

February 8, 2010

Mark Steyn says to the president, it's the spending, Stupid.

National Review's Jim Geraghty sums up Obama's America thus: "Unsustainable is the new normal." Indeed. The other day, Douglas Elmendorf, director of the Congressional Budget Office, described current deficits as "unsustainable." So let's make them even more so. The president tells us, with a straight face, that his grossly irresponsible profligate wastrel of a predecessor took the federal budget on an eight-year joyride, so the only way his sober, fiscally prudent successor can get things under control is to grab the throttle and crank it up to what Mel Brooks in "Spaceballs" (which seems the appropriate comparison) called "Ludicrous Speed."

Obama's spending proposes to take the average Bush deficit for the years 2001-08, and double it, all the way to 2020. To get out of the Bush hole, we need to dig a hole twice as deep for one-and-a-half times as long. And that's according to the official projections of his Economics Czar, Ms. Rose Colored-Glasses. By 2015, the actual hole may be so deep that even if you toss every Obama speech down it on double-spaced paper you still won't be able to fill it up. In the spendthrift Bush days, federal spending as a proportion of GDP averaged 19.6 percent. Obama proposes to crank it up to 25 percent as a permanent feature of life.

But, if they're "unsustainable," what happens when they can no longer be sustained? A failure of bond auctions? A downgraded government debt rating? Reduced GDP growth? Total societal collapse? Mad Max on the New Jersey Turnpike? ...

...Speaking of roads, I see that, according to USA Today, when the economic downturn began the U.S. Department of Transportation had just one employee making over \$170,000. A year and a half later, it has 1,690. ...

Peter Schiff explains how government is strangling the American economy.

...Regulation acts like a tax on job creation. By subjecting employers to all sorts of extra expenses when they hire people, regulations increase the cost of employment far beyond the wages employers actually pay their workers. In fact, some regulations are specifically tied to the number of workers employed. This provides some employers with a strong incentive to stay small and not hire. ...

...Subsidies produce the opposite effect of regulation, but sometimes the results can be just as harmful. Government subsidies divert resources towards politically favored activities, resulting in more jobs in areas such as health care and education, but fewer jobs in other sectors such as manufacturing. The net effect of this transfer is to diminish the productive capacity and efficiency of the economy, which lowers real economic growth and diminishes employment opportunities.

Although not as visible as regulations and subsidies, government spending also plays a large role in job destruction. The more money government spends, the more resources it drains from the private sector. The fiscal 2011 budget proposed by President Obama contains \$3.8 trillion in federal spending. Think of government as a cancer feeding off the private sector. The larger it grows, the more jobs it kills. ...

Jennifer Rubin knows why the administration can't figure out how to get jobs created.

... Perhaps if the president or anyone in his administration had ever run a business or been responsible for a payroll, there would be more understanding about the negative impact Obama's policies (including his mandate- and fine-filled health-care bill) have on those we must rely on to fuel the economic recovery. Unfortunately, this administration is long on academic types and government bureaucrats and short on entrepreneurs. We could use a few about now.

[David Goldman \(aka Spengler\)](#) comments on last Friday's jobless numbers.

... I don't think that government statisticians are faking the data; they simply are running the old statistical routines out of the canned econometrics program to generate seasonal adjustment factors which are—to put it mildly—a lot less meaningful in the present environment than in a normal economy.

The Liberal death march continues. [Charles Krauthammer](#) explains why.

...A year later, after stunning Democratic setbacks in Virginia, New Jersey and Massachusetts, Obama gave a stay-the-course State of the Union address (a) pledging not to walk away from health-care reform, (b) seeking to turn college education increasingly into a federal entitlement, and (c) asking again for cap-and-trade energy legislation. Plus, of course, another stimulus package, this time renamed a "jobs bill."

This being a democracy, don't the Democrats see that clinging to this agenda will march them over a cliff? Don't they understand Massachusetts?

Well, they understand it through a prism of two cherished axioms: (1) The people are stupid and (2) Republicans are bad. Result? The dim, led by the malicious, vote incorrectly. ...

In the [Detroit News](#), [Nolan Finley](#) discusses the condescension and the irresponsibility that we are seeing from the president.

There's always been a disconnect between what Barack Obama says and what he does, but for the last few weeks, the president's rhetoric has been wholly detached from reality. ...

...After unveiling his budget earlier this week, Obama crisscrossed the country, lecturing Americans on the virtues of frugality. "We simply cannot continue to spend as if deficits don't have consequences," the president said, adding that the government has to make hard choices and set priorities.

That's a good message. Except that this is entirely Obama's budget. He's the one who failed to set priorities, who didn't make hard choices. The nearly \$1.3 trillion deficit built into this budget is historic in its fiscal recklessness, and it belongs to him. ...

In the [WaPo](#), [Charles Lane](#) comments on a request from Senator Blanche Lincoln to Obama, asking for a more centrist approach. The president refused on the grounds that anything other than Obama policies are Bush policies.

...The first was the ease with which he cast Lincoln's plea for a bit more centrism as a call for a return to Bushism -- the "exact same proposals that were in place for the last eight years." That's not what she was advocating; it's not what [any Democrat who's questioning his approach](#) is advocating. But the president set up this strawman, and he pummeled it, rather than engaging Lincoln's valid concerns.

The second striking thing was how easily he appeared to write off Lincoln politically. Conceding nothing, he implied that her defeat was not only a foregone conclusion, but also an acceptable price to pay for staying the course on policy. ...

...Still, give the president credit: No one can accuse him of bending his principles to politics. Of course, if there's a price to be paid for that this year, he won't be the one paying it. Blanche Lincoln, among others, will get to do that.

[Jennifer Rubin](#) adds excellent comments to Charles Lane's piece.

[Charles Lane](#) catches Obama writing Sen. Blanche Lincoln's political obituary. During the meeting Senate Democrats had with Obama, the imperiled Red State senator practically pleaded with the president to turn to the Center. ("Are we willing as Democrats to push back on our own party?") Her request was summarily denied. Any accommodation to "centrism" is a return to Bush policies, said Obama. Lane is stunned on two grounds by Obama's stridency...

Well, at least the Red State senators and Blue Dog Democrats know where they stand. They are about to be pushed off that "precipice" Obama keeps talking about. But, as Lane notes, the dogmatic fidelity to leftism requires Obama to ignore some fairly convincing political evidence that this is the way to ruin for the Democratic party — and for Obama. ("If Virginia and New Jersey didn't prove that, Massachusetts did. And November could prove it again.")

