

August 24, 2010

We have had Ladies' Days in the past; days when all our selections were penned by the stronger sex. Today, we have gone a step further with a Jennifer Rubin Day. She was on vacation for awhile, and has returned full force. The humor section does have one item from Scott Adams, the proprietor of Dilbert. Scott tells us what is in store for those who wish to build "green."

Excellent cartoons today, and yesterday also.

[Jennifer Rubin](#) says that the Obami jumped the gun when they reported that the Middle East peace talks are resuming.

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*"Too often such talks produce little substance, and devolve into casting unfair blame at Israel for its legitimate efforts to guard its own security, while ignoring the unending violence that is openly encouraged by Palestinian leaders. That is especially the case with negotiations that involve the United Nations, the Russians, and the Europeans. I encourage President Obama to work against that tendency, and to set the tone in these talks by stressing the very real national security concerns Israel is dealing with. ..."*

[Rubin](#) contrasts [WaPo's](#) op-eds on the prez.

*You have to give the Washington Post credit — their editors certainly offer a contrast on their op-ed pages. Today, needless to say, you have a Michael Gerson and Eugene Robinson. The difference is stark, and revealing.*

*From Gerson you have a measured analysis, which takes into account the series of events that have transformed Obama from a cult-like figure into a struggling and rather radioactive one. ...*

*...Then there is [Eugene Robinson](#), who understandably must be at his wit's end, as the politician in whom he and so many others on the left invested so much effort and so much of their own credibility to promote is now stumbling. His thesis is as bizarre as it is unsupported: "President Obama Is on a Winning Streak," is the title of his column. ...*

*...What is missing in Robinson's take — the economy, the poll news, the complete Mosque debacle — makes Gerson's point. The gap between aspirations and results is now so wide that the only way to bridge it is to fudge the facts and leave out much of what has transpired over the last year. Robinson and Gerson come from opposing political perspectives. But the most noticeable difference is the degree to which they attend to the facts and are able to draw therefrom persuasive conclusions. In that department, there is no comparison.*

The Shadow Obama continue to grow in number. It started with the Shadow Cabinet and widened into recess appointments. Obama is determined to give power to radicals with questionable backgrounds, without proper examination by the legislative branch. [Rubin](#) tells us about the latest. We wonder if it is time for Congress to start independent investigations into the people who have not gone through the traditional appointment process.

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*Now he's at it again, this time to get an ambassador to El Salvador through. What was her problem? [Josh Rogin](#) explains that Mari Carmen Aponte is going to be pushed through "despite lingering GOP concerns about her long-ago relationship with a Cuban operative." ...*

*...This is yet another instance of both Obama's preference for appointing questionable characters and his need (which likely will intensify with time) to resort to strong-arm tactics. (After all, none of the Democrats in the Senate really wanted to vote for this woman, did they?) This does not seem to be the sort of president who's going to tack to the center and learn the art of compromise after November. But we'll see.*

In discussing an unpleasant remark by an Obama fan, [Rubin](#) has an inspiring quote from George H.W. Bush.

*...But that did get me thinking about George H.W. Bush. And, because I live in the Internet age, I found this speech, which Bush 41 delivered to the [National Association of Evangelicals](#). It is a beautiful statement on religion and faith in public life that is worth reading in full. A sample:*

*"As I said many times before, prayer always has been important in our lives. And without it, I really am convinced, more and more convinced, that no man or no woman who has the privilege of serving in the Presidency could carry out their duties without prayer. I think of Lincoln's famous remark, "I've been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." The intercessionary prayers that so many Americans make on behalf of the President of the United States, in this instance on behalf of me and also of my family, they inspire us, and they give us strength. And I just wanted you to know that, and Barbara and I are very, very grateful to you. ..."*

And [Rubin](#) comments on the mosque mess that Obama waded into.

*...In reality, Obama is stymied when he can't charm his opposition or shame them into accepting his position.*

*...If one is really going to advance our interests or mediate successfully between parties with conflicting interests and values, it won't do to simply stamp your foot and simply insist everyone show empathy toward and defer to the Muslims' point of view (or that of one segment of Muslims). It's not going to win over the 68 percent of Americans. It's not going to bring peace to the Middle East. It's not going to make Obama an effective or popular president.*

*Of course I don't believe Obama is a Muslim. But his excessive deference to Muslim states abroad and now to the American Muslim community has set many Americans' teeth on edge and fueled conspiratorialists' suspicions. There's not much he should or can do about the latter. But the American*

people, not to mention our allies, sense that there is something very much amiss in all the genuflecting. That, in part, is why the mosque controversy has been so devastating for Obama.

One Obama advisor is likely going to make the mosque mess even worse. [Jennifer Rubin](#) points out the statement.

*...What is clear is that Axelrod and Jarrett, arguably the most powerful of Obama's team, also possess the worst instincts:*

*"...And Axelrod, a canny tactician with a keen sensitivity to political danger, didn't dissuade his boss from jumping in, citing his own parents' experiences with religious persecution as Jews in Europe."*

*...his disgusting invocation of the Nazi analogy — make no mistake, the American people get the role of the Nazis in this one, and the Muslims are awarded the status of potential Holocaust victims — suggests his undiluted leftism has rendered him tone deaf and a severe liability for a president who needs his worst instinct to be curbed, not accentuated. ...*

[Rubin](#) adds some interesting political information to the mosque mess from a Democratic source that she interviewed.

*...But wasn't this an act of bravery and courage, as the left punditocracy has trumpeted? Not for those trying to win elections, the operative explained:*

*"By getting involved in this issue — which was on a glide path to work out fine at the local level — the president and his team have put every Democrat running for Congress in the crosshairs of an issue that is 70-30 the wrong way. "Mr. Candidate, do you agree with your president?" This is just the latest insult these guys have hurled at Congress. And what do you get? Does your 30% base like you more? I can't remember a White House with so much contempt for its own party. And why? Because they love the sound of their own voice. ..."*

[Rubin](#) gives us some good news about the possible demise of Obamacare.

