

Capitalism Is Not Charity

✘ Does anyone remember those old television commercials that actress Sally Struthers did for the Christian Children's Fund back in the 1980s? Man, they were effective. They'd show heart-breaking images of impoverished children in Africa while Struthers explained that for the price of a cup of coffee each day, you could feed, cloth, and educate those children. If those commercials didn't pull on your heart-strings, nothing would.

I haven't seen those commercials in some time, but I'm certainly reminded of them whenever I hear our president speak on the economy. President Obama seems to believe that the only reason we still have chronically high unemployment and anemic economic growth is because American businesses are too stingy – whether it be in hiring or taxation. After all, the president has done everything *he* can do to get people back to work... It's only right that the private sector now fulfills its moral obligation – at least that's the way he sees it.

Instead of starving children as his backdrop, he uses bridges that need repair or firemen, policemen, and teachers whose jobs need saving. And if the business world doesn't fall in line with his vision for economic success, they've failed on their moral responsibilities to the country... and they must be called out and held responsible for the poor state of the economy.

Now part of this Obama strategy is clearly political. He doesn't really believe that fixing some bridges and propping up government jobs is going to turn the economy around. However, he absolutely believes in social economic justice that relies on income redistribution as the answer for a healthy and fair economy. It's the number one reason why he has such a hard time grasping basic capitalistic concepts for substantive economic growth.

The problem, of course, with viewing the economy as a charity is that contributions are seen as mere acts of generosity which are largely inconsequential to the donor... certainly not a risk with consequences. And that's the very rationale the administration uses when publicly shaming the private sector to *step up*. They justify tax hikes by claiming they're "patriotic" and have no negative ramifications beyond the rich just having to pay "a little bit more". They call on CEOs to ignore economic realities, and to "stop complaining about government and get some action underway", as Obama economic adviser, Jeffrey Immelt put it a few months ago.

There's no consideration coming from this administration when it comes to cost-benefit analysis, risk versus reward, and what motivates business investment. It's all about inflicting guilt and blame upon *rich guys* who are too "unambitious", "soft", and "lazy" to get up off the side-lines and give back to society. I don't see Obama's mindset changing.

So, if the president is determined on viewing capitalism as a charity, perhaps he can learn a few things from Sally Struthers...

Sally represented specific beneficiaries: Needy children. In Obama's charity of *the greater good*, no one has any clue who the beneficiaries are. When it comes to taxation, the beneficiaries could be anything from bloated, wasteful government bureaucracies and politicians' pet projects to foreign assistance for countries who support our enemies. Yet, the administration speaks of increased taxes as if their purpose is every bit as noble a cause as starving children. Tax payers understandably don't believe they are respected by our leaders. They don't see any fiscal discipline or transparency coming from Washington, yet they're called on to support whatever government venture their money will fund.

Sally didn't mock donors. She didn't garnish support by calling people "fat cats", "greedy", or singling them out as

the "one percent" who aren't doing their "fair share". It's amazing to me that while the wealthiest 1% of our nation pays 40% of the total taxes in this country, they are the ones the administration chooses to vilify. Our country largely relies on the *evil rich* to fund the government services and entitlements the rest of us benefit from, yet we are told repeatedly by the president that they are neglecting their patriotic duty.

Sally walked the walk. She traveled to African countries and assisted in bringing aid to the children she advocated for. President Obama wants businesses to be charitable and hire new employees at their expense, even if it doesn't make sense from a profitability standpoint. Yet, he has trouble contributing to private sector job creation at his own *political* expense. He supports shutting down a billion dollar Boeing plant in South Carolina to pacify labor unions which are a large part of his political base. That move would cost thousands of new jobs. Obama places moratoriums on oil drilling, and stalls plans for construction of the Keystone oil pipeline to appease environmentalists within his political base. Those moves cost tens of thousands of jobs.

Sally didn't actively work against the humanitarian efforts she promoted. The United States has the second highest corporate tax rate in the world. The Obama administration expects businesses to hire employees and invest in the economy, but won't leave them with adequate capital and certainty to do so. He's like the older brother who grabs you by the wrists, and forces you to slap your own face while tauntingly asking you, "Why are you hitting yourself? Why are you hitting yourself?" If the administration won't sacrifice federal revenue in order to simulate private sector hiring, why would Obama expect businesses to sacrifice corporate revenue in order to hire?

