

December 27, 2009

A topical note from [Mark Steyn](#) concerning the failed Christmas Day bomber in Detroit. ... So once again we see the foolishness of complaceniiks who drone the fatuous clichés about how "in this struggle, scholarships will be far more important than smart bombs". The men eager to self-detonate on infidel airliners are not goatherds from the caves of Waziristan but educated middle-class Muslims who have had the most exposure to the western world and could be pulling down six-figure salaries almost anywhere on the planet. And don't look to "assimilation" to work its magic, either. We're witnessing a process of generational de-assimilation: In this family, yet again, the dad is an entirely assimilated member of the transnational elite. His son wants a global caliphate run on Wahhabist lines.

[Jennifer Rubin](#) follows on the story of the Nigerian terrorist trained in Yemen.

... reality is complicating the Obama administration's war on terror policies. It must be maddening to the Obami that they are presented once again with inconvenient evidence that their insistence on emptying Guantanamo of dangerous people is mind-bogglingly inane. ...

[Charles Krauthammer](#) says, as regards Iran ...

... We lost a year. But it was not just any year. It was a year of spectacularly squandered opportunity. In Iran, it was a year of revolution, beginning with a contested election and culminating this week in huge demonstrations mourning the [death](#) of the dissident Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri -- and demanding no longer a recount of the stolen election but the overthrow of the clerical dictatorship.

Obama responded by distancing himself from this new birth of freedom. First, scandalous silence. Then, a few grudging words. Then relentless engagement with the murderous regime. With offer after offer, gesture after gesture -- to not Iran, but the "Islamic Republic of Iran," as Obama ever so respectfully called these clerical fascists -- the United States conferred legitimacy on a regime desperate to regain it.

Why is this so important? Because revolutions succeed at that singular moment, that imperceptible historical inflection, when the people, and particularly those in power, realize that the regime has lost the mandate of heaven. With this weakening dictatorship desperate for affirmation, why is the United States repeatedly offering just such affirmation? ...

[Jennifer Rubin](#) agrees.

... Because the policy of engagement is so nonsensical one is left wondering whether the end game is and has always been some form of "nuclear containment," which is itself quite preposterous when it comes to a revolutionary Islamic state that has already announced its regional aspirations (including the elimination of the Jewish state) and compiled a track record of terror sponsorship. But it does explain the Obami's effort to be inoffensive, talk down military options, and defer sanctions until the time line on halting the mullahs' nuclear program collapses on itself. (Too late!)

These two explanations are, of course, not mutually exclusive. The Obami's may have thought they'd give engagement their best shot, with the "back up" plan of learning to live with a nuclear-armed Iran. (Do you feel safer yet?) Regardless, we are in a far worse position at the end of 2009 because we were practicing engagement at the exact moment we should have been pressing for regime change. It was a colossal misjudgment, one which will be viewed, I suspect, (along with the decision to give KSM a civilian trial) as among the worst national-security calls by any president.

Mark Steyn warns what is in store for us in ObamaCare.

Last week, during a bit of banter on Fox News, my colleague Jonah Goldberg reminded me of something I'd all but forgotten. Last September, during his address to Congress on health care, Barack Obama declared:

"I am not the first president to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last."

Dream on. The monstrous mountain of toxic pustules sprouting from greasy boils metastasizing from malign carbuncles that passed the Senate on Christmas Eve is not the last word in "health" "care" but the first. It ensures that this is all we'll be talking about, now and forever.

Government can't just annex "one-sixth of the US economy" (ie, the equivalent of annexing the entire British or French economy, or annexing the entire Indian economy twice over) and then just say: "Okay, what's next? On to cap-and-trade..." Nations that governmentalize health care soon find themselves talking about little else.

In Canada, once the wait times for MRIs and hip surgery start creeping up over two years, the government distracts the citizenry with a Royal Commission appointed to study possible "reforms" which reports back a couple of years later usually with recommendations to "strengthen" the government's "commitment" to every Canadian's "right" to health care by renaming the Department of Health the Department of Health Services and abolishing the Agency of Health Administration and replacing it with a new Agency of Administrative Health Operations which would report to a reformed Council of Health Policy Administrative Coordination to be supervised by a streamlined Public Health Operations & Administration Assessment Bureau. This package of "reforms" would cost a mere 12.3 gazillion dollars and usually keeps the lid on the pot until the wait times for MRIs start creeping up over three years. ...

