

December 1, 2008

[John Fund](#) thinks Chambliss has a good chance tomorrow in Georgia.

[Ann Coulter](#) on the foolishness of Obama's Gitmo promises.

I thought the rest of the world was going to love us if we elected B. Hussein Obama! Somebody better tell the Indian Muslims. As everyone but President-elect B. Hussein Obama's base knows, many of the Guantanamo detainees cannot be sent to their home countries, cannot be released and cannot be tried. They need to be held in some form of extra-legal limbo the rest of their lives, sort of like Phil Spector.

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[Amity Shlaes](#) says Krugman's ideas will only make things worse.

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He's also arguing that some writers and economists have been misrepresenting the 1930s to make the effect of FDR's overall policy look worse than it was. I'm interested in part because Mr. Krugman has mentioned me by name. He recently said that I am the one "whose misleading statistics have been widely disseminated on the right."

Mr. Krugman is a new Nobel Laureate, teaches at Princeton University and writes a column for a nationally prominent newspaper. So what he says is believed to be objective by many people, even when it isn't. But the larger reason we should care about the 1930s employment record is that the cure Roosevelt offered, the New Deal, is on everyone else's mind as well. In a recent "60 Minutes" interview, President-elect Barack Obama said, "keep in mind that 1932, 1933, the unemployment rate was 25%, inching up to 30%."

The New Deal is Mr. Obama's context for the giant infrastructure plan his new team is developing. If he proposes FDR-style recovery programs, then it is useful to establish whether those original programs actually brought recovery. The answer is, they didn't. New Deal spending provided jobs but did not get the country back to where it was before. ...

And [Reason Magazine](#) tells what big spending states can learn from Texas and Florida.

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\$550 million in aggregate during Bush's term (1999-2007). When many other states were raising taxes, Bush's privatization initiatives helped Florida to shed almost \$20 billion in taxes and over 3,700 positions in the state workforce.

And at the urban level, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, a Democrat, has been [on a privatization tear](#) in recent years. Under his watch he's privatized over 40 services and activities, saving taxpayers millions. Since 2005, Daley has initiated long-term lease agreements with the private sector for the Chicago Skyway toll road, Midway Airport, four major downtown parking garages, and the city's parking meter system downtown. Chicago netted over \$5 billion in the process to pay down city debt, establish a \$500 million rainy day fund, and shore up public pensions. ...

Ruben Navarete says [Richardson](#) was dissed.

... It's humiliating to be second choice for secretary of state. But it is even more humiliating to be second choice for secretary of commerce.

This isn't about Richardson, who might be very happy heading for ribbon cuttings in Toledo while Clinton heads for blue-ribbon summits in Tel Aviv. This is about something larger. Richardson is the nation's only Hispanic governor and the most prominent Hispanic elected official in the country. And the way he was treated doesn't say much about Obama's respect for the Hispanic community. Nor does the fact that Obama seems to have filled his top four Cabinet posts -- justice, treasury, defense, and state -- and couldn't find a single Hispanic to put in any of them.

America's largest minority took a chance on Obama despite the fact that the president-elect had no track record in reaching out to them and didn't break a sweat trying to win their votes. They deserve better.

[Cynthia Tucker](#) of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution had nice things to say about W. Of course, she slapped him around first.

... The president-elect's popularity stands in stark contrast to that of the man he is replacing. President Bush's approval rating is stalled in the low 20s — and deservedly so. But Bush did at least one thing right in an eight-year tenure characterized by incompetence and hyper-partisanship: He appointed black Americans to the post of secretary of state, the highest position of authority blacks had held before Obama's election.

Many pundits have already noted that Bush's failures helped to create a climate in which Obama could win. So did Bush's singular achievement — the elevation of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. It ought to be noted that it was a Republican, not a Democrat, who broke the barrier that had limited black appointees to the usual Cabinet positions dealing with housing and health.

Whatever their political failures, Powell and Rice are both bright, hardworking and honorable individuals. Their presence on the national stage, in positions that had nothing to do with affirmative action or "urban affairs," helped white Americans get used to seeing black Americans in positions of great prestige. ...

[WSJ reports](#) on W's pardon proclivities.

A decade ago, Leslie Collier, a 50-year-old corn and soybean farmer in Charleston, Mo., pleaded guilty to poisoning bald eagles. He says the worst thing about his criminal record was that it meant he was barred by law from owning a gun.

So, after George W. Bush, a strong defender of the Second Amendment, took office, Mr. Collier wrote to the president seeking a pardon, saying he wanted to go hunting with his kids. He explained that he accidentally killed the eagles while trying to poison coyotes that were attacking wild turkeys and deer on property he farms.

