sister Bekah’s example and got a soprano ukulele in the summer and has used the internet and her creative brain to learn dozens of songs (including the Harry Potter theme song). She will only perform in her room, but we can hear the sounds at night. She routinely quotes Dumbledore: "Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light." Other favorite Gillian quotes: Everyone was born right handed, but only the gifted overcome it, and I'm not short, I'm fun sized! She has been great with Zac’s arrival into our home (although we are still working on changing a diaper), and she can feed him and watches over him like a hawk. She has the same awakening problem that Caite had and has to set four, yes FOUR, alarms each morning in order to be awake enough for Mom to walk in and get her up for school. The wood floor of her room is slowly disappearing under the mess but she remains sweetly sheepish about cleaning it up. We were surprised when, without any notice to us, she prepared and delivered an entry into the middle school persuasive speech context with "the little engine that could - how Google changed the world". We were tremendously proud when she won the whole school-wide contest! This is the stuff that you learn when you watch the Discovery Channel with her... this name sounds like a good epithet to use when frustrated.... no, really the fish's name IS the "sarcastic fringehead"?!? awesome. You can look it up: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/speciesid/fish_page/fish84a.html>

**NATE:**

Nate is sometimes up and down, but he remains very sweet and adorable, even though he no longer wants to cuddle (or often just be in the same room). He has been very helpful with the baby and doing a lot more reading. He still loves creating wonderful things with the tiny Legos (now known as “too many choking hazards that need to be cleaned up” in our home). He loves the iPAD and reads or plays games on it all the time – it has almost completely replaced the DSX. Ah, technology, it marches inexorably onward (or at least until the electromagnetic pulse wipes it all away…). He now tells the occasional joke and has a clearly discernable sense of humor, complete with the unexpected comment that amazes and cracks us up. We love his school (Vanguard Vikings) but academics remain a chore for him. He still disrobes down to underwear the minute he gets home (so give us a few minutes of warning when you visit), because he “just feels more comfortable that way”. He loves action movies, 3-D movies and a well-made animated comedy. He remains devoted (like his Dad) to NCIS – we watch each new episode together if at all possible. Jolene introduced him to the SyFy channel, so his range of interests has expanded somewhat. We still do not know where he will wind up in life, but the journey continues.

**CHRISTIE:**

We celebrated 10 years since Christie was diagnosed and treated for her Cancer. We are very blessed. She remains the glue that holds us all together. None of us would be who or where we are without her. A little obsessive (at times), a little stressed (at times), a little crazed (at times) and always amazing. We compiled a list of over 30 meals that she makes that we love and did not count any of the “special meals” for holidays or special occasions. She is an amazing cook. Meanwhile, she has functioned as the general contractor (along with Ken our “handyman extraordinaire”) for the remodeling of our kitchen and utility room. It has gone remarkably smoothly. We had no kitchen for about 4 weeks and got the functioning appliances back on the day before Thanksgiving (talk about “just in time delivery”). We hope that it finishes up in the first month of the year so that we can begin inviting people to our home again. With the adventure in getting Zac and bringing him into the family and dealing with his health issues, she has been a rock. Now we just need to stay healthy for enough time to get him through college (529 plan here we come - yikes!). Her master plan to transition from small children in our own home to small grandchildren seems to have serious hope of coming to fruition! She maintains a serious gym regimen with Pilates, stationary bike, elliptical work etc and looks to be the same weight as when we got married! Bruce (as he constantly tells pretty much anyone he meets) is a very lucky man.