This is what happens when arrogance and political extremism meet political tone-deafness. The Obami haven't learned anything from Massachusetts; they simply are more candid that the Blanche Lincolns have no place in their party. But in doing so, they're also writing off the majority of the electorate, which doesn't share their fascination with big government and doesn't appreciate their disdain for the ability of ordinary citizens to make decisions on their own. When Obama tells Lincoln to get lost, he's also telling the voters of Arkansas (and a bunch of other states) that his agenda and his party's political goals aren't for them. Does he suppose that he can govern and win re-election by dismissing all centrists in this fashion? That's a recipe for becoming a fringe minority party, not a broad governing majority. I suspect Lane is right: it will take a November 2010 election to ram that message home.

[Ed Morrissey](#) has some interesting thoughts on Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goldman's comments about Obama. You know, like the one where the mayor said, "I gotta tell you this, everybody says I shouldn't say it, but I gotta tell you the way it is. This president is a real slow learner."

...I find myself in the odd position of defending Obama on this score. His speech contained very clear conditionals (emphases mine):

When times are tough, you — you tighten your belts. You don't go buying a boat ***when you can barely pay your mortgage***. You don't blow a bunch of cash on Vegas ***when you're trying to save for college***.

Well ... yeah. Maybe Obama would have been better advised to keep it generic by saying "in the casinos" rather than "on Vegas", but otherwise, this is only remarkable for its banality. You'd hear the same kind of advice from your parents, and probably would have rolled your eyes at its obvious nature. ...

...But the man who will pay most will be Harry Reid, who has spent the past year carrying Obama's water on Capitol Hill. He can't win re-election without a huge turnout in Sin City and a big spread. If Obama becomes unpopular in Las Vegas, Reid's re-election will become an impossibility rather than the improbability it is at the moment. ...

[John Stossel](#) calls him Spiro T. Obama.

This week the President again showed how thin-skinned he is about criticism in the media. Maybe he's so sensitive to criticism because [he's gotten so little of it](#). ...

In the [Telegraph Blogs, UK](#), [Nile Gardiner](#) says that Obama can stop apologizing for America, and start apologizing for himself. Gardiner recommends 10 items. Here are three:

4. Apology to the victims of Communism

Barack Obama made Berlin a central stage of his presidential election campaign when he addressed an adoring crowd of hundreds of thousands of Germans in July 2008. However in November 2009, President Obama [could not be bothered](#) to fly to Berlin to attend the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, when even the Russian president showed up. Hillary Clinton stood in for the commander-in-chief and delivered an underwhelming speech that was more about Obama than American leadership in the Cold War. The White House decision to snub the Berlin ceremony was an insult to the memory of the tens of millions who perished at the hands of Communism in Europe. It demonstrated a callous disregard for human suffering and a refusal to acknowledge the huge role played by Ronald Reagan and the American people in bringing down the Iron Curtain. It also displayed what can only be described as an arrogant disdain for the transatlantic alliance.

5. Apology to the victims of the Sudan genocide

The Obama administration's decision to engage with the brutal regime in Khartoum led by Omar Hassan al-Bashir, was both shocking and morally sickening. Obama's special envoy to Sudan, retired Air Force Major General [J. Scott Gration](#) summed up the new US strategy when [he ludicrously declared](#): "We've got to think about giving out cookies. Kids, countries — they react to gold stars, smiley faces, handshakes, agreements, talk, engagement." This sent an appalling signal to would be genocidal regimes across the world that even they can be rehabilitated after murdering hundreds of thousands of people. Although it has received relatively little attention, the White House's offer to lift sanctions against Sudan in exchange for "concrete steps in a new direction", was one of the worst decisions made by Barack Obama since he took office.

6. Apology to the people of Honduras

It is still difficult to fathom the reasoning behind the White House's incredible decision to side with Marxist despot Manuel Zelaya after he was removed by the Honduran Congress with the backing of the country's Supreme Court. The Obama administration immediately condemned the fully constitutional actions of pro-American legislators who acted against a power-hungry figure determined to stay in power beyond his fixed term of office. Bizarrely, the White House aligned itself with the likes of America-hating tyrants like Hugo Chavez, Fidel Castro and Daniel Ortega against pro-democracy forces who love the United States.

Orange County Register

Unsustainable's the new normal

by Mark Steyn



At the National Prayer Breakfast, Barack Obama singled out for praise Navy Corpsman Christian Bouchard. Or, as the president called him, "Corpseman Bouchard." Twice.

Hey, not a big deal. Throughout his life, the commander in chief has had little contact with the military, and less interest. And, when you give as many speeches as this guy does, there's no time to rehearse or read through: You just gotta fire up the prompter and wing it. But it's revealing that nobody around him in the so-called smartest administration of all time thought to spell it out phonetically for him when the speech got typed up and loaded into the machine. Which suggests that either his minders don't know that he doesn't know that kinda stuff, or they don't know it, either. To put it in Rumsfeldian terms, they don't know what they don't know.

Which is embarrassingly true. Hence, the awful flop speeches, from the Copenhagen Olympics to the Berlin Wall anniversary video to the Martha Coakley rally. The palpable whiff given off by the White House inner circle is that they're the last people on the planet still besotted by Barack Obama, and that they're having such a cool time starring in their own reality-show remake of "The West Wing" they can only conceive of the public – and, indeed, the world – as crowd-scene extras in "The Barack Obama Show." They expect you to cheer and wave flags when the floor manager tells you to, but the notion that, in return, he should be able to persuade you of the merits of his policies seems entirely to have eluded them.

But, since Obama's mispronunciation is a pithier summation of the State of the Union than any of the dreary 90-minute sludge he paid his speechwriters for, let us consider it: Is America a Corpseman walking?

Well, we're getting there. National Review's Jim Geraghty sums up Obama's America thus: "Unsustainable is the new normal." Indeed. The other day, Douglas Elmendorf, director of the Congressional Budget Office, described current deficits as "unsustainable." So let's make them even more so. The president tells us, with a straight face, that his grossly irresponsible profligate wastrel of a predecessor took the federal budget on an eight-year joyride, so the only way his sober, fiscally prudent successor can get things under control is to grab the throttle and crank it up to what Mel Brooks in "Spaceballs" (which seems the appropriate comparison) called "Ludicrous Speed."

Obama's spending proposes to take the average Bush deficit for the years 2001-08, and double it, all the way to 2020. To get out of the Bush hole, we need to dig a hole twice as deep for one-and-a-half times as long. And that's according to the official projections of his Economics Czar, Ms. Rose Colored-Glasses. By 2015, the actual hole may be so deep that even if you toss every Obama speech down it on double-spaced paper you still won't be able to fill it up. In the spendthrift Bush days, federal spending as a proportion of GDP averaged 19.6 percent. Obama proposes to crank it up to 25 percent as a permanent feature of life.