Peter Schiff has similar thoughts.

As business owners undergo the yearly ritual of passing through eye-popping health insurance premium increases to their employees, it's easy to understand why any attempt at health insurance reform would be met with some degree of hope. Unfortunately, President Obama and his Democratic allies in Congress are about to take a very bad system and make it unimaginably worse.

While ramming their new legislation through Congress, the Democrats have taken great pains to point out that they do not intend to "socialize medicine." But make no mistake, that's where we're headed. Even if some naïve centrists believe that their efforts have denied the Left a total victory, the practical implications of the current legislation sow the seeds for complete capitulation. ...

Some of the grownups in the Dem party are getting the message. **Bill Daley**, brother to the mayor, and former Clinton Commerce Secretary says it is time to trim their far-left sails.

... All that is required for the Democratic Party to recover its political footing is to acknowledge that the agenda of the party's most liberal supporters has not won the support of a majority of Americans -- and, based on that recognition, to steer a more moderate course on the key issues of the day, from health care to the economy to the environment to Afghanistan.

For liberals to accept that inescapable reality is not to concede permanent defeat. Rather, let them take it as a sign that they must continue the hard work of slowly and steadily persuading their fellow citizens to embrace their perspective. In the meantime, liberals -- and, indeed, all of us -- should have the humility to recognize that there is no monopoly on good ideas, as well as the long-term perspective to know that intraparty warfare will only relegate the Democrats to minority status, which would be disastrous for the very constituents they seek to represent.

The party's moment of choosing is drawing close. While it may be too late to avoid some losses in 2010, it is not too late to avoid the kind of rout that redraws the political map. The leaders of the Democratic Party need to move back toward the center -- and in doing so, set the stage for the many years' worth of leadership necessary to produce the sort of pragmatic change the American people actually want.

Jennifer Rubin makes the same point less obtusely.

... And if the Democrats refuse to heed the voters and their own nervous members? Then we will have a major course correction on Election Day 2010. It is now conceivable that the House may fall back into Republican hands and that the Democrats will lose their filibuster-proof majority. And that will be the end of the untrammelled experiment in Obamaism, which can loosely be described as the endeavor to campaign as a moderate and race as far Left as possible until the voters notice.

We will see in 2010 whether the Democrats pull back from that precipice, or whether the voters shove a good number of them over it. Either way, 2010 will be the beginning of a new phase in the Obama presidency. Polls indicate that the public will be relieved, whether that new beginning comes from a voluntary course adjustment or a tidal wave election.

Reiha Salam, in Forbes, provides a review, of sorts, of James Cameron's new movie Avatar.

... In a sense, capitalism is the villain of Avatar. Yet what Cameron fails to understand is that capitalism represents a far more noble and heroic way of life than that led by the Na'vi. As Abraham Lincoln noted in 1858, the unique thing about the industrial revolution wasn't that humans invented steam-power and other ingenious inventions. In fact, a steam engine was manufactured in ancient Alexandria without ever being used. But that society didn't value the invention and spread of labor-saving devices. Instead, it valued physical courage and martial valor. The truly revolutionary thing about the industrial revolution was the rise of entrepreneurship. An entrepreneurial society doesn't value the ability to murder mammoths or members of the neighboring tribe above all else. It values the ability to develop useful ideas and devices and practices that had never been seen before. ...

The Corner

Let's Roll 2 [Mark Steyn]

On September 11th 2001, the government's (1970s) security procedures all failed, and the only good news of the day came from self-reliant citizens (on Flight 93) using their own wits and a willingness to act.

On December 25th 2009, the government's (post-9/11) security procedures all failed, and the only good news came once again from alert individuals:

"Suddenly, we hear a bang. It sounded like a firecracker went off," said Jasper Schuringa, a film director who was traveling to the US to visit friends.

"When [it] went off, everybody panicked ... Then someone screamed, 'Fire! Fire!'"

Schuringa, sitting in seat 20J, in the right-most section of the Airbus 330, looked to his left. "I saw smoke rising from a seat ... I didn't hesitate. I just jumped," he said.

Schuringa dove over four passengers to reach Abdul Mutallab's seat. The suspect had a blanket on his lap. "It was smoking and there were flames coming from beneath his legs."

"I searched on his body parts and he had his pants open. He had something strapped to his legs."