On the surface, the list of the 14 people pardoned by the president this week shows few common denominators in terms of time served, geographic location or even type of crime, except that the felonies were non-violent. But a closer look at some of the newly pardoned shows many of them are church-going, blue-collar workers from rural areas (and ardent Bush supporters) who had little trouble finding jobs after their convictions. There is another common thread: the important role firearms once played in their lives.

President Bush has pardoned fewer people -- 171 -- than any president since World War II, with the exception of his father, who pardoned 74. ...

John Fund

The Devil Went Down to Georgia (But Obama Won't)

Barack Obama has recorded a radio ad and some robocalls aimed at helping to turn out Democratic voters in tomorrow's Senate runoff in Georgia. Significantly, however, the president-elect has not responded to appeals by Democratic candidate Jim Martin to visit the state. That may be a sign that incumbent GOP Senator Saxby Chambliss is believed even by Democrats to have a sizeable edge in tomorrow's vote.

Mr. Obama has apparently decided to avoid too high a profile in the race. He may recall that a similar runoff in Georgia after the 1992 presidential election helped tarnish another Democratic president-elect in the weeks just after his victory.

In 1992, Democratic incumbent Wyche Fowler failed to clear the obligatory 50% mark in his race against GOP challenger Paul Coverdell, requiring a two-candidate runoff. Democrats put on a full-court press to save the seat. Both Mr. Clinton and his vice presidential running mate Al Gore flew into Georgia on the day before the vote to whip up support. "Bill Clinton and I need Wyche Fowler in the Senate to break the deadlock in the House and Senate and bring about the change that Bill Clinton and I represent," Mr. Gore told a rally before the election. Voters apparently weren't so sure. They elected Mr. Coverdell in an upset.

Republicans clearly scent the chance today to show they remain politically relevant. The GOP has dispatched its "A" team to the Peach State. Rudy Giuliani has campaigned for Mr. Chambliss, as has John McCain. Even Governor Sarah Palin is making the long trek from Alaska today to campaign for the Republican incumbent. The signs are good for Mr. Chambliss. In last month's presidential race, African-Americans made up 35% of early voters who cast ballots in Georgia before Election Day. In the runoff election so far, African-Americans, a strong base of support for Mr. Martin, account for only 23% of the early voting pool.

The Georgia race is being closely watched because Democrats now have 58 seats in the Senate and still hope to reach a filibuster-proof majority of 60 once a recount in the disputed Minnesota Senate race is completed. But a GOP victory in Georgia would abruptly end these supermajority hopes and supply a big psychological boost to a GOP that hasn't had much of any good news lately.

Human Events

Terrorists' Restless Leg Syndrome

by Ann Coulter

I thought the rest of the world was going to love us if we elected B. Hussein Obama! Somebody better tell the Indian Muslims. As everyone but President-elect B. Hussein Obama's base knows, many of the Guantanamo detainees cannot be sent to their home countries, cannot be released and cannot be tried. They need to be held in some form of extra-legal limbo the rest of their lives, sort of like Phil Spector.

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Far from being sodomized and tortured by U.S. forces -- as Obama's base has wailed for the past seven years -- the innocent scholars and philanthropists being held at Guantanamo have been given expensive, high-tech medical procedures at taxpayer expense. If we're not careful, multitudes of Muslims will be going to fight Americans in Afghanistan just so they can go to Guantanamo and get proper treatment for attention deficit disorder and erectile dysfunction.

After being captured fighting with Taliban forces against Americans in 2001, Abdullah Massoud was sent to Guantanamo, where the one-legged terrorist was fitted with a special prosthetic leg, at a cost of \$50,000-\$75,000 to the U.S. taxpayer. Under the Americans With Disabilities Act, Massoud would now be able to park his car bomb in a handicapped parking space!

No, you didn't read that wrong, because the VA won't pay for your new glasses. I said \$75,000. I would have gone with hanging at sunrise, but what do I know?

Upon his release in March 2004, Massoud hippity-hopped back to Afghanistan and quickly resumed his war against the U.S. Aided by his new artificial leg, just months later, in October 2004, Massoud masterminded the kidnapping of two Chinese engineers in Pakistan working on the Gomal Zam Dam project.

This proved, to me at least, that people with disabilities can do anything they put their minds to. Way to go, you plucky extremist!

Massoud said he had nothing against the Chinese but wanted to embarrass Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf for cooperating with the Americans. You know, the Americans who had just footed -- you should pardon the expression -- a \$75,000 bill for his prosthetic leg.

Pakistani forces stormed Massoud's hideout, killing all the kidnapers, including Massoud. Only one of the Chinese engineers was rescued alive.

As a result of the kidnapping, the Chinese pulled all 100 engineers and dam workers out of Pakistan, and work on the dam ceased. This was bad news for the people of Pakistan -- but good news for the endangered Pakistani snail darter!

In none of the news accounts I read of Massoud's return to jihad after his release from Guantanamo is there any mention of the fact that his prosthetic leg was acquired in Guantanamo, courtesy of American taxpayers after he was captured trying to kill Americans on the battlefield in Afghanistan.