But, if they're "unsustainable," what happens when they can no longer be sustained? A failure of bond auctions? A downgraded government debt rating? Reduced GDP growth? Total societal collapse? Mad Max on the New Jersey Turnpike?

Testifying to the House Budget Committee, Director Elmendorf attempted to pull back from the wilder shores of "unsustainable": "I think most observers expect that the government will act, that the unsustainability will be resolved through action, not through witnessing some collapse down the road," he said. "If literally nothing is done, then eventually something very, very bad happens. But I think the widespread view is that you and your colleagues will take action."

Dream on, you kinky fantasist. The one thing that can be guaranteed is that a political class led by Harry Reid, Nancy Pelosi, Barney Frank, a handful of reach-across-the-aisle Republican accommodationists and an economically illiterate narcissist in the Oval Office is never going to rein in unsustainable spending in any meaningful sense. That leaves Director Elmendorf's alternative scenario. What was it again? Oh, yeah:

"Some collapse down the road."

Speaking of roads, I see that, according to USA Today, when the economic downturn began the U.S. Department of Transportation had just one employee making over \$170,000. A year and a half later, it has 1,690.

Happy days are here again!

Did you get your pay raise this year? What's that, you don't work for the government? Yes, you do, one way or another. Good luck relying on Obama, Pelosi, Frank and the other Emirs of Kleptocristan "taking action" to "resolve" that. In the past month, the cost of insuring Greece's sovereign debt against default has doubled. Spain and Portugal are headed the same way. When you binge-spend at the Greek level in a democratic state, there aren't many easy roads back. The government has introduced an austerity package to rein in spending. In response, Greek tax collectors have walked off the job.

Read that again slowly: To protest government cuts, striking tax collectors are refusing to collect taxes. In a sane world, this would be an hilarious TV comedy sketch. But most of the Western world is no longer sane. It's tough enough to persuade the town drunk to sober up, but when everyone's face down in the moonshine, maybe it's best just to head for the hills. But where to flee? America is choosing to embrace Greece's future when even the Greeks have figured out you can't make it add up. Consider the opening paragraph of Martin Crutsinger, "AP Economics Writer":

"WASHINGTON – President Barack Obama sent Congress a \$3.83 trillion budget on Monday that would pour more money into the fight against high unemployment, boost taxes on the wealthy and freeze spending for a wide swath of government programs."

What language is that written in? How can a \$3.83 trillion budget "freeze spending"? And where's the president getting all this money to "pour" into his "fight" against high unemployment? Would it perchance be from the same small businesses that might be hiring new workers if the president didn't need so much money to "pour" away? Heigh-ho. Maybe we can all be striking tax collectors. It seems a comfortable life. If unsustainable is the new normal, it should also be the new national anthem. Take it away, Natalie Cole:

"Unsustainable

That's what you are

Unsustainable

Though near or far

Like a ton of debt you've dropped on us

How the thought of you has flopped on us

Never before Has someone spent more"

It's not the "debt" or the "deficit," it's the spending. And the only way to reduce that is with fewer government agencies, fewer government programs, fewer government employees, lower government salaries.

Instead, all four are rocketing up: We are incentivizing unsustainability, and, when it comes to "some collapse down the road," you'll be surprised how short that road is.

Euro Pacific Capital **More Government Equals Fewer Jobs**

by Peter Schiff

With today's unexpected decline in December payrolls, the cry for more job-related stimulus will grow even louder. But the sad truth is that any new stimulus or jobs bills will ultimately swell the ranks of the unemployed, thereby raising calls for an even bigger federal effort. If we are not careful, government regulations, subsidies, and spending, all designed to fight unemployment, could push the labor market into a death spiral.

Regulation acts like a tax on job creation. By subjecting employers to all sorts of extra expenses when they hire people, regulations increase the cost of employment far beyond the wages employers actually pay their workers. In fact, some regulations are specifically tied to the number of workers employed. This provides some employers with a strong incentive to stay small and not hire.

The minimum wage law, which is really just a very visible workplace regulation, actually makes it illegal for employers to hire certain individuals and [destroys entire categories of jobs](#). For instance, faced with high labor costs, some restaurants will avoid hiring dishwashers by switching to plastic utensils and paper plates. On a larger scale, factories may decide to switch to robotic assembly lines if human labor gets too expensive.

Other types of regulations, such as those that prohibit discrimination, create incentives for employers not to hire individuals that fall within the protected class. This is the result of potential litigation costs that may result from wrongful termination lawsuits. In other words, the more expensive government makes it to fire workers, the less likely they are to hire them in the first place.

Subsidies produce the opposite effect of regulation, but sometimes the results can be just as harmful. Government subsidies divert resources towards politically favored activities, resulting in more jobs in areas such as health care and education, but fewer jobs in other sectors such as manufacturing. The net effect of this transfer is to diminish the productive capacity and efficiency of the economy, which lowers real economic growth and diminishes employment opportunities.

Although not as visible as regulations and subsidies, government spending also plays a large role in job destruction. The more money government spends, the more resources it drains from the private sector. The fiscal 2011 budget proposed by President Obama contains \$3.8 trillion in federal spending. Think of government as a cancer feeding off the private sector. The larger it grows, the more jobs it kills. Unfortunately, most politicians follow the misguided advice of economist John Maynard Keynes, who advocated government spending as a means of job creation. In reality, government spending merely results in government jobs replacing more efficient private sector jobs.

Some economists point to taxes as the primary job killer, and argue that lower taxes will boost employment. While I have sympathy for this view, it misses the larger issue that the burden of government is not what it taxes but what it spends. The proposed fiscal 2011 federal budget contains "only" 2.4 trillion of taxes. The remaining 1.4 trillion of spending is borrowed (incredibly, for every dollar the government collects in taxes, it now spends almost \$1.60). I would argue that a dollar borrowed kills more jobs than a dollar taxed.

Therefore, cutting taxes and borrowing the shortfall kills more jobs than it creates. This is true because jobs require capital and government borrowing more directly crowds out private capital investment than taxes do.

In the end, I fully expect the government to directly provide make-work jobs to the armies of the unemployed. This will accelerate the pace of private sector job destruction and make our economy even less productive than it is today. This means that while the government may be able to provide people with jobs, the wages they pay will provide little in the way of purchasing power. In the end, we will become a nation of government employees, with plenty of work but little to show for it.