The unassuming hero ripped the flaming, molten object — which resembled a small, white shampoo bottle — off Abdul Mutallab's left leg, near his crotch. He said he put out the fire with his bare hands.

Schuringa yelled for [water](#), and members of the flight crew soon appeared with fire extinguishers. Then, he said, he hauled the suspect out of the seat.

If the facts remain broadly as outlined, this incident has serious implications for airline travel: A man is on the no-fly list but is allowed to board the plane. Everyone flying on an inbound long-haul flight to the United States is forced to hand over excessively large amounts of liquids and gels and put the small amounts permitted into separate plastic bags, yet the no-fly guy's material for bomb-making sails through undetected.

This time the last line of defense worked. Next time, the paradise-seeking jihadist might get lucky and find himself sitting next to, say, [Charlie Sheen](#), too immersed in a lengthy treatise on how 9/11 was an inside job to notice the smoldering socks in the next seat; or to the same kind of nothing-to-see-here crowd who thought Major Hasan's [e-mails](#) were "consistent with his research interests".

As for the [perpetrator](#):

The young man, who yesterday night attempted to ignite an explosive device aboard a Delta Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit, Michigan in the United States has been identified as Abdul Farouk Umar Abdulmutallab, the 23-year-old son of Alhaji Umaru Mutallab, **former First Bank chairman. Mutallab, a former minister and prominent banker** recently retired from the bank's board...

The **family home of the Mutallabs in Central London**, is currently being searched by men of the Metropolitan Police. THISDAY checks reveal that the suspect, Abdulfarouk Umar Muttalab who is **an engineering student at the University College, London** had been noted for his extreme views on religion since his secondary school days at the **British International School, Lome, Togo**.

So once again we see the foolishness of complaceniiks who drone the fatuous cliches about how "in this struggle, scholarships will be far more important than smart bombs". The men eager to self-detonate on infidel airliners are not goatherds from the caves of Waziristan but educated middle-class Muslims who have had the most exposure to the western world and could be pulling down six-figure salaries almost anywhere on the planet. And don't look to "assimilation" to work its magic, either. We're witnessing a process of generational de-assimilation: In this family, yet again, the dad is an entirely assimilated member of the transnational elite. His son wants a global caliphate run on Wahhabist lines.

Contentions

[Obami's Anti-Terror Policies Necessitate Stonewalling](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

One has to marvel at the opening graph of this [Politico](#) story:

Growing evidence that the Nigerian man charged with trying to blow up a commercial airliner as it landed in Detroit Friday spent time in Yemen and may have been fitted with customized, explosive-laden clothing there could complicate the U.S. government's efforts to send home more than 80 Yemeni prisoners currently at Guantanamo Bay.

Yes, reality is complicating the Obama administration's war on terror policies. It must be maddening to the Obami that they are presented once again with inconvenient evidence that their insistence on emptying

Guantanamo of dangerous people is mind-bogglingly inane. It is not surprising that Republicans were quick to point this out:

“Yesterday just highlights the fact that sending this many people back—or any people back—to Yemen right now is a really bad idea,” said Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-Mich.), the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee. “It’s just dumb....If you made a list of what the three dumbest countries would be to send people back to, Yemen would be on all the lists.” “I think it’s a major mistake,” Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.) said about prisoner releases to Yemen. “I don’t think Guantanamo should be closed, but if we’re going to close it I don’t believe we should be sending people to Yemen where prisoners have managed to escape in the past....Obviously, if [Abdulmutallab] did get training and direction from Yemen, it just adds to what is already a dangerous situation.”

Moreover this suggests that together with the domestic terror attack by Major Nadal Hassan, the Obama team will be hard pressed to make the claim that its policy of moral preening — closing Guantanamo, giving up on enhanced interrogation techniques, attacking the CIA, and giving KSM a public forum — is appropriate in the midst of daily evidence that our enemies are unimpressed with such gestures and are motivated not by objections to our military tribunals or incarceration policies but rather by their battle against western civilization itself.

And the Obami’s response is predictable. King and Hoekstra, as have many of their colleagues (e.g., Rep. Frank Wolf on Yemen releases, Sen. Pete Sessions on the Uighurs), are running into a stone wall in attempting to get basic information from an administration whose first instinct is to stonewall and rebuff any oversight efforts:

As with the shooting at Ft. Hood in November, the White House has ordered federal agencies not to provide briefings or answer inquiries from members of Congress, leaving all such contacts to be handled by the White House. “I don’t think I ever saw that throughout President Bush’s time in the White House. I could call directly to the director of the CIA or the [National Counterterrorism Center] and get whatever briefings I wanted,” Hoekstra said. He called the briefing limits “totally inappropriate,” but said the White House maintained the orders were needed because of the ongoing criminal investigation.

