

March 9, 2010

In the Weekly Standard, [Andrew Stuttaford](#) reviews the Greek fiscal crisis from Germany's point of view.

...Throwing Greece out of the eurozone might be emotionally satisfying (over half of German voters are in favor, though it probably isn't even legally possible), but inevitably the result, pushing the country into default, would achieve nothing constructive. What would make sense is for Germany and the other countries at the eurozone's core to abandon the currency. The euro would slump, giving the nations that still use it the devaluation they so badly need. But that's not going to happen either. The European elites have sunk too much political capital into the single currency to give it up now. They will plough forward regardless of the current crisis. If the logic of that course provides the rationale, or at least an excuse, for the even deeper EU integration that most European voters do not want, then so much the better.

But the opinions of the electorate no longer count for that much anywhere within the EU. With feelings running as they are in her country, Chancellor Angela Merkel has to be seen to be talking tough and doing everything she can to avoid Germany being stuck with the Greeks' bills. At one level she may mean it, but she knows it is just theater. Merkel will huff and Merkel will puff, but she will not risk bringing down what is left of Athens's ruins. If a rescue party has to be put together, Germany will be a prominent part of it.

To be fair, it's not all bad news for Germany. If Greece is indeed bailed out by some or all of its EU partners, the longer-term impact will be both to weaken the euro (which will help Germany's important export sector) and, by preserving the eurozone as it is, keep many of Germany's competitors within the eurozone most helpfully hobbled. The combination of higher levels of cost inflation, lower levels of efficiency, and a shared, hard currency has eroded much of the price advantage that was once the main selling point for the industries of Europe's less-advanced economies. It is estimated that the PIIGS would have to devalue by more than 30 percent to restore their competitive position against Germany, a situation that is only going to get worse. ...

In the Washington Examiner, [Michael Barone](#) contrasts Texas and California. Texas demonstrates how low taxes, fiscal conservatism, and less government produce a more robust economy.

...Texas is a different story. Texas has low taxes -- and no state income taxes -- and a much smaller government. Its legislature meets for only 90 days every two years, compared with California's year-round legislature. Its fiscal condition is sound. Public employee unions are weak or nonexistent.

But Texas seems to be delivering superior services. Its teachers are paid less than California's. But its test scores -- and with a demographically similar school population -- are higher. California's once fabled freeways are crumbling and crowded. Texas has built gleaming new highways in metro Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth.

In the meantime, Texas' economy has been booming. Unemployment rates have been below the national average for more than a decade, as companies small and large generate new jobs. ...

So how are the Dems doing on the health care vote in the House? [John Fund](#) posts on Pelosi's troubles.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's iron grip on the House of Representatives may be slipping. The latest whip count shows she has fewer than 200 hard votes to pass the Senate health care bill that President Obama is insisting on. She needs 216 votes.

Several episodes last week have combined to make Speaker Pelosi's job difficult. She was forced to back down from her support of embattled Rep. Charles Rangel as chairman of the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee when faced with threats by her own members that they would side with Republicans in a motion against Mr. Rangel. She next tried to install Rep. Pete Stark, a fellow Californian, as a Rangel replacement but was forced to retreat when Committee members revolted. Then she ended the week by claiming she had no knowledge of sexual harassment charges against now-resigned Rep. Eric Massa of New York, even though her deputies had known about them for a month. ...

We have a hat-trick of posts from [Jennifer Rubin](#). First she reviews the column of a distraught liberal who can't understand why Obama isn't succeeding.

...Frankly, Obama has a big picture. It's just the wrong one — a statist spend-a-thon that seeks to reorient the balance between private and public sectors, grow the scope of the federal government, and do it all without popular support. As for the governance problem, however, Hunt is right that neither Obama nor his flock of supposedly smart people are good at devising, negotiating, and selling policy. They are at heart pols who peaked during a cynical campaign in which they sold Obama to the public as something he was not (e.g. moderate, prepared, pro-Israel). But then it's nearly impossible to govern from the far Left of the political spectrum in a Center-Right country.

Now the Obami are trapped in a thicket of overstuffed legislation and beset upon by a public chagrined to find that Obama isn't what he was cracked up to be. So the infighting starts. The backstabbing goes public. The excuse-mongering revs up. All that, however, stems from a central difficulty: a erudite but inexperienced president with a surplus of hubris is trying to impose a radical vision on an unwilling populace. It's bound to fail. And so far, it is.

[Jennifer Rubin](#) also looks at a couple of Dems who haven't been persuaded yet to sacrifice their political careers.

"If the House and Senate can't work out cost containment, I don't see how I could support a bill that doesn't help our business community," Rep. John Adler (D., N.J.) said on "Fox News Sunday." "I'm not sure we've gone far enough in terms of fixing the underlying system to make it affordable for businesses and taxpayers."

Rep. Jason Altmire (D., Pa.), also appearing on Fox, said he needed "to see a much clearer picture of the cost containment." He suggested strengthening provisions in the bill aimed at shifting the way providers are reimbursed, to be based on quality of care rather than the number of procedures performed."

...So all that is left is to see if the congressional leaders can cajole their members into passing something that is neither substantively nor politically sound. Unfortunately, the bribery and strong-arming needed to do that only intensifies the public's disgust for the process and for the lawmakers who are pushing this on them. The longer this goes on, the less sense ObamaCare makes, especially to those who really have no reason to throw themselves over a cliff so that Obama-Reid-Pelosi can spare themselves humiliation. After all, the troika can come up with a face-saving, bare-bones deal, the lawmakers can tell the voters they did something, and they can get back to the Democratic members' real concern — trying to save themselves from the angry electorate.

[Jennifer Rubin](#) discusses how passing Obamacare doesn't end the pressure on politicians. *Explaining the road ahead on ObamaCare, Rich Lowry said on [Meet the Press](#):*

"So they, so they have to try to force it through just on sheer partisan muscle. They're going to come down with the full force of the party and, and the president on every single one of these members. And Nancy

Pelosi's going to channel Ataturk and his famous order of the battle of Gallipoli: "I don't order you to attack, I order you to die." And Democrats, they seem to think that if they pass this they're going to put it behind him. They'll really put it right back in front of them again. This will be a debate for years because this bill has serious legitimacy problems."