All of these anecdotes are pointless, of course, because capitalism is not charity, nor should it be treated as such.

Ironically, it's the actual charities in this country that are among some of the most hurt by Obama's rejection of free market capitalism. Most are completely reliant on private sector wealth, so they're suffering. Sally Struthers certainly can't be happy about that.

Just How Important is Personality in Presidential Elections?

☒ Over the past few months, a number of political analysts have presented multiple economic statistics suggesting the historical infeasibility of President Obama winning a second term. In a nutshell, it's pretty much unprecedented for an incumbent president ending his third year in office with this high of an unemployment rate and this low of an economic growth rate to achieve re-election.

While that information may be interesting, I certainly don't put a lot of stock in it. Being that our country enjoyed a strong economy for the better part of the last three decades, prior to the 2008 meltdown, those statistics haven't been applicable to elections since Ronald Reagan took office. Therefore, I suspect that the traditional predictors of voter behavior are probably a bit outdated.

The country, after all, has changed a lot over the past thirty years. We've evolved into a media-driven era of ever-shrinking attention spans and a relentless need to keep ourselves entertained. We enjoy public spectacles, prefer style over substance, and are regularly being bombarded with dueling ideological viewpoints that are too often misrepresented as

fact. It stands to reason that with such cultural change comes an alteration in how we evaluate our presidential candidates.

When I look back at the presidential elections from the last thirty years, I do notice a certain consistency, but not one supported by mathematical statistics. The pattern I see is that the general election candidate with the most appealing personality has always won. I don't see a single exception.

Think about it for a moment. Completely disregard all of the candidates' individual backgrounds and platforms, as well as the state of the country on election day, and just compare their personalities... Am I wrong?

Stuffy individuals like Walter Mondale, Al Gore, and John Kerry all exuded competence and carried impressive credentials, but they lacked the personable nature of their counterparts. Candidates like George H.W. Bush, Bob Dole and John McCain all came across as genuine and thoughtful. They had impressive resumes, and were war heroes to boot, but they lacked the spryness and natural charisma of their opponents.

Now, I'm not going to suggest that the majority of voters select candidates without any regard to substantive experience, achievements, and visions, but I do tend to believe that personalities play a far larger role in the outcome of modern day elections than most people realize.

Former George W. Bush adviser Karl Rove has made the point on numerous occasions that his boss reasonably "shouldn't have won" the 2000 election. The Clinton/Gore administration left office with the country in a state of peace and prosperity. It would have stood to reason that the electorate would have chosen to *stick with what worked* and elect Vice President Al Gore like they did with George H.W. Bush following the Reagan administration. Yet, Gore was so personally unappealing and boorish that he lost many potential supporters to his charming and energetic, underdog opponent. Ultimately, I believe it was

that alone that made the difference in a race that was much tighter than anyone expected it to be.

The same could be said about the 2004 election. By election day, Bush's popularity rating was teetering on 50%, the Iraq war was extremely unpopular, and the Democratic party was united. With the inclusion of 527 groups, the Democrats outspent the Republicans by \$124 million during the campaign. Yet, Independents just couldn't quite get excited about John Kerry. The consensus seemed to be that Kerry had beaten Bush in all three presidential debates, but in my opinion, he was just so drab and uncharismatic that he couldn't seal the deal with the electorate.

On the other side of the aisle, George H.W. Bush's first term in office seemed to be a fairly successful one. He presided over the fall of the Berlin Wall and successful military operations in Panama and the Persian Gulf. By election day, the economy had recovered from a mild recession. Yet, there was undeniable star quality in a saxophone-playing governor from Arkansas that charmed the voters away.

We all know how well Barack Obama's *cult of personality* has served him. Granted, the Republican Party had a substantial deficit in public support by 2008, but on paper, a junior senator with no leadership experience or legislative achievements should have been a tough sell to the American public... even with a historic candidacy and unprecedented support from the news media. Had Obama not had his glowing personality, million dollar smile, and infectious charm to gloss over his shortcomings and a stiff opponent, a Republican victory would have certainly been possible.