Perhaps if the Obami’s anti-terror policies were more in sync with public opinion and reality, they would be more forthcoming. But the public will have only one question: are we safer because of the Obama administration’s policies? So far, there is reason to think we are not.

Washington Post

[2009: The year of living fecklessly](#)

Regarding Iran, it was a year of spectacularly squandered opportunity.

by Charles Krauthammer

On Tuesday, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad did not just reject President Obama's latest feckless floating nuclear deadline. He [spat on it](#), declaring that Iran "will continue resisting" until the United States has gotten rid of its 8,000 nuclear warheads.

So ends 2009, the year of "engagement," of the extended hand, of the gratuitous apology -- and of spinning centrifuges, two-stage rockets and a secret enrichment facility that brought Iran materially closer to becoming a nuclear power.

We lost a year. But it was not just *any* year. It was a year of spectacularly squandered opportunity. In Iran, it was a year of revolution, beginning with a contested election and culminating this week in huge

demonstrations mourning the [death](#) of the dissident Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri -- and demanding no longer a recount of the stolen election but the overthrow of the clerical dictatorship.

Obama responded by distancing himself from this new birth of freedom. First, scandalous silence. Then, a few grudging words. Then relentless engagement with the murderous regime. With offer after offer, gesture after gesture -- to not Iran, but the "Islamic Republic of Iran," as Obama ever so respectfully called these clerical fascists -- the United States conferred legitimacy on a regime desperate to regain it.

Why is this so important? Because revolutions succeed at that singular moment, that imperceptible historical inflection, when the people, and particularly those in power, realize that the regime has lost the mandate of heaven. With this weakening dictatorship desperate for affirmation, why is the United States repeatedly offering just such affirmation?

Apart from ostracizing and delegitimizing these gangsters, we should be encouraging and reinforcing the demonstrators. This is no trivial matter. When pursued, beaten, arrested and imprisoned, dissidents can easily succumb to feelings of despair and isolation. Natan Sharansky [testifies](#) to the electric effect Ronald Reagan's Evil Empire [speech](#) had on lifting spirits in the gulag. The news was spread cell to cell in code tapped on the walls. They knew they weren't alone, that America was committed to their cause.

Yet so aloof has Obama been that on Hate America Day (Nov. 4, the anniversary of the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran), pro-American counter-demonstrators chanted, "Obama, Obama, you are either with us or with them," i.e., their oppressors.

Such cool indifference is more than a betrayal of our values. It's a strategic blunder of the first order.

Forget about human rights. Assume you care only about the nuclear issue. How to defuse it? Negotiations are going nowhere, and whatever U.N. sanctions we might get will be weak, partial, grudging and late. The only real hope is regime change. The revered and widely supported Montazeri had actually issued a fatwa against nuclear weapons.

And even if a successor government were to act otherwise, the nuclear threat would be highly attenuated because it's not the weapon but the regime that creates the danger. (Think India or Britain, for example.) Any proliferation is troubling, but a nonaggressive pro-Western Tehran would completely change the strategic equation and make the threat minimal and manageable.

What should we do? Pressure from without -- cutting off gasoline supplies, for example -- to complement and reinforce pressure from within. The pressure should be aimed not at changing the current regime's nuclear policy -- that will never happen -- but at helping change the regime itself.

Give the kind of covert support to assist dissident communication and circumvent censorship that, for example, we gave Solidarity in Poland during the 1980s. (In those days that meant broadcasting equipment and copying machines.) But of equal importance is robust rhetorical and diplomatic support from the very highest level: full-throated denunciation of the regime's savagery and persecution. In detail -- highlighting cases, the way Western leaders adopted the causes of Sharansky and Andrei Sakharov during the rise of the dissident movement that helped bring down the Soviet empire.

Will this revolution succeed? The odds are long but the reward immense. Its ripple effects would extend from Afghanistan to Iraq (in both conflicts, Iran actively supports insurgents who have long been killing Americans and their allies) to Lebanon and Gaza where Iran's proxies, Hezbollah and Hamas, are arming for war.

