

Obama, The Cellophane Man

For a long time, I was a member of the chorus that faulted Barack Obama for not carrying through with his campaign pledge of transparency. But now that he's been in the Oval Office for well over a year, I realize how wrong I was. I actually owe the man an apology. He is the most transparent president we have ever had, and by now even a blind man can see through him.

Furthermore, even those people who disagreed with his politics, but regarded him as a good guy, must have surely had second thoughts when, during the health care summit, Obama turned to John McCain and curtly reminded him that the election was over. Talk about your sore winners! Being the sort of imp I am, if I had been Sen. McCain, I might have asked the president if he was referring to the one that recently took place in Massachusetts.

Speaking of the health care summit, the highlight of the seven hour snooze fest for me was when Rep. Louise Slaughter (D, NY), shared the anecdote about the woman who wound up wearing her dead sister's dentures. My initial reaction was to wonder why a liberal would object to the practice; after all, they've made recycling a major tenet of their religion. My second reaction was the realization that Henry Waxman (D, the Moon) might be a terrible congressman, but he's a first-rate straight man. I was watching Waxman, who was sitting next to Slaughter, and when she related her tale of woe, he not only didn't begin to cackle the way I did, he didn't even crack a smile. But I guess after sitting in Congress for 40 years, you stop reacting to idiocy.

It's almost as if Obama and Tiger Woods have been competing to see which of them can lose the greatest amount of goodwill in the shortest amount of time. There is, of course, a major difference between the two look-alikes. Tiger's precipitous

plummet in popularity affects only his fortunes and those of his sponsors and agents. Obama, on the other hand, has wasted his political capital as recklessly as he's wasted America's financial capital, thus bringing the entire nation to the brink of bankruptcy.

It's at times like these that I wish America had followed Britain's example to a greater extent. If Obama, Pelosi and Reid, were forced to call for a vote of confidence, I can guarantee they'd have a lot more time to devote to their kids, their grandkids and their various hobbies.

While watching Obama chair the summit, it occurred to me that he really does believe he's the smartest man in America. But, then, I suspect that if any of us spent a lot of time hanging around with the likes of Joe Biden, Robert Byrd, Charley Rangel and Barbara Boxer, we, too, would wind up with an inflated ego. Of course, Obama was equally infatuated with himself when he was still in college. I mean, why else would someone write his memoirs when he was barely out of law school? The truth is, I have a 27" TV in the bedroom and the two things that don't fit on its relatively small screen are CinemaScope movies from the 1950s and Barack Obama's ego.

Some of my readers, I must confess, have accused me of having an over-inflated ego. But I demur. I'd readily agree that, as egos go, mine is healthy, even robust, but surely not oversized. After all, when people refer to me as a political pundit, I vehemently deny it. I know pundits when I see them, and I am definitely not one. Rush Limbaugh is a pundit. Sean Hannity is a pundit, and so are Karl Rove, Juan Williams and Dick Morris. So far as I can tell, the one thing they all have in common is that day in and day out, they devote the same time and attention to reading the New York Times that an orthodox rabbi devotes to the Torah. That means that on a regular basis, they are reading and apparently memorizing every stupid thing that such highly respected lunkheads as Frank Rich, Maureen Dowd and Paul Krugman, write.

Personally, I would prefer reading the telephone book. For one thing, it's factual. For another, it's better written.

Heckling President Obama

With the 24/7 cable TV news cycle now beamed all the world, President Barack Obama must be wondering whether he will ever have a moment of peace again. If it isn't the Tea Party people calling him a socialist, it's disenchanted Republicans saying his administration couldn't care less about being bipartisan. As the nation becomes further polarized ideologically, the president is given no quarter in the criticism department.

And now the far left is after him. Recently the president's speech was interrupted in Los Angeles by protestors yelling about the military policy of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Signed by President Clinton, this directive orders military authorities not to inquire about homosexuality and tells gay military personnel not to talk about it.

President Obama is on record as saying he wants to revoke the policy and allow gays to serve openly. But that does not seem to be enough for some dissenters. They want revocation *right this minute* and are confronting Mr. Obama. Last week, police had to clear Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House, because the protestors became so rowdy. That was extremely unusual, as the park is traditionally set aside for dissenters.

Also, peace activists Code Pink and Cindy Sheehan have now branded the president as a "war-monger" for not pulling out of Iraq and Afghanistan, which, of course, would immediately lead to thousands of deaths. It's interesting; the peace-niks apparently don't care if many people die violent deaths as

long as “peace” is embraced. And they don’t seem to be bothered by the fact that Afghan women would be brutalized if the Taliban returns. Give peace a chance? Sure, if you don’t mind women not being able to leave the house.

Before television and radio, presidents largely had it made. Teddy Roosevelt often groused about unfair attacks in the print press, but old Teddy could shoot animals all day long and nobody said a word about it.