*It was supposed to save them from electoral ruin. It was "historic." It was going to be the final opportunity to address the issue. It was ObamaCare and now the Democrats, on the brink of an electoral wipe-out, are begging the electorate not to throw them out because they rammed it through. Their pitch? We'll change ObamaCare. Yes, it has come to this.*

[Ben Smith](#) reports:

*Key White House allies are dramatically shifting their attempts to defend health-care legislation, abandoning claims that it will reduce costs and deficit, and instead stressing a promise to "improve it."...*

*...If the bill is as bad as everyone now concedes it is and it won't do what was promised (what the Democrats promised), what exactly is the rationale for re-electing the Democrats, who can no longer make a credible argument that it is a good bill, let alone an historic one?*

*It does give hope, however, that "repeal and reform," the Republican mantra on ObamaCare, might have bipartisan support after the November election.*

[Rubin](#) shares the reason for the Dems sudden change of heart about Obamacare.

*Charlie Cook, one of the more cautious and respected pollsters and political analysts, is now saying the Democrats will lose the House. [Gerald Seib](#) reports...*

*...To be precise, Republicans need to win 39 Democratic seats to get control of the House, and Mr. Cook's current estimate is that they are in line for a 35- to 45-seat gain. "But frankly, I think we're being very conservative with that," he added. "The odds of it being higher than that range are a lot better than lower."*

*As Seib notes, maybe the Democrats finally will gin up their base. Perhaps, he offers, "Democrats might figure out how to do a better job convincing the nation of the wisdom of their policies." Is that likely? No. And as we've seen this week with another round of awful jobs numbers and the Ground Zero debacle, things could very well get even worse.*

The desperation of the Democrats is just revving up, comments [Rubin](#).

*The Democrats are now in full retreat. Less 75 days before the midterm elections, the Republicans have a historic lead in congressional generic polling. The president's approval rating is sinking. It is now every man for himself, as the Democrats scramble to be the ones on the electoral lifeboat that will survive the electoral wave. The smarter and more vulnerable Democrats distance themselves from Obama on the Ground Zero mosque. A few savvy Senate Democrats back extension of the Bush tax cuts. And now they're even promising to "improve" ObamaCare.*

*But wait. As to the latter, why not do it before the election? Hey, there is time. They claim that they're not out of touch. They say the bill could use some work. So how about it, fellows? Oh, yes, I guess they don't really mean it. This would be another gambit, a fraudulent inducement really, to convince voters to spare them the ax. We'll put immigration reform at the top of the agenda. We'll pass a budget. We'll fix ObamaCare. Desperation rivals dishonesty as the central feature of their campaign strategy. ...*

[Rubin](#) comments on the effects of the drilling moratorium, including one sentence that should cut straight to the hearts of Obama supporters.

*The Obama team, we are told, can't figure out how to stem unemployment. But actually, it seems they simply place job creation and preservation below other priorities. [This report](#) explains:*

*Senior Obama administration officials concluded the federal moratorium on deepwater oil drilling would cost roughly 23,000 jobs, but went ahead with the ban because they didn't trust the industry's safety equipment and the government's own inspection process, according to previously undisclosed documents.*

*Critics of the moratorium, including Gulf Coast political figures and oil-industry leaders, have said it is crippling the region's economy, and some have called on the administration to make public its economic analysis. A federal judge who in June threw out an earlier six-month moratorium faulted the administration for playing down the economic effects.*

*The Obama administration, the least transparent in history, however, has been actively misleading the court: "The administration has said in court filings that the economic effect of suspended drilling wasn't as severe as the industry asserted." The administration turns out to have less credibility than Big Oil. ...*

[Scott Adams](#) shares helpful tips for building green.

*...When I started researching the field of green building, as part of the planning for our own home, I learned that, in many cases, you can't get there from here. Allow me to share some of the things we learned. It's California-centric, but I think you can generalize from my experience.*

*As a rule, the greener the home, the uglier it will be. I went into the process thinking that green homes were ugly because hippies have bad taste. That turns out to be nothing but a coincidence. The problem is deeper. For example, the greenest sort of roof in a warm climate would be white to reflect the sun. If you want a beautiful home, a white roof won't get you there. Sure, you could put a lovely garden on your roof, because you heard someone did that. But don't try telling me a garden roof wouldn't be a maintenance nightmare. And where do you find the expert who knows how to do that sort of thing?*

*Second, the greenest sort of home would have few windows because windows bleed heat. In particular, if your lot has a view to the west, forget putting windows on that side because your family members will heat up like ants under a magnifying glass. Try telling your architect that you don't want a lot of windows on the view side. He'll quit. ..*

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## Contentions

### [Like Deja Vu All Over Again](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

Today the resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority was announced. After 18 months of bullying Israel, the Obami's tone was markedly different. As [this report](#) explained:

But Mrs. Clinton pointedly did not mention using Israel's pre-1967 borders as the basis for territorial negotiations — a basic plank of previous talks — or set any other basic terms for the negotiations. Nor did she press the Israeli government to extend a moratorium on the construction of Jewish settlements, which would remove a potential hurdle to a deal.

In 18 months, the Obami managed to climb back to where the Bush administration had been — direct talks with no preconditions. An experienced Israel hand notes that there had been four years of direct talks until George Mitchell “destroyed them with his demands about settlements.” He continues: “The one-year timetable is the — who knows — fifth or tenth or twentieth deadline, and will have no different fate. The Roadmap gave it three years — and that was not enough. So that is plain silly. But above all, they begin with NO common understanding.”

This was made clear by the administration's [readout](#) of a briefing given to American Jewish leaders:

U.S. officials told Jewish community leaders on a private conference call this afternoon that they believe Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is on the verge of joining Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in accepting an invitation to resume peace talks. But he acknowledged that details of the talks have yet to be finalized, plans for a presidential visit to the region remain unclear, and hopes of drawing other Arab leaders and Hamas into the process ride on the momentum of the talks themselves.