This strikes me as a key point. The only way to put this issue behind Democrats, get back to focusing on the economy, and defuse the electorate's anger is to vote this down. By passing it, the Democrats will invite perpetual challenges — a never-ending stream of measures to repeal it and a continuous campaign (beginning this year and extending to 2012 and beyond) to rip it out by the roots. ...

The question, then, isn't just whether proponents can jam ObamaCare through Congress with a legislative sleight of hand and on a narrow partisan basis. It is, rather, what would happen next: how the entire political landscape could potentially be upended. But in the case of ObamaCare, it's perhaps worse for its supporters than abortion or any other hot-button issue — after all, two-thirds of the public disapproves of what they're doing right now. And that's before the taxes and the Medicare cuts hit. ...

Robert Samuelson contrasts the millennial generation with previous generations.

Consider a study of the 50 million millennials 18 and over by the Pew Research Center. The report found some surprising and some not-so-surprising developments. ...

...In many ways, millennials merely extend existing social trends. Since the end of the draft in the early 1970s, military service has become increasingly rare. Just 2 percent of millennial men are veterans; at a similar age, 13 percent of boomers and 24 percent of older Americans were. Every younger generation shows more racial and sexual openness. Half of millennials favor gay marriage; among boomers and older Americans, support is a third and a quarter, respectively. Only 5 percent of millennials oppose interracial marriage, compared with 26 percent among those 65 and over.

What's also striking are the vast areas of continuity. Pew asked about having a successful marriage. More than four-fifths of all age groups rate it highly important. Homeownership? About three-quarters of all age groups say it's also highly important. The belief in God is widespread: 64 percent of millennials, 73 percent of those 30 and over. There's consensus on many values, even if ideals (stable marriages, for instance) are often violated. ...

...Millennials could become the chump generation. They could suffer for their elders' economic sins, particularly the failure to confront the predictable costs of baby boomers' retirement. This poses a question. In 2008, millennials voted 2-1 for Barack Obama; in surveys, they say they're more disposed than older Americans to big and activist government. Their ardor for Obama is already cooling. Will higher taxes dim their enthusiasm for government?

Roger Simon says it's time to see more non-left films.

The 2010 Academy Awards may not have marked the end of "liberal Hollywood" as we know it, but they certainly put a solid dent in it. With the pro-military "The Hurt Locker" winning over the enviro-pabulum of "Avatar" and Sandra Bullock garnering the Best Actress Oscar for a Christian movie, the times are a-changin' at least somewhat, maybe even a lot.

But one thing is now certain. It is time for conservative, center-right and libertarian filmmakers to stop feeling sorry for themselves and go out and just do it. Their "victocrat" days are over. No more excuses. "The Hurt Locker" and "The Blind Side" have proven that it can be done. ... If you want to make a film with themes you believe in, quit whining about Industry prejudice and start writing that script and trying to get it made. That's not an easy thing, no matter what your politics.

Right siders can take inspiration too from Sunday's Oscar ceremonies themselves. They weren't defamed for a moment. Missing in action was the usual libo-babble, no extended hymns to the cause du jour or ritual Bush-bashing. And Barack Obama wasn't even mentioned. Not once. But the troops were – several times by Kathryn Bigelow. ...

Nile Gardiner comments on the Hurt Locker win.

I'm glad [The Hurt Locker](#) triumphed over [Avatar](#) at tonight's [Oscars](#). Not only is Hurt Locker a far superior film – with standout performances, an intelligent and brilliantly executed script, as well as three dimensional lead characters – it is also a tremendously patriotic film which pays tribute to the courage of American troops serving in Iraq. For all these reasons I named it as one of [the top 10 conservative movies](#) of the last decade. The film won six awards, including Best Picture, Best Director (Kathryn Bigelow), and Best Original Screenplay.

I acknowledge that Hurt Locker [has attracted a good deal of controversy](#) and has divided opinion in the States over aspects of historical accuracy, and the debate will continue to rage. But I believe it thoroughly deserved its Oscar wins, and that the powerful message it projects about the US mission in Iraq and those who serve in the American armed forces, is an overwhelmingly positive one. ...

David Harsanyi asks, What's in a name?

...Is there no better way to let everyone know how special your über-gifted little one is than digging deep into Irish folklore, Apocryphal Gospel or Tolkien for a name? Is the humiliation of sending him to school with something as pedestrian as "Joe" too much to bear? ...

...My childhood acquaintances were a monotonous blend of Jeffreys and Lisas and Tonys — and even "Butch," who, unlike today's Finn or Adonia (kids who, let's face it, have no choice but to be creative writing majors or strippers) is undoubtedly, unlike myself, engaged in some manner of productive and masculine work. ...

...It's not like we need to fret too much about "following rules." Any individualism or free thinking is wrung from those little souls with ruthless urgency as public schools relentlessly instill the importance of "collective good" early and often. ...

Weekly Standard
Do Mention the War
by Andrew Stuttaford



Tolstoy was wrong. Every unhappy family is not unhappy in its own way. Scratch the surface of a foundering relationship, and you'll often find that money is, if not the sole source of the misery, undeniably the most poisonous. This is certainly true within the "ever closer" family that the European Union is meant to be. Some of the EU's most savage fights have been about cash, an awkward fact that can equally be read as underlining just how far from familial this most unnatural of unions really is. The different nations of the EU remain, emotionally at least, nations. They continue to be foreign to each other. And who wants to give their money to a bunch of foreigners?

So it shouldn't be any surprise that Germans are infuriated at the thought of having to stump up for a rescue of Greece's Augean state. Their own economy is faltering. They have held back labor costs for years. They have, often painfully, maintained budgetary discipline. That's not the way it's been in Greece. With Greek government debt at 125 percent of GDP, a budget deficit of 12.7 percent, and distinctly shaky public support for any sort of austerity program, there is little, beyond beaches, about that country to appeal to citizens of the thrifty Bundesrepublik. Opinion polls show that over two-thirds of Germans reject the idea of contributing to a Greek bailout, and the venom with which that opposition is expressed suggests that exasperation has drifted into contempt.

