

State of the Union, Why Don't They Ask?

✘ The President laid out his agenda in the State of the Union Address, and it was filled with initiatives and statements similar to what he has said before. It gives the media the opportunity to ask questions that they have neglected in the past. Statements that were presented as facts also need clarification. Up until now, the President and the White House press secretary have escaped answering important questions. We should continue to wonder why the following clarifications and challenging questions are not asked.

Mr. President: In your speech you spoke about universal preschool. Almost every study concludes that there can be temporary effects, but by the 3rd grade there is no lasting impact of preschool. In these challenging budgetary times, why are you pushing for increasing a program that has shown such a universally agreed lack of results?

Mr. President: With your interest in raising the minimum wage, can you show any time this policy has led to more employment? Didn't unemployment increase when you and a Democratic Congress raised the minimum wage in 2009?

Mr. President: You said that you have cut two and half trillion dollars of the \$4 trillion that economists say is needed to show a sustainable path. If it is assumed that part of your \$2.5 trillion claim is the \$1.2 trillion sequester, then why are you advocating delaying and reducing these cuts, before they're even implemented, while counting them toward this goal? The figure of \$4 trillion was put out more than three years ago. With your delay in dealing with this problem, many groups have changed it to \$6 trillion to make up for the time squandered. Are you aware of this? Is there going to ever be a year in our government's future where we

will spend less than the year before?

Mr. President: You have said that you are waiting for Congress to act on climate change, and if they don't, you will. If climate change is truly as devastating to our future as you have expressed, and you have this power that you stated in the speech, then why won't you act now?

Mr. President: You said that none of your proposals will add one dime to the deficit. Certainly, most of these proposals cost money. Can you tell us what you are proposing to cut or what taxes are you proposing to increase in order to pay for each of these new initiatives?

Mr. President: You continue to reference the Cayman Islands and people having bank accounts offshore as a loophole in the tax code. Can you tell us the loophole in the tax code that you're referring to, and your proposal to eliminate it? Could you be misstating the fact that other countries have lower taxes, and it is wise for a company to locate their headquarters outside the United States for that reason?

Mr. President: You had a very emotional appeal on gun control in your speech. Gun control has not proven to be effective in reducing gun violence anywhere that it has been tried. What is your reason for supporting the proposed gun-control legislation?

Mr. President: You implied in your speech, and have stated in the past, that the Washington "dysfunction" and arguing over policy are causing the economy to underperform. A time period that you often refer to in terms of economic success is the 1990's. During that time, Newt Gingrich was Speaker of the House, and the Republicans controlled the Senate as well. Their disagreements with President Clinton led to two government shutdowns. This shows how the "dysfunction" in Washington was much worse at that time than it is now. Shouldn't we look at your policies and actions to explain the

lack of economic performance rather than the fact that there are continuing arguments in Washington?

Perhaps some adventurous reporter will now have the opportunity to ask for clarification on these issues...but probably not.

Would Santorum Have Been the Better Candidate?

✘ When Rick Santorum was doing well in the Republican primaries, the common beef against him was that he could never be a viable candidate in the general election because he placed too much emphasis on “social issues.” His tenacious positions on gay marriage, abortion, family values, religion and the like would scare off independent voters. He would be written off as a wacko by everyone outside the GOP right wing.

No matter that he held exactly the correct positions on fiscal responsibility, tax policy, bureaucratic red tape and military preparedness. No matter that he was an articulate foe of Obamacare, while Mitt Romney was dogged by his embarrassing history with Romneycare back in Massachusetts. Romney was the safer candidate.

It is quite possible that a conservative candidate would have prevailed over Romney in the primaries if there hadn't been so many of them. In several states that Romney captured during the early going, the combination of Santorum, Newt Gingrich and, for a brief time, Rick Perry and Michelle Bachmann, out-pollled Mitt. Mitt had the advantage of being the unique figure in the race – moderate and, so it was argued, safe. His support was strong enough to earn him pluralities, but rarely

majorities.

I don't think Gingrich was ever likely to win the nomination, because despite his brilliant mind his reputation preceded him. An election with Newt as the candidate would have been all about him and his morals.

But Santorum – had Gingrich dropped out of the race earlier – could have made it a horse race against Mitt.

Ah, but then there would be that problem of his wacky obsession with social issues.

That line of thinking has turned out to be nonsense. This election campaign has become very much about social issues. We can thank President Obama for that, starting from the moment that he made his public statement in support of gay marriage. Or perhaps we should go back farther, to when he decreed that Catholic institutions must pay to provide free birth control and abortion pills to their employees, in contradiction to their religious beliefs.

The citizens of 32 states have voted on gay marriage, and all of those states have voted in favor of propositions that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. The 32 include hard-core GOP reliables, of course, but they also include such swing states as Colorado, Florida, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin. They even include some states that are normally considered solidly blue and were easily won by Obama in 2008.