**BRUCE:**

Bruce got promoted this year. After a long national search, the powers-that-be at UT Southwestern decided to go with the internal candidate. He is now the Executive Vice-President for UT Southwestern Health System Affairs. This means that he is in charge of the University Hospitals (currently ~~460 beds, expanding with our new hospital which is scheduled to be open in late 2014, to ~600 beds) as well as the faculty practice and the relationships with Parkland Health and Hospitals, Children’s Medical Center of Dallas and the North Texas VA hospital. Big job. In November, with the early retirement of the CEO, he took over as interim CEO of the hospitals as well. Much to do, including trying to predict/shape the future. It means finally giving up clinical work, which he misses. Why do this, you ask? Because somebody has to do it. Because real leadership is not about ego or personal glory. It is about what kind of environment one can create so that others can truly accomplish something. A *good* man must seriously question himself and any decision that leads to harm or consequences for others, especially if those people trust you. But we are all fallible and the world is a complicated, dangerous and unfair place. So what to do? Well, *someone* has to be in charge, someone must lead. No one who does so is perfect, so he will therefore make mistakes. And since the world is unfair, it is inevitable that some of those mistakes will have consequences that bring guilt. One hopes that good men do not shy away from such guilt, or from leading because of those consequences, but instead, decide to be in charge anyway. He hopes that he is such a man.

Intelligence and experience are commodities that are measured on various scales. But wisdom is a deepening blend of intelligence, experience, and something that's more precious, and impossible to quantify. Intelligence is critical. But smart people make mistakes, not despite their intelligence, but often because they're so smart, they're sure they must be right. To quote Satchel Paige: "It's not what you don't know that hurts you; it's what you know that just ain't so." Experience can knock around intelligence, to create the kind of doubt that can lead to reflection and maturity. But if you let experience alone guide decisions, you might not try anything new, which will turn wisdom into mush. An essential ingredient of wisdom is morality, to use an old-fashioned, even unexpected word: knowing when it's right to make a decision that we won't judge by whether it's bold, clever, or without risk, but whether it's truly wise. Lots of people are smart. Lots of people have experience. But wise is an adjective not used often. Is it just morality applied to experience and intellect? I think it is that, but more too. It is the ability to see the future and the present three dimensionally, so you see how things play out, and whether the future, in that circumstance, would be good or not. It is about putting off immediate gratification for future well-being. It's about seeing the broader impact of a decision, and who, the long run benefits and who is hurt.

This summer, Bruce got to perform in the Shakespeare at Winedale 40th reunion performance… It was made more special because Bekah was Doc Ayres’ assistant for the week. The reunion week is just like a mini-summer. We journey from "wow, this is awesome", to "what have I gotten myself into", to "pit of despair", to maybe, just maybe" to "uh oh" to "damn, that was fine!" in such a tiny span of time. And, after weeks and weeks of angst and anticipation, in the blink of an eye, it is over all too soon. A glorious week of hard work (for as Peter Brook said "to play is hard work"). We got to sweep and clean the barn, speak Shakespeare's words, dance and sing together before each meal, care for one another, listen to one another, see old (in all senses of the word) friends, and prepare for the great gift we gave ourselves, our audience of friends and Doc. He got to play Justice Shallow and Bottom and Balthazar and assorted servants, oddlings and spear carriers. Had all of the glorious emotions - joy, exhilaration, fear, satisfaction, glory, camaraderie and "...we in it shall be remembered- we few, we happy few, we band of brothers; For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother". He owes a debt to fellow Winedalians and to his wife and family who allow him to depart and sweat with peers in the 100+ degree heat of the Texas summer so that we can do something that makes our hearts glad. Doc does have a knack for attracting and finding some pretty remarkable people who come with a real spirit of generosity. Jackie Robinson said: Life is not a spectator sport, a life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives. By this criteria, we all lead very important lives.

Bruce is officially in his mid-fifties. He long ago became invisible to young women. He is at peace with that circumstance. He is strangely mesmerized by the commercial featuring middle-aged men gleefully celebrating their ability to drink water and drive long distances (I particularly enjoy that the slightly younger women in the commercial appear to be turned on knowing that their geezers don't have to urinate frequently). Worse was the sad “spectacle” of The Who playing the Super Bowl halftime show: By disclaimer, should note that he saw them play live as a teen and wore out the grooves on multiple vinyl records. But watching The Who perform at halftime was watching serious public humiliation due to age. The Jamboree Medley of Iconic Counterculture Hits Now Made Toothless By Time And Money was just pathetic – and the fact that the kids only know these songs as the theme music to CSI made him want to cry... what happened to "hope I die before I get old"? You know you're getting older when... You throw your back out on the toilet. You shave your ears. Women your age have real breasts and artificial hips. You sometimes pee in morse code -- dots and dashes. Your car radio is set to “classic rock” so you have something to switch to during NPR pledge drives. Your doctor says things like, “that’s normal for a man your age”. Beneath your chin is what appears to be a neck skin hammock. You choose your new car because it offers great lumbar support and convenient cup holders. And you start actually noticing when people you admire die. So here are a couple:

John Wooden died this year at age 99. He taught tolerance, togetherness, and diversity in a pre-Civil Rights Act USA; His “Pyramid of Success” has become one of the most influential ideas in the modern world of business, expanding beyond its origins in basketball and becoming a metaphor for achievement and greatness. Wooden was frequently asked why he was so successful, and he often talked about how his conquering of fear was at the core of his being. He did not fear death, and thus lived a long life. He did not fear racism, and thus was able to bring races together. When asked what he would want God to say to him when he finally reached the pearly gates, Wooden responded simply, “Well done.” His wisdom, kindness, and leadership positively influenced thousands of lives.

Daniel Schorr died in July - he was 93 . He was the only reporter on Nixon’s “enemies list”. Aside from listening to him pretty religiously on NPR weekends, he was a guy we studied at UT in the seventies as a powerhouse in the Washington reporting business -- and he was still relevant in 2010. I heard him two weeks before he died in his regular spot on NPR talking about Russian spies. This is a guy you had to listen to in the sixties -- and still 50 years later. He will be missed.

**I expect that I have to say something about Health Care, so…**

I suspect that our collective search for villains in health care—from incompetent physicians or nurses (as revealed by medical malpractice lawsuit expansion) to greedy pharmaceutical companies or evil health insurers—has distracted us and our political leaders from addressing the fundamental causes of our nation’s health-care crisis. All of the actors in health care—from doctors to insurers to pharmaceutical companies—work in a heavily regulated, massively subsidized industry full of structural distortions. They all want to serve patients well. But we also all behave rationally in response to the economic incentives those distortions create. Accidentally, but relentlessly, America has built a health-care system with incentives that inexorably generate terrible and perverse results. Incentives that emphasize health *care* over any other aspect of health and well-being. That emphasize treatment over prevention. That disguise true costs. That favor complexity, and discourage transparent competition based on price or quality. That result in a generational pyramid scheme rather than sustainable financing. And that—most importantly—remove consumers from their irreplaceable role as the ultimate judge of value.

These are the impersonal forces that explain why things have gone so badly wrong in health care, producing the national dilemma of runaway costs and poorly covered millions. The unfortunate premise behind today’s incremental approach to health-care reform is just an expansion of the current “Rube Goldberg” (defined as “an involved complicated invention, laboriously contrived to perform a simple operation”) contraption. The principles of the Health Care Reform legislation are a reprise of previous reforms—addressing access to health care by expanding government aid to those without adequate insurance, while attempting to control rising costs through centrally administered initiatives. Some of the ideas now on the table may well be sensible in the context of our current system. But fundamentally, this “comprehensive” reform merely further entrenches in place the current system—insurance-based, employment-centered, administratively complex and mostly provided by the government. It addresses the underlying causes of our health-care crisis only obliquely, if at all, by extending the current system to more people through expansion of (mostly) governmental programs. It will likely increase the ultimate cost of true reform.

To achieve maximum coverage at acceptable cost with acceptable quality, health care will need to become subject to the same forces that have boosted efficiency and value throughout the economy. We will need to regulate and reduce, rather than expand, the role of insurance; focus the government’s role exclusively on things that only government can do (protect the poor, cover us against true catastrophe, enforce safety standards, and ensure provider competition); overcome our addiction to Ponzi-scheme financing, hidden subsidies, manipulated prices, and undisclosed results; and rely more on consumers as the ultimate guarantors of good service, reasonable prices, and sensible trade-offs between health-care spending and spending on all the other good things money can buy. The unfortunate fact is, health-care demand has no natural limit. Our current system will always keep creating new treatments to cure previously incurable problems. Some of these will save lives or add productive years to them; many will simply make us more comfortable. That’s all to the good. But the cost of this comfort, and whether it’s really worthwhile, is never calculated—by anyone. For almost all our health-care needs, the current system allows us as consumers to ask providers, “What’s my share?” instead of “How much does this cost?”—a question we ask before buying every other good or service. And the subtle difference between those two questions is costing us all a fortune.