Well there is certainly less here than even the initial Obama spin would have had us believe. It seems to be that only an initial dinner is set. (“The United States will put its imprimatur on the talks in an orchestrated series of meetings that begin with a White House dinner Sept. 1 hosted by Mr. Obama.”) Beyond that? “Within the negotiations we've obviously had a lot of preparatory discussions with the parties on how to structure them, and we'll need to finalize those, so we're not in a position now to really talk about that.” Good grief. This has all the makings of a rushed announcement to try to put a horrid week for the White House behind them.”

It is interesting that Obama's role is not yet finalized either. In fact, as my Israel expert points out, the death knell of the talks may be Obama's own presence. After all, the Israelis have learned the hard way not to trust him, so it's difficult to see how his presence could be a help. The telltale sign of the level of animosity between Obama and the Jewish state – he doesn't yet have the nerve to visit Israel, where he could very likely face angry crowds. ("‘He looks forward to an opportunity to visit Israel,’ [Dan Shapiro] said of Obama, adding that such a visit would likely include a stop in the Palestinian Territories. The visit ‘could be very valuable and very meaningful at the right time.’") Translation: he's not going anytime soon.

The statements by others released on Friday were indicative of the low expectations that these talks engender among knowledgeable observers. AIPAC, which is obliged to cheer each step in the fruitless "peace process," declares that it "welcomes the renewal of direct peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), as announced Friday by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and expresses its appreciation to the Obama administration for its efforts in making this goal a reality." But even its usually bubbly tone was replaced by sober and somewhat skeptical caveats:

For talks to succeed the PA must match Israel's commitment to conducting peace talks without preconditions or excuses, abandon its longstanding attempts to avoid making difficult choices at the negotiating table and cease incitement against Israel at home and abroad. Likewise, Arab states must heed the calls by the Obama Administration and Congress to take immediate and meaningful steps toward normalization with Israel, and they must provide the political support for the Palestinians to make the kind of significant and difficult choices that will be required.

An even more candid statement came from Senate candidate Pat Toomey, who said he was hopeful but also "wary":

Too often such talks produce little substance, and devolve into casting unfair blame at Israel for its legitimate efforts to guard its own security, while ignoring the unending violence that is openly encouraged by Palestinian leaders. That is especially the case with negotiations that involve the United Nations, the Russians, and the Europeans. I encourage President Obama to work against that tendency, and to set the tone in these talks by stressing the very real national security concerns Israel is dealing with.

And what happens when the talks go nowhere? Will we face yet another intifada? Will the bridging proposals morph into a imposed peace plan? Who knows — not even Day 2 is set yet. The administration has imbibed the peace process Kool-Aid, but there is little evidence that it promotes peace or that the Obami are competent to oversee negotiations. And meanwhile the real Middle East crisis — the development of an Iranian nuclear weapon looms on the horizon. In a real sense, the "peace process" is nothing more than a dangerous distraction.

## [Gerson vs. Robinson](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

You have to give the *Washington Post* credit — their editors certainly offer a contrast on their op-ed pages. Today, needless to say, you have a Michael Gerson and Eugene Robinson. The difference is stark, and revealing.

From Gerson you have a measured analysis, which takes into account the series of events that have transformed Obama from a cult-like figure into a struggling and rather radioactive one. [He writes:](#)

The most destructive gap for President Obama is not the Republican lead on the generic congressional ballot or even a job disapproval that has surpassed approval — it is the gap between aspiration and reality.

The Manhattan mosque controversy showed the problem in compressed form. First came the Obama of high-toned principle (largely the right principle, in my view). Then a politically motivated recalibration. Then a scrambling staff explanation. Then an embarrassed silence, since it is difficult to clarify the clarification of a clarification. Then the president's regretful assertion of "no regrets."

I don't agree with Gerson's position on the mosque, but his rendition of the fact is exact and his list of other examples is overwhelmingly persuasive. He explains, "From the firing of Shirley Sherrod to the obsession with Fox News to lashing out at the 'professional left,' the Obama administration engages in a daily hypocrisy." And then he provides still more examples to support his conclusion:

Politicians have been known to say one thing and do another. And high ideals and high rhetoric always create the potential for hypocrisy. But the disappointment with Obama is especially acute. He won office by providing new voters with intoxicating hopes. America was tipsy with idealism — resulting in a particularly difficult hangover. ... All politicians fall — but not from such a height.

Then there is [Eugene Robinson](#), who understandably must be at his wit's end, as the politician in whom he and so many others on the left invested so much effort and so much of their own credibility to promote is now stumbling. His thesis is as bizarre as it is unsupported: "President Obama Is on a Winning Streak," is the title of his column. Bet you're confused, since he's at an all-time low in the polls, his party faces an electoral wipe-out, his predictions of a summer of recovery have proven to be ludicrous, his party is so desperate as to promise to "improve" his "historic" health-care legislation, and he's incurred the wrath of both supporters and critics of the Ground Zero mosque.

So what is Robinson's argument based on (other than wishful thinking)? Well, there is Obama's success in Iraq. Bet you thought that was George W. Bush's (over the objections of Robinson and Obama), but now all praise is due to Obama because he said he'd bring the troops home. "When he took office, there were about 160,000 U.S. troops in Iraq on the heels of George W. Bush's combat surge," is how Robinson evades the historical record. That would be the surge, which led to an American victory and permitted Obama to bring home troops "on the heels" of a remarkable accomplishment. And he seems unaware of or chooses to ignore criticism from the right that the departure timetable is too abrupt and puts at risk the gains we have made. ("Even his scorched-earth Republican critics, by their silence, are acknowledging that the president has fulfilled his campaign promise to be 'just as careful getting out of Iraq as we were reckless getting in.'") One half-truth, built on an evasion, topped off by a misrepresentation.

OK, what else does Robinson have? The GM bailout: "The company was saved, workers kept their jobs, and taxpayers are going to get their money back. That's nice work." Yes, but we haven't gotten our money back. And in typical Keynesian fashion, he forgets that all the money spent on GM wasn't used someplace else in the economy, perhaps to create more jobs in industries with a brighter future. But I will concede that it turned out better than many expected.

