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### We should know whom we owe

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In his State of the Union, President Obama made U.S. debt reduction a priority. If America wants to pay back her debt, we need to know who our creditors are.

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The White House just held meetings with China's Hu Jintao where U.S. debt to them (now \$896 billion) and our economic relationship were top issues. The Treasury Department discloses what we owe China, Japan (\$877 billion), Britain (\$512 billion), Brazil (\$184 billion) and most countries — but refuses to disclose how much we owe Saudi Arabia and other oil nations.

With gas prices threatening \$4 a gallon, this is something Florida's 14 million drivers, especially seniors on a fixed income, as well as the tourism industry, care about.

Oil countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya and Venezuela, hold a fifth (\$210 billion) of U.S. debt. OPEC, the Saudi-ruled cartel, manipulates oil and gasoline prices. They are taking what we pay at the pump and loaning it back to us.

In response to our inquires about how much we owe the Saudis, Treasury spokespersons and staff would only provide a formal non-statement: "Treasury has been reporting this data in the same way for many years. The Treasury Department General Counsel is reviewing how this information is disclosed to the public." Basically, you can wait for Godot before we'll tell you.

9-11 drives U.S. foreign policy and national security. Critics have long questioned our relationship with the homeland of 15 of the 19 9-11 hijackers. It remains a major training ground for terrorist organizations, including al-Qaida.

It is one of the most repressive governments. They batter their women, hide them under shawls and force them to marry young and have sex; women cannot vote or drive.

During the financial crisis, Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner traveled to Riyadh to reassure the Saudis. The Saudi British Bank's chief economist said the trip was necessary because "Saudi Arabia is a very important holder of U.S. paper."

The relationship with the House of Saud extends way beyond debt. Comics have fun with the pseudo-erotic adventures in the desert: President Bush kissing the king's cheek, President Obama bowing to him. It played a critical role in stopping Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, and we would not allow Saddam to reach Saudi Arabia. We consider them a key ally against Iran.

In November, DOD agreed to sell the Saudis \$60 billion in military equipment and training — the largest U.S. arms deal in history. If their nation is a harbor for terrorists against us, why are we supplying them arms? We are boxed into their debt, and we owe them. If the American people are being blackmailed, shouldn't we know to what extent?

We have a right to know how much money we owe to whom. It's our money.

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