James Buchanan had no idea what he was doing, and his incompetence directly led to the Civil War. Yet Buchanan could sleep well at night knowing that few knew he was a nitwit.

Even John F. Kennedy understood that he had the media under control and could do pretty much what he wanted in his off hours. The presidency is a stressful job; apparently Kennedy dealt with that stress in ways that would have made him an Internet sensation today.

The truth is that the modern American president is a piñata. It’s Whack-A-Mole time on Pennsylvania Avenue. Every second of every day, somebody is hammering the Chief Executive.

This kind of stuff takes a toll. Many brilliant Americans simply will not enter politics because they don’t want their spirits crushed. I admire the resiliency of President Obama, just as I admired President Bush’s pluck. These are tough guys, like ’em or not.

The Freedom Factor

“Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.” –Kris Kristofferson

The raging debate over Obamacare is not exactly all about health. It's really about freedom, or lack thereof. It's simple when you cut through all the overheated rhetoric: The anti-Obama folks believe the president is imposing a massive federal presence that will erode personal freedoms. The pro-Obama crew supports a huge federal apparatus to impose "social justice," believing that is the government's moral responsibility.

The personal freedom issue is pretty clear as well. We have less of it today than we did this time last year. In an aggressive power grab; the feds now control the health care industry, and the IRS has increased its already enormous power because it will enforce Obamacare mandates. In addition, your private medical records will no longer be private. They will be accessible by federal bureaucrats. If that doesn't make you queasy, nothing will.

And then there's higher education. The president wants the feds, not private lending institutions, to distribute college loans, and it looks like that will happen.

And then there's the banking industry. The Obama administration seeks tough oversight rules and wants to call major shots in the financial world. Federal regulation could strangle some banks and force most of them to do exactly what the government wants.

And then there's the energy industry. The president wants to mandate how private business consumes energy and dish out financial punishment if federal rules are not followed. That's the cap-and-trade deal.

In addition to the direct intrusion on business and private behavior (vis-à-vis health insurance), the redistribution of wealth train is roaring towards its next destination. That would be a national sales tax like they have in Europe. The president well understands the huge debt that is piling up

because of all the federal spending. So he has to raise more money. Wealthy Americans are going to get hammered by income tax and capital gains hikes, but there are simply not enough rich folks to counter the red ink. So get ready for a new tax proposed on stuff you buy.

Even though everyone will pay the sales tax, there will be a variety of rebates for poor Americans so they will not suffer from the sales tax. The middle class will most likely bear the brunt of it. But it may not happen because the Democrats in Congress might well be voted out of power next November. That's one of the high stakes in the midterm election.

Not since the early days of the Vietnam War has there been such a stark divide between liberal and conservative Americans, between Republicans and Democrats. The battle lines are clearly drawn: individual freedom versus federal power. Take your pick.

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Paging Doctor Kildare

So now we find out that if Obamacare becomes law, about 30% of the primary care doctors in America will consider leaving the medical profession. That bit of brightness comes from a survey published by the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*. According to the Medicus Firm, which interviewed more than a thousand American physicians, 55% of them believe that the quality of medical care in America will decline if the Democrats pass the present health care reform proposals. And, apparently, many of them want no part of it.

Although the media largely ignored the Medicus study that the NEJM picked up, the story is huge. Perhaps as many as thirty million more Americans may have access to health insurance, and the question is, who will treat them?

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 22% increase in practicing physicians over the next decade, but that will not be enough to treat the universal health care crush, especially if a bunch of doctors now on the job pack it in.

There are essentially two reasons that some doctors are nauseous over Obama-care. First, control. Medical people simply do not want federal pinheads telling them how to treat

their patients. The medical profession attracts intelligent, assertive people who are motivated to help others. This is not a docile crowd.

Second, money. Right now, many doctors are already seeing too many patients in order to pay the bills and to provide a decent living for their families. Obamacare does nothing to bring down the outrageous expense of medical malpractice insurance, and it is likely to cut Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements. Doctors can do the math. Their expenses remain high, their incomes decline. Again, these are smart people who could make good money doing something else.

In Canada and Great Britain, where socialized medicine is practiced, it is difficult to actually see a doctor in some places. Instead, nurses, physician assistants, and other medical personnel fill the need. That is what could happen in the United States once the feds begin calling the health care shots.

Not since the Iraq war has America been so divided on an issue. Yes, ideology is playing a part. Conservatives despise government intrusion in the marketplace, but liberals love it. Right now, however, most polls show the majority have turned on Obamacare. The latest *Wall Street Journal* poll, for example, shows 48% opposing and just 36% supporting.

So here's my question: What would Marcus Welby and Dr. Kildare say? These guys usually had the answers back when wise doctors were the subjects of TV programs and health care seemed to be a glamorous profession.

Would Ben Casey support Obamacare? We know the M*A*S*H guys would. Dr. Jekyll might like it, but Mr. Hyde? I don't know.

What I do know is that many Americans are sick of the whole health care thing. And no prescription on earth will change that.