



THE BLOG 09/30/2013 02:14 pm ET | Updated Nov 30, 2013

This Creepy Ad Can Kill You



By Marty Kaplan

“You’re not going to let Uncle Sam put his finger up your butt, are you, dude?”

We’re at a bustling town fair, a few weeks from now. Kids climb on the fire truck. Community groups sell cupcakes and give out flyers. At the “Enroll America” booth, people are on healthcare.gov signing up for the health insurance marketplace.

But here’s a weird sight: an Uncle Sam character, someone dressed in a Fourth of July costume and a creepy mask (think of the King character in the Burger King commercials), is waving at fairgoers.

Creepy Uncle Sam doesn’t speak, but he’s accompanied by a normal-looking guy in his 20s who’s trying to pitch to young people in the crowd.

“Hey, how’s it going, bro?”

“Cool, man,” replies a Millennial, not stopping. “Have a good one.”

“Say, you’re not headed over to that booth to opt into Obamacare, are you?”

The Millennial pauses. “Actually, I am.”

That’s when Creepy Uncle Sam produces a blue latex doctor’s glove and proceeds to put it on, and when the normal-looking guy says, “You’re not going to let Uncle Sam put his finger up your butt, are you, dude?”

Uncle Sam got this gig on Craigslist, where ads now running seek actors to wear the costume for a weekend in exchange for \$275 from Generation Opportunity, which is billionaires David and Charles Koch’s delivery system for this dirty bomb.

In case you haven’t seen the rollout of the Koch brothers’ latest disinformation campaign: Two Creepy Uncle Sam ads are now running on TV, “The Glove” and “The Exam.” “The Glove” targets young men. A twenty-something guy is in an exam room. The doctor tells him to take his pants off, lie on his side and bend his knees to his chest. It looks like he’s going to get a prostate exam. But his doctor leaves, and out of nowhere Uncle Sam pops up by the young guy’s behind and pulls on a latex glove. The patient is freaked. I’m freaked. Every man watching, except for the odd alien abduction fetishist, is involuntarily freaked.

“Don’t let government play doctor,” the ad ends. “Opt out of Obamacare.”

The message of “The Glove”: You’re young. Don’t sign up for a health care exchange. Screw the individual mandate. You’re a free man. Act like it.

In “The Exam,” it’s a young woman in an exam room. She’s wearing a hospital gown; her feet are in stirrups, the posture of maximum vulnerability. But when her gynecologist steps out, Creepy Uncle Sam rises between her legs. In his hand, a speculum, which he clenches scarily. If you don’t want the government invading your most private place, Millennial women, you’d better opt out of Obamacare.

The Kochs' sabotage is shrewder than defunding Obamacare because it goes to the whole basis for the Affordable Care Act's plan to cover the uninsured: the creation of a risk pool that includes the young and healthy as well as the not young and not immortal. If young people aren't insured, the system will fail; the individual mandate is the compact that connects us across generations and conditions to protect the sick, the poor and the unemployed. Kill the enrollment of the young in Obamacare, and you kill the program.

That's the mission of Generation Opportunity, which itself calls the ads "creepy." In tandem with the TV spots, this fall the Kochs are funding a propaganda blitz at town fairs, tailgate parties and on 20 campuses, where pizza and lies will be handed out to young Americans. I totally made up their in-person pitch, above; theirs will no doubt be way slicker. If they succeed in sinking Obamacare, some 45,000 Americans will die each year from lack of coverage, and 2 million people a year will be bankrupt due to unpaid medical bills. But at least the Kochs and our other whining oligarchs won't be required to provide health insurance to their employees.

Gen Opp, as the astroturf campaign styles itself, is recruiting. "Want to join the team?" They say on their site that they're looking for young artists to create "original, edgy" art — "videos, memes, images, graphics, digital design" — and young writers to produce "clear, compelling, succinct attractive writing," in order to express "our love of freedom, our mistrust of government... In many cases, we can even pay you, and your art could be seen by a national audience. Awesome, right?"

Right. Awesome. You can pretty much imagine the not-so-young lobbyist who wrote that copy at \$900 an hour.

Gen Opp is just a symptom of our American dysfunction. It's what you get when an activist Supreme Court strikes down limits on the political corruption that big money can anonymously buy; when ideologues and dunderheads from gerrymandered districts face no electoral accountability for their demagoguery; when fearful news media misleadingly frame the story as two political parties equivalently guilty of bad behavior. Welcome to plutocrat's paradise. If the Kochs really want to know what Creepy Uncle Sam looks like, the answer is only a mirror away.

This is my column from The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles. My JJ columns won the 2013 Best Columnist award from the LA Press Club. You can read more of them here, and email me there if you'd like.

Follow Marty Kaplan on Twitter: www.twitter.com/martykaplan

Do you have information you want to share with HuffPost? Here's how.



Marty Kaplan 

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director