



**THE BLOG** 11/12/2013 12:16 pm ET | Updated Jan 23, 2014

# The Obamacare Apocalypse, And the Real One



By Marty Kaplan

Last week a professor of physics and astronomy told the *New York Times* that the probability of an asteroid hitting the earth — it happened over Chelyabinsk, Russia in February, with the energy of 30 Hiroshimas — isn't once in a century or two, it's once in a decade or two. It's only a matter of time before a Sarah Palin names these death rocks "Obamacare asteroids." A Ted Cruz also will liken Obamacare to an asteroid, assuring us Obamacare has a 100 percent chance of causing Armageddon. Some concern troll will say that the beleaguered White House "needs a Bruce Willis" to rescue it from losing the Senate and seeing its legacy repealed.

No one has a clue how we will look back on this time. It's possible that Republicans will fail to win veto-proof, Obamacare-killing control of Congress in 2014. It's possible that young people will join the risk pool, despite the Koch brothers' plan to stop them. It's possible that some of the Republican governors who refused Medicaid money for 8 million of their constituents will find themselves so wildly unpopular that they'll do a 180. It's possible that people in the individual market stranded by the law and their insurance companies will find solutions. Hell, it's even possible that healthcare.gov will work.

So it's not nuts to think that by the time Obama leaves office, the American health care system will be better in lots of ways, Obamacare will be the new normal and solid majorities will like it. There may be no "Keep Your Hands Off My Obamacare" signs during the 2016 campaign, but it's possible that the painful rollout of the exchanges will be forgotten.

That would ruin things for the drama queens in the media. Their master narrative is Countdown to Armageddon. Demagogues need end times to raise money. News needs to shout apocalypse to get attention.

It's not just Obamacare. Imagine that CBS News had no reason to retract the Benghazi piece on *60 Minutes*. If accounts of Dylan Davies's F.B.I. interviews hadn't made their way to the *New York Times* and impugned the star source, every right-wing blowhard in the media and the Congress would be in full impeachment mode by now, and every recycled Benghazi talking point would be super-duper extra-

breaking breaking news. But the story fell apart. Davies played Lara Logan like Scooter Libby played Judith Miller. CBS News may have hoped the story would inoculate them against the liberal bias charge, but instead they put the quality of their judgment into play.

Without the Benghazi drum to beat, Lindsay Graham, Darrell Issa and the shows that love them have reverted to the Obamacare apocalypse to keep us scared and watching. What's so strange is that there's an actual Armageddon in plain sight that's failing to get the red-siren treatment it deserves.

As *The Last Hours: Warming the World to Extinction*, a 10-minute movie written by Thom Hartmann and directed by Leila Conners makes terrifyingly clear, climate change is on track to cause the sixth mass extinction in geologic history. The fifth, the K-T extinction 65 million years ago, was caused by an asteroid hitting the earth off the coast of the Yucatan peninsula — and it killed the dinosaurs. The third mass extinction — the Permian, the worst — was caused by volcanic eruptions in the Siberian Traps that warmed the oceans six degrees Celsius and melted trillions of tons of methane that had been frozen beneath the sea floor and ice sheets. The methane this released into the atmosphere doubled the warming the volcanoes caused and killed 95 percent of all life on earth. Today, fossil fuel burning and industrial agriculture are increasing greenhouse gases at rates never before recorded by humans, physicist Michael Mann says in the film, “far greater than any of the most rapid events that happened in the deep geological past,” including the Permian extinction.

Talk about doomsday scenarios. If this keeps happening, Obamacare, along with everything else we love, hate or talk about, will be irrelevant, because our species won't be around to love, hate or talk about anything. But you would not know that things are as dire as they are from watching the news, which is just how Exxon-Mobil, Monsanto and the Koch brothers like it.

The day before the *Times* reported a tenfold increase in the odds of an asteroid strike, Erik Petigura, a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley made front page news with what he found in the four years of data that the Kepler spacecraft sent back to Earth until it malfunctioned last winter. It turns out that “there could be as many as 40 billion habitable Earth-sized planets in the Milky Way galaxy.” Forty-five hundred individual candidates for Earth 2.0 have so far been identified, the nearest of which may be only 12 light years away, orbiting a star, Petigura said, that “would be visible to the naked eye.”

If one of those habitable exoplanets gave rise to a civilization technologically capable of sending signs of its existence into space, it would take a really, really long time for such a signal to reach us. By the time we detect it, life on Earth 2.0 may have long ago become extinct. The same lag applies to the signals our civilization has been beaming into space. If one day some interstellar auditor of ours wonders why our signal has gone dark, I just hope that the last message they pick up from our planet is a worthy battle over taxing carbon or sustainable farming, not some hyperventilating attention junkies doom-mongering about Obamacare.

*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.*