I don't think personality is as major a factor in primary elections. After all, those most passionate in the political process take their obligations more seriously than the non-ideological voter. But the general election is an entirely different landscape. Candidates are playing to a lot of voters

who simply don't follow the issues and current events all that closely. Many look to the general election debates to see who's the better showman and who they find more personally appealing.

Now, I know I'm not drawing any groundbreaking conclusion here. The idea that charisma and likability are assets in a campaign is something every political observer has recognized for generations. But 2012 is really going to be a testimonial to just *how* important personality is to us as voters. On paper and barring any dramatic events, there's no way that Obama should win a second term. The country's an absolute mess. Mitt Romney will most likely be the Republican candidate. If that's the case, it will be the *Charmer in Chief* versus the *Disciplined Professional*. Both men are strong, articulate speakers and debaters. Both will come highly prepared. Yet, one can't deny that Obama has a distinct advantage in the personality department. Despite our president's known reliance on teleprompters, he actually comes across as the least scripted of the two. Even Romney's laugh seems carefully rehearsed, and voters will notice that.

2012 will be a landmark election. Voters will be making big choice on how we'll move forward as a nation. But I suspect we'll also determine in 2012 just how superficial we've become as an electorate.

Should Giuliani Have Run This Time?

- ✘ Earlier this year, when former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani began sending signals that he might jump into the

2012 presidential race, there seemed to be a collective eye-roll from political pundits across both sides of the aisle. The general consensus was that Giuliani's time had come and gone. I tended to agree.

After all, Giuliani's fall during the 2008 presidential primaries was a thing of legend. He went from being the strong, early front-runner to earning only single-digit support by the time states began casting their votes. A poor campaign strategy and Giuliani's liberal stance on some social issues was largely thought to be responsible. So, if his widely praised leadership during the 9/11 attacks and his exceptional economic and security results as NYC mayor weren't enough to earn him even honorable mention by Republican voters in 2008, how could he possibly fare better in 2012? Right?

Well, I'm starting to think he might have.

As a registered Republican, I've been uneasy about the current GOP field. And if poll results are any indication, I'm not alone. The front-runner position has changed numerous times over the past few months, and most voters claim they could still change their mind on who they'll support. The Republican establishment clearly hasn't been satisfied with the selection. They tried for months to draft Mitch Daniels, Paul Ryan, and Chris Christie to no avail.

In a nutshell, the dilemma stems from differences in the perceived electability and the conservative credentials of each candidate. Most Republicans want a principled conservative in the White House, which is why they're reluctant to support Mitt Romney who has a well-documented history of switching views on major issues to gain favor with whatever crowd he's courting. While they respect Romney for his business successes, debate skills, and electability, they recognize the need for drastic reforms and they're not sure they can rely on his commitment to pursue them. On the other hand, they largely trust the conservative purity of most of

the remaining candidates, but are skeptical of their electability.

In this environment, I can't help but think Giuliani would have actually been in a pretty good position, had he made the leap. He clearly isn't a *social* conservative, but he's certainly a fiscal conservative with a pretty strong record in New York City to prove it. Sure, that record didn't help him much in 2008, but it was a different country then. The economy didn't tank until after the GOP candidate had already been settled on. When the Republicans were still battling it out, foreign policy was the key issue of the day and social issues were front and center.

That's not really the case these days. Look at how much trouble the strongest social conservatives in the GOP race are having right now. Michele Bachmann and Rick Santorum have sunk to the bottom of the polls, and Rick Perry's firm stances on social issues have done nothing to help his candidacy. Unsurprisingly, the 2012 election is about the economy, not social issues.

As we've seen with the popularity of Herman Cain and Chris Christie, GOP voters like plain talkers and bold thinkers who have no qualms in disregarding political correctness to press their agenda. I still see these qualities in Giuliani anytime he's interviewed or delivering a speech. In fact, the reason the media keeps coming to him for comment on the Occupy Wallstreet protests is because they recognize the stark contrast in styles between he and current New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg. Giuliani's criticisms of the Obama administration over the past couple of years have been clear, concise, and at times masterful. I sometimes think he looks more presidential now than he did in 2008.