Medical care, of course, is merely one component of our overall health. Nutrition, exercise, education, emotional security, our natural environment, and public safety may now be more important than care in producing further advances in longevity and quality of life. (In 2005, almost half of all deaths in the U.S. resulted from heart disease, diabetes, lung cancer, homicide, suicide, and accidents-all of which are arguably influenced as much by lifestyle choices and living environment as by health care.) And of course even health itself is only one aspect of personal fulfillment, alongside family and friends, travel, recreation, the pursuit of knowledge and experience, and more.

Yet spending on health care, by families and by the government, is crowding out spending on almost everything else. As a nation, we now spend almost 18 percent of our GDP on health care. In 1966, Medicare and Medicaid made up 1 percent of total government spending; now that figure is 20 percent, and rising. Already, the federal government spends eight times as much on health care as it does on education, 12 times what it spends on food aid to children and families, 30 times what it spends on law enforcement, 78 times what it spends on land management and conservation, 87 times the spending on water supply, and 830 times the spending on energy conservation. Education, public safety, environment, infrastructure - all other public priorities are being slowly devoured by the health-care beast.

True reform is to be found in the cost curve and the politicians are not inclined to bend it. We must get at the root causes of escalating healthcare costs, i.e., too much medicine with attendant bureaucracy, inefficiency and waste at multiple levels. The engrained political gridlock and infighting and the lack of a coordinated, sustained national will to rein in healthcare costs will likely ensure the continued decay of the system. Some things then become predictable: Medical costs will continue to climb at a rate much greater than inflation; Higher medical costs will translate into higher health insurance premiums; As premiums continue to rise, fewer businesses and individuals will be able to afford insurance. Until only the largest companies can offer coverage and the wealthiest individuals can afford their coverage (mandates notwithstanding); The number of personal bankruptcies attributable to healthcare costs will not decrease; The morbidity and premature deaths due to lack of access to affordable health care will rise; The burden on public healthcare sectors will mount, taxes will increase and there will be a gradual, steady decline in community health services; Medicare premiums and services will likely become means-tested; In the current system, Medicare will go technically bankrupt; Primary care will be provided by foreign medical graduates and non-physician providers (the latter is likely a good thing); Physician incomes will be significantly reduced (esp. the surgical sub-specialists at the high end of the physician wage scale); States or the Feds will have to step in to regulate hospital costs; and, finally, at the end of the day, the U.S. will be forced to implement a rationed single payer healthcare system, much like Medicare.

**Some crazy things about our Government:**

This year, the Texas State Board of Education hit on a genius idea. They made history by making history up. With a conservative majority on the board, they made sweeping changes in what Texas students will be taught and what will be written in textbooks about American history, including: Largely deleting the civil rights movement. Replacing any reference to the "slave trade" with the "Atlantic triangular trade". Changing any reference to "democracy" to "constitutional republic.". Treating Jefferson Davis equally with Abraham Lincoln. Describing the Civil War as a battle over states' rights, with references to slavery minimized. Not using President Barack Obama's name in the textbook, just calling him the 45th President. Well, why not? If you have the votes, who needs the actual truth? Just plain embarrassing.