Then there is the BP oil spill. Robinson treats in this way the Democrats' anger over the administration's misrepresentation of the extent of the clean-up: "The administration's claim that three-quarters of the oil was disposed of — by nature or by human intervention — before it could despoil the environment looks overly optimistic to some researchers. ... But a few months ago, who imagined that the president and his family would so soon be able to enjoy a day on a gulf beach and a meal of gulf seafood?" And who could have imagined that he would have given a widely panned Oval Office speech, sent his poll numbers skidding, advertised the limits of overarching liberal government, and caught flack

for not going to the Gulf on his first vacation? (He had to do a day of make-up later in the summer). Listen, I don't think there's a Democrat on the ballot willing to tout the BP oil spill as an Obama "win."

And then, the cherry on the top of his frothy column is the Ground Zero mosque controversy. Big win for Obama. He must be joking, right? Nope."Obama saw his duty to uphold the values of our Constitution and make clear that our fight is against the terrorists, not against Islam itself. Instead of doing what was popular, he did what was right." And reversed himself within twenty-four hours. And incurred the ire of the left. And is giving his own party fits. Well, all that was left out.

What is missing in Robinson's take — the economy, the poll news, the complete Mosque debacle — makes Gerson's point. The gap between aspirations and results is now so wide that the only way to bridge it is to fudge the facts and leave out much of what has transpired over the last year. Robinson and Gerson come from opposing political perspectives. But the most noticeable difference is the degree to which they attend to the facts and are able to draw therefrom persuasive conclusions. In that department, there is no comparison.

## [Another Questionable Appointee, Another Recess Appointment](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

Obama is using the recess appointment again. Recall that is how he got the [SEIU's lawyer](#) on to the National Labor Relations Board and how he got Donald Berwick [past the Senate's scrutiny](#). ("Senate confirmation of presidential appointees is an essential process prescribed by the Constitution that serves as a check on executive power and protects Montanans and all Americans by ensuring that crucial questions are asked of the nominee — and answered," [Max] Baucus said in a statement.)

Now he's at it again, this time to get an ambassador to El Salvador through. What was her problem? [Josh Rogin](#) explains that Mari Carmen Aponte is going to be pushed through "despite lingering GOP concerns about her long-ago relationship with a Cuban operative." Obama's not serious, is he? Oh, yes indeed:

Aponte's nomination had been stalled as of April due to objections by Sen. Jim DeMint, R-SC, who prevented the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from voting on the nomination because he was worried about a romantic involvement she had in the 1990s with Robert Tamayo, a Cuban-born insurance salesman who was alleged to have ties to both the FBI and Fidel Castro's intelligence apparatus.

DeMint and other Republicans wanted access to all of the FBI's records on the relationship. The FBI interviewed both Aponte and Tamayo about the matter back in 1993, but Aponte has admitted she declined to take a lie-detector test. She withdrew herself from consideration to be ambassador to the Dominican Republic in 1998 after then Sen. Jesse Helms promised to ask invasive questions about the relationship at her hearing, citing "personal reasons."

Translation: the Clinton administration was not going to go to bat for this woman. But not Obama. Off she will go, with no examination of her ties to Castro.

This is yet another instance of both Obama's preference for appointing questionable characters and his need (which likely will intensify with time) to resort to strong-arm tactics. (After all, none of the Democrats in the Senate really wanted to vote for this woman, did they?) This does not seem to be the sort of president who's going to tack to the center and learn the art of compromise after November. But we'll see.

## [Shilling for Obama's Religiosity](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

I'm sure you've said it a thousand times: "What did we do before the Internet?" Well, I, for one, wouldn't have followed *this* trail. On an issue unrelated (more on that in a separate post), at *First Read* I came across a stunning assertion, even for the cable-news chief cheerleader for Obama. In his frenzy to defend Obama, [Chuck Todd](#) asserts: "President Obama is more religious than Reagan or H.W. Bush ever was; in fact, he gets Bible verses sent to his blackberry EVERY DAY." *Good golly* — how does Todd know the level of religiosity of these three men? (And I imagine he knows what Obama gets on his blackberry because the White House tells him so, and that's good enough for him.)

But that did get me thinking about George H.W. Bush. And, because I live in the Internet age, I found this speech, which Bush 41 delivered to the [National Association of Evangelicals](#). It is a beautiful statement on religion and faith in public life that is worth reading in full. A sample:

As I said many times before, prayer always has been important in our lives. And without it, I really am convinced, more and more convinced, that no man or no woman who has the privilege of serving in the Presidency could carry out their duties without prayer. I think of Lincoln's famous remark, "I've been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." The intercessory prayers that so many Americans make on behalf of the President of the United States, in this instance on behalf of me and also of my family, they inspire us, and they give us strength. And I just wanted you to know that, and Barbara and I are very, very grateful to you. ...

Like you, President Reagan and I understood that the cold war wasn't simply some mundane competition between rival world powers. It was a struggle for the mind of man. On one side was a system dedicated to denying the life of the spirit and celebrating the omnipotence of the state. On the other was a system founded on a profound truth, that our Creator has endowed his children with inalienable rights that no government can deny.

And now, 8 years later, we can say confidently, Americans won the cold war. We won it by standing for what's right. Tonight our children and grandchildren — and I take great joy in this — tonight our children and our grandchildren will go to their beds untroubled by the fears of nuclear holocaust that haunted two generations of Americans. In our prayers we asked for God's help. I know our family did, and I expect all of you did. We asked for God's help. And now in this shining outcome, in this magnificent triumph of good over evil, we should thank God. We should give thanks.

Yes, *wow*. And needless to say, there are oodles of equally and even more eloquent discourses by Reagan on faith, prayer, evil, and God.

Now, I'm not about to rank presidents by devoutness, but Todd's got some nerve boasting about Obama's religious faith, which is, as with all presidents, unknowable except to the Creator. It's bad enough when Todd shills for the White House on subjects that are a matter of public record, but he really should leave religion out of it.