One way or the other, Iran will dominate 2010. Either there will be an Israeli attack or Iran will arrive at -- or cross -- the nuclear threshold. Unless revolution intervenes. Which is why to fail to do everything in our power to support this popular revolt is unforgivable.

Contentions

The Worst Decision of Them All

by Jennifer Rubin

As [Charles Krauthammer](#) notes, we have frittered away a critical year with Iran with perhaps the stupidest foreign-policy gambit in a generation: the notion that we could prostrate ourselves before tyrannical regime and thus endear ourselves to it and talk it out of its nuclear ambitions. The timing could not have been worse, as he observes:

We lost a year. But it was not just *any* year. It was a year of spectacularly squandered opportunity. In Iran, it was a year of revolution, beginning with a contested election and culminating this week in huge demonstrations mourning the death of the dissident Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri — and demanding no longer a recount of the stolen election but the overthrow of the clerical dictatorship. . .

Why is this so important? Because revolutions succeed at that singular moment, that imperceptible historical inflection, when the people, and particularly those in power, realize that the regime has lost the mandate of heaven.

And apparently we have only begun to deliver the bouquets of legitimacy, as we consider the first high-level visit since the 1979 revolution by an American official — the president's unofficial secretary of state. (Hillary Clinton will still be busy with agricultural projects in India or with whatever she does when not singing the praises of the Obami's non-existent human-rights policy.)

It is, in Krauthammer's words, "unforgivable," whether from a human-rights perspective or a nuclear-deterrence standpoint, that we should have given sustenance to the mullahs in a year in which depriving them of the same might have made a very big difference. It is what comes from believing that the world's problems and the threats to the security of the West arise from misunderstandings or from America's own "belligerence," which if muffled would bring forth a new era of cooperation. It is the same mentality that supposes that moving terrorists from Guantanamo to Illinois will earn brownie points with would-be terrorists. Just don't make them mad and we'll be safer.

As [Stephen Hayes](#) explains in a must-read piece, there was zero evidence that this sort of approach would work with Iran:

The problem, it turns out, was not George W. Bush. It wasn't a lack of American goodwill or our failure to acknowledge mistakes or our underdeveloped national listening skills. The problem is the Iranian regime. This should have been clear from the beginning, and should have been glaringly obvious after the fraudulent election and the deadly response to the brave Iranians who questioned the results. There were plenty of clues: an Iranian president who routinely denies the Holocaust and threatens to annihilate Israel; a long record of using terrorism as an instrument of state power; the provision of safe haven to senior al Qaeda leaders in the months and years after the 9/11 attacks; and a policy, approved at the highest levels of the Iranian leadership, of trying to kill Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Obami deny being naive about the nature of the regime, but the repetition of their disclaimer suggests they are sensitive on the point. Indeed, their policy "of the extended hand, of the gratuitous apology," has as its central feature the belief that becoming inoffensive makes aggressors less inclined to pursue their aims. But what historical precedent is there for this? The record is replete with examples to the contrary. Pick your favorite — WWII, the Cold War, etc.

Because the policy of engagement is so nonsensical one is left wondering whether the end game is and has always been some form of "nuclear containment," which is itself quite preposterous when it comes to a revolutionary Islamic state that has already announced its regional aspirations (including the elimination of the Jewish state) and compiled a track record of terror sponsorship. But it does explain the Obami's effort to

be inoffensive, talk down military options, and defer sanctions until the time line on halting the mullahs' nuclear program collapses on itself. (Too late!)

These two explanations are, of course, not mutually exclusive. The Obami's may have thought they'd give engagement their best shot, with the "back up" plan of learning to live with a nuclear-armed Iran. (Do you feel safer yet?) Regardless, we are in a far worse position at the end of 2009 because we were practicing engagement at the exact moment we should have been pressing for regime change. It was a colossal misjudgment, one which will be viewed, I suspect, (along with the decision to give KSM a civilian trial) as among the worst national-security calls by any president.

Orange County Register Cross the river, burn the bridge

by Mark Steyn

Last week, during a bit of banter on Fox News, my colleague Jonah Goldberg reminded me of something I'd all but forgotten. Last September, during his address to Congress on health care, Barack Obama declared:

"I am not the first president to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last."

