

Obama Never Tried to Bridge the Divide



Last night, President Obama delivered his final State of the Union address. In it, he expressed personal discontent with the years of national polarization that have accompanied his tenure in office. He admitted that the situation is worse now than how he'd found it back 2008.

“It’s one of the few regrets of my presidency – that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better,” the president said from the United States Capitol. “There’s no doubt a president with the gifts of Lincoln or Roosevelt might have better bridged the divide, and I guarantee I’ll keep trying to be better so long as I hold this office.”

It was a good line, but the reality is that Obama *already has* the gifts required to soften the increasingly sharp tone that has plagued our ideologically diverse nation over the years (he’s far better equipped than most, in fact). He has simply chosen not to use those gifts.

The truth is that that promising young politician, who began his rise to prominence in 2004 with a high-profile, universally praised speech about national unity, never really believed his own rhetoric.

We caught a few glimpses of Obama’s true regards for Americans on the other side of the ideological spectrum (specifically those who embrace traditional values) in 2008, as he was campaigning for the presidency. It was in April of that year that he was recorded behind closed doors famously describing

them as bitter, bigoted people who “cling to guns or religion.”

Still, *Hope and Change* won the day, Obama was elected our 44th president, and all of those promises of national unity soon flew out the window. The administration never got around to searching for common ground from which to solve the problems our country faced. It instead spent the next four years incessantly blaming George W. Bush for all of the country's continuing woes, while shoving a deeply unpopular, massive healthcare bill right down Americans' throats.

This, of course, led to the rise of the Tea Party, a national grassroots protest against gross government reach. Recognizing it as a political threat (especially after the 2010 elections), the mainstream media and Democratic Party portrayed the Tea Party instead as a racist movement against our president.

With an awful economy, chronically high unemployment, and essentially no presidential achievements to boast of by the time the 2012 campaign rolled around, Obama's re-election strategy was built almost entirely around pitting different demographics of Americans against each other.

Disciplinary class warfare rhetoric was used to create scapegoats and stoke jealousy among the electorate. Wealthy people were portrayed as villains who weren't paying their “fair share,” and the middle class was told they were victims of wealthy people.

The *War on Women* was unveiled to fabricate the threat of some cultural return to a *Mad Men* era of white male chauvinism. This of course included possible birth control bans, unequal pay for women, and insensitivity to rape.

Racial tensions were fueled by Obama inserting himself into local police matters like the Trayvon Martin case. And of course there were all of those mouthpieces and supporters in

the media who managed to identify “racial code words” whenever a prominent Republican criticized the president.

Obama’s general election opponent Mitt Romney perhaps summed things up best (a couple of months out from the election) when he said: “His [Obama’s] campaign strategy is to smash America apart and then try to cobble together 51 percent of the pieces. If an American president wins that way, we would all lose...”

He was right, of course. Obama may have won that year, but the country lost all hope of attaining precisely what the president says he wanted.

Of course, Obama didn’t do this all on his own. There’s been plenty of “rancor” (as the president put it) from both sides of the aisle, and it certainly existed long before he took office. What’s silly is the notion that the president tried to improve the situation. He most certainly did not. He enthusiastically added to it.

What could he have done differently, had he been serious about uniting the country? It’s a question (a fair one) that is often asked when our president is categorized by someone as a divider. Beyond the obvious answer of making a serious attempt to work with the opposition party in congress, there’s another, much simpler idea that presented itself just last week.

It was something called “Guns in America” – a nationally-televised CNN town hall event, hosted by Anderson Cooper. The event was billed as an opportunity for citizens from both sides of the U.S. gun control debate to engage in dialogue directly with President Obama.

I must admit that when I first heard of the event, I assumed it would be of a similar style to other “town halls” our president has participated in. In the past, they’ve typically consisted of a room full of Obama supporters asking

propagandist, tightly-scripted softball questions, while the opposing viewpoints are delegitimized down to a caricature (another example Obama's divisiveness).

With the CNN event, however, I was pleasantly surprised. The network actually managed to put together a solid group of thoughtful, particularly relevant participants, who were each given the opportunity to ask the President of the United States smart, serious questions about gun control. It was a *real* dialogue – largely respectful on both sides – with Anderson Cooper doing a fair job of moderating.

What made the forum particularly valuable was that it put Obama on even footing with people whose arguments he typically twists into straw-man postures for the sake of bolstering his own agenda. By forgoing that advantage this time, and placing himself in a position where he would be forced to deal directly with contending viewpoints, he made the kind of concession he rarely makes to the American public.

In exchanging ideas with staunch Second Amendment advocates like Taya Kyle (Chris Kyle's widow) and rape survivor Kimberly Corban (*full disclosure: Corban is a friend of mine*), Obama gave some power back to the people, and some credence to the views of his opponents. For that he deserves some credit...and even some respect.

Imagine if President Obama had agreed to participate in these types of events years ago, on big, important issues like healthcare reform. Imagine how much political goodwill he could have earned by elevating his opposition rather than demonizing it.

It's not like the idea hadn't occurred to him. As some might recall, Obama actually proposed something similar when he was running for president in 2008.



Breaking: Presidential candidate Donald Trump endorses John A. Daly's new novel.

