

Plenty of Scary things and mysteries on Halloween 09

by Jeff Smithpeters, *Clarksdale Blues Star*, published week of Oct. 29, 2009

While one key number shows the tow truck of Obama's stimulus plan may be pulling our country out of the sucking swamp, only one wheel is out. Despite our Gross Domestic Product rising 3.5 percent from July to September, the rest of our wheels are still in the green sludge, barely catching hold of solid bottom. Unemployment is expected to still be around 10 percent. Gas is going up. So is a pack of peanuts.

I'm scared about this country's jalopy being pulled apart rather than being pulled whole out of that mudhole. I'd rather the Presidential and Congressional stimulus passed back in the spring pulled the car out intact so we can drive away. You can't drive a rear chassis.

But Mississippi, like a lot of other states, has hitched a slightly smaller truck to the front bumper, but that truck can sure pull. While the infusion of federal funds helped keep colleges and k-12 schools nearly fully financed according to budget projections for 09-10, our governor Haley "Tightened Belt" Barbour has cut state education funding from that very budget, in response to anemic monthly tax receipt reports. Other states are struggling with the same problem, among them Iowa, Alabama, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

Unlike most of those states, however, prospects in Mississippi for raising substantial revenue to make up for these cuts have a stubborn anti-tax-for-the-rich crusader governor to deal with (or not to deal with). He'll have to at least accept undoubtedly inadequate raises in fees, tuitions and some sales taxes. But teachers will still be let go and class sizes will increase.

The Mississippi rich will get to continue paying the same income tax rate as anyone making over \$5,000 in taxable income. Governor Barbour has said he's not happy with even that tiny pittance of a rate. He said last month on Mississippi Public Broadcasting channels that our tax system is "too progressive per se." He even made those little quotation marks in the air with his fingers.

I'm scared about our recent moves to stay in the wars we voted to roll credits on. Who decided our main purpose in Afghanistan was to defeat the Taliban? Isn't this the equivalent of China invading us and trying to defeat the Southern Baptists? The Taliban is a belief system as much as it is a militant group. We can no more defeat the Taliban than China could defeat the belief that Disney's *The Little Mermaid* is pro-gay.

I'm scared about the health care bill. Will the liars get their way, the ones who've tried to tell us the Soviet Union's gulag archipelago looms behind the ability of American broke 37-year-olds to get an upper endoscopy without going bankrupt?

Will *Dancing With the Stars*, the novels of Dan Brown, Glenn Beck's show, and Kate and Jon Gosselin finally triumph in dissolving all the brain cells in our collective unconscious?

Will Mississippi continue to spend \$800 thousand a year to advertise for its state agencies on Supertalk FM, whose hosts declare many times hourly that any kind of government service will screw up its responsibilities so bad we would all prefer the anarchy of Mel Gibson's Road Warrior movies?

Will Supertalk itself—a state tax-financed public option legislators never debated or mentioned—ever be allowed to fight for market share without its giant government subsidy? If so, will its stations stay where they are now, with 12<sup>th</sup> place ratings in the Jackson, Mississippi market and coming in 5<sup>th</sup> in the Columbus-Starkville-West Point market (their best Arbitron showing, but still a moribund 4.1 percent share)?

Will Paul Gallo, JT and the Brick or Sid Salter ever stop slandering government agencies long enough to admit their paychecks come mostly from government agency advertising money?

Will I stop updating facebook so that my friends know how my right arm-shoulder-neck pain is doing, a pain only intensified by my being on the computer all day?

Will my youthful exception application to Curmudgeons International be accepted so that I can receive their complimentary subscription to Ways the World Kills You Bi-Weekly and knee socks with the official seal—Andy Rooney unsuccessfully biting into a carrot with his dentures. Of course, the knee socks are designed to immediately accordion right down to your ankles, so that your prematurely grey leg hair, like your dooming and glooming, can be applauded by one and all.