To give more money to the Greeks would be akin to giving schnapps to an alcoholic, argued Frank Schaeffler, deputy finance spokesman for the Free Democrats, the junior partner in Germany's governing coalition. *Focus* magazine ran a cover story on "The Fraudster in the Euro-Family" (a reference to the more creative aspects of the Greek government's accounting) and illustrated it with the Venus de Milo, one-armed and flipping the bird. The tabloid *Bild* raged at the "proud, cheating, profligate" Greeks. A writer for the rather more heavyweight *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* asked whether Germans should have to retire at 69 rather than 67 to pay for Greek workers striking against proposals to increase their retirement age from 61 to 63. The mood in Germany was not improved by Greece's deputy prime minister. Stung by all the criticism of his country, he grumbled that, having made off with Greece's gold during the war, the Germans were in no position to complain "about stealing and not being very specific about economic dealings."

Germany has long paid the largest share (currently around 20 percent) of the cost of Europe's trudge towards union. Its annual payments into the EU now exceed what it gets back by over \$10 billion. In part this has been viewed as a fair price for Germany's readmission into polite society. It was also an expression of the once widespread belief—deluded if understandable—among Germany's political class that an ersatz European patriotism could take the place of the German nationalism that had turned out so unfortunately just a few years before. Over six decades after Hitler perished in his bunker, however, these arguments are running a little thin.

Making matters worse is the debt (in all senses) that the Greek crisis owes to the establishment of the euro, the single currency for which German politicians ignored their voters and junked the deutsche mark in a two-stage process ending in January 2002. The deutsche mark had been one of the great successes of postwar Germany, a symbol of renewed prosperity and bulwark against any return of the hyperinflation that stalks that country's historical memory. But, to those that counted—i.e., not German voters—the European Union mattered more. The deutsche mark perished, and the economic and budgetary rules—the Maastricht Criteria—designed to preserve the integrity of its successor (and reassure the twitchy German electorate) have not been kept in much better shape.

The new currency proved both an enabler of Greece's profligacy and an agent of its economic troubles—a double whammy not confined to Greece. From the first, the euro's interest rates were primarily determined by economic conditions in the eurozone's core—Germany, the Benelux, and France—which meant that rates were too low for the nations on the periphery. One size did not fit all. The low interest rates fueled inflation, speculative bubbles, and, in some cases, excessive government borrowing in Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain, the four "PIGS" in the financial markets' insulting jargon. (You're welcome to throw in another I for Italy.) The usual response to disruptions of this nature is devaluation. Signing up for a single currency, however, has removed that option.

Despite German voters' hopes, this mess cannot safely be confined within the PIIGS' sties. Drastic austerity programs by the debt-struck might in theory do the trick—although the wisdom of this is debatable at a time of deeply depressed domestic demand—but to succeed they require a degree of consent. Consent, however, is not the message that all those Greek strikes are delivering. So far, Brussels appears to be resting its hopes on the idea that talk of austerity, promises of support, and the prospect of closer economic supervision will be enough to persuade markets to keep funding the PIIGS' budget deficits. Greece will for now be the sharpest test of that idea, but ultimately the country will not be allowed to fail. Even if it did not destroy confidence in the surviving PIIGS, a Greek collapse would, just as a start, trigger mark-to-market downgrades across the battered balance sheets of Europe's largest financial institutions. German banks, for instance, have loaned the equivalent of 20 percent of their country's GDP to the PIIGS, and their French counterparts even more.

Throwing Greece out of the eurozone might be emotionally satisfying (over half of German voters are in favor, though it probably isn't even legally possible), but inevitably the result, pushing the country into default, would achieve nothing constructive. What would make sense is for Germany and the other countries at the eurozone's core to abandon the currency. The euro would slump, giving the nations that still use it the devaluation they so badly need. But that's not going to happen either. The European elites have sunk too much political capital into the single currency to give it up now. They will plough forward regardless of the current crisis. If the logic of that course provides the rationale, or at least an excuse, for the even deeper EU integration that most European voters do not want, then so much the better.

But the opinions of the electorate no longer count for that much anywhere within the EU. With feelings running as they are in her country, Chancellor Angela Merkel has to be seen to be talking tough and doing everything she can to avoid Germany being stuck with the Greeks' bills. At one level she may mean it, but she knows it is just theater. Merkel will huff and Merkel will puff, but she will not risk bringing down what is left of Athens's ruins. If a rescue party has to be put together, Germany will be a prominent part of it.

To be fair, it's not all bad news for Germany. If Greece is indeed bailed out by some or all of its EU partners, the longer-term impact will be both to weaken the euro (which will help Germany's important export sector) and, by preserving the eurozone as it is, keep many of Germany's competitors *within* the eurozone most helpfully hobbled. The combination of higher levels of cost inflation, lower levels of efficiency, and a shared, hard currency has eroded much of the price advantage that was once the main selling point for the industries of Europe's less-advanced economies. It is estimated that the PIIGS would have to devalue by more than 30 percent to restore their competitive position against Germany, a situation that is only going to get worse.

Like so much to do with Brussels's strange imperium, this story is a lot less straightforward than it first appears.

Andrew Stuttaford, who writes frequently about cultural and political issues, works in the international financial markets.

Washington Examiner

[Low-tax Texas beats big-government California](#)

by Michael Barone

"Stop messing with Texas!" That was the message Gov. Rick Perry bellowed on election night as he celebrated his victory over Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison in the Republican primary for governor. In his reference to Texas' anti-littering slogan, Perry was making a point applicable to national as well as Texas politics and addressed to Democratic politicians as well as Republicans.

His point was that the big-government policies of the Obama administration and Democratic congressional leaders are resented and fiercely opposed not just because of their dire fiscal effects but also as an intrusion on voters' independence and ability to make decisions for themselves.