By a 5-4 decision in January, the Supreme Court rolled back restrictions on corporate spending on federal campaigns. In his dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens accused the majority of judicial activism and attacked the use of corporate personhood in the case. Congratulations President George Bush - you preached against activist judges and then turn out to appoint some of the biggest judicial activists in history! The Supreme Court majority thus voids 70 years of attempted reform to give the ordinary citizen a real voice in politics, freeing corporations to use their aggregate corporate wealth to flood federal elections and buy government influence. Under the decision, insurance companies, banks, drug companies, energy companies and the like will be free to each spend $5 million, $10 million or whatever they want from corporate funds to elect or defeat a federal candidate -- and thereby to buy influence over the candidate's positions on issues of economic importance to the company. We are moving to an age where the senator from Arkansas may be the senator from Wal-Mart or the congressman from North Carolina may be the congressman from Bank of America.

One week in October, I read a story about something that happened just a few blocks from Congress, where politicians debate and do not decide anything about illegal immigrants. There were pounding rains and on a Thursday, Bernice Clark was driving along Rhode Island Avenue in Washington with her great-grandson when her car was stopped dead by flooding. Water surged into the passenger compartment. Her great-grandson, Davonte Williams, pushed open his door and leapt out. But Bernice Clark was stuck in the driver's seat. Her great-grandson tried to fight his way back to pull her out. But, as the water rose higher each second, it pulled Davonte away from the car and put more pressure on the door that his great-grandmother struggled to open. Witnesses say that a passerby, who appeared to be Hispanic, saw Davonte straining to reach his great-grandmother. The passerby didn't make a video with his cellphone and send it out over YouTube. He didn't call 911 to say, "There's a woman drowning. You ought to get over here." He didn't post a message to his Facebook friends: "Wow. Woman fighting for her life right in front of me. Look at this pic!". The man stripped off his clothes and dove into the cold, grimy, churning waters. "He came over and jumped into where we were and brought me out," says Bernice Clark. "He saved me." And then, the man went away. He didn't stay around to receive congratulations, or join Bernice Clark and her great-grandson for some hot soup, and receive their tearful thanks for saving their lives. There may be several reasons why the man did not stay at the scene of the rescue. The likeliest may be that he is an illegal immigrant who feared that police would soon show up and ask for proof of his identity. It is not easy — in fact, it's illegal — for a policeman to say these days, "You saved people. Nice work. I'll pretend you weren't here." As people in Congress and across the nation debate illegal immigration, we might want to think a bit about this about this unidentified stranger, who may be doing backbreaking work for little money in our own backyards and apartment blocks. This man may seem invisible to many. But when he saw someone in danger and distress, he risked his life to save them. He was a hero. He was a model citizen, just like the vast majority of the “illegal” immigrants living in this country.

I am all for public debate and (when appropriate) dissent. But some of what has been occurring in our country is not acceptable to me. You've probably heard about Tea Party members shouting "Nigger!" at Black Congressmen during a protest in Washington, D.C. in March. One of the protesters spat on Congressman Emmanuel Cleaver, while another called openly gay Representative Barney Frank a "faggot". Signs that announced "Obama's Plan: White Slavery," or "The American Taxpayers are the Jews for Obama's Oven," are offensive. Supporting, exacerbating and exploiting public fear and anger for cynical political ends or using fear and hatred to assault the very legitimacy of our elected leaders is nothing less than a betrayal of American values whether it is done from the right or the left. No matter what party one supports, we should all take strong action to support civil, honest, and respectful public debate. Publicly we should ask politicians to do two simple things:

- Unequivocally condemn bigotry and hate among their supporters, and make clear that those who embrace it have no place in their party.

- Be clear that we will not tolerate fear-mongering from officials in the either party, at any level.

**With respect to the Economy:**

We must place priority on reducing the deficit, say Republicans and “centrist” Democrats. And then, virtually in the next breath, they declare that we must preserve tax cuts for the very affluent, at a budget cost of $700 billion over the next decade. In effect, a large part of our political class is showing its priorities: given the choice between asking the richest 2 percent or so of Americans to go back to paying the tax rates they paid during the Clinton-era boom, or allowing economics to crumble — literally in the case of roads, figuratively in the case of education — they’re choosing the latter. It’s crucial to keep state and local government in mind when you hear people ranting about runaway government spending. Yes, the federal government is spending more, but state and local governments are cutting back. If you add them together, it turns out that the big spending increases have been in safety-net programs like unemployment insurance. That is, for all the talk of a failed stimulus, if you look at government spending as a whole you see hardly any stimulus at all.