Obama may have miscalculated badly here – something he rarely did when he was running four years ago. I suspect that he may have doomed his candidacy by his new emphasis on social issues. When it comes to social issues, the majority of Americans don't seem to be with him. This is not to argue that gay marriage, for example, is either good or bad. What matters in an election is whether the candidate's positions are popular.

If Rick Santorum had won the GOP nomination, he might have been better able to exploit the social issues. Social issues are his thing, he has strong convictions, and what he says rings true and sincere. He would have lit some fires.

Mitt, by contrast, even when he says the right things, always seems a little squishy. And now and then, alas, one can point to times in the past when he said something different about the same issue.

Some Free Advice for the Republican Field

✘ To be perfectly honest, I'm not crazy about any of the Republicans running for president. I still think Mitt Romney has the best chance to beat President Obama, but I also think he's one of those rich guys who's embarrassed about being rich. Rick Santorum is a train wreck. He blames the media for bringing up social issues that he had already brought up. I could be wrong, but I think deep down, Rick Santorum would like to set up a neat little theocracy here in secular America just to make sure we're all living moral lives – as he sees it. I like Newt Gingrich. I think he's smart and has some good ideas and would make Barack Obama look silly in a nationally televised debate. But every now and then he goes off the deep end and someplace along the line I fell out of love with him. Then there's Ron Paul, who makes a lot of sense when he's talking about money, and very little sense when he's talking about a whole bunch of other things, especially foreign affairs.

That said, I still plan to vote for anyone running against

the person currently occupying the White House. But what has me worried is that the Republicans have spent entirely too much time belittling each other – all to the benefit, I fear, of Barack Obama. I understand the reality of the situation – they have to win the nomination before they can run in the general election. But all the name-calling can't help the Republican who survives. You think the Democrats aren't taking notes – and making video clips – to use in ads once the nominee is picked?

It's time for the Republicans to knock off the sniping and start running against President Obama. Here's what I think they should do – and whoever does will stand a good chance of winning the hearts of any voter who hasn't already made up his or her mind:

Tell the American people that this president doesn't have a clue when it comes to money. Tell them that he spends and spends and spends to make government bigger and more people dependent on it. Tell them that he has raised the debt by about \$5 trillion dollars since he took office and if he wins re-election things will get worse, that he will have no incentive to stop trying to transform America into something that resembles socialist Europe. Tell them that when he gets done taxing the "rich" he'll come after you – the middle class – because he can't tax the top one percent enough to do everything he wants to do.

Tell them that while we had to go to war in Afghanistan, 10 years (plus) are enough. Tell them that we beat the Germans and the Japanese in four years, and that we've been in Afghanistan way too long. Tell them we go to war to defend America, not to nation build. Tell them that 10 minutes after we leave – whenever that is – the Taliban will be back terrorizing the locals, because that's what terrorists do when the locals are afraid. Tell them that we as Americans abhor what the religious fanatics in that country do to their people but we will not shed any more American blood to make things

better. The Afghan people must do that. And tell them that if the Taliban or their friends even think about using Afghanistan to stage another attack on America, we will unleash drones on them and when they die they won't even know what hit them.

Tell the American people that while you don't care whether they use contraceptives or not, and that you'll stay out of their way if they decide to have an abortion, tell them that having kids outside of marriage is hurting them, their kids, and their country. Tell them that having children without being married – according to study after study – will put them and their kids behind the 8 ball; that their kids will likely grow up poor, that they run a higher risk of failing in school and will likely have all sorts of other problems. Tell the American people that you will use the bully pulpit not to preach morality but to encourage people to think straight – and to stop their dysfunctional behavior. Tell them that the reason they're poor is not because someone else is rich, or because America hates minorities or women or anyone else. Tell them the reason they're poor is because they do things that make them poor.

Tell the American people that we're all in this together. That no longer will half the working population pay absolutely no federal income tax. Tell them that we are a generous nation that will help the working poor. But half the country isn't poor. So the rest of the American people – the ones who have deductions that reduce their federal income tax rate to zero – will start paying something. Tell them that if they elect you president, everybody will have skin in the game – and even if they don't know it now – everybody will be thankful before long. Nobody really wants to feel like a freeloader.

And finally, tell the American people that Barack Obama rode into office on a promise to bring us together and then made a conscious decision to run for re-election trying to drive us

apart. From now on, you should tell them, there will be no more class warfare, no more pitting Americans against each other based on how much money they have in the bank.

Tell them these are not just words. Tell them you too have a vision of America and that it is decidedly not Barack Obama's vision. Tell them, that with their help, we will feel good about ourselves again, that we will stop apologizing for America's supposed sins. And then tell them that if this is not the America they want then they should vote for the other guy.

Gingrich Wins SC ... Media Help Big Time

☒ You might figure Newt Gingrich was in a heap of trouble in South Carolina when his ex-wife Marianne told ABC News that he once said he wanted an open marriage.

After all, South Carolina is a conservative state with a lot of evangelical Christian voters, who don't go for that kind of thing.