No one would include Perry on a list of serious presidential candidates, including himself, even in the flush of victory. But in his 10 years as governor, the longest in the state's history, Texas has been teaching some lessons to which the rest of the nation should pay heed.

They are lessons that are particularly vivid when you contrast Texas, the nation's second most populous state, with the most populous, California. Both were once Mexican territory, secured for the United States in the 1840s. Both have grown prodigiously over the past half-century. Both have populations that today are about one-third Hispanic.

But they differ vividly in public policy and in their economic progress -- or lack of it -- over the last decade. California has gone in for big government in a big way. Democrats hold big margins in the legislature largely because affluent voters in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area favor their liberal positions on cultural issues.

Those Democratic majorities have obediently done the bidding of public employee unions to the point that state government faces huge budget deficits. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's attempt to reduce the power of the Democratic-union combine with referenda was defeated in 2005 when public employee unions poured \$100 million -- all originally extracted from taxpayers -- into effective TV ads.

Californians have responded by leaving the state. From 2000 to 2009, the Census Bureau estimates, there has been a domestic outflow of 1,509,000 people from California -- almost as many as the number of immigrants coming in. Population growth has not been above the national average and, for the first time in history, it appears that California will gain no House seats or electoral votes from the reapportionment following the 2010 census.

Texas is a different story. Texas has low taxes -- and no state income taxes -- and a much smaller government. Its legislature meets for only 90 days every two years, compared with California's year-round legislature. Its fiscal condition is sound. Public employee unions are weak or nonexistent.

But Texas seems to be delivering superior services. Its teachers are paid less than California's. But its test scores -- and with a demographically similar school population -- are higher. California's once fabled freeways are crumbling and crowded. Texas has built gleaming new highways in metro Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth.

In the meantime, Texas' economy has been booming. Unemployment rates have been below the national average for more than a decade, as companies small and large generate new jobs.

And Americans have been voting for Texas with their feet. From 2000 to 2009, some 848,000 people moved from other parts of the United States to Texas, about the same number as moved in from abroad. That inflow has continued in 2008-09, in which 143,000 Americans moved into Texas, more than double the number in any other state, at the same time as 98,000 were moving out of California. Texas is on the way to gain four additional House seats and electoral votes in the 2010 reapportionment.

This was not always so. In the two decades after World War II California, with its pleasant weather, was the Golden State, a promised land, for most Americans, while Texas seemed a provincial rural backwater. Many saw postwar California's expansion of universities, freeways and water systems a model for the nation. Few experts praised Texas' low-tax, low-services government.

Now it is California's ruinously expensive and increasingly incompetent government that seems dysfunctional, while Texas' approach has generated more creativity and opportunity. So it's not surprising that Texas voters preferred Perry over an opponent who has spent 16 years in Washington. What's

surprising is that Democrats in Washington are still trying to impose policies like those that have ravaged California rather than those that have proved so successful in Texas.

John Fund

[Nancy Pelosi's California Gang](#)

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's iron grip on the House of Representatives may be slipping. The latest whip count shows she has fewer than 200 hard votes to pass the Senate health care bill that President Obama is insisting on. She needs 216 votes.

Several episodes last week have combined to make Speaker Pelosi's job difficult. She was forced to back down from her support of embattled Rep. Charles Rangel as chairman of the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee when faced with threats by her own members that they would side with Republicans in a motion against Mr. Rangel. She next tried to install Rep. Pete Stark, a fellow Californian, as a Rangel replacement but was forced to retreat when Committee members revolted. Then she ended the week by claiming she had no knowledge of sexual harassment charges against now-resigned Rep. Eric Massa of New York, even though her deputies had known about them for a month.

Ms. Pelosi's miscues have rattled the Democratic caucus and led to what Democratic staffers say is an "every man for himself attitude" among many of their bosses. Ms. Pelosi and her aides seem intent on passing health care with little consideration of the reelection challenges that Democratic members face back home. More and more Democratic backbenchers are coming to the conclusion that the Democratic leadership is not looking out for the interests of those who voted them into power.

"Across the caucus, there is growing dissatisfaction and resentment -- not so much directed at Pelosi --- but with her cadre of California liberals seen as continually driving her House agenda, regardless of the hits the rest of us will have to take," one House Democrat told National Journal. "She seems to only be listening to this small cadre, and the rank and file are expected to simply fall in line," complains another Democrat.

Speaker Pelosi swats away suggestions she is losing control of her members. "I feel very strong," she insisted to reporters. But the health care vote is an acid test for her. The Democratic caucus is filled with members who want a health care bill but are reluctant to follow their Speaker's lead. If she fails to get the votes, it may lead to a spreading concern that the House leadership can't govern. The last time that happened was in 2006, and Republicans soon lost their majority.

A similar crisis of governance in the House occurred in 1994, when Democrats failed to pass a crime bill on the floor despite an overwhelming majority. Republicans took control of the House that November. Democrats worry that this year's health care bill could become the equivalent of the crime-bill debacle. That's why they are working hard to round up health care votes, but so far with limited success.

Contentions

[The Obama Parlor Game: What's Wrong with Him?](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

[Al Hunt](#) is the latest participant in the "What the heck is wrong with this presidency?" parlor game. He reviews the bidding in the Rahm Emanuel vs. People Less Smart Than Rahm controversy. But that's beside the point, says Hunt:

Yet there is a larger self-created problem for which Emanuel and [David] Axelrod are only partly to blame. Go back to the remarkable Obama campaign of 2007-2008. More than any of its rivals, it had a strategic sense of what it was, where it wanted to go.

This provided a shield against setbacks: losing the New Hampshire primary, the candidate's careless remarks about rural Pennsylvania voters or even the incendiary remarks of Obama's pastor. These became speed bumps in the strategic narrative.

That is missing in the Obama presidency. Too often it seems situational rather than strategic, reactive more than proactive. Thus setbacks, from minor ones, such as the handling of the Christmas Day bomber, to major ones, like the loss of the Senate seat in Massachusetts, throw team Obama off stride, and leave voters confused.