Contentions

Squeezing the Job Creators

by Jennifer Rubin

The Obama administration can't figure out how to spur job creation. They seem stumped. They've spent all that money. So many government programs have been given a boost, and yet hiring remains stagnant. What to do? Well, for starters, they should not let the Bush tax cuts expire. As Mark Tapscott notes, the [impact on small businesses](#), most of which pay taxes under the individual, not corporate, tax rates, is stark:

The top marginal tax rate today is about 41 percent, so the Obama budget, if enacted as proposed, would result in an increase of slightly more than 8 percentage points. If the goal is to generate new economic growth that will lower the unemployment rate among existing jobs and create millions of new jobs in an expanding economy, the direction for taxation of small business ought to be down by 8+ percent, not up by that amount.

Well, that seems like a no-brainer, yet Obama and his congressional allies continue to talk in class-warfare terms. These are the "rich," and they can afford, indeed they *should* be, paying more, we are told. But where do the Obama administration think the jobs and investments come from? Occasionally, the light goes on, and Obama pays tribute to the private sector. He's going to mush some TARP money over for small-business lending and come up with a tax credit for new hires. But all of this is dwarfed by a giant tax hike on small-business owners, suggesting that he really doesn't appreciate that every tax dollar taken from a small-business person is one not used to employ another worker or expand a store, factory, or office.

Perhaps if the president or anyone in his administration had ever run a business or been responsible for a payroll, there would be more understanding about the negative impact Obama's policies (including his mandate- and fine-filled health-care bill) have on those we must rely on to fuel the economic recovery. Unfortunately, this administration is long on academic types and government bureaucrats and short on entrepreneurs. We could use a few about now.

Asia Times - Inner Workings Blog

It's Worse Than It Looks, or: Would You Seasonally Adjust Noah's Flood?

by David Goldman

The drop in the unemployment rate to 9.7% is an artifact of seasonal adjustment: Employment on the Household Survey actually fell from 137.953 million to 136.809 million. Seasonally adjusted, it rose from 137.792 million to 138.333 million. That is, the actual number of people who said they had jobs fell, but by less than would occur in a typical December-to-January period. Temporary hiring during the Christmas season tends to bulk up the employment numbers, which normally fall during January.

What if the temporary jobs weren't there in the first place? In that case, seasonal adjustment wouldn't apply; the normal December-to-January tick would be swamped by the structural change. It's sort of like seasonally adjusting rainfall patterns during Noah's flood.

I don't think that government statisticians are faking the data; they simply are running the old statistical routines out of the canned econometrics program to generate seasonal adjustment factors which are—to put it mildly—a lot less meaningful in the present environment than in a normal economy.

Washington Post

[The great peasant revolt of 2010](#)

by Charles Krauthammer

"I am not an ideologue," protested President Obama at a [gathering with Republican House members](#) last week. Perhaps, but he does have a tenacious commitment to a set of political convictions.

Compare his [2010 State of the Union](#) to his [first address to Congress](#) a year earlier. The consistency is remarkable. In 2009, after passing a \$787 billion ([now \\$862 billion](#)) stimulus package, the largest spending bill in galactic history, he unveiled a manifesto for fundamentally restructuring the commanding heights of American society -- health care, education and energy.

A year later, after stunning Democratic setbacks in Virginia, New Jersey and Massachusetts, Obama gave a stay-the-course State of the Union address (a) pledging not to walk away from health-care reform, (b) seeking to turn college education increasingly into a federal entitlement, and (c) asking again for cap-and-trade energy legislation. Plus, of course, another stimulus package, this time renamed a "jobs bill."

This being a democracy, don't the Democrats see that clinging to this agenda will march them over a cliff? Don't they understand Massachusetts?

Well, they understand it through a prism of two cherished axioms: (1) The people are stupid and (2) Republicans are bad. Result? The dim, led by the malicious, vote incorrectly.

Liberal expressions of disdain for the intelligence and emotional maturity of the electorate have been, post-Massachusetts, remarkably unguarded. [New York Times columnist Charles Blow chided Obama](#) for not understanding the necessity of speaking "in the plain words of plain folks," because the people are "suspicious of complexity." Counseled Blow: "The next time he gives a speech, someone should tap him on the ankle and say, 'Mr. President, we're down here.' "

A Time magazine blogger was even more blunt about the ankle-dwelling mob, explaining that we are "[a nation of dodos](#)" that is "too dumb to thrive."

Obama joined the parade in the State of the Union address when, with supercilious modesty, he chided himself "for not explaining it [health care] more clearly to the American people." The subject, he noted, was "complex." The subject, it might also be noted, was one to which the master of complexity had [devoted 29 speeches](#). Perhaps he did not speak slowly enough.

Then there are the emotional deficiencies of the masses. Nearly every Democratic apologist lamented the people's anger and anxiety, a free-floating agitation that prevented them from appreciating the beneficence of the social agenda the Democrats are so determined to foist upon them.

That brings us to Part 2 of the liberal conceit: Liberals act in the public interest, while conservatives think only of power, elections, self-aggrandizement and self-interest.

It is an old liberal theme that conservative ideas, being red in tooth and claw, cannot possibly emerge from any notion of the public good. A [2002 New York Times obituary for philosopher Robert Nozick](#) explained that the strongly libertarian implications of Nozick's masterwork, "Anarchy, State, and Utopia," "proved comforting to the right, which was grateful for what it embraced as philosophical justification." The right, you see, is

grateful when a bright intellectual can graft some philosophical rationalization onto its thoroughly base and self-regarding politics.

This belief in the moral hollowness of conservatism animates the current liberal mantra that Republican opposition to Obama's social democratic agenda -- which couldn't get through even a Democratic Congress and powered major Democratic losses in New Jersey, Virginia and Massachusetts -- is nothing but blind and cynical obstructionism.

By contrast, Democratic opposition to George W. Bush -- from Iraq to Social Security reform -- constituted *dissent*. And dissent, we were told at the time, including by candidate Obama, is "[one of the truest expressions of patriotism](#)."

No more. Today, dissent from the governing orthodoxy is nihilistic malice. "They made a decision," explained David Axelrod, "[they were going to sit it out and hope that we failed, that the country failed](#)" -- a perfect expression of liberals' conviction that their aspirations are necessarily the country's, that their idea of the public good is the public's, that their failure is therefore the nation's.

Then comes Massachusetts, an election Obama himself helped nationalize, to shatter this most self-congratulatory of illusions.

For liberals, the observation that "the peasants are revolting" is a pun. For conservatives, it is cause for uncharacteristic optimism. No matter how far the ideological pendulum swings in the short term, in the end the bedrock common sense of the American people will prevail.