Dream on. The monstrous mountain of toxic pustules sprouting from greasy boils metastasizing from malign carbuncles that passed the Senate on Christmas Eve is not the last word in "health" "care" but the first. It ensures that this is all we'll be talking about, now and forever.

Government can't just annex "one-sixth of the US economy" (ie, the equivalent of annexing the entire British or French economy, or annexing the entire Indian economy twice over) and then just say: "Okay, what's next? On to cap-and-trade..." Nations that governmentalize health care soon find themselves talking about little else.

In Canada, once the wait times for MRIs and hip surgery start creeping up over two years, the government distracts the citizenry with a Royal Commission appointed to study possible "reforms" which reports back a couple of years later usually with recommendations to "strengthen" the government's "commitment" to every Canadian's "right" to health care by renaming the Department of Health the Department of Health Services and abolishing the Agency of Health Administration and replacing it with a new Agency of Administrative Health Operations which would report to a reformed Council of Health Policy Administrative Coordination to be supervised by a streamlined Public Health Operations & Administration Assessment Bureau. This package of "reforms" would cost a mere 12.3 gazillion dollars and usually keeps the lid on the pot until the wait times for MRIs start creeping up over three years.

The other alternative is what the British did earlier this year: They created an exciting new "Patient's Bill of Rights", promising every Briton the "right" to hospital treatment within 18 weeks. Believe it or not, that distant deadline shimmering woozily in the languid desert haze can be oddly reassuring if you've ever visited a Scottish emergency room on a holiday weekend. And, if the four-and-a-half months go by and you still haven't been treated, you get your (tax) money back? Ah, no. But there is a free helpline you can call which will give you continuously updated estimates on which month your operation has been rescheduled for.

I mention these not as a preview of the horrors to come, but because I've come to the bleak conclusion that U.S.-style "health" "reform" is going to be far worse. We were told we had to do it because of the however many millions of uninsured, yet this bill will leave some 25 million Americans uninsured. On the other hand, millions of young fit healthy Americans in their first jobs who currently take the entirely reasonable view that they do not require health insurance at this stage in their lives will be forced to pay for coverage they neither want nor need. On the other other hand, those Americans who've done the boring responsible grown-up

thing and have health plans Harry Reid determines to be excessively “generous” will be subject to punitive taxes up to 40 per cent. On the other other other hand, if you’re the member of a union which enjoys privileged relations with Commissar Reid you’ll be exempt from that 40 per cent shakedown.

On the other other other other hand, if you’re already enjoying government health care, well, you’re 83 years old and, let’s face it, it’s hardly worth us giving you that surgery for the minimal contribution you make to society, so in the cause of extending government health care to millions of people who don’t currently get it we’re going to ration it for those currently entitled to it. Looking at the millions of Americans it leaves uninsured, and the millions it leaves with worse treatment and reduced access, and the millions it makes pay significantly more for their current health care, one can only marvel at Harry Reid’s genius: government health care turns out to be all government and no health care. Adding up the zillions of new taxes and bureaucracies and regulations it imposes on the citizenry, one might almost think that was the only point of the exercise.

That’s why I believe America’s belated embrace of government health care is going to be far more expensive and disastrous than the Euro-Canadian models. Whatever one’s philosophical objection to the Canadian health system, it is, broadly, fair: Unless you’re a cabinet minister or a bigtime hockey player, you’ll enjoy the same equality of crappiness and universal lack of access that everybody else does. But, even before it’s up-and-running, Pelosi-Reid-Obamacare is an impenetrable thicket of contradictory boondoggles, shameless payoffs and arbitrary shakedowns.

That’s why Nebraska’s grotesque zombie senator Ben Nelson is the perfect poster boy for the new arrangements, and not just another so-called Blue Dog Democrat spayed into compliance by a massive cash injection. There is no reason on earth why Nebraska should be the only state in this Union to have every dime of its increased Medicare tab picked up by the 49 others.

So either that privilege will be extended to all, or to favored others, or its asymmetry will be balanced by other precisely targeted lollipops hither and yon. Whatever happens, it’s a dagger at the heart of American federalism, just as the bill’s magisterial proclamation that the Independent Medicare Advisory Board can only be abolished by a two-thirds vote of the Senate strikes at one of the most basic principles of a free society – that no parliament can bind its successors.