Well, it's arguable whether the Christmas Day bombing was a "minor" setback or a sign of a systemic failure to understand our enemy and devise appropriate responses to wage a war against Islamic fundamentalists. But Hunt insists there's a "big picture" deficiency here. He sums up: "Most important, however, is whether the Obama administration can emulate the Obama campaign and fashion a coherent strategy for governing." Well, that seems to be closer to the nub of the problem.

Frankly, Obama *has* a big picture. It's just the wrong one — a statist spend-a-thon that seeks to reorient the balance between private and public sectors, grow the scope of the federal government, and do it all without popular support. As for the governance problem, however, Hunt is right that neither Obama nor his flock of supposedly smart people are good at devising, negotiating, and selling policy. They are at heart pols who peaked during a cynical campaign in which they sold Obama to the public as something he was not (e.g. moderate, prepared, pro-Israel). But then it's nearly impossible to govern from the far Left of the political spectrum in a Center-Right country.

Now the Obami are trapped in a thicket of overstuffed legislation and beset upon by a public chagrined to find that Obama isn't what he was cracked up to be. So the infighting starts. The backstabbing goes public. The excuse-mongering revs up. All that, however, stems from a central difficulty: a erudite but inexperienced president with a surplus of hubris is trying to impose a radical vision on an unwilling populace. It's bound to fail. And so far, it is.

Contentions

Doubtful Democrats

by Jennifer Rubin

The big moment, the game changer, never comes. That's been the story on health care for over a year. We had the September speech. We had the State of the Union. We had the health-care summit. Obama never garners the momentum from these events to change minds and votes. Indeed, the passage of time and the repetition of dubious talking points have unnerved Democrats whose votes are essential. [This report](#) explains:

On Sunday, two Democrats who hold swing votes said they were focusing on how much money the overhaul would actually save, both for employers and insured workers, and for the federal government. The House and Senate have passed competing bills, and leaders now are putting together a compromise version. Details on cost savings are still being worked out.

"If the House and Senate can't work out cost containment, I don't see how I could support a bill that doesn't help our business community," Rep. John Adler (D., N.J.) said on "Fox News Sunday." "I'm not sure we've gone far enough in terms of fixing the underlying system to make it affordable for businesses and taxpayers."

Rep. Jason Altmire (D., Pa.), also appearing on Fox, said he needed "to see a much clearer picture of the cost containment." He suggested strengthening provisions in the bill aimed at shifting the way providers are reimbursed, to be based on quality of care rather than the number of procedures performed. Critics say the

government's current fee-for-service reimbursement system within its Medicare program encourages providers to offer patients unnecessary procedures.

Why hasn't the president been able to win over these and the other needed House Democrats? Well, the nature of the bill simply cannot be disguised – it's a massive new entitlement, a huge tax increase, a whack at Medicare, and set of Rube Goldberg funding gimmicks designed to conceal the true cost. The lawmakers know it, and the public knows it.

So all that is left is to see if the congressional leaders can cajole their members into passing something that is neither substantively nor politically sound. Unfortunately, the bribery and strong-arming needed to do that only intensifies the public's disgust for the process and for the lawmakers who are pushing this on them. The longer this goes on, the less sense ObamaCare makes, especially to those who really have no reason to throw themselves over a cliff so that Obama-Reid-Pelosi can spare themselves humiliation. After all, the troika can come up with a face-saving, bare-bones deal, the lawmakers can tell the voters they did *something*, and they can get back to the Democratic members' real concern — trying to save themselves from the angry electorate.

Contentions

What Happens If It Passes?

by Jennifer Rubin

Explaining the road ahead on ObamaCare, Rich Lowry said on [Meet the Press](#):

So they, so they have to try to force it through just on sheer partisan muscle. They're going to come down with the full force of the party and, and the president on every single one of these members. And Nancy Pelosi's going to channel Ataturk and his famous order of the battle of Gallipoli: "I don't order you to attack, I order you to die." And Democrats, they seem to think that if they pass this they're going to put it behind him. They'll really put it right back in front of them again. This will be a debate for years because this bill has serious legitimacy problems.

This strikes me as a key point. The only way to put this issue behind Democrats, get back to focusing on the economy, and defuse the electorate's anger is to vote this down. By passing it, the Democrats will invite perpetual challenges — a never-ending stream of measures to repeal it and a continuous campaign (beginning this year and extending to 2012 and beyond) to rip it out by the roots. In a sense, it's like *Roe v. Wade* — a highly controversial action that was viewed as procedurally illegitimate by a large segment of the electorate and that energized an entire movement dedicated to its repeal.

The question, then, isn't just whether proponents can jam ObamaCare through Congress with a legislative sleight of hand and on a narrow partisan basis. It is, rather, what would happen next: how the entire political landscape could potentially be upended. But in the case of ObamaCare, it's perhaps worse for its supporters than abortion or any other hot-button issue — after all, two-thirds of the public disapproves of what they're doing right now. And that's before the taxes and the Medicare cuts hit.

On *This Week*, [Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell](#) made this point, vowing that ObamaCare would be the key issue this November:

Every election this fall will be a referendum on this bill. ... The benefits don't kick in for four years. ... Just looking at the politics of it there's nothing but pain here for the next four years. Why in the world would they conclude that would be popular?

Nancy Pelosi doesn't have the votes now to pass the bill. If she did, they'd have voted already. She may promise that a Senate reconciliation process will "fix" the Senate bill and she may reassure nervous House members that they will "move on" if they finally vote this through. But House members should be wary of

both promises. These lines seem to be the latest in a long list of sales pitches from the Democratic leadership, which is obviously willing to sacrifice as many members as needed to pass their "historic" bill.

Newsweek

The Real Generation Gap

by Robert Samuelson

WASHINGTON -- The "generation gap" endures as a staple of American political and social analysis. The notion that the special circumstances and experiences of each succeeding cohort imbue it with different perceptions, beliefs and values seems intuitively reasonable and appealing. It's also flattering. In a mass-market culture, belonging to a distinct subgroup, even if it numbers many millions, contributes to a sense of identity. In a 1969 Gallup poll, 74 percent of Americans believed in the generation gap. A poll last year found that 79 percent now do.