News about the prosthetic leg might interfere with stories of the innocent aid workers being held captive at Guantanamo in George Bush's AmeriKKKa.

To the contrary, although Massoud's swashbuckling reputation as a jihadist with a prosthetic leg appears in many news items, where he got that leg is almost purposely hidden -- even lied about.

"Abdullah Massoud ... had earned both sympathy and reverence for his time in Guantanamo Bay. ... Upon his release, he made it home to Waziristan and resumed his war against the U.S. With his long hair, his prosthetic limb and impassioned speeches, he quickly became a charismatic inspiration to Waziristan's youth." -- The New York Times

He's not a one-legged terrorist -- he's a freedom fighter living with a disability. I think we could all learn

something about courage from this man.

"He lost his leg in a landmine explosion a few days before the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in September 1996. It didn't dampen his enthusiasm as a fighter and *he got himself an artificial leg later, says Yusufzai.*" -- The Indo-Asian News Service

Where? At COSTCO?

"The 29-year-old Massoud, who lost his left leg in a landmine explosion while fighting alongside the Taliban, often used to ride a horse or camel because his disability made it painful for him to walk long distances in hilly areas." -- BBC Monitoring South Asia

Side-saddle, I'm guessing. And you just know those caves along the Afghan-Pakistan border aren't wheelchair accessible.

"He was educated in Peshawar and was treated in Karachi after his left leg was blown up in a landmine explosion in the Wreshmin Tangi gorge near Kabul in September 1996. He now walks with an artificial leg specifically made for him in Karachi." -- Gulf News (United Arab Emirates)

Karachi? Hey, how do I get into this guy's HMO?

They can't lick leprosy in Karachi, but the Gulf News tells us Massoud got his artificial leg at one of their specialty hospitals.

Anyone who thinks the Guantanamo detainees can be released without consequence doesn't have a leg to stand on.

WSJ

The Krugman Recipe for Depression

Massive government spending is no solution to unemployment.

by Amity Shlaes

Paul Krugman of the New York Times has been on the attack lately in regard to the New Deal. His new book "The Return of Depression Economics," emphasizes the importance of New Deal-style spending. He has said the trouble with the New Deal was that it didn't spend enough.

He's also arguing that some writers and economists have been misrepresenting the 1930s to make the effect of FDR's overall policy look worse than it was. I'm interested in part because Mr. Krugman has mentioned me by name. He recently said that I am the one "whose misleading statistics have been widely disseminated on the right."

Mr. Krugman is a new Nobel Laureate, teaches at Princeton University and writes a column for a nationally prominent newspaper. So what he says is believed to be objective by many people, even when it isn't. But the larger reason we should care about the 1930s employment record is that the cure Roosevelt offered, the New Deal, is on everyone else's mind as well. In a recent "60 Minutes" interview, President-elect Barack Obama said, "keep in mind that 1932, 1933, the unemployment rate was 25%, inching up to 30%."

The New Deal is Mr. Obama's context for the giant infrastructure plan his new team is developing. If he proposes FDR-style recovery programs, then it is useful to establish whether those original programs actually brought recovery. The answer is, they didn't. New Deal spending provided jobs but did not get the country back to where it was before.

This reality shows most clearly in the data -- everyone's data. During the Depression the federal government did not survey unemployment routinely as it does today. But a young economist named Stanley Lebergott helped the Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington compile systematic unemployment data for that key period. He counted up what he called "regular work" such as a job as a school teacher or a job in the private sector. He intentionally did not include temporary jobs in emergency programs -- because to count a short-term, make-work project as a real job was to mask the anxiety of one who really didn't have regular work with long-term prospects.

The result is what we today call the Lebergott/Bureau of Labor Statistics series. They show one man in four was unemployed when Roosevelt took office. They show joblessness overall always above the 14% line from 1931 to 1940. Six years into the New Deal and its programs to create jobs or help organized labor, two in 10 men were unemployed. Mr. Lebergott went on to become one of America's premier economic historians at Wesleyan University. His data are what I cite. So do others, including our president-elect in the "60 Minutes" interview.

Later, Lee Ohanian of UCLA studied New Deal unemployment by the number of hours worked. His picture was similar to Mr. Lebergott's. Even late in 1939, total hours worked by the adult population was down by a fifth from the 1929 level. To be sure, Michael Darby of UCLA has argued that make-work jobs *should* be counted. Even so, his chart shows that from 1931 to 1940, New Deal joblessness ranges as high as 16% (1934) but never gets below 9%. Nine percent or above is hardly a jobless target to which the Obama administration would aspire.