The debates have possibly been more important than any other factor in this year's campaign cycle, and as many might remember, Giuliani's a pretty decent debater with a knack for

getting crowds riled up. He's also been fairly consistent on the issues. It would be hard to imagine him getting caught up in a finger-pointing contest like with Romney and Perry.

Fundraising would have surely been a challenge for Giuliani. Big donors most likely would have been hesitant to invest in his campaign, considering the outcome from three years earlier. But as we've seen from Herman Cain, a shoe-string budget with constant media appearances can go a long way toward rallying support. And with momentum, the donors who helped Giuliani in 2008 would have surely come back on board.

Most importantly, as odd as this might sound considering his 2008 performance, I think Giuliani would have been electable. He still has more name recognition than probably all GOP candidates in the race, and polls earlier this year actually showed him in the lead of all Republican candidates in the important primary state of New Hampshire... a state he barely campaigned in, in 2008. Nationally, he still polls well with independents, and at a time when the country is crying for strong leadership, he's one guy who has rarely been challenged on his credentials to lead.

There's no doubt that his biggest advantage as a candidate this time around would have been the overall weakness of the field. Yes, I've come to terms that this is indeed a lackluster field. Most voters aren't quite sold on anyone. Every candidate seems to have an Achilles heel that would certainly be used as ammunition against them during the general election. At this point, Giuliani's past marital problems and stance on abortion don't seem like any worse obstacles than those faced by the other candidates.

In the end, it's all a moot point. The field is set. But one has to wonder if we'll look back to the presidential race a year from now and wonder why more high-profile candidates like Giuliani didn't take the plunge at such a dire time in our nation's history.

Collective Misery is the Prescription for Failure

✘ About a year ago, I was going through a pretty rough time in my life. Having barely survived *Recovery Summer*, the once thriving company that had employed me for 15 years was about to go out of business. Twelve hour work days and substantial pay-cuts weren't enough to keep us above water. The job market was awful and I was receiving few callbacks on my resume. Two evenings a week, I'd find myself across town, wrapped up in the two to three hour process of donating my blood plasma to earn some extra money. When I'd get home, often after my kids were already in bed, I'd sit in front of my laptop and put sports merchandise up for bid on eBay. I knew unemployment was right around the corner and I wanted to put myself in the best possible financial position to support my family during that time.

A few weeks later, the company did go under and I was out of a job. It was scary. I felt like I had the weight of the world (my world, anyway) pressing down on my shoulders. Friends and family offered their best wishes and words of encouragement.

Someone close to me sent me a well-meaning email during that time. In it, he wrote, "If it's any consolation, there's A LOT of people out there who are going through the same thing." I remember reading those words with a scowl on my face and thinking, *Is he serious? How could that possibly make me feel any better?* A few days later, someone else made almost the exact same remark to me. Once again, I found the statement puzzling. Why would I take comfort in the knowledge that many others were going through the same hardships that I was? Why would I find that even remotely satisfying? I'd much rather

have everyone else be doing just fine. I'd much rather be the exception than the rule.

I suppose it's a statement on our culture – that collective suffering is supposed to somehow make us feel better about ourselves. It's no wonder that we've become so dependent as a nation. When enough people are handed defeats, defeatism becomes acceptable, even an inevitability... and we look to others to save us.

We see this brand of group-think in the Occupy protesters. We hear it in their messaging – “We are the 99%”. The collective nature of their grievances substantiates (in their minds) the notion that they're victims, and that those who aren't (the wealthy) are to blame. Thus, the rich owe something to the less fortunate.

This is certainly the mindset the Obama administration is counting on in hopes of winning a second term. You see it in their relentless pursuit of the class warfare strategy that ironically can only be successful if the economy remains weak, jobs remain sparse, and people remain resentful of those who are succeeding. In that sense, it seems the administration has given up on things getting better as well.

This viewpoint is exactly why our country has become “soft” as President Obama puts it. It's not because we've run out of ideas or lost the capacity to innovate. It's because we've been conditioned to sell ourselves short, and have been coaxed into believing that our fate is largely in the hands of others.