Between then and now, of course, generations have shifted. Then, it was baby boomers (those now 46-64) arrayed against the World War II and Depression generations. Now it's "millennials" (those 29 or younger) and Gen Xers (from 30 to 45) vying with boomers and older Americans. The precise generational boundaries are somewhat arbitrary, and other individual differences (income, religion, education, geography) usually count for more. Still, generational contrasts help plot change and continuity in America.

Consider a study of the 50 million millennials 18 and over by the Pew Research Center. The report found some surprising and some not-so-surprising developments. Surprising (to me): Almost two-fifths of millennials have tattoos, up from a third among Gen Xers and from a seventh (15 percent) among boomers. Not surprising: Millennials are the first truly digital generation. Three-quarters have created a profile on Facebook or some other social networking site. Only half of Gen Xers and 30 percent of boomers have done so. A fifth of millennials have posted videos of themselves online, far more than Gen Xers (6 percent) or boomers (2 percent).

In many ways, millennials merely extend existing social trends. Since the end of the draft in the early 1970s, military service has become increasingly rare. Just 2 percent of millennial men are veterans; at a similar age, 13 percent of boomers and 24 percent of older Americans were. Every younger generation shows more racial and sexual openness. Half of millennials favor gay marriage; among boomers and older Americans, support is a third and a quarter, respectively. Only 5 percent of millennials oppose interracial marriage, compared with 26 percent among those 65 and over.

What's also striking are the vast areas of continuity. Pew asked about having a successful marriage. More than four-fifths of all age groups rate it highly important. Homeownership? About three-quarters of all age groups say it's also highly important. The belief in God is widespread: 64 percent of millennials, 73 percent of those 30 and over. There's consensus on many values, even if ideals (stable marriages, for instance) are often violated.

Generation doesn't matter. There's a tendency to overdo the generalizations, minimize national culture and ignore individual differences. The 1960s' stereotype of most baby boomers -- to take an obvious example -- as pot-smoking, sex-obsessed, authority-challenging, anti-capitalist libertines was overdrawn. But for today's young, generational placement may matter a lot in one area: the economy.

The deep slump has hit millennials hard. According to Pew, almost two-fifths of 18- to 29-year-olds (37 percent) are unemployed or out of the labor force, "the highest share ... in more than three decades." Only 41 percent have a full-time job, down from 50 percent in 2006. Proportionately, more millennials have recently lost jobs (10 percent) than those over 30 (6 percent). About a third say they're receiving financial help from their families, and 13 percent of 22- to 29-year-olds have moved in with parents after living on their own.

The adverse effects could linger. An oft-quoted study by Yale University economist Lisa Kahn found that college graduates entering a labor market with high unemployment receive lower pay and that the pay penalty can last two decades. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Don Peck argues that many millennials, overindulged as children and harboring a sense of entitlement, are ill-prepared for a "harsh economic environment." They lack the persistence and imagination to cope well. That indictment may be unfair. My own experience is that millennial co-workers are diligent, disciplined and determined in the face of frustration.

Regardless, more bad news may lie ahead. As baby boomers retire, higher federal spending on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid may boost millennials' taxes and squeeze other government programs. It will be harder to start and raise families.

Millennials could become the chump generation. They could suffer for their elders' economic sins, particularly the failure to confront the predictable costs of baby boomers' retirement. This poses a question. In 2008, millennials voted 2-1 for Barack Obama; in surveys, they say they're more disposed than older Americans to big and activist government. Their ardor for Obama is already cooling. Will higher taxes dim their enthusiasm for government?

Roger L. Simon

Did the 2010 Academy Awards Mark the End of "Liberal Hollywood"?

The 2010 Academy Awards may not have marked the *end* of "liberal Hollywood" as we know it, but they certainly put a solid dent in it. With the pro-military "The Hurt Locker" winning over the enviro-pabulum of "Avatar" and Sandra Bullock garnering the Best Actress Oscar for a Christian movie, the times are a-changin' at least somewhat, maybe even a lot.

But one thing is now certain. It is time for conservative, center-right and libertarian filmmakers to stop feeling sorry for themselves and go out and just do it. Their "victocrat" days are over. No more excuses. "The Hurt Locker" and "The Blind Side" have proven that it can be done. Get out of the closet, guys and gals. If you want to make a film with themes you believe in, quit whining about Industry prejudice and start writing that script and trying to get it made. That's not an easy thing, no matter what your politics.

Right siders can take inspiration too from Sunday's Oscar ceremonies themselves. They weren't defamed for a moment. Missing in action was the usual libo-babble, no extended hymns to the *cause du jour* or ritual Bush-bashing. And Barack Obama wasn't even mentioned. Not once. But the troops were – several times by Kathryn Bigelow.

And, yes, we can all take pleasure in her being the first woman to win Best Director, again no matter which side of the political spectrum we come from. She did a Helluva job.

And, oh yes, I thought Steve Martin and Alec Baldwin did a reasonable job of hosting too – a lot better than the likes of Letterman, etc. They kept things moving along (except for the unbelievably tedious "salute to horror" and the traditionally soporific dance numbers). And didn't you like the look on Sean Penn's face when Bullock won for "The Blind Side"?



Mark Boal, Kathryn Bigelow and Greg Shapiro celebrate Hurt Locker's Oscars victory

I'm glad [The Hurt Locker](#) triumphed over [Avatar](#) at tonight's [Oscars](#). Not only is *Hurt Locker* a far superior film – with standout performances, an intelligent and brilliantly executed script, as well as three dimensional lead characters – it is also a tremendously patriotic film which pays tribute to the courage of American troops serving in Iraq. For all these reasons I named it as one of [the top 10 conservative movies](#) of the last decade. The film won six awards, including Best Picture, Best Director (Kathryn Bigelow), and Best Original Screenplay.