The ankle-dwelling populace pushes back. It recenters. It renormalizes. Even in Massachusetts.

Detroit News

[Obama picks campaigning over leading](#)

by Nolan Finley

There's always been a disconnect between what Barack Obama says and what he does, but for the last few weeks, the president's rhetoric has been wholly detached from reality.

Many pundits predicted that after the Massachusetts massacre Obama would swing toward the middle, adopt a conciliatory approach and adjust his policies and priorities to reflect the mood of the nation.

Instead, the president jutted his chin a notch higher in the air and launched into campaign-style attack mode. His statements range from outrageous to audacious and risk throwing Washington into total gridlock. It's a risky strategy that ought to worry Democrats who this fall will face an electorate weary of political bickering.

It began with the State of the Union address last week. Obama could have tried to catch some Republican flies with honey, challenging them to meet him in the middle and letting them weigh the political consequences of saying no. He opted for vinegar instead.

The speech started with a call for cooperation and ended with the president taunting Republicans and tagging them with the blame for Washington's mess.

Obama accepted an invitation to the Republican congressional retreat, which should have opened the door to a working relationship. But the president slammed it shut. The session continued the partisan baiting and accusations, and drew comparisons to the raucous exchanges of Britain's Parliament.

Obama isn't missing a chance to spank the GOP. How this fits into his professed objective of ending the destructive rancor in Washington is difficult to see.

More likely, the president is hardening partisan lines and confirming the public's view that Washington is a broken place.

Not only that, but Obama's assertions fail the accuracy test. To suggest Republicans blocked him is laughable. Until Scott Brown is seated as the new Republican U.S. senator from Massachusetts -- which could happen as early as today -- Republicans can't block anything.

The president has to accept responsibility for stubbornly pressing an ideological agenda that was out of sync with the public's priorities and then not effectively advocating for his own proposals.

For a solid year, Democrats held a rare super-majority in Congress. Had Obama been a better politician and a more forceful leader, he could have passed his entire wish list. He squandered his advantage, and now he wants to place the blame elsewhere.

He's good at that. After unveiling his budget earlier this week, Obama crisscrossed the country, lecturing Americans on the virtues of frugality. "We simply cannot continue to spend as if deficits don't have consequences," the president said, adding that the government has to make hard choices and set priorities.

That's a good message. Except that this is entirely Obama's budget. He's the one who failed to set priorities, who didn't make hard choices. The nearly \$1.3 trillion deficit built into this budget is historic in its fiscal recklessness, and it belongs to him.

He ought to be wagging his finger in the mirror.

Campaign rhetoric is fine for campaigns, but not so good for governing. Obama needs to face the fact that he's made some pretty serious mistakes in his first year that can't be covered up with campaign sound bites.

Nolan Finley is editorial page editor of The Detroit News.

Washington Post

Obama dismisses Blanche Lincoln's plea to be more centrist

by Charles Lane

President Obama's sharp exchange of views with House Republicans made a splash the other day -- though for civility and substance, I much preferred the excellent [left-meets-right encounter between Rep. Paul Ryan \(R-Wisc.\) and our very own wunderkind Ezra Klein](#).

In any case, for those seeking a true measure of Obama's judgment, on both policy and politics, the [meeting between the president and Senate Democrats](#) yesterday was much more instructive. Obama's words made it clear that, notwithstanding his party's recent election losses at the polls and its declining poll ratings, he has no intention of embarking on a Bill Clinton-style "triangulation" strategy.

The pivotal moment came when [Sen. Blanche Lincoln of deep-red Arkansas, a centrist who's on her way to defeat in November, practically begged the president to repudiate "extreme" liberals](#) -- a clear reference to the Nancy Pelosi-led House -- and tack to the center. Arguing that the Democrats' ambitious legislative agenda was sowing job-destroying "uncertainty" in the business community, she asked: "Are we willing as Democrats to push back on our own party?"

Obama's reply, in a nutshell: Sorry, Blanche.

If the price of certainty is essentially for us to adopt the exact same proposals that were in place for eight years leading up to the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression -- we don't tinker with health care, let the insurance companies do what they want, we don't put in place any insurance reforms, we don't mess with the banks, let them keep on doing what they're doing now because we don't want to stir up Wall Street -- the result is going to be the same. I don't know why we would expect a different outcome pursuing the exact same policy that got us into this fix in the first place.

But the president is not only against a centrist shift on policy grounds; he also thinks it is a political loser:

If our response ends up being, you know, because we don't want to -- we don't want to stir things up here, we're just going to do the same thing that was being done before, then I don't know what differentiates us from the other guys. And I don't know why people would say, boy, we really want to make sure that those Democrats are in Washington fighting for us.

Two things struck me as extraordinary about Obama's reply.

The first was the ease with which he cast Lincoln's plea for a bit more centrism as a call for a return to Bushism -- the "exact same proposals that were in place for the last eight years." That's not what she was advocating; it's not what [any Democrat who's questioning his approach](#) is advocating. But the president set up this strawman, and he pummeled it, rather than engaging Lincoln's valid concerns.

The second striking thing was how easily he appeared to write off Lincoln politically. Conceding nothing, he implied that her defeat was not only a foregone conclusion, but also an acceptable price to pay for staying the course on policy. To be sure, maybe the whole thing was just kabuki -- Lincoln standing up to the president for the benefit of the folks back home who don't like him, and Obama obligingly playing his part. But it sure looked pretty spontaneous to me.

The Lincoln-Obama debate epitomized the left-vs.-center debate within the Democratic Party these days, which is much broader than health care, even though it is necessarily focused on that for the moment. The question is whether the party should cut its losses on comprehensive health reform, or keep pursuing it despite the political headwinds, on the grounds that even an initially unpopular bill would be easier to defend than no bill at all.

David Plouffe, back in the White House to direct post-Massachusetts political operations, favors nailing the party's colors to the health-care mast. [He wrote recently in the Post](#) that "if we do not pass it, the GOP will continue attacking the plan as if we did anyway, and voters will have no ability to measure its upside. If we do pass it, dozens of protections and benefits take effect this year."

Obama's answer to Lincoln suggests that he fully embraces the Plouffe strategy. I don't understand it. Independently of what anyone might think of the health-care bill's merits, the public's attitude is hardening against it; it is politically toxic, period. If Virginia and New Jersey didn't prove that, Massachusetts did. And November could prove it again. If the Dems tip-toe away from health care now, it would be embarrassing, but they would at least give the electorate time to forget the issue and focus on the Democrats' other accomplishments -- if they can come up with some between now and November.