What kept the picture so dark so long? Deflation for one, but also the notion that government could engineer economic recovery by favoring the public sector at the expense of the private sector. New Dealers raised taxes again and again to fund spending. The New Dealers also insisted on higher wages when businesses could ill afford them. Roosevelt, for example, signed into law first his National Recovery Administration, whose codes forced businesses to pay an above-market minimum wage, and then the Wagner Act, which gave union workers more power.

As a result of such policy, pay for workers in the later 1930s was well above trend. Mr. Ohanian's research documents this. High wages hurt corporate profits and therefore hiring. The unemployed stayed unemployed. "If you had a job you were all right" -- the phrase we all heard as children about the Depression -- really does capture the period.

Why does all this matter today? Because lawmakers are considering new labor legislation containing "card check," which would strengthen organized labor and so its wage demands. Because employees continue to pressure firms to spend on health care, without considering they may be making the company unable to hire an unemployed friend. Piling on public-sector jobs or raising wages may take away jobs in the private sector, directly or indirectly.

What the new administration decides about marginal tax rates also matters. Mr. Obama said in a Thanksgiving talk that he wanted to "create or save 2.5 million new jobs." People who talk about saving new jobs are usually talking about the private-sector's capacity to generate jobs in the future -- not about the public sector alone. We know that the new administration is going to spend. But how? It can try to figure out a way to do that without hurting the private sector. Or it can just spend, Krugman-wise, and risk repeating the very depression we seek to avoid.

Ms. Shlaes is senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of "The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression" (HarperPerennial, 2008).

Reason

Lone Star Lessons

What Texas and Florida can teach big spending states

by Leonard Gilroy

One of the most profound spillover effects of the current economic crisis is that it has also exposed a festering fiscal health crisis in state and local government. "Drunken sailor" spending in recent years and declining property values (and thus reduced property tax revenues) have combined to produce massive state and city budget shortfalls.

A [recent study](#) by the Center for Budget & Policy Priorities found that at least 41 states have recently faced, or are facing, budget deficits. Today 13 states are staring at budget shortfalls in excess of \$1 billion in fiscal year 2009, with California (\$31 billion) and New York (\$6.4 billion) leading the pack. [Moody's recently reported](#) that 30 states are in recession, and 19 more are at risk.

At the local level, New York City is facing a \$2.3 billion shortfall, and its transit agency, the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority, is \$1 billion in the hole (both figures are larger than some state deficits).

How governments find themselves in this position is obvious: They're addicted to spending taxpayer dollars. Kudos to New York Gov. David Paterson for a refreshing bit of political honesty, [telling The Wall Street Journal](#) last week that, "What's actually more embarrassing than the fact that we have such a huge deficit now, when bonuses are down and capital gains are down, is the fact that when there was...wealth, we overspent."

This hasn't stopped the big spenders from seeking a federal bailout. In September, we saw California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger fire the first shot across the bow, hinting at possibly needing [\\$7 billion in federal assistance](#) to keep the state's doors open. The Governor has [increased state spending by over 40 percent](#) since he made his failed promise to [blow up the boxes](#) of state government.

Several weeks ago we saw a [parade of governors and mayors](#) on Capitol Hill asking for a bailout of state and local government. On that occasion, South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford was the voice of fiscal sanity, offering a cautionary warning that "[t]his \$150 billion may in fact further infect our economy with unnecessary government influence and unintended fiscal consequences."

Most recently, the mayors of three big cities—Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Phoenix—[sent a letter to Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson](#) asking the feds to use a portion of the \$700 billion bailout to assist struggling cities.

States are looking to the feds for help because the two usual go-to sources of funding for state and local governments—taxes and bonds—are going to be severely constrained in the coming years. The political will to raise state and local taxes is almost non-existent. And the tough credit market means states—especially those with big deficits—are going to have a hard time borrowing, prompting some analysts to believe we've seen [the end of an era of relatively cheap money](#) and easy borrowing for governments.

So what's a state to do to climb out of the fiscal hole they've dug themselves into? It's simple: Spend within your means and partner with the private sector more often to deliver more services.

Texas is currently the envy of the nation with an \$11 billion budget *surplus*. How did the state do it? For starters, the Texas Constitution gives the state Comptroller of Public Accounts (a chief fiscal officer, of sorts) the responsibility to certify the state's budget and send back any spending bills that the state can't afford. It's an elected position and the current comptroller, Susan Combs, launched a ["Where the Money Goes"](#) website to boost transparency and show taxpayers where their money is going. Having a third-party enforce prudent fiscal forecasting and spending helps to avoid the situation so many states now face—governors and legislators gravitate to the rosier of revenue projections to help justify new spending, and then when the mythical money doesn't materialize, the state faces a budget "crisis."

Texas also engages in performance-based budgeting—tying a given programs' funding to its effectiveness at meeting clear performance targets. A Sunset Advisory Commission conducts mandatory periodic reviews of all state agencies to find duplicative or unnecessary programs that must be cut. Since the Sunset Commission was created in 1977, over 47 governmental agencies have been eliminated and another 11 have been consolidated.