I acknowledge that *Hurt Locker* [has attracted a good deal of controversy](#) and has divided opinion in the States over aspects of historical accuracy, and the debate will continue to rage. But I believe it thoroughly deserved its Oscar wins, and that the powerful message it projects about the US mission in Iraq and those who serve in the American armed forces, is an overwhelmingly positive one.

Avatar is technically brilliant with the most sophisticated special effects ever committed to celluloid. Its director James Cameron has made some of the greatest sci-fi films in history and has been a visionary and ground-breaking figure in Hollywood for over 25 years. The film deservedly picked up awards for Visual Effects and Cinematography, but was not deserving of a Best Picture win.

The acting in *Avatar* was mediocre, the storyline simplistic, and frankly large stretches of the movie, while visually impressive, were rather dull. In terms of sheer cinematic excitement, *Avatar* is not in the same league as Cameron's earlier classics, *Terminator* and *Aliens*, and less engaging than *Titanic*.

But what I found most jarring about *Avatar* was its overtly anti-American and anti-military bias. As [I wrote](#) at the time of the film's release in December:

Avatar "is an intensely political vehicle with a distinct agenda. In fact I would describe it as one of the most left-wing films in the history of modern American cinema, and perhaps the most commercially successful political movie of our time. While the vast majority of cinemagoers will simply see it as popcorn entertainment, Avatar is at its heart a cynical and deeply unpatriotic propaganda piece, aimed squarely against American global power and the projection of US economic and military might across the world."

Cameron himself has confirmed that in his mind, *Avatar* is in part an allegory of both the war in Iraq as well as the wider War on Terror. In [an interview with The Times](#) he declared:

"We went down a path that cost several hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives. I don't think the American people even know why it was done. So it's all about opening your eyes."

"We know what it feels like to launch the missiles. We don't know what it feels like for them to land on our home soil, not in America. I think there's a moral responsibility to understand that."

Avatar cost up to \$400 million to produce and market. In contrast, *The Hurt Locker* had a budget of just \$11 million. *Avatar* is in essence a hugely expensive political statement against America's leadership of the world, and the US-led war in Iraq. *The Hurt Locker* is not an overtly political movie, but it pays tribute to the tremendous bravery and sacrifice of American troops fighting in Iraq, at a time when Hollywood has produced a slew of anti-war movies.

The Hurt Locker is a brave film that goes against the conventional wisdom in an overwhelmingly left-wing film-making community, and which struck a powerful chord with both critics and the American public. *The Hurt Locker* was the clear underdog in this year's Oscar contest, and its stunning win over a far larger adversary was a triumph for an independent movie that celebrates the heroism and dedication of American troops on the battlefield in the face of a brutal enemy.

Denver Post

Peculiar be thy name

by David Harsanyi

Perhaps no finer Christian name has ever been bestowed upon a child than the one Jermaine Jackson, of Jackson 5 fame, came up with for his son: Jermajesty.

We can forgive the famous for not being bound by the norms of civil behavior and branding their offspring Kyd or Suri or Trig or Satchel or Apple (or, apparently, any inanimate object that happens to be laying around), but what has happened to the rest of us?

Is there no better way to let everyone know how special your über-gifted little one is than digging deep into Irish folklore, Apocryphal Gospel or Tolkien for a name? Is the humiliation of sending him to school with something as pedestrian as "Joe" too much to bear?

Researchers at San Diego State University recently confirmed what any parent who has arranged a play date already knows well: Ordinary won't do anymore. The study found that in 1955, nearly one-third of boys received one of the 10 most popular names. By 2007, fewer than one in 10 received a "common name."

In other words, according to researchers, in the 1950s your average first-grade class would feature at least one boy with the top name (James) while by 2013, it will take six classes to find only one kid with the top name (Jacob).

My childhood acquaintances were a monotonous blend of Jeffreys and Lisas and Tonys — and even "Butch," who, unlike today's Finn or Adonia (kids who, let's face it, have no choice but to be creative writing majors or strippers) is undoubtedly, unlike myself, engaged in some manner of productive and masculine work.

Live Science reports that researchers believe this explosion of unusual baby names is a cultural shift that ignores the once-valued "fitting in" and embraces the frowned-upon idea of "standing out."

Once I heard it put that way, I was completely on board and primed to name my next kid Davinity.

"When taken too far," the piece warns, "this individualism could also lead to narcissism, according to researcher Jean Twenge of San Diego State University." Twenge seems to have a major hang-up about the imagined plague of individualism sweeping across the American landscape (as if parents in the '50s wanted their kids to toil on assembly lines in life-long anonymity).

She goes on to explain: "There's been this cultural shift toward focusing on the individual, toward standing out and being unique as opposed to fitting in with the group and following the rules."