What about the economy’s future? Everything we know about economic growth says that a well-educated population and high-quality infrastructure are crucial. Emerging nations are making huge efforts to upgrade their roads, their ports and their schools. Yet in America we’re not doing that. How did we get to this point? Three decades of anti-government rhetoric, rhetoric that has convinced many voters that a dollar collected in taxes is always a dollar wasted, that the public sector can’t do anything right. People talk about how the economic failures of the Obama administration show that big-government policies don’t work. But what big-government policies are they talking about? Medicare? Medicaid? Social Security? The Defense Department spending on foreign wars? These are hardly Obama’s policies. It appears that the Obama stimulus — which itself was almost 40 percent tax cuts — was far too cautious to turn the economy around. Now, maybe it wasn’t possible for President Obama to get more in the face of Congressional skepticism about government. Part of the answer, surely, is that people who should have had the people’s best interests in mind were too concerned about re-election or future political aspirations. And this is especially, though not only, true of the President. We tend to forget that Ronald Reagan often gave ground on policy substance — most notably, he ended up enacting multiple tax increases. But he never wavered on ideas, never backed down from the position that his ideology was right and his opponents were wrong. President Obama, by contrast, has consistently compromised the principles that he campaigned upon. He has praised Reagan for restoring American dynamism (when was the last time you heard a Republican praising F.D.R.?), adopted G.O.P. rhetoric about the need for the government to tighten its belt even in the face of recession, offered symbolic freezes on federal spending, jobs (Alex lost one of them) and wages. None of this stopped the right from denouncing him as a socialist. Yes, politics is the art of the possible. We all understand the need to deal with one’s political enemies. But it’s one thing to make deals to advance your goals; it’s another to compromise your ideals. When it comes to congress, Obama appears to have had only one thing on his mind for the past two years – winning over the GOP. Take the stimulus plan: he sweetened the deal for Republicans by adding $250 billion in tax cuts. In exchange, the Republicans gave Obama and the Democrats…. Nothing, nada, niente. Did that stop the President from reaching across the aisle? Nope. When health care law was being crafted, the GOP said ‘forget it’, so Obama dropped the public option (apparently it had a “pre-existing condition”). So the Republicans gave Obama… nothing, zilch, zip, zero, jack-squat. Now we get to extending the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest 2% of Americans… once again, Obama caves to Republican wishes and no one pays any more taxes while our deficit which is mortgaging the future of our children simply grows. What did Obama get for this compromise? You guessed it - nolo, the null set, absolutely nothing.  **If you don't stick to your values when they're being tested, they're not values -- they're hobbies.** We cannot seem to fix the estate tax, cannot control defense spending, cannot pass the dream act for kids, cannot even vote to pay for 9/11 first responders health care (until the last day of the lame duck congress)! Somewhere there need to be some people in Washington who are not slaves to oppositional ideology but are actually trying to get something done to help the American people. **It's not that the Democrats are playing checkers and the Republicans are playing chess. It's that the Republicans are playing chess and the Democrats are another room trying to decide what game they know enough about in order to actually play.** Most Americans don’t live their lives solely as Democrats, Republicans, liberals or conservatives.  **I think that 70 to 80 percent of us are pretty reasonable people that truthfully, if we sat down, even on contentious issues, we would get along. Unfortunately, the other 20 percent of the country seem to run it.**

**Well enough serious stuff. We still have faith in the world.** Faith isn’t about going to services or how much money you put into the little plate (although those are good things). Faith is about what you do each day. It is about aspiring to be better and nobler and kinder than you are. It is about making sacrifices for the good of others – even when there is no one who will tell you what a hero you are. We have faith in all of you.

We wish you all health, happiness and joy. Keep in touch.

Bruce, Christie, Alex, Caite, Bekah, Gillian, Nate and Zac (plus Phoebe, Daisy and Fenway)

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