Still, give the president credit: No one can accuse him of bending his principles to politics. Of course, if there's a price to be paid for that this year, he won't be the one paying it. Blanche Lincoln, among others, will get to do that.

Contentions

Sorry Blanche, You're Toast

by Jennifer Rubin

[Charles Lane](#) catches Obama writing Sen. Blanche Lincoln's political obituary. During the meeting Senate Democrats had with Obama, the imperiled Red State senator practically pleaded with the president to turn to the Center. ("Are we willing as Democrats to push back on our own party?") Her request was summarily denied. Any accommodation to "centrism" is a return to Bush policies, said Obama. Lane is stunned on two grounds by Obama's stridency:

The first was the ease with which he cast Lincoln's plea for a bit more centrism as a call for a return to Bushism — the "exact same proposals that were in place for the last eight years." That's not what she was advocating. ... The president set up this strawman, and he pummeled it, rather than engaging Lincoln's valid concerns. The second striking thing was how easily he appeared to write off Lincoln politically. Conceding nothing, he implied that her defeat was not only a foregone conclusion, but also an acceptable price to pay for staying the course on policy.

Well, at least the Red State senators and Blue Dog Democrats know where they stand. They are about to be pushed off that "precipice" Obama keeps talking about. But, as Lane notes, the dogmatic fidelity to leftism requires Obama to ignore some fairly convincing political evidence that this is the way to ruin for the Democratic party — and for Obama. ("If Virginia and New Jersey didn't prove that, Massachusetts did. And November could prove it again.")

This is what happens when arrogance and political extremism meet political tone-deafness. The Obami haven't learned anything from Massachusetts; they simply are more candid that the Blanche Lincolns have no place in their party. But in doing so, they're also writing off the majority of the electorate, which doesn't share their fascination with big government and doesn't appreciate their disdain for the ability of ordinary citizens to make decisions on their own. When Obama tells Lincoln to get lost, he's also telling the voters of Arkansas (and a bunch of other states) that his agenda and his party's political goals aren't for them. Does he suppose that he can govern and win re-election by dismissing all centrists in this fashion? That's a recipe for becoming a fringe minority party, not a broad governing majority. I suspect Lane is right: it will take a November 2010 election to ram that message home.

Hot Air

Las Vegas mayor: Obama is "a real slow learner"; Update: Reid questioning Obama's patriotism?

by Ed Morrissey

Las Vegas mayor Oscar Goodman lambasted Barack Obama yesterday after Obama made a reference to his city in a speech demanding better fiscal discipline earlier in the day. [A year ago](#), Obama raised Goodman's ire by demanding an end to expensive corporate meetings in Las Vegas, but smoothed things over with an apology and a clarification. [This time](#), Goodman says an apology won't cut it and that Obama has proven himself to be "a real slow learner" (via [Gateway Pundit](#)):

"I guess you've all seen the president's remarks or read about the president's remarks, well I've got some remarks of my own. I was back in Washington, D.C. about two weeks ago, going up and down the halls of the capitol telling people about our economy here, trying to get them to be sympathetic to what we're trying to accomplish, then I have to read what President Obama said.

"He has a real psychological hang up about the entertainment capitol of the world. An apology won't be acceptable this time, I don't know where his vendetta comes from but we're not going to let him make his bones by lambasting Las Vegas, that's why (the press) is here today.

“He didn’t learn his lesson the first time, but when he hurt our economy by his ill conceived rhetoric, we didn’t think it would happen again, but now that it has I want to assure you, when he comes I’ll do everything I can to give him the boot back to Washington and to visit his failures back there.

“I gotta tell you this, everybody says I shouldn’t say it, but I gotta tell you the way it is. This president is a real slow learner.”

I find myself in the odd position of defending Obama on this score. His speech contained very clear conditionals (emphases mine):

When times are tough, you — you tighten your belts. You don’t go buying a boat **when you can barely pay your mortgage**. You don’t blow a bunch of cash on Vegas **when you’re trying to save for college**.

Well ... *yeah*. Maybe Obama would have been better advised to keep it generic by saying “in the casinos” rather than “on Vegas”, but otherwise, this is only remarkable for its banality. You’d hear the same kind of advice from your parents, and probably would have rolled your eyes at its obvious nature.

Just as obviously, Las Vegas doesn’t need any more negative connotations on its gambling business in this tough economy. In that sense, it’s difficult to blame Goodman for overreacting after last year’s Obama scolding, which really *was* ill-informed. Goodman won’t lose any popularity points by blasting Obama again, at least not in Las Vegas itself.

But the man who will pay most will be Harry Reid, who has spent the past year carrying Obama’s water on Capitol Hill. He can’t win re-election without a huge turnout in Sin City and a big spread. If Obama becomes unpopular in Las Vegas, Reid’s re-election will become an impossibility rather than the improbability it is at the moment.

And of course, Mayor Goodman diagnoses Obama perfectly by calling him “a slow learner” — but does so on the wrong grounds.

Update: Obama [clarified his remarks](#) today in a letter to Reid:

After sparking a firestorm of criticism from Nevada’s elected officials for suggesting that people saving money for college shouldn’t blow it in Las Vegas, Obama told U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in a letter that he wasn’t saying anything negative about Las Vegas.

It was the second time since taking office that Obama singled out Las Vegas as a potential example of spending excessively.

“I was making the simple point that families use vacation dollars, not college tuition money, to have fun,” Obama said, according to the letter released by Reid’s office. “There is no place better to have fun than Vegas, one of our country’s great destinations.”

Do you think Nevada Democrats are feeling the pressure? Rep. Shelley Berkley unloaded on Obama, too, while Reid wondered whether Obama would prefer Americans spend their money in other countries:

“Enough is enough!” Democratic Congresswoman Shelley Berkley said in a statement. “President Obama needs to stop picking on Las Vegas and he needs to let Americans decide for themselves how and where to spend their hard-earned vacation dollars.”

Nevada’s tourism has been hit hard during the past two years as consumers everywhere tighten leisure spending and companies spend less on meetings and conventions.

Reid, one of Obama’s closest allies, issued a statement headlined “Reid to Obama: ‘Lay off Las Vegas’” and was unusually blunt in his reaction.

"The President needs to lay off Las Vegas and stop making it the poster child for where people shouldn't be spending their money," Reid said. "I would much rather tourists and business travelers spend their money in Las Vegas than spend it overseas."

So now Reid is questioning Obama's patriotism? Talk about running off the rails! I know Reid needs to distance himself from Obama, but that's just ridiculous hyperbole.