Unfortunately, the longer this goes on and the more dependent people become, the harder it is to convince them that the power of the individual is the key to prosperity in this country. Wealthy people have achieved their success by rising above collectivism and apathy. They've carved out their own niche, innovated, worked hard, taken risks, and achieved self-

reliance. These are the people we should be supporting as a society, because with their success comes opportunity for the rest of us.

And *opportunity* is a key term that has been missing from the national debate. We hear a lot of promises about forecasts and outcomes because people want to hear the bottom line and be comforted, but opportunity is not about guaranteed outcomes. It's about setting an environment for success and leaving it up to individuals to seize the moment and advance themselves.

But misery loves company. At least that's the message of the Obama administration. By dividing us into groups based on our income brackets and stoking the envy of those on the low end of the scale, they're emboldening collective anguish instead of emboldening individualism. And they're only doing it because they believe it to be a smart campaign strategy, not because they believe it's good for the nation.

People like to be empathized with. Maybe it's human nature. But once we've bought into the notion that collective misfortune is a foregone conclusion without dependence on others, we've truly lost the American spirit of individualism that has historically been the catalyst for success in this great country. And the faster we discard those who try to sell us on the merits of dependence, the better.

The Democratic Hawk Flies Free

☒ Toward the end of 2006, comedian Dennis Miller made these interesting comments regarding the upcoming 2008 presidential election:

“Let’s see, maybe it’s time for a Democratic president. Stay with me. Because the next step in the inevitable escalation in this war with radical Islam is going to involve us being appreciably more brutal and ruthless than we have been to date. And I think the left’s cronyism with the mainstream media will provide cover for someone on that side of things to up the ante.”

It was a thought-provoking statement that really caught my attention. Miller of course wasn’t endorsing a Democratic president, as some blog websites speculated at the time. He was making the point that a Democratic president would have an easier time prosecuting the War on Terror because the media would not plague the administration’s actions with the same intense scrutiny they gave to George W. Bush.

It appears that Miller is not only a brilliant political observer, but also a prophet.

By the time Bush left office, his post-9/11 foreign policy initiatives had been completely and utterly excoriated by the media. The mainstream media had invested years into building the narrative that everything Bush had done had only damaged our nation’s image and invited more violence upon our country. That theme resonated with our war-weary nation, and the Democratic candidate who most disassociated himself with those policies won the presidency.

But something interesting happened once that new president took office. Barack Obama, one of the most outspoken critics of *everything Bush*, continued on with many of those very same Bush policies. Even more interesting was that the media really didn’t seem to mind all that much.

The contrast in reactionary media analysis has been nothing short of remarkable.

Let’s look at some examples:

Abu Ghraib

It's hard to think about the Iraq War without thinking about Abu Ghraib. After all, the story of prisoner abuse committed by U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison in 2004 had a profound impact on our country's mission in Iraq. The disturbing images of naked Iraqis forced into humiliating positions by smiling members of our military sparked waves of violence and served as a recruitment tool for the insurgent groups committed to keeping the country in a state of chaos.

The story of Abu Ghraib was featured more than 50 times on the front page of the New York Times. The national news networks followed suit, keeping the story in the news cycle for months while running the shocking photos over and over again for the world to see. Pundits enthusiastically pressed the notion that the soldiers' actions weren't acts of unsupervised insubordination, but were directly produced from the Bush administration's prisoner detainment policies. Many called for Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's resignation, and some were even suggesting that members of the Bush administration should be tried for war crimes.

One has to wonder how much better things might have turned out in Iraq had the atrocities not been so widely publicized and twisted into a representation of our presence in Iraq. One also has to wonder how the media would handle a similar story during the Obama presidency.

Well, it would probably come as a shock to most people, but a similar story actually DID take place during Obama's administration.

In 2011, Rolling Stone magazine reported on a group of American soldiers who formulated and carried out a plan in 2010 to kill innocent civilians in Afghanistan. At least four victims were confirmed. After murdering the civilians, the soldiers posed for pictures with the corpses and even took

body parts with them as souvenirs. The article alleged that the incidents were on the radar of Army senior leadership who were slow to react, and then engaged in a cover-up of the atrocities.