Similarly, Washington state and South Carolina apply a performance budgeting model in which state activities are ranked in order of priority and effectiveness. The administration then "purchases" (funds) the activities from the top of the list down until all available revenues have been used up, ditching the lowest priority activities and eliminating poor-performing, unnecessary, or wasteful ones.

Policymakers also seem to be increasingly recognizing that [privatization and competitive service delivery](#) are proven tools for doing more with less. Competitive sourcing allows the private sector to compete for jobs and contracts that are currently performed by the government. Federal employees actually won 83 percent of the job competitions from fiscal year 2003 through fiscal year 2007. But the competition still helps save a lot of money. Taxpayers [saved \\$25,000 for every job](#) that was put up for competition because even when the government kept the job it significantly improved efficiency and reduced costs.

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And at the urban level, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, a Democrat, has been [on a privatization tear](#) in recent years. Under his watch he's privatized over 40 services and activities, saving taxpayers millions. Since 2005, Daley has initiated long-term lease agreements with the private sector for the Chicago Skyway toll road, Midway Airport, four major downtown parking garages, and the city's parking meter system downtown. Chicago netted over \$5 billion in the process to pay down city debt, establish a \$500 million rainy day fund, and shore up public pensions.

There are ways for cities and states to dig out of this fiscal mess. Making taxpayers pay for a federal handout won't solve a problem rooted in a state government's addiction to spending. As state and local governments begin to reckon with the magnitude of their fiscal crunch, privatization and more prudent fiscal stewardship will be the key to "right-sizing" government and avoiding future binge spending when economic conditions do improve.

Leonard Gilroy is the director of government reform at [The Reason Foundation](#).

San Diego Union-Tribune via Real Clear Politics

[The Richardson Snub](#)

by Ruben Navarrette

SAN DIEGO -- Check out this gold-plated resume: Seven-term member of Congress; special envoy to North Korea, Iraq, Cuba and Sudan; U.N. ambassador; energy secretary; governor; and five-time nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize.

You would think such an overachiever would be a shoe-in for secretary of state in the Barack Obama administration, especially if that person was also a member of a highly sought-after ethnic group that gave two-thirds of its votes to Obama and helped him win four battleground states. And what if that person also happened to be a former presidential candidate who had stuck his neck out to endorse Obama over Hillary Clinton and wound up persona non grata among Team Clinton and even likened to "Judas" by ever-loyal Clintonista James Carville?

Finally, what if that person had the backing of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, an association of 26 national and regional Hispanic civil rights and public policy organizations. The NHLA recently sent a letter to President-elect Obama recommending New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson as secretary of state. John Trasvina, the group's chairman who also serves as president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, wrote: "No one is more qualified to serve as our country's chief diplomat than Gov. Bill Richardson." Board member Janet Murguia, the president and CEO of the National Council of La Raza, added this about Richardson: "His appointment would send a powerful message to Latinos throughout our country as well as to our neighbors in this hemisphere."

Now I wonder what message it sends that President-elect Obama has apparently passed over Richardson and seems ready to offer the post at state to their former rival, Hillary Clinton. While known the world over from her days as first lady, Clinton doesn't have anywhere near Richardson's level of experience in foreign affairs. Besides, she treated Obama reprehensibly during the primary. Does anyone really think that if Hillary had been elected president that she would be vetting Barack Obama for secretary of state?

After the snub, Richardson turned the other cheek and got slapped again. He is reportedly about to be offered, as a parting gift, a job -- secretary of commerce -- that someone else turned down. That someone else was Penny Pritzker, the president-elect's chief fundraiser who reportedly was Obama's choice for the post. A billionaire heir to the Hyatt hotel fortune, Pritzker withdrew her name from consideration.

What a mess. Supporters of both Obama and Richardson, along with a willing media, are spinning like mad and trying to clean it up. They're desperate to convince anyone who will listen that no one was slighted and that everything worked out as planned. It's all rainbows and puppy dogs.

Sadly, that includes those Latinos "leaders" -- using the term tentatively -- who, just weeks ago, were pressuring Obama to give Richardson an entirely different job.

When I called Trasvina to ask what he thought of recent events, the former Clinton Justice Department official served his disappointment sunny side up.

"Sure, I'm disappointed," Trasvina said. "A lot of people are disappointed. But is Richardson a good fit for the Commerce Department? The answer is yes. And is this a good fit for the community? The answer is yes."

And do you suppose Latino leaders are going easier on a Democrat who ignored them than they would a Republican who did the same. The answer is yes.

Don't fall for the spin. It's humiliating to be second choice for secretary of state. But it is even more humiliating to be second choice for secretary of commerce.