John Stossel's Blog

[Spiro T. Obama](#)

This week the President again showed how thin-skinned he is about criticism in the media. Maybe he's so sensitive to criticism because [he's gotten so little of it](#).

The president's advice came in answer to a question from Sen. Mike Bennet, D-CO, who is facing a difficult re-election fight back home and wanted to know what Democrats and Republicans can do "to fix this institution so that our democracy can actually withstand the test that we're facing right now."

"You know what I think would actually make a difference, Michael? I think if everybody here -- excuse all the members of the press who are here -- if everybody here turned off your CNN, your Fox, your blogs," Obama said, before being interrupted by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-CA, who piped up, "And MSNBC!"

Obama, appropriately reminded of the network with shows more friendly to liberals, continued, "Just turn off the TV -- MSNBC, blogs -- and just go talk to folks out there, instead of being in this echo chamber where the topic is constantly politics. ... It is much more difficult to get a conversation focused on how are we going to help people than a conversation about how is this going to help or hurt somebody politically."

[Glenn Thrush](#) was reminded of another politician who was sensitive about his press reviews.

President Obama's back is against the wall, so he's getting in touch with his inner Agnew, hitting the neo-nattering nabobs of cable and the Net.

Which amused [Don Surber](#).

How un-Bushlike. For most of his 8 years, President Bush 43 took a drubbing in the press. Honeymoon? Every story about him seemed to carry an obligatory Florida paragraph up until 9/11. I don't recall Bush complaining. At least publicly.

Whining about bad press has been unpresidential since John Adams and his Alien and Sedition Act.

Adams did not get a second term...

Hey, 53% of America, nice crybaby you elected.

The first year of Barack Obama's presidency was marked by a series of embarrassing and groveling apologies for his country on the world stage. From his [apology to the French](#) for America's supposed "arrogance", to his [massive mea culpa](#) before the Muslim world in Egypt, President Obama succeeded in elevating national humiliation into an art form.

In his second year, I would strongly encourage the president to stop apologising for his country, and project more pride in his great nation's past. The United States, together with Great Britain, have done more to advance the cause of liberty and freedom on the world stage than any other nations in history. From defeating the menace of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Empire, to liberating tens of millions of Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US and UK have consistently been at the forefront of the defence of the free world in the face of tyranny.

If President Obama does feel the urge to show contrition on the world stage in 2010, he should apologise not for his country but for his administration's shoddy treatment of its allies as well as political dissidents fighting for freedom across the world. He has also shown extraordinary indifference towards the victims of Communist rule in Europe, as well as the hundreds of thousands who perished in Darfur at the hands of the Sudanese regime. While every dictatorship on earth, from Iran to Venezuela to Sudan has been earmarked for engagement by the Obama White House, some of America's closest friends and supporters have been shunned, humiliated or left out in the cold.

So here is a list of apologies that Barack Obama should make on behalf of his own administration, for undermining America's traditional alliances, treating America's friends with contempt, and refusing to side with the victims of totalitarian regimes.

1. Apology to the British people

Barack Obama's treatment of America's closest ally has been little short of appalling. It started off badly when he threw [a bust of Churchill](#) out of the Oval Office within days of coming to power, and went downhill from there. He humiliated the British Prime Minister during his visit to Washington last March, treating him like the leader of a Third World country, and sent him packing with [a gift of 25 DVDs](#). Obama has little interest in the Special Relationship, and cannot even bring himself to acknowledge the sacrifice of British troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. As an exceedingly rude and ignorant senior State Department official [put it](#) - *"There's nothing special about Britain. You're just the same as the other 190 countries in the world. You shouldn't expect special treatment."*

2. Apology to allies in Eastern and Central Europe

The Obama administration's cowardly decision to appease Moscow by pulling out of an agreement to install missile interceptors and radars in Poland and the Czech Republic was an appalling betrayal of key US allies who had faced up to intense intimidation from Russia. As [I wrote at the time](#), *"the impending cancellation of Third Site is a shameful abandonment of America's friends in eastern and central Europe, and a slap in the face for those who actually believed a key agreement with Washington was worth the paper it was written on."*

3. Apology to Iranian Dissidents

Barack Obama's appeasement of the brutal Iranian regime in the name of "engagement" has not only emboldened Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Mullahs, but has also undercut the millions of Iranians who have bravely protested against the Islamist theocracy. President Obama has remained largely silent in the face of the brutal beating, rape, torture and murder of thousands of political dissidents since Ahmadinejad

was fraudulently re-elected last year. Obama's refusal to take a strong stand for fear of offending the Iranian regime is a disgrace, and a damning indictment of his world leadership.

4. Apology to the victims of Communism

Barack Obama made Berlin a central stage of his presidential election campaign when he addressed an adoring crowd of hundreds of thousands of Germans in July 2008. However in November 2009, President Obama [could not be bothered](#) to fly to Berlin to attend the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, when even the Russian president showed up. Hillary Clinton stood in for the commander-in-chief and delivered an underwhelming speech that was more about Obama than American leadership in the Cold War. The White House decision to snub the Berlin ceremony was an insult to the memory of the tens of millions who perished at the hands of Communism in Europe. It demonstrated a callous disregard for human suffering and a refusal to acknowledge the huge role played by Ronald Reagan and the American people in bringing down the Iron Curtain. It also displayed what can only be described as an arrogant disdain for the transatlantic alliance.

5. Apology to the victims of the Sudan genocide

The Obama administration's decision to engage with the brutal regime in Khartoum led by Omar Hassan al-Bashir, was both shocking and morally sickening. Obama's special envoy to Sudan, retired Air Force Major General [J. Scott Gration](#) summed up the new US strategy when [he ludicrously declared](#): *"We've got to think about giving out cookies. Kids, countries — they react to gold stars, smiley faces, handshakes, agreements, talk, engagement."* This sent an appalling signal to would be genocidal regimes across the world that even they can be rehabilitated after murdering hundreds of thousands of people. Although it has received relatively little attention, the White House's offer to lift sanctions against Sudan in exchange for "concrete steps in a new direction", was one of the worst decisions made by Barack Obama since he took office.

6. Apology to the people of Honduras

It is still difficult to fathom the reasoning behind the White House's incredible decision to side with Marxist despot Manuel Zelaya after he was removed by the Honduran Congress with the backing of the country's Supreme Court. The Obama administration immediately condemned the fully constitutional actions of pro-American legislators who acted against a power-hungry figure determined to stay in power beyond his fixed term of office. Bizarrely, the White House aligned itself with the likes of America-hating tyrants like Hugo Chavez, Fidel Castro and Daniel Ortega against pro-democracy forces who love the United States.