Now it seems to me that this should have AT LEAST been as big of a story as Abu Ghraib. After all, people were actually killed this time. But the vast majority of the American public has never heard of this. Why? The national media was largely disinterested. It was a one-day story, and not even a top story at that. This time, the press was content with simply reporting a few of the facts and letting the U.S. military deal with the situation internally. There was no media appetite to investigate and speculate further.

The Patriot Act

Does anyone else remember how controversial the Patriot Act used to be? I certainly recall Senator John Kerry and other 2004 presidential candidates repeatedly criticizing President Bush for its enactment. I also seem to remember it being critiqued regularly on the evening news. According to the Media Research Center, my memory did not fail me. The MRC reported that from 2001 to 2006, the Patriot Act was the focus of 91 network news stories on ABC, CBS, and NBC alone... and that didn't even include their morning news broadcasts! 62% of those stories highlighted complaints or fears that the law infringed on the civil liberties of innocent Americans. New York Times columnists regularly expressed their contempt, and CBS News even ran the story of a poor Texas couple who claimed the Patriot Act ruined their marriage. Heck, I even remember the topic of The Patriot Act turning up on an episode of "The Practice", with James Spader launching into a courtroom tirade over the gall of its existence.

When the Patriot Act came up for renewal during the Bush years, its content was routinely scrutinized by the media. Pundits would shake their heads in disgust after Bush would

sign on the dotted line.

Whatever happened to the Patriot Act? Well, in May of this year, President Obama renewed it, and if you weren't paying very close attention, you would have never known it happened. It was barely mentioned by the news media, with no critical analysis on the evening news broadcasts on ABC, CBS, and NBC.

Guantanamo Bay

Oh Gitmo... What a hot topic you once were. The Guantanamo Bay detention camp, established in 2002 by the Bush administration, took lumps from the media for years. Journalists regularly swooned to spokespeople from civil rights and human rights organizations, putting microphones in front of them, and letting them swing away with claims that the United States was breaking numerous laws as well as relinquishing our moral responsibilities and providing a recruiting tool for terrorist groups. Candidate Obama even made the closure of Gitmo one of the primary promises of his presidential campaign.

President Bush often stated in public appearances that his desire was to close Guantanamo Bay as well, but explained that there was no better alternative for dealing with such detainees. Besides, many of the prisoners' home countries refused to take them into custody after they were captured on the battlefield, and other countries vowed to have the prisoners killed if returned to them. The media soundly rejected Bush's logic.

Once elected, President Obama immediately announced plans to close Gitmo, but three years later it's still open and serving the same purpose as it did during the Bush administration. Yet, we no longer hear media claims that the facility is a propaganda tool for terrorists. We no longer hear media concerns of prisoner abuse at Gitmo. The Obama administration is rarely even asked about the facility anymore.

Others

When president Bush used unmanned drone missile attacks during his presidency, the media was critical of the collateral damage they caused. These days, the media largely loves the tactic, and regularly hails the Obama administration for its increased usage.

Remember how the media pressed the point for years that Saddam Hussein was not a threat to our nation, thus we should have never started a war in Iraq? Was Muammar Gaddafi a threat to our nation?

Compare media concern over the physical and psychological treatment of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed with media concern over the actual killing of Osama Bin Laden and Anwar Al-Awlaki. Tell me if you notice anything interesting.

Why doesn't the media follow Cindy Sheehan anymore? And when's the last time you saw someone from Code Pink being interviewed? We're still at war, aren't we? Why doesn't the anti-war movement get any coverage these days?

Remember the NSA warrantless wire-tapping controversy? Why is it no longer a controversy? The NSA is still conducting warrantless wire-tapping after all.

Yep, Dennis Miller really hit the nail on the head that night. When media analysts and representatives from the Democratic party are asked to identify President Obama's accomplishments during his first term, they all tend to point to his national security and foreign policies first. That just goes to show how instrumental the news media is in framing the national debate in this country. If you're a Republican president, hawkish policies are a failure. If you're a Democratic president, those same policies are at worst, not notable... and at best, worthy of praise.

And without media scrutiny to shape public perception, the

president has the political capital to pursue those policies until they succeed.