## [Krauthammer and Dean Agree: Obama Blew It](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

[Charles Krauthammer](#), as he is wont to do, makes a salient observation. On Obama's Iftar speech at the White House, which begat arguably the worst week of his presidency, he writes:

It takes no courage whatsoever to bask in the applause of a Muslim audience as you promise to stand stoutly for their right to build a mosque, giving the unmistakable impression that you endorse the idea. What takes courage is to then respectfully ask that audience to reflect upon the wisdom of the project and to consider whether the imam's alleged goal of interfaith understanding might not be better achieved by accepting the New York governor's offer to help find another site.

In his own way (with the required sneers at conservatives), [Howard Dean](#), of all people, makes the same point:

This center may be intended as a bridge or a healing gesture but it will not be perceived that way unless a dialogue with a real attempt to understand each other happens. That means the builders have to be willing to go beyond what is their right and be willing to talk about feelings whether the feelings are "justified" or not. No doubt the Republic will survive if this center is built on its current site or not. But I think this is a missed opportunity to try to have an open discussion about why this is a big deal, because it is a big deal to a lot of Americans who are not just right-wing politicians pushing the hate button again. I think those people need to be heard respectfully, whether they are right or whether they are wrong.

But not Obama – the great healer, the no-Blue-America-no-Red-America politician. In reality, Obama is stymied when he can't charm his opposition or shame them into accepting his position.

We have seen this consistently in his Middle East policy. In fact, it is his habitual mode of Muslim outreach — whether in his fawning engagement of Iran (which demanded neglect of the Green Movement), his failed attempt to dispatch an ambassador to Syria, his Cairo speechifying, or his appointing an envoy, who voiced suspicion of the prosecution of terrorists by his own government, to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Obama imagines that by simply telling Muslim leaders (certainly, not democracy advocates or human-rights protesters) what *they* want to hear, we will improve our image and cool their ire toward the U.S. But this is childlike and shortsighted.

If one is really going to advance our interests or mediate successfully between parties with conflicting interests and values, it won't do to simply stamp your foot and simply insist everyone show empathy toward and defer to the Muslims' point of view (or that of one segment of Muslims). It's not going to win over the 68 percent of Americans. It's not going to bring peace to the Middle East. It's not going to make Obama an effective or popular president.

Of course I don't believe Obama is a Muslim. But his excessive deference to Muslim states abroad and now to the American Muslim community has set many Americans' teeth on edge and fueled conspiratorialists' suspicions. There's not much he should or can do about the latter. But the American people, not to mention our allies, sense that there is something very much amiss in all the genuflecting. That, in part, is why the mosque controversy has been so devastating for Obama.

## [How Bad?](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

How bad is the Ground Zero mosque story for the White House? Bad enough that Obama advisers are pointing fingers at the president and trying to absolve themselves of the fiasco. [Politico](#) reports:

Prior to the decision, [Rahm] Emanuel and Obama's communications staff vividly — and presciently — predicted that Obama would be handing Republicans a weapon to batter Democrats as weak-kneed on terrorism three months before the midterms, according to several people familiar with the situation.

In other words, not our fault! Valerie Jarrett and David Axelrod, the president's most devoted cheerleaders for the most extreme liberal positions, were all for it, you see. But not Emanuel and the

communications team because they are smart enough — they remind us — to tell Obama what a harebrained idea this was. But it wouldn't look good, especially for Emanuel, who had his own bout of “not my fault” media coverage early in the year, to look so blatantly disloyal. So he throws in an e-mail:

“Give me a break,” Emanuel e-mailed POLITICO when asked about a press report that he had opposed the move. “We all stand behind and support the president's decision.”

But on background, you guys should know: “not my fault!” What is clear is that Axelrod and Jarrett, arguably the most powerful of Obama's team, also possess the worst instincts:

No one supported Obama more forcefully than Jarrett, Obama's close friend and the administration's liaison to the civil rights community, who told people she thought the mosque issue was a matter of core Democratic principle, according to several sources familiar with her actions.

And Axelrod, a canny tactician with a keen sensitivity to political danger, didn't dissuade his boss from jumping in, citing his own parents' experiences with religious persecution as Jews in Europe.

Well, I guess his sensitivity to political danger was on the fritz. And his disgusting invocation of the Nazi analogy — make no mistake, the American people get the role of the Nazis in this one, and the Muslims are awarded the status of potential Holocaust victims — suggests his undiluted leftism has rendered him tone deaf and a severe liability for a president who needs his worst instinct to be curbed, not accentuated.

But this is a reminder that the one responsible for the White House's egregious political malpractice and who is hermetically sealed from the concerns and values of the American people is the president. He is the only one who matters — and it is his flawed judgment and estrangement from ordinary Americans that have landed him in a ditch.

## **RE: How Bad?**

by Jennifer Rubin

Democrats on the ballot are understandably infuriated with the White House. First, Robert Gibbs announced that the House could well be lost. Then, after months of trying to pump up the base, the White House went after the “professional left.” [Rebecca Traister](#) (h/t Ben Smith) wailed on behalf of Democrats: “Congratulations, administration, on helping to further ensure that the only people in the country absolutely guaranteed to go out and vote for Obama will now do so with a hell of a lot less enthusiasm.” Next up was the Ground Zero mosque fiasco.

The fury among Democrats shouldn't be underestimated. A longtime Democratic operative steamed to me: “Valerie Jarrett is the Barack-whisperer-in-chief. She has nurtured the myth of Obama's supernatural powers longer than anyone — second only to her sidekick, Axelrod — and the two of them, and their bad ideas, are at the root of virtually every mistake and overreach out there, especially the ill-fated Muslim-outreach campaign launched in the first hours of the presidency. It was probably Jarrett who told the president it was a good idea to bow down to the king of Saudi Arabia, too.” *Ouch*.