This isn't about Richardson, who might be very happy heading for ribbon cuttings in Toledo while Clinton heads for blue-ribbon summits in Tel Aviv. This is about something larger. Richardson is the nation's only Hispanic governor and the most prominent Hispanic elected official in the country. And the way he was treated doesn't say much about Obama's respect for the Hispanic community. Nor does the fact that Obama seems to have filled his top four Cabinet posts -- justice, treasury, defense, and state -- and couldn't find a single Hispanic to put in any of them.

America's largest minority took a chance on Obama despite the fact that the president-elect had no track record in reaching out to them and didn't break a sweat trying to win their votes. They deserve better.

Even though Barack Obama received less than 53 percent of the popular vote, his favorable rating stands at 67 percent. It appears that many conservatives who didn't support him are nevertheless enthusiastic about his presidency and optimistic about his tenure.

How could it be otherwise? Americans were hungry for change, as was the rest of the planet. Obama's victory has generated excitement around the world — among Muslims, Christians and Buddhists, Scandinavians and South Africans, democrats and autocrats — and helped to restore the moral authority of the U.S. As *The Economist* put it recently, "All of Europe is on the hunt for a European Barack Obama."

The president-elect's popularity stands in stark contrast to that of the man he is replacing. President Bush's approval rating is stalled in the low 20s — and deservedly so. But Bush did at least one thing right in an eight-year tenure characterized by incompetence and hyper-partisanship: He appointed black Americans to the post of secretary of state, the highest position of authority blacks had held before Obama's election.

Many pundits have already noted that Bush's failures helped to create a climate in which Obama could win. So did Bush's singular achievement — the elevation of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. It ought to be noted that it was a Republican, not a Democrat, who broke the barrier that had limited black appointees to the usual Cabinet positions dealing with housing and health.

Whatever their political failures, Powell and Rice are both bright, hardworking and honorable individuals. Their presence on the national stage, in positions that had nothing to do with affirmative action or "urban affairs," helped white Americans get used to seeing black Americans in positions of great prestige.

A cottage industry is already budding of journalists, historians and social scientists attempting to explain the remarkable cultural changes that allowed election of the first black president a mere 44 years after passage of the Voting Rights Act. Books will be written, seminars held and tenure granted around that one subject.

Social scientists would no doubt point to popular culture as one catalyst for this amazing transformation. Hollywood is a social arbiter, influencing cultural standards as it chooses characters for movies and TV shows. Bill Cosby and "The Cosby Show" gave white America an image of a high-achieving upper-middle-class family. Morgan Freeman played an American president when the world nearly ended in "Deep Impact," released in 1998; Dennis Haysbert, another black actor, was president when "24" launched in 2001.

Meanwhile, America's young adults have grown up in a world of diversity, where "Big Brother" has an integrated cast and hip-hop is as popular with white kids as with black ones. Because of what they've seen growing up, younger Americans are less likely to be bound by rigid racial traditions.

For older Americans, however, Powell and Rice were pivotal. Because he had more credibility than anyone else in the Bush administration, it was Powell who was chosen to help lead the nation to war by delivering an unfortunate speech at the United Nations in 2003. Rice broke ground as well as Bush's national security adviser in his first term.

Three years ago, I wrote of my astonishment at seeing the enthusiastic greeting Rice received at the University of Alabama's Bryant-Denny Stadium when she walked onto the field during a football game's halftime. I'm an Alabama native, as Rice is, and I remember its oppressive and violent Jim Crow era, as she does.

"She was not the first black person to step onto the University of Alabama's football field to so enthusiastic a greeting, but she is the first who has never worn a helmet and shoulder pads," I wrote. "Had I not witnessed the moment myself — in all its magic and wonder — I could not have imagined it."

Impressed as I was at that moment, though, there were other things I still could not imagine.

"I am not naïve enough to believe that racism is dead, the nation is colorblind or that Rice could be elected president, as some have claimed," I wrote.

Racism is still not dead, nor is the nation colorblind, but a black person has been elected president. And Bush's promotion of Rice and Powell helped pave the way and should be acknowledged.

WSJ

Seeking a Presidential Pardon? Try Praising the Right to Bear Arms

Five Forgiven by Bush Share a Trait: They Really Missed Their Weapons

by Amir Efrati

A decade ago, Leslie Collier, a 50-year-old corn and soybean farmer in Charleston, Mo., pleaded guilty to poisoning bald eagles. He says the worst thing about his criminal record was that it meant he was barred by law from owning a gun.



Leslie Collier

"Ever since I was old enough to remember, my dad and uncles took me hunting. Goose, duck, deer, turkey, rabbit and squirrel hunting, mostly. It was tradition and about the only recreation we had I would like to be able to teach [my children] the proper way to hunt and handle firearms I am a good citizen in the community, serve my church, love my country, and pay my taxes. I would greatly appreciate getting this resolved."