These details are obnoxious not merely in and of themselves but because they tell us the truth about where we’re headed: Think of the way almost every Big Government project bursts its bodice and winds up bigger and more bloated than its creators allegedly foresaw. In this instance, the stays come pre-loosened, and studded with loopholes. Because the Democrat operators – the Nancy Pelosis and Barney Franks – know that what matters is to get something, anything across the river, and then burn the bridge behind you. My Republican friends often seem to miss the point in this debate: The so-called “public option” is not Page 3,079, Section (f), Clause VII. The entire bill is a public option – because that’s where it leads, remorselessly. The so-called “death panel” is not Page 2,721, Paragraph 19, Sub-section (d), but again the entire bill – because it inserts the power of the state between you and your doctor, and in effect assumes jurisdiction over your body. As the savvier Dems have always known, once you’ve crossed the Rubicon, you can endlessly re-reform your health reform until the end of time, and all the stuff you didn’t get this go-round will fall into place, and very quickly.

As I’ve been saying for over a year now, “health care” is the fast-track to a permanent left-of-center political culture. The unlovely Democrats on public display in the week before Christmas may seem like just a bunch of jelly-spined opportunists, grubby wardheelers and rapacious kleptocrats, but the smarter ones are showing great strategic clarity.

Alas for the rest of us, Euro-style government on a Harry Reid/Chris Dodd/Ben Nelson scale will lead to ruin.

As business owners undergo the yearly ritual of passing through eye-popping health insurance premium increases to their employees, it's easy to understand why any attempt at health insurance reform would be met with some degree of hope. Unfortunately, President Obama and his Democratic allies in Congress are about to take a very bad system and make it unimaginably worse.

While ramming their new legislation through Congress, the Democrats have taken great pains to point out that they do not intend to "socialize medicine." But make no mistake, that's where we're headed. Even if some naïve centrists believe that their efforts have denied the Left a total victory, the practical implications of the current legislation sow the seeds for complete capitulation.

This first round of reform could be labeled as the 'neutron bomb' of the insurance industry: it leaves some of the private apparatus standing, but it irradiates whatever remains of the industry's market viability.

The bill's centerpiece is a clause prohibiting insurers from denying coverage based on a pre-existing medical condition. However noble and marketable an idea, this proscription removes the very basis upon which any insurance model operates profitably.

A system of insurance requires that premiums be collected from a pool of low-risk people so that funds are available in case a high-risk event befalls a particular person. In that way, premiums can be low and coverage can be widely available, even if the benefits offered are hypothetically unlimited.

For example, homeowners buy fire insurance even though their houses are very unlikely to burn down. Recognizing that a fire could wipe them out financially, most homeowners endure the cost of coverage even if they never expect to collect. The same model applies to health insurance in a free market.

However, the health care bill removes the need for healthy individuals to carry insurance. Knowing that they could always find coverage if it were eventually needed, people would simply forgo paying expensive premiums while they are healthy, and then sign on when they need it. But insurance companies cannot survive if all of their policyholders are filing claims!

Correctly anticipating this incentive, the Senate bill imposes an annual fine which gradually escalates to \$750 for those who fail to buy coverage. So what? I would gladly pay \$750 in order to avoid the \$8,000 per year I pay now for personal health insurance. Currently, I'm relatively healthy for a 46 year old and I don't anticipate making a big claim. But if I do, under the new rules I can always get 'insurance' after the fact. Heck, if I can stay healthy for the next couple of decades, I'll save a fortune. Think about how much easier the decision would be if I were 20 years younger! Since most people are capable of figuring this out, the entire insurance industry would collapse under such a system.

There can be no question that \$750 annual maximum penalty is a mere placeholder. It is the camel's nose under the tent. When the non-discrimination provision kicks in, the only way these companies could remain solvent would be for Congress to raise the fine to the point where the penalty is greater than the gain of skipping coverage.

For me, that would have to be roughly \$8,000 per year. Introducing such a fine right now would have surely killed the bill. So, the wily wonks in Washington have chosen to move slower, knowing that once the first step is taken, the second becomes inevitable.

However, there is another, more devious possibility. Perhaps our elected officials actually intend to bite the hands that feed them. They could double-cross insurance companies by not raising the fine in five years, thereby forcing the industry into bankruptcy as millions of healthy people opt-out. During the ensuing 'insurance crisis,' our courageous leaders could ride to the rescue with a nationalized, single-payer system.