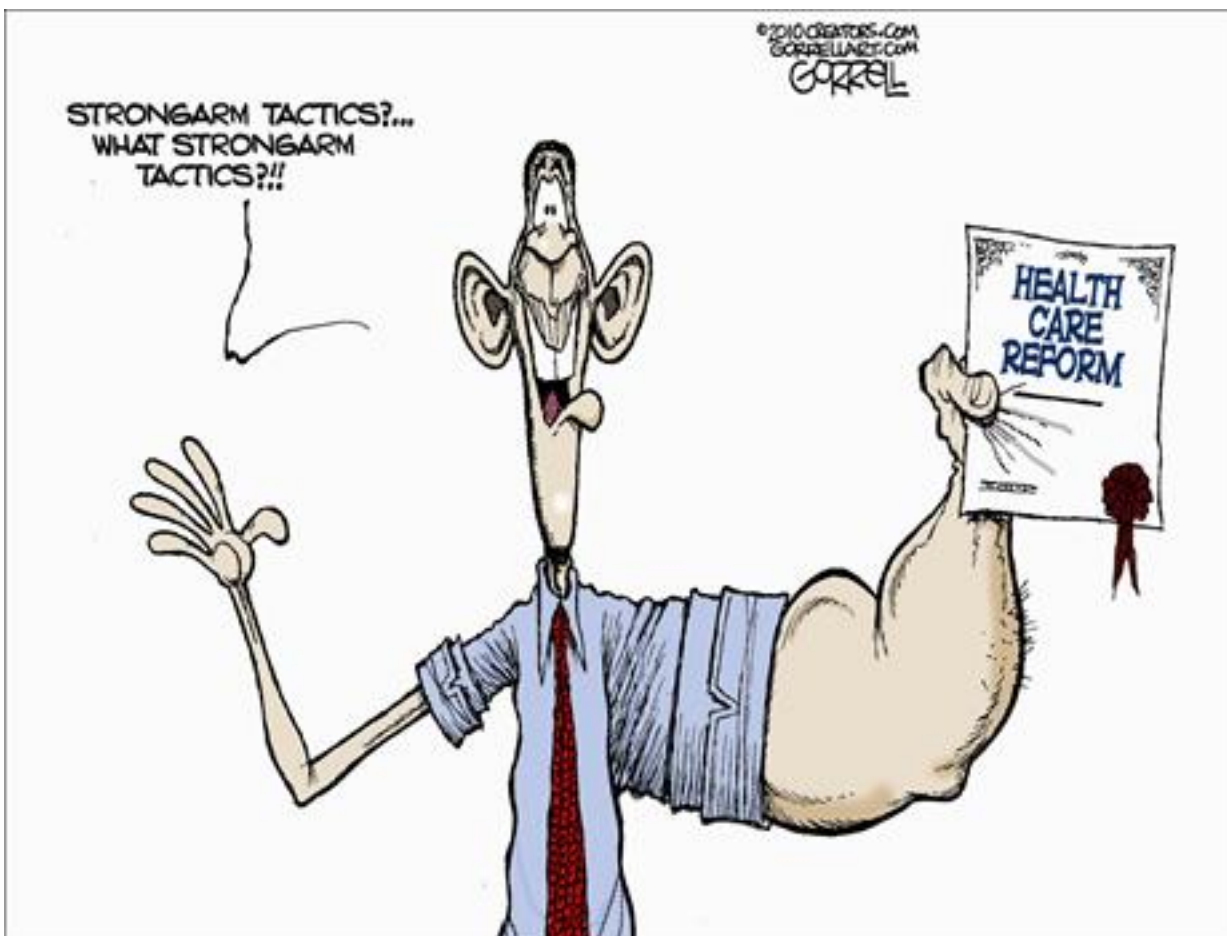
Though Twenge is a professor and I a mere writer with barely enough intellectual ability to use two mildly unique girl names I found lying around in biblical text for my daughters, I wonder what's wrong with standing out and being unique?

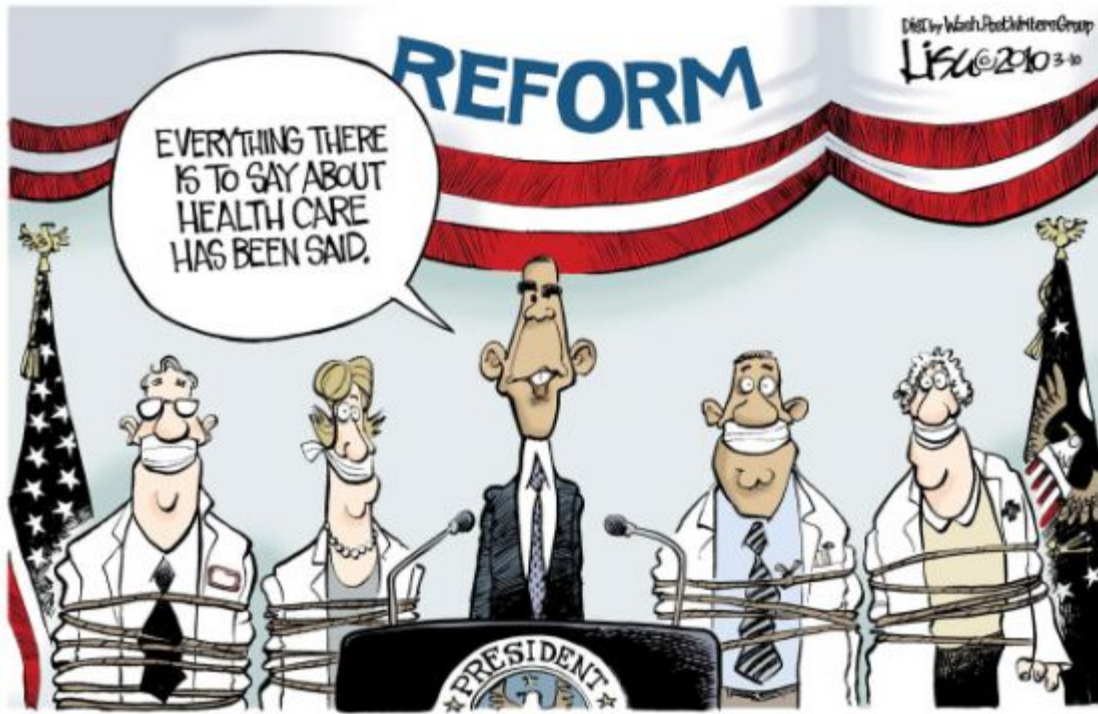
Why shouldn't parents desire their children to be distinctive? Why shouldn't children live with names that aren't common?

It's not like we need to fret too much about "following rules." Any individualism or free thinking is wrung from those little souls with ruthless urgency as public schools relentlessly instill the importance of "collective good" early and often.

Yes, one can lament some loss of cultural identity and continuity, because there are some conflicting messages being sent — say, Caleb Berkowitz or Jeremiah Yang. But diversity is our strength (and I have that on good authority, from numerous bumper stickers) and creative christening only adds richness to our society.

My hope is that we continue to name kids Jet, Juice Box or Whathaveyou. Then again, the process has become so atomized, in a few years you might start thinking about Mary or John. You know, if you're really going for something unique







www.dailycartoons.com/cartoons

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



"I just had to tell someone.
This was too good to blog."