But wasn't this an act of bravery and courage, as the left punditocracy has trumpeted? Not for those trying to win elections, the operative explained:

By getting involved in this issue — which was on a glide path to work out fine at the local level — the president and his team have put every Democrat running for Congress in the crosshairs of an issue that is 70-30 the wrong way. “Mr. Candidate, do you agree with your president?” This is just the latest insult these guys have hurled at Congress. And what do you get? Does your 30% base like you more? I can't

remember a White House with so much contempt for its own party. And why? Because they love the sound of their own voice.

Yowser. August is a month that in recent years has been fraught with political peril and more than a few surprises. Democrats never imagined, however, that there would be a bombardment launched at them from the head of their own party. The smarter ones will run far from the president; the survivors after the election will owe the White House no loyalty. Forget the right-wingers; Obama's biggest problem may be preventing a mutiny in his own party.

### **Bipartisan Agreement at Last on ObamaCare**

by Jennifer Rubin

It was supposed to save them from electoral ruin. It was "historic." It was going to be the final opportunity to address the issue. It was ObamaCare and now the Democrats, on the brink of an electoral wipe-out, are begging the electorate not to throw them out because they rammed it through. Their pitch? We'll change ObamaCare. Yes, it has come to this.

[Ben Smith](#) reports:

Key White House allies are dramatically shifting their attempts to defend health-care legislation, abandoning claims that it will reduce costs and deficit, and instead stressing a promise to "improve it."

The messaging shift was circulated this afternoon on a conference call and PowerPoint presentation organized by FamiliesUSA — one of the central groups in the push for the initial legislation. ... [The presentation] suggests that Democrats are acknowledging the failure of their predictions that the health care legislation would grow more popular after its passage, as its benefits became clear and rhetoric cooled. Instead, the presentation is designed to win over a skeptical public, and to defend the legislation — and in particular the individual mandate — from a push for repeal.

The presentation also concedes that the fiscal and economic arguments that were the White House's first and most aggressive sales pitch have essentially failed.

So now the contest is between the one party, which jammed ObamaCare through despite the public's wishes, but now is experiencing an election-eve conversion, and the other, which opposed it all along and is promising to repeal it. If the bill is as bad as everyone now concedes it is and it won't do what was promised (what the *Democrats* promised), what exactly is the rationale for re-electing the Democrats, who can no longer make a credible argument that it is a good bill, let alone an historic one?

It does give hope, however, that "repeal and reform," the Republican mantra on ObamaCare, might have bipartisan support after the November election. Or, in the words of the politician derided for being dense but who's far more in sync with the public than the president on just about every issue (e.g., ObamaCare, Israel, the war against Islamic jihadists, the Ground Zero mosque, the failed stimulus), maybe we can *all* agree to [refudiate](#) Obama.

### **Charlie Cook: GOP Will Win the House**

by Jennifer Rubin

Charlie Cook, one of the more cautious and respected pollsters and political analysts, is now saying the Democrats will lose the House. [Gerald Seib](#) reports:

"I think Republicans are going to get the House back," he said flatly in a conversation taped for WSJ.com's "Big Interview" segment, which will be posted on the site Friday morning.

To be precise, Republicans need to win 39 Democratic seats to get control of the House, and Mr. Cook's current estimate is that they are in line for a 35- to 45-seat gain. "But frankly, I think we're being very conservative with that," he added. "The odds of it being higher than that range are a lot better than lower."

As Seib notes, maybe the Democrats finally will gin up their base. Perhaps, he offers, "Democrats might figure out how to do a better job convincing the nation of the wisdom of their policies." Is that likely? No. And as we've seen this week with another round of awful jobs numbers and the Ground Zero debacle, things could very well get even worse.

## Desperation Time

by Jennifer Rubin

The Democrats are now in full retreat. Less 75 days before the midterm elections, the Republicans have a historic lead in congressional generic polling. The president's approval rating is sinking. It is now every man for himself, as the Democrats scramble to be the ones on the electoral lifeboat that will survive the electoral wave. The smarter and more vulnerable Democrats distance themselves from Obama on the Ground Zero mosque. A few savvy Senate Democrats back extension of the Bush tax cuts. And now they're even promising to "improve" ObamaCare.

But wait. As to the latter, why not do it *before* the election? Hey, there is time. They claim that they're not out of touch. They say the bill could use some work. So how about it, fellows? Oh, yes, I guess they don't really mean it. This would be another gambit, a fraudulent inducement really, to convince voters to spare them the ax. *We'll put immigration reform at the top of the agenda. We'll pass a budget. We'll fix ObamaCare.* Desperation rivals dishonesty as the central feature of their campaign strategy.

As the great philosopher Groucho Marx put it, you don't like those principles? They've got other principles. Well, not a principle but an eye-rolling mantra of declining utility: George W. Bush.

It is worth pondering what they mean by invoking the name of the president whose approval is now higher than Obama's in key congressional districts. The Republicans are going to start another surge and win the war in Iraq all over again? A Republican Senate will insist on judicial appointees of the caliber of John Roberts and Sam Alito? A Republican Congress will insist we not raise taxes in the midst of a recession or burden the private sector with a mind-numbingly complicated regimen of financial reforms? Many voters would say, "Sign me up!" As his brother [Jeb Bush](#) put it: "It's a loser issue — they have a big L on their foreheads. If that's all they've got, it's a pretty good indication of the problems that the Democrats face in 2010."

Then there is the old standby: insult the American people. We are bigots, rubes, and Constitutional illiterates, the left tells us. Finding themselves on the wrong side of an emotional issue, they have lashed out at the Ground Zero mosque opponents. It is too much even for [Howard Dean](#): "I think some of my own folks on my end of the spectrum of the party are demonizing some fairly decent people that are opposed to this. Sixty-five percent of the people in this country are not right-wing biogts." Aww, thanks, Howard. And it's 68 percent, but who's counting?

If you think the Democrats' strategy seems scattered and bizarre, you are not alone. The voters, already cynical and angry, are unlikely to be charmed by transparent campaign inducements or to be scared by bogeymen. Nor are they likely to reward with their votes those labeling them racists. In fact, if the voters didn't have reason to throw the Democrats out before, all of this may convince them it's time to give others a chance.