-- Leslie Collier, in his application for a pardon ([Read the full application](#) and the [pardon later issued by the White House](#))

So, after George W. Bush, a strong defender of the Second Amendment, took office, Mr. Collier wrote to the president seeking a pardon, saying he wanted to go hunting with his kids. He explained that he accidentally killed the eagles while trying to poison coyotes that were attacking wild turkeys and deer on property he farms.

On the surface, the list of the 14 people pardoned by the president this week shows few common denominators in terms of time served, geographic location or even type of crime, except that the felonies were non-violent. But a closer look at some of the newly pardoned shows many of them are church-going, blue-collar workers from rural areas (and ardent Bush supporters) who had little trouble finding jobs after their convictions. There is another common thread: the important role firearms once played in their lives.

President Bush has pardoned fewer people -- 171 -- than any president since World War II, with the exception of his father, who pardoned 74. Presidents don't discuss their reasons for issuing pardons, with few exceptions. Nor do they tell petitioners why their wish was granted. The Justice Department's "pardon

attorney," who reviews hundreds of petitions a year and recommends candidates to the president, had no comment.

Coincidentally or not, at least seven of the 14 pardoned on Monday are former hunters or shooting enthusiasts. In interviews, five of them said they wrote in their petitions to the government that a desire to win back the right to bear arms was a chief reason for wanting a pardon.

Robert Mohon Jr. of Grant, Ala., who pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute marijuana and served a year in prison in the late 1980s, wrote in his petition that he was concerned about his heritage. He wanted to pass down his father's hunting rifles to his grandchildren and teach them "the enjoyment of the outdoors." His felony record was standing in the way.

"That's what's wrong with the world today -- nobody knows how to handle guns," says the 61-year-old retiree.

The state of Illinois allowed Richard Culpepper to keep his shotguns after he was convicted in 1987 of lying to the government in order to receive unemployment checks. But in 2002, when he bought an English Pointer hunting dog and tried to buy a new gun, he says he was rejected and the state revoked his privilege.

So, the 52-year-old retired locomotive engineer from Mahomet, Ill., says he applied for a pardon by explaining the situation and attaching photos of Cartman, the dog.

Another pardon recipient from Monday is Danny Pue, 64, of Conroe, Texas, who pleaded guilty to illegal storage of hazardous waste and got six months' home confinement in 1996. He wrote in his petition that he was an avid sport shooter and wanted to enjoy weekly target practice with his family again. "We live in the country and I felt secure with my firearms," says the machine-shop employee.

Convicted felons lose a host of civil rights, including the right to vote, seek political office or bear arms. A presidential pardon forgives federal crimes and restores basic rights.

Many felons can win back some rights from their states after they complete their punishment. But the right to possess guns can be restored only by the president, says Margaret Love, a former pardon attorney under the first President Bush and the first term of President Clinton, who pardoned 396, mostly during his second term. (Felons are allowed to possess certain antique guns, she says.)

Before applying for a pardon, an individual must wait five years after serving prison time or home confinement and must have finished probation or supervised release. The president can exercise his or her clemency powers at any time, even if the felon hasn't formally applied.

Petitioners must show they've led an upstanding life since their conviction and accepted responsibility for their actions with remorse, according to the Justice Department.

The whole process can take years, and the odds are long. Through the end of October, President Bush had pardoned 7% of applicants during his term, department statistics show. There is a backlog of several thousand applications.

President Bush still has more than 50 days left in his term, and December is his favorite month for granting clemency, says P.S. Ruckman, Jr., a political science professor at Rock Valley College in Rockford, Ill., who tracks presidential pardons.

The White House declined to address whether President Bush was trying to aid people who sought to restore their gun rights. "The president carefully considered recommendations for pardons and commutations on a case-by-case basis and made his determination. He will continue to review clemency requests," a spokesman said.

In a pardon petition, the applicant must explain the criminal offense, give employment and residence history and other biographical information, and the reasons for seeking pardon. If the petition succeeds, an official in the pardon attorney's office calls the pardon recipient by phone to convey the good news.

According to the Justice Department, if a case looks promising, the pardon attorney often asks the FBI to conduct a background investigation. Bureau agents collect information by interviewing the applicants and their friends, neighbors and sometimes former teachers and coaches, and assess their reputations in the community. The pardon attorney and deputy attorney general, the No. 2 official in the Justice Department, give a positive or negative recommendation before an application goes to the White House for the president's consideration.

Most pardons receive scant attention because they involve ordinary citizens with no connection to the president. Others grab headlines, including President Clinton's controversial pardon of tax-evasion fugitive Marc Rich, whose wife donated money to Mr. Clinton's presidential library.