And he might have been in trouble, except CNN's John King came to the rescue.

King, you'll recall, moderated the GOP presidential debate two days before the primary and right out of the box brought up Gingrich's messy former marital life.

The conservative in-house audience booed – and then Gingrich took over.

“I think the destructive, vicious, negative nature of much of

the news media makes it harder to govern this country,” Gingrich fired back., “harder to attract decent people to run for public office. And I am appalled that you would begin a presidential debate on a topic like that.”

Cue the wild, enthusiastic applause coming from the audience that rose to its feet. Politico said, “It was, simply put, Gingrich’s best single moment in any 2012 debate, and he’s had many good ones.”

Two days later, Gingrich won the South Carolina primary – and it wasn’t close.

Whatever else these results tell us, one thing is clear: social conservative Christians may find open marriage repugnant, but not as repugnant as they find the so-called mainstream news media.

The news media should take notice, but if history is any indication, they won’t. They’ll write the CNN debate episode off as just one more example of those nutty right-wingers bashing the liberal media – which they deny are liberal. They continue to fiddle while their institution burns.

According to a CBS News poll, 53 percent of South Carolina voters made up their minds in the last few days before the election. Several things happened in those last few days, and I think Rick Perry’s decision to leave the race and throw his support to Gingrich was the least of them. More important was the Nightline interview with the former Mrs. Gingrich, which stunk to high heaven, and Gingrich’s put-down of John King.

Marianne Gingrich didn’t come off as a victim so much as a vengeful woman telling stories on TV about something she says happened (and he denies) more than 10 years earlier. What kind of woman, I’m guessing a lot of voters wondered, reveals conversations that took place inside a marriage – not to her sister or her best friend, but to millions of total strangers watching TV.

And the debate: Gingrich showed passion, something conservatives desperately want in their candidate and something Mitt Romney seems genetically incapable of showing.

Still, even though conservatives never felt at ease with Romney, he nonetheless had been the odds-on favorite to win South Carolina, mainly because voters thought he had the best chance to defeat Barack Obama. That was before the Nightline interview and the CNN debate.

A few days ago it came out that Romney lost Iowa after he had apparently won it. So as things stand now, there have been three GOP contests and the only thing Romney has won is the New Hampshire primary; not such a big deal since New Hampshire is practically his home state. The candidacy that once seemed inevitable now seems anything but.

Yogi was right: It ain't over 'til it's over.

Who Can Beat Obama?

✘ In a piece for Commentary magazine – entitled “What Change Looks Like Under Obama” – Peter Wehner ticks off a few interesting statistics:

A misery index that is at a 28-year high.

America's credit rating downgraded for the first time in American history.

A standard of living for Americans that has fallen further and more steeply over the past three years than at any time since the government began recording it five decades ago.

An unemployment rate that now stands at 9.0 percent. October

marks the 33rd consecutive month in which the unemployment rate was above the 8 percent level that the Obama administration said it would not exceed as a result of his stimulus program. And 28 out of the last 30 months has seen unemployment at 9.0 percent or above—the longest stretch of high unemployment since the Great Depression.

Obama is now on track to have the worst jobs record of any president in the modern era.

The share of the eligible population holding a job has reached its lowest level since July 1983.

Chronic unemployment is worse than the Great Depression.

The rate of economic growth under Obama has been only slightly higher than the 1930s, the decade of the Great Depression.

Federal spending as a percent of GDP, the budget deficit as a percent of GDP, and the federal debt as a percent of GDP have all reached their highest level since World War II.

Confidence among U.S. consumers has plunged to the lowest level in more than 30 years.

The number of people in the U.S. who are in poverty has seen a record increase on President Obama's watch, with the ranks of working-age poor approaching 1960s levels that led to the national war on poverty.

A record number of Americans now rely on the federal government's food stamps program.

There's more ...

A few weeks ago in his weekly Wall Street Journal column, Karl Rove offered up these statistics:

74 percent of Americans say we're "on the wrong track."

No president has won re-election with so many Americans thinking we're heading in the wrong direction.

Only 13 percent say they're "satisfied" with how things are going in the country.

Rove tells us no president has even been re-elected with a number that low.

So, how can the Republican nominee – whoever he or she is – possibly lose?

Easy. As Rove points out, the president's team can't run "on a positive record but they can run a negative campaign ... Such a strategy will be ugly, but it could be successful."

Here's one more statistic, from a Public Policy Poll (associated with the Democratic Party), that was just released:

Barack Obama leads all six Republicans in head to head polls by margins raging from three to 11 points; Romney trails 46 to 43.

So with just about everything seemingly going against him, the president still beats every Republican challenger, as least as of the poll numbers today.

It's clear that while voters may not be happy with the president, they're not thrilled with any Republican either. So to all those conservatives who are still staying "any conservative can beat Obama" ... think again. If the election were held today, there's a good chance none of them could beat Obama.