7. Apology to the Israeli people

Barack Obama has shown less enthusiasm for backing Israel, America's closest ally in the Middle East, than any president since Jimmy Carter. His [speech before a Muslim audience](#) in Cairo in June set the tone for his approach towards Israel when he controversially drew parallels between the plight of the Palestinians and the Jewish people during the Holocaust, and used the word "occupation" describing Palestinian refugee camps. Obama's weakness in the face of the Iranian nuclear threat has also caused widespread concern, and has significantly increased the likelihood that Israel will have to defend itself against Iran.

8. Apology to pro-democracy forces in Venezuela

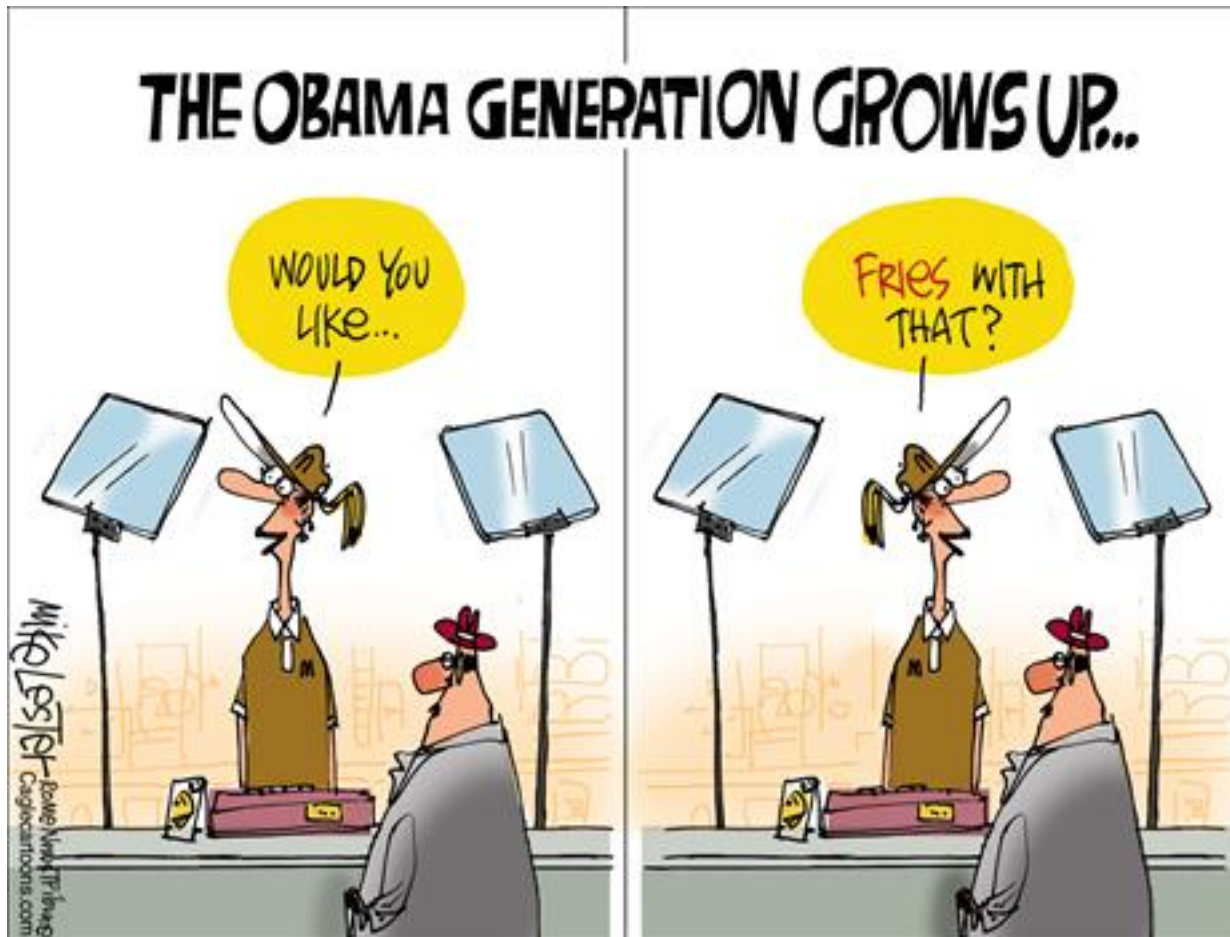
Barack Obama's handshake with Hugo Chavez at the Summit of the Americas last April set the tone for a new, more amicable US relationship with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's chief ally in Latin America. It was a move that hugely undercut the democracy movement in Venezuela, and the millions of Venezuelans who are clamouring for freedom. Washington's silence over widespread human rights violations by the Chavez regime is yet another blight on the Obama administration's reputation. The president's decision to reach out to Chavez was also a dangerously naive gesture that offered a veneer of legitimacy to one of the world's [biggest state sponsors of international terror](#), with close ties to Iran, Syria and Sudan.

9. Apology to the Dalai Lama

As *The Telegraph* [reported last October](#), Barack Obama was the first US president to refuse to meet the Dalai Lama since the Tibetan spiritual leader first started visiting Washington nearly 20 years ago. This, despite the fact that he had been welcomed to the United States [no less than 10 times](#), and had been awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest US civilian award. The White House decision was taken in order not to offend Beijing ahead of a November summit with Hu Jintao. There is now [speculation](#) Obama has changed his mind and will meet with the Dalai Lama later this month, despite strong Chinese opposition. A perfect opportunity then for an apology to one of the great symbols of freedom on the world stage.

10. Apology to Chinese dissidents

Freedom in China has been given short thrift by the Obama administration, which has attached less importance to human rights across the world than any American government in modern times. The position of the Obama team was put bluntly by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, when she was questioned about Chinese state oppression in [a press roundtable in South Korea](#) last February: *“but our pressing on those issues can’t interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate change crisis, and the security crisis. We have to have a dialogue that leads to an understanding and cooperation on each of these.”* Not exactly a message of US support for thousands of Chinese pro-democracy activists who regularly face imprisonment, beatings and torture.





THE ENGINE OF JOB CREATION IS BUSINESS...



AND GOVERNMENT CAN FUEL THAT ENGINE.

ERICALLIE
CALLECAERSONE
PUB210USDIAPER



LISW©2010 1-14 Dist by Wash. Post Writers Group

HEADLINE: PRESIDENT OBAMA REACHES OUT TO REPUBLICANS!