Brenda Helmer

So far, President Bush's pardons have been low-risk politically. The pardonees were one-time offenders who got very little or no prison time for crimes that occurred long ago. That includes 47-year-old Brenda Helmer, who says she "discovered" guns when she dated a police officer at age 18. "Ever since then I was hooked," she says.

Mrs. Helmer, who helps run her husband's dentistry practice, says she occasionally hunted doves but mostly kept her hobby to target shooting. She lost her gun rights after her conviction in 1998 for having knowledge of a felony fraud and not reporting it to authorities.

In 2004, she wrote in her pardon petition that she was worried the felony might cause delays when she traveled to do missionary work. She also wrote that she was a life member of the National Rifle Association who wanted her gun rights back.

When the Fort Worth, Texas, resident received the fateful call from the Justice Department, she "couldn't talk, or breathe," and spent a few moments regrouping before informing her husband, who was by her side. "Prayer works," she says.

As for Mr. Collier, the Missouri farmer, he picked up one of his old rifles from his parents' house a few hours after receiving the news and went into the forest with his 22-year-old son. It was the last day of deer season.

Area Man Holding Out Until Next Exit For Better Fast Food Options



Don Turnbee weighs his options.

ERIE, PA—Local fast food consumer and occasional motorist Don Turnbee announced his decision Wednesday to bypass I-79's Greenville exit in hopes that the following turnoff would lead to more appealing fast food options.

According to Turnbee, though the previous exit had several fast food establishments to choose from, the 41-year-old said that he "didn't feel like McDonald's," and that he had "just had Taco Bell a couple days ago."

"I think I want Wendy's," Turnbee told reporters at a rest stop alongside the highway. "There hasn't been a Wendy's in a while so there will probably be one at the next exit or the one after that."

"When you get on the road, there are more McDonald's and Burger Kings than Wendy's," Turnbee explained. "You'd think it'd be about the same, but it isn't."

While holding out for a superior option, Turnbee has passed on multiple eating opportunities, including a Long John Silver's at the Conneaut Lake exit, a Roy Rogers in Saegertown, and an entire fast food plaza off exit 147A containing an Arby's, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Quiznos, Burger King, and Starbucks.

"I'm not turning off for a Starbucks," Turnbee said of the coffeehouse chain. "Starbucks isn't food."

Turnbee was unable to recall the last time he had eaten at Wendy's, saying that the one closest to him is "kind of far away," since it is located pretty much where the old Rax used to be. Despite not frequenting a Wendy's in months, Turnbee said that his current trip has reinvigorated his enthusiasm for the fast food chain.

"I like the No. 2 there," said Turnbee, referring to the Wendy's Old Fashioned Combination Meal consisting of a double cheeseburger, a large order of French fries, and a large soft drink. "They stopped doing Biggie sizes a while ago, but large is Biggie. It's the same."

"The chili's okay," he added.

Turnbee, who is currently on route to pick up his wife, Shelly, from her sister's house, said he would be on the lookout for a dining service sign with a miniature Wendy's logo. While Turnbee said he depends on these icons to inform him as to what dining options are ahead, he was confused by one near the Mercer exit, which had an image of just a fork and knife, and no other specific details.

Turnbee claimed the dining icon probably meant that the restaurants at that exit were of the sit-down variety only.

"I bet it had places like Perkins or Cracker Barrel," Turnbee said. "They aren't bad, but when I'm on my way somewhere I don't like to waste time with waiters and stuff."

According to fellow motorists, Turnbee was spotted pulling off at a rest stop along I-79 an hour into his trip. At the rest stop, sources confirmed that Turnbee approached a pair of vending machines, carefully surveyed their contents, and then turned around to exit the building.

"I don't want peanut butter cups or chips," Turnbee told reporters, adding that he would draw on past turnpike-driving experiences to aid him in his most recent fast food endeavor. "A month ago I wanted Burger King, but I got off too early and ended up getting a piece of pizza at a Sbarro even though I didn't want a piece of pizza. And then the next exit had a Burger King."

Turnbee said there have been two Wendy's restaurants on his drive thus far. He didn't patronize the first, he said, because he hadn't gotten far enough along in his trip to justify making a pit stop. He mistakenly passed the second because he was "fiddling with the dang radio," and by the time he realized what had happened it was too late.

"I'm getting hungry," he said.

Though Turnbee remains steadfast in his decision to eat at Wendy's, he stated that he would only leave the highway if the establishment "seemed all right" and was visible from his car.

"One time I got off and instead of the Taco Bell being right there, there was another small Taco Bell sign with an arrow pointing to the left," Turnbee said. "I drove for a good five minutes, but all I saw were some houses and trees. I'm not doing that again."

As of press time, Turnbee was observed getting off the Breezewood exit. Onlookers said he pulled into a Wendy's location, noted that the line inside the restaurant extended beyond the crimson-rope metal stanchions, and then proceeded to leave.

Turnbee was last seen pulling into the McDonald's across the street.

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