

And Speaking Of This Horrible Economy...

A thought occurred to me the other night – didn't Barack Obama promise to bring the troops home from the dangerous Middle East if he became President? Well, it's been more than 6 weeks since he's taken office, and I haven't even heard any talk whatsoever about troops coming home. I realize these things take time, but like I said, it doesn't even seem to be in the planning stages as of yet.

And then I was thinking, what happens when they DO come home, and now we have thousands of able-bodied Americans who just served our country only to come home to find out that there are NO JOBS for them? What will that do to the unemployment rate? And pardon my ignorance, but when do people in the military get paid? Are they receiving paychecks right now while they're serving, or do they get paid when they come home or both? If they get paid from the government when they come home, that will complicate matters also since the government will suddenly be responsible for paying thousands of soldiers.

I'm not saying that the President is keeping the troops overseas to procrastinate the employment problem. But the fact remains that he *promised* he'd get them home and ASAP. And there is also the fact that the job opportunities are shrinking at a rapid rate. I normally don't get too political, but I haven't heard any of the analysts on tv talk about what to do with the troops for employment should they return to the United States, so I thought I'd throw it out there.

And it needs to be said how incredibly thankful I am to not be personally affected by the struggling economy. My husband is self-employed and successful, and I haven't even thought about going back to work myself yet since my kids are still very

little. My family and friends seem relatively unscathed as well; although I did see my former neighbors in the newspaper the other day for foreclosure. What a shame; they were nice people. Here's to hoping the economy improves – and fast!

Springing Ahead

Tonight is the night we change our clocks for Daylight Savings Time. I guess we're ending Daylight Savings – or maybe we're starting it. I don't know and I don't really care. All I know is that I will be losing an hour of sleep. Ok, it's not THAT bad; I do like when the sun stays out later, although there is no sun in the weather forecast for the next few days... But I loathe the idea of losing a precious hour of sleep. If I remember correctly, the time change throws the kids into a tizzy for a few days every year until their bodies readjust – something else to look forward to.

So anyway, this should serve as your reminder to change those clocks – no excuses about being late to church or theater meetings tomorrow! And yes, you must flip the clocks forward, not backward. Remember, it's SPRING ahead, FALL back. And try not to fret about losing that hour of sleep. As Jay Leno said last night referring to this horrible economy that only seems to be getting worse:

“After losing your job, your 401K, and your house, losing an hour of sleep seems like nothing!”

I Know Who To Blame For This Economy

WAL-MART! I can find many ways to blame Wal-Mart for the way the economy is tanking. Time for my latest beef about the place. We went over there Friday morning because my husband didn't have to work until after lunch, and we need an oil change. So we thought we'd get the oil change done together this time, which made me really happy because normally it's just me and my two children (ages 2 and 7 mos.) who have to kill around 2 hours there every 3 months (or sometimes even more frequently). If you're thinking that spending 2 hours at Wal-Mart with 2 little kids while trying not to spend a lot of money is both exhausting and frustrating, you aren't very far off the mark. So anyway, Friday I thought I had company for the oil change, but even so, who wants to spend hours at Wal-Mart? When we pulled up, I was pleasantly surprised to see that there weren't any cars waiting, so I thought we might actually be out of there in under an hour – WRONG! The wait time they quoted us was an hour and a half! But we needed the oil change and were kind of trying to kill time until the area restaurants would start serving lunch, so we decided to go for it, especially since they've opened an H & R Block in the Wal-Mart for tax season. Taxes and an oil change – kill two birds with one stone, or so we thought... We get to the other side of the store where the makeshift H & R Block is, and we find out it's not open until 1pm. So we went back to the Automotive Department to sign in our car anyway, and that's when we discover that an oil change at Wal-Mart is now \$30! That is a \$7.50 increase in price over the last 3 months! So no taxes to get done + expensive oil change + long wait = forget it! And I will add the fact that Wal-Mart sucks at oil changes. Almost every time I'd come home with the car, it would act funny or something else would be wrong with it. Once they forgot to put the air filter back in, several times they

didn't replace the wiper fluid when it was checked off on the to-do list, and a few times I had to go back and have them re-vacuum the interior of the car because they said they did it but clearly had not. Those were the days when oil changes were still so reasonable in price that we got the full monty of services, including the vacuuming and the refilling of fluids – not anymore!

We called other places around town, and we found that Wal-Mart is now the most expensive AND takes the longest. But at the other places you needed an appointment, so we'll have to wait until next week – no problem if I don't have to go back to Wal-Mart! Plus I'd rather support the little guy anyway (ever hear the country music song "Little Man" by Alan Jackson? It's a good one and I highly recommend listening to it if you're frustrated about Wal-Mart's world take-over). And that brings me to why I'm blaming Wal-Mart for the awful economy...

They're putting all the little guys out of business, so there go the jobs and the competition in the retail world that was keeping product and services prices reasonable. Wal-Mart sets the pricing trends, unfortunately. Mark my words, as soon as the little guys in town get wind that Wal-Mart upped their oil change prices, they will follow suit and you won't be able to touch an oil change for under \$30. And worse yet, I read in the newspaper just yesterday that Wal-Mart is the only retail place that posted profits for January. In fact, they're doing even better than Wall Street predicted for them, which in this economy, makes them stand alone in that respect.

The state of our economy is so bad right now that I suppose it's not logical to blame just one entity. But moaning about Walmart is a good venting tool, and they p*ss me off!

Now I REALLY Hate Walmart

And my husband is on the bandwagon too. My husband is a clearance maniac – he loves finding good deals on stuff that's been marked down from its original price. He found he especially loved the clearance deals at the Defiance Ohio Walmart, which is not too far from us. But yesterday, that changed...

It turns out that the Defiance Walmart, which is only a few months old, by the way, changed their clearance prices overnight! They used to have some really good discounts, and it was fun to go there and try to find them. But now, they haven't just changed the way they mark stuff down; they've taken actual clearance items that were already marked down and marked them back up!

Case in point: My husband had a Plantronics Headset that he bought last week for \$5. It broke, so he was going to return it, but he forgot it at home. No problem, he thought, I'll just buy a new one for \$5 and return the old one another time. WRONG – unless he wanted to spend \$21 on the new one! That's right, they took a \$5 clearance item and marked it up to \$21 – more than **quadruple** the price!!! So he asked the lady in electronics if they raised their clearance prices, and she said, "I'm not going to lie to you. We did raise the prices. They took away our clearance budget." Whatever that means. Not something I, the consumer, should be concerned with... except that they took all the fun out of clearance shopping at Walmart! And of course the people at customer service couldn't help us return our headset since we didn't have the broken one with us... their suggestion? Buy a new one for \$21, then return the broken one later for \$5 – thanks but no thanks! Here are some other examples of clearance items that they re-inflated: ATI Video Card from \$50 to \$115, Panasonic Cordless Phone from \$30 to \$69, and a US Robotics SkypePhone from \$5 to \$16. Each of these items had at least a

100% increase in price. I understand that the economy sucks and inflation and blah, blah, but I think Walmart should have kept these items on the clearance where they had them; then started their new clearance policy with new clearance items. I mean, come on, is Walmart really that worried about going broke?

The bottom line is, Walmart keeps finding ways to take away whatever fun is left in shopping. First it was by playing their little pricing games that get us to spend more and close down their competition, and now they've taken away their good clearance deals. Well, maybe their policies will bite them in the you-know-what come Christmas time when they don't have any room on their shelves for the new Christmas products because no one wants to touch their crappy clearance items at their not-so-clearance prices!