The desperation of the left stems not merely from the prospect of an election wipeout but also from the potential for a repudiation of the undistilled liberal rule that has riled voters. The “permanent majority”, the shift from a center-right to a center-left country — that fantasy goes poof! The real possibility that ObamaCare will never go into effect, leaving as Obama’s sole accomplishment the completion of the Iraq war successfully waged against his objections, is no doubt terrifying to the left.

But if you think the Democrats are desperate now, wait until the election returns are in. The effort to explain the results — to furiously spin the returns as really good news for Obama and to simultaneously blame the results on anti-Muslim hysteria — will make the Democrats’ current campaign tactics seem tame and sane by comparison.

## **Jobs Take Second Place, Again**

by Jennifer Rubin

The Obama team, we are told, can’t figure out how to stem unemployment. But actually, it seems they simply place job creation and preservation below other priorities. [This report](#) explains:

Senior Obama administration officials concluded the federal moratorium on deepwater oil drilling would cost roughly 23,000 jobs, but went ahead with the ban because they didn’t trust the industry’s safety equipment and the government’s own inspection process, according to previously undisclosed documents.

Critics of the moratorium, including Gulf Coast political figures and oil-industry leaders, have said it is crippling the region’s economy, and some have called on the administration to make public its economic analysis. A federal judge who in June threw out an earlier six-month moratorium faulted the administration for playing down the economic effects.

The Obama administration, the least transparent in history, however, has been actively misleading the court: “The administration has said in court filings that the economic effect of suspended drilling wasn’t as severe as the industry asserted.” The administration turns out to have less credibility than Big Oil. (“An American Petroleum Institute spokesman said the documents show ‘the government itself understood there would be significant impacts felt throughout the region.’”) And, in fact, the administration simply ignored those who raised the warning flag:

In another document, William Hauser, chief of the regulations and standards branch of what was formerly called the Minerals Management Service, outlined the risks of various drilling activities in an email to colleagues and then wrote: “The more I write this stuff the more I believe we can/should/could regulate/stop activities through a prudent management process versus a moratoria scheme.”

This shouldn’t surprise us. The administration’s proclivity to make grand gestures, finger point, bash private industry, and satisfy the left’s pent-up demand has meant that time and time again, the Obama team gave job creation and preservation short shrift. *Extend the Bush tax cuts; we can “weather it.” Pass ObamaCare; business will absorb the costs.*

It’s no wonder voters think Obama and the Democratic Congress have failed to focus on jobs. They are about to find out the perils of ignoring the voters’ concerns.

WSJ

## How I (Almost) Saved the Earth

*No one said it would be easy to build the greenest house on the block. Scott Adams on perplexing energy bills, ugly lawns and the true meaning of 'green'*

by Scott Adams

Let's say you love the Earth. You see an article in a magazine about a guy who built a "green" house using mostly twigs, pinecones and abandoned bird nests. You want to build a green home, too. So you find an architect, show him the magazine and say, "Give me one just like this."

Good luck with that.



Your architect only knows how to design homes using materials that his local planning commission is likely to approve. But he wants the job, so he tries hard to talk you out of using twigs, pinecones and abandoned bird nests. He tells you that no builder will build it. He tells you it won't get approved by the

city. He tells you it won't stand up to earthquakes, hurricanes or termites. But you persist. You're saving the Earth, damn it. No one said it would be easy.

So the architect—and later your building engineer, too—each asks you to sign a document saying you won't sue them when beavers eat a load-bearing wall and your entire family is crushed by forest debris. You make the mistake of mentioning this arrangement to your family, and they leave you. But you are not deterred because you're saving the planet, damn it. You'll get a new family. A greener one.

Your next hurdle is the local planning commission. They like to approve things that are similar to things they've approved before. To do otherwise is to risk unemployment. And the neighbors don't want to live next to a house that looks like a compost pile. But let's say, for the sake of this fascinating story, that everyone in the planning commission is heavily medicated with medical marijuana and they approve your project over the objections of all of your neighbors, except for the beavers, who are suspiciously flexible. Now you need a contractor who is willing to risk his career to build this cutting-edge structure.

Good luck with that.

No builder wants a risky project that could end his career. And how would he price it? He'd have to learn a whole new building method and find subcontractors willing to take on the risk. Amazingly, after a long search, you find a builder who is willing to tackle the project for about 25% more than the cost of a traditional house frame, which is reasonable given the extra business uncertainties. You're OK with the extra costs because you're saving the Earth, damn it.

Against all odds, you get the house built. But you can't figure out why your monthly energy bill is the same as your neighbor's. That magazine article assured you that twigs, pinecones and bird nests are excellent insulators. Where did you go wrong?

One day you run into an engineer who, unlike yourself, actually knows something. He listens to your whining about your energy bill and speculates that perhaps the walls weren't packed densely enough. Or maybe there was too much moisture in the mix. Or maybe magazine articles are a bad way to learn about the science of insulation. Or perhaps, he speculates, while choosing his words carefully, you were too ignorant to realize that the majority of your energy loss is through your windows and roof.

My point is that being green is hard. My wife and I recently built what is arguably the greenest home for miles around. OK, stop. This is a good time to define "green."

The greenest home is the one you don't build. If you really want to save the Earth, move in with another family and share a house that's already built. Better yet, live in the forest and eat whatever the squirrels don't want. Don't brag to me about riding your bicycle to work; a lot of energy went into building that bicycle. Stop being a hypocrite like me.

I prefer a more pragmatic definition of green. I think of it as living the life you want, with as much Earth-wise efficiency as your time and budget reasonably allow. Now back to our story.

When I started researching the field of green building, as part of the planning for our own home, I learned that, in many cases, you can't get there from here. Allow me to share some of the things we learned. It's California-centric, but I think you can generalize from my experience.