The real tragedy is that the current bill does nothing to restrain the forces that are propelling healthcare costs into the stratosphere, namely: regulatory bans of insurance competition, the out-of-control medical malpractice industry, federal programs and subsidies, and a tax code that favors a third-party payment system - which alienates the patient from the cost of his care.

To consider that many in Washington have the nerve to market this multi-trillion dollar monstrosity as a "deficit reduction bill" is to realize that our representatives have lost all touch with reality. For those keeping score, the government made similarly rosy projections in the mid-1960's when Medicare was first introduced. The inflation-adjusted cost of that program already exceeds the original estimate by a factor of ten. That's probably where we are headed this time around.

Washington Post
[Keep the Big Tent big](#)
by William M. Daley

The announcement by Alabama Rep. Parker Griffith that he is switching to the Republican Party is just the latest warning sign that the Democratic Party -- my lifelong political home -- has a critical decision to make: Either we plot a more moderate, centrist course or risk electoral disaster not just in the upcoming midterms but in many elections to come.

Rep. Griffith's decision makes him the fifth centrist Democrat to either switch parties or announce plans to [retire](#) rather than stand for reelection in 2010. These announcements are a sharp reversal from the progress the Democratic Party made starting in 2006 and continuing in 2008, when it reestablished itself as the nation's majority party for the first time in more than a decade. That success happened for one major reason: Democrats made inroads in geographies and constituencies that had trended Republican since the 1960s. In these two elections, a majority of independents and a sizable number of moderate Republicans joined the traditional Democratic base to sweep Democrats to commanding majorities in Congress and to bring Barack Obama to the White House.

These independents and Republicans supported Democrats based on a message indicating that the party would be a true Big Tent -- that we would welcome a diversity of views even on tough issues such as abortion, gun rights and the role of government in the economy.

This call was answered not just by voters but by a surge of smart, talented candidates who came forward to run and win under the Democratic banner in districts dominated by Republicans for a generation. These centrists swelled the party's ranks in Congress and contributed to Obama's victories in states such as Indiana, North Carolina, Virginia, Colorado and other Republican bastions.

But now they face a grim political fate. On the one hand, centrist Democrats are being vilified by left-wing bloggers, pundits and partisan news outlets for not being sufficiently liberal, "true" Democrats. On the other, Republicans are pounding them for their association with a party that seems to be advancing an agenda far to the left of most voters.

The political dangers of this situation could not be clearer.

Witness the losses in New Jersey and Virginia in this year's off-year elections. In those gubernatorial contests, the margin of victory was provided to Republicans by independents -- many of whom had voted for Obama. Just one year later, they had crossed back to the Republicans by 2-to-1 margins.

Witness the drumbeat of ominous poll results. Obama's [approval rating](#) has fallen below 49 percent overall and is even lower -- 41 percent -- among independents. On the question of which party is best suited to manage the economy, there has been a [30-point swing](#) toward Republicans since November 2008, according to Ipsos. Gallup's generic congressional ballot shows Republicans leading Democrats. There is

not a hint of silver lining in these numbers. They are the quantitative expression of the swing bloc of American politics slipping away.

And, of course, witness the loss of Rep. Griffith and his fellow moderate Democrats who will retire. They are perhaps the truest canaries in the coal mine.

Despite this raft of bad news, Democrats are not doomed to return to the wilderness. The question is whether the party is prepared to listen carefully to what the American public is saying. Voters are not re-embracing conservative ideology, nor are they falling back in love with the Republican brand. If anything, the Democrats' salvation may lie in the fact that Republicans seem even more hell-bent on allowing their radical wing to drag the party away from the center.

All that is required for the Democratic Party to recover its political footing is to acknowledge that the agenda of the party's most liberal supporters has not won the support of a majority of Americans -- and, based on that recognition, to steer a more moderate course on the key issues of the day, from health care to the economy to the environment to Afghanistan.

For liberals to accept that inescapable reality is not to concede permanent defeat. Rather, let them take it as a sign that they must continue the hard work of slowly and steadily persuading their fellow citizens to embrace their perspective. In the meantime, liberals -- and, indeed, all of us -- should have the humility to recognize that there is no monopoly on good ideas, as well as the long-term perspective to know that intraparty warfare will only relegate the Democrats to minority status, which would be disastrous for the very constituents they seek to represent.

The party's moment of choosing is drawing close. While it may be too late to avoid some losses in 2010, it is not too late to avoid the kind of rout that redraws the political map. The leaders