"I'm going to have all the negotiations around a big table," said Obama on healthcare reform. "We'll have doctors and nurses and hospital administrators. Insurance companies, drug companies – they'll get a seat at the table, they just won't be able to buy every chair. But what we will do is, we'll have the negotiations televised on C-SPAN, so that people can see who is making arguments on behalf of their constituents, and who are making arguments on behalf of the drug companies or the insurance companies. And so, that approach, I think is what is going to allow people to stay involved in this process."

People liked the *C-SPAN* idea at the time (even Obama's presidential opponent John McCain), as it was cast under the banner of inclusiveness and transparency.

Of course, it never happened. Obama never pursued it, because inclusiveness and transparency have never been part of the president's agenda. Divide and conquer has always been his game.

What a shame it's been for the country.

Obama's Legacy: Selling Us on Fluff in the Face of Crisis

✘ On January 20, 2009 (the day Barack Obama was sworn into office) the country was in pretty rough shape. We were in the depths of the Great Recession. Millions of Americans were losing their jobs, companies were shutting down left and right, the stock market was tanking, 12.5% of Americans were living in poverty, and 34 million Americans were receiving food stamps. Our national debt was over \$10 trillion. And even with a new president coming into power – one who had an approval rating of over 70% – only 40% of the country thought the nation was headed in the right direction.

I wonder what I would have thought back then, if someone could have looked five years into the future and told me what kind of issues were on the agenda of a re-elected President Obama in the year 2014. According to the president's *State of the Union* address, those things are the *injustice* of rich people becoming wealthier at a faster rate than non-rich people, the need for legislation to deal with women being paid 9 cents less on the dollar than men (not 23 cents as the president stated), and the raising of the minimum wage.

I'm pretty sure that I would have thought something like this: *My God. This guy must have been the greatest economic president in the history of our nation! If these things are our country's greatest economic hurdles in the year 2014, he must have ushered in a level of prosperity and economic solvency that no one could have ever imagined!*

Unfortunately, that's not what happened.

After five years of President Obama (and 4 1/2 years after the

Great Recession ended), our national debt is over \$17 trillion – \$7 trillion more than when he took office, and \$8 trillion more than the amount *Candidate* Obama told us was both “irresponsible” and “unpatriotic”. The debt is projected to reach \$20 trillion by the time Obama leaves office, much in part to the refusal of the administration and the Democratic party to reform our entitlement programs – the leading drivers of our debt.

The U.S. poverty level under Obama has broken a 50-year record, sitting at 15% for three straight years. 47 million Americans now receive food stamps – 13 million more than when Obama took office. Again, this is 4 1/2 years after the recession ended.

The labor force participation rate is at a 35-year low with 1.3 million fewer jobs than when the recession began. This means that if the labor force participation rate were the same as it was when the recession started, the current unemployment rate would be around 11% right now – not the much lower number the administration is now bragging about.

Since Obamacare has been signed into law, the cost of healthcare has continued to rise. Insurance premiums and deductibles have also risen as a direct result of Obamacare. Several millions of Americans (with millions more to follow once the employer mandate kicks in) have been thrown off of their insurance plans, again because of the law.

It sure seems that there are lots of economic challenges out there are *far* more pressing than the income gap between the rich and the non-rich (which has grown four times faster under Obama), a trivial income discrepancy between genders, and raising the minimum wage. Yet, *those* are the primary issues being focused on by our president as we head into the 2014 midterm campaign season, and perhaps the most glaring absurdity of the whole thing is that few people find that weird.

Even with only 30% of Americans now believing this country is heading in the right direction (10% less than when President Obama took office at a very chaotic time in our country's history), the national narrative is centered around small-ball, abstract, petty issues that *no one* would rank at the top of their list of concerns. Yet, they're reliably at the top of the *media's* concerns, along with the tiresome *War on Women* nonsense, so that's likely what we'll *all* be talking about until November.

The political pundits often state that Obamacare will define Obama's legacy as our president. I understand why they say that. After all, the law (which has never had popular support) affects nearly 1/5 the U.S. economy and is changing (for better or worse) the healthcare system in this country for each and every one of us, either directly or indirectly. 

I'm of a different opinion, however. I believe the legacy of Obama, when the *true state of the union* is looked back on years from now, will be his astonishingly successful knack for distracting Americans from the big, historical challenges our country faces – challenges that he has never had an appetite to deal with. I believe his legacy will be his ability to convince a large portion of the country (with a lot of help from the media) that their problems could be solved with aimless pursuits of economic *fairness* and *equality*, for which his policies only made *less* attainable in a capitalistic society that *already* lends its citizens the best chance of achieving both.

Regardless of what you think about President Obama, there's little doubt that he's an incredibly impressive individual, especially when you recognize how completely impotent his rhetoric has rendered the opposition party. Even now, as more and more people are waking up to the unfortunate realities of Obamacare and are realizing that the president can't be trusted to make the right decisions (2/3 of the country

according to a recent poll), he's still able to set the national narrative with his smile, his eloquence, and a litany of poll-tested slogans that we've been hearing for years now.

President Obama is undoubtedly a masterful salesman. I just wish my countrymen weren't the marks being conned.