As a rule, the greener the home, the uglier it will be. I went into the process thinking that green homes were ugly because hippies have bad taste. That turns out to be nothing but a coincidence. The problem is deeper. For example, the greenest sort of roof in a warm climate would be white to reflect the sun. If you want a beautiful home, a white roof won't get you there. Sure, you could put a lovely garden on your

roof, because you heard someone did that. But don't try telling me a garden roof wouldn't be a maintenance nightmare. And where do you find the expert who knows how to do that sort of thing?

Second, the greenest sort of home would have few windows because windows bleed heat. In particular, if your lot has a view to the west, forget putting windows on that side because your family members will heat up like ants under a magnifying glass. Try telling your architect that you don't want a lot of windows on the view side. He'll quit.

Remember to skip the water-wasting lawn. White pebbles are the way to go if you want to save the Earth. I was born with almost no sense of style whatsoever, and even I hate looking at pebble lawns, although I do respect the choice.

Realistically, you'll need to find a middle ground between green design and aesthetics. We chose roof tiles that are lighter colored than a typical roof, but nowhere near white. We used artificial grass in the side and back of the house, which is great for playing, while leaving a small patch of natural grass in the front for appearance. We have relatively few windows on the hot west side facing the street and most are shaded. The greenest number of west-facing windows would have been zero, but that would poop all over the curb appeal.

The next problem you discover when trying to build green is that there is no way to model the entire home's energy efficiency before it is built. It's as much guessing as engineering. Every home is unique. You can't be sure if, let's say, a whole house fan in the attic is worth the extra expense, assuming you do everything else right. We opted for the fan, which is designed to efficiently draw in the cool evening air. In practice, we don't use it because it makes a hum that I barely notice but my wife doesn't want to hear. I did not see that coming.

We have a photovoltaic system for generating electricity. That's the most visible sign of a green home, and probably the dumbest. I expect the system to pay for itself in nominal dollars, perhaps in 15 years. But if I compare it with the most obvious alternative, it makes no economic sense. The smart alternative would have been to wait until the costs for systems like this drop by 50%, which will probably happen in a few years.

I confess that we put in the photovoltaic system partly for psychological reasons. I heard great stories of energy meters "spinning backwards" and I wanted in on that. But thanks to our local power company, PG&E, I've been unable to determine if the system is working at all. I know for sure that during the first four months I generated power for PG&E, gave it to them for free and then bought it back at full price. It had something to do with a delay in PG&E getting the right kind of meter installed.

Now we have the right meter, but no backward-spinning anything that I can detect. And I think I'm getting billed full price, but I can't decipher the impenetrable documents they send me.

The biggest energy drain in a home is for heating and cooling. We opted to heat our home with a system that runs warm water through all of the floors. The system is energy efficient, I'm told, and wonderfully comfortable, but it's powered by gas. So while our photovoltaic system will someday help during the summer, it will never help much in the cold months when the sun is wimpy and we're burning gas to heat the floors. Worse yet, the heated floors are so pleasant that we probably overuse them compared with a forced air system. That's a classic unintended consequence.

Conclusion: Photovoltaic systems are a waste of money. But I'd do it again in a heartbeat, because I love the Earth, damn it. In my defense, the price of your future photovoltaic system will never come down unless idiots like me pay too much today. You're welcome.

Throughout the building process I picked as many expert brains as I could to figure out what energy-related aspects of the house would be the most bang for the buck. Opinions sometimes varied, but here's what came out at the top.

Heating and cooling are the biggest energy thieves. And roofs and windows matter the most for heat transfer. Focus your research and budget there. Most of the information you find will come from manufacturers who have a financial interest in misleading you, and also of course from cartoonists who write opinion pieces after being misled by those same manufacturers. Good luck with your research.

If your local building code doesn't already require a radiant barrier—a type of insulator for the roof—then look into it. I'm told that should be on the top of your list, at least for warm climates. This would be a good time to point out that nothing you learn about green building materials will be supported by relevant data that is in the proper context for your particular home. But the rest of your life is probably a mess too, so you'll get used to it fast.

If you're thinking of buying a home that has lots of windows on the wrong side for your climate, you should pass. Few things make a home less liveable, and more of an energy hog, than improper orientation to the sun. I've lived in two homes with that issue, and it causes a variety of problems. For example, all of my dreams involved trying to extinguish fires using nothing but my ingenuity and a full bladder.

A classic energy mistake is to put in an oversized heating and cooling system. Consider hiring an independent engineer to recommend a system size. That way you can elevate your problem from not knowing what size your furnace should be to not knowing if you hired the right independent engineer. You'll be surprised how good that feels.

Attic fans, and whole house fans (which are different), get good reviews for homes that are not otherwise well designed. If you do everything else right, the fans might not make that much of a difference. But from experience I can tell you that everyone who knows a little bit about green building will ask if you have a fan system. A low-cost alternative is to simply tell people that you have a whole house fan that somehow makes your energy meter spin backwards.

If your budget allows, it's good to include a lot of stonework in the interior. The thermal mass of the stones is a natural regulator of temperature. The same goes for a solid slab foundation. And obviously when you build your own home, your entire body will become tense and calcified from the process, which probably helps keep your couch at a good temperature year round. A lot of this is just common sense.

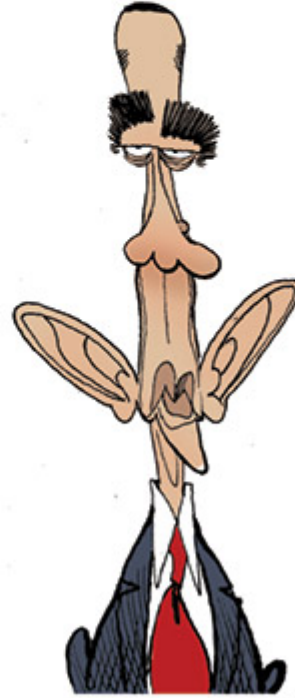
Kidding aside, I do love the Earth, damn it. And if my only contribution to its well-being is joining the early adopters (OK, idiots) so that those who follow have better information and lower costs for green building, I'm OK with that. I just hope it's enough to make up for the squirrel I ran over this morning with the minivan.

—*Scott Adams is the creator of 'Dilbert.'*

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