

Against More Taxes? You May Be a Terrorist!

☒ He sounded more like a pastor than a politician that night in Tucson. Here was a man with compassion and dignity who wanted just one thing – to bring Americans together. Barack Obama was at his eloquent best that night in January when he delivered a moving tribute at a memorial for the victims of the Arizona massacre.

He talked about how “our discourse has become so sharply polarized,” about how “we are far too eager to lay blame for all that ails the world at the feet of those who happen to think differently than we do.” He said, “It’s important for us to pause for a moment and make sure that we’re talking with each other in a way that heals, not in a way that wounds.”

Who could disagree with that? Well, it turns out that the president’s most reliable (and fawning) supporters – liberal commentators – either forgot what the president said, or didn’t buy into it in the first place.

Today, these media pundits are doing what they so often do when they disagree with the other side. They’re vilifying their opponents, opponents whom they see as enemies. And they’re doing it, again as they so often do, while convincing themselves that they are the stewards of civility in our culture, and that their commentary is the essence of serious and intelligent public discourse.

There’s nothing new, of course, about liberal vulgarity. Bush was a Nazi, Cheney was a war criminal, the tea party is comprised of racists, Sarah Palin and Rush Limbaugh inspired the Tucson lunatic to shoot up the place. Howard Dean once said, “I hate Republicans and everything they stand for.” Can’t get much clearer than that, can you?

Now, it's the current debate between Democrats and Republicans over raising the debt ceiling that has ratcheted up the rhetoric – while important, hardly a “sexy” topic that should generate the angry attacks it has.

Let's begin with Mr. “I Feel a Thrill Running Up My Leg When President Obama Speaks” – Chris Matthews. Twice, in less than 24 hours, Mathews said on MSNBC that Republicans who oppose raising the debt ceiling are “terrorists.” He referred to the GOP as the “Wahhabis of American government,” a reference to the sect of Islam often tied to intolerance and hate.

How civil is that?

Also on MSNBC, Tina Brown, the editor-in-chief of Newsweek and the Daily Beast, called Republicans in Congress “suicide bombers” for not “accommodating” the president in his call for more taxes.

When Rosie O'Donnell said Rudy Giuliani looked like a “Pez dispenser” that was merely obnoxious and insulting. But comparing Republicans to suicide bombers – fanatics who slaughter innocent people – simply because they oppose tax increases? That crosses the line from childish taunts in the playground right into the heart of hate speech territory.

Then there's Richard Cohen, the Washington Post columnist who once said that Newt Gingrich “should be hanged” for “hypocrisy.” Now he's describing the Republican party as a “cult” and says the GOP presidential candidates comprise “a virtual political Jonestown.”

As Peter Wehner, the thoughtful political analysts and prolific blogger put it: “It's hard to know whether these pundits understand how stupid and childish their rants are, or whether they're so blinded by their ideology they don't understand it's not really appropriate to refer to people with whom you disagree on taxes as Wahhabis, suicide bombers and members of a death cult.”

Six months ago in Tucson, President Obama said that, "Rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame, let's use this occasion to expand our moral imaginations, to listen to each other more carefully, to sharpen our instincts for empathy, and remind ourselves of all the ways that our hopes and dreams are bound together."

Six months later in Washington, the same president said that, "The debt ceiling should not be something that is used as a gun against the heads of the American people to extract tax breaks for corporate jet owners or oil and gas companies that are making billions of dollars because the price of gasoline has gone up so high."

A gun to the head? Yes, we know, it's only a figure of speech, but an unfortunate one, since a gun to the head is what inspired President Obama to speak out so eloquently in the first place about restoring civility, and decency, to our national conversation. A pastor wouldn't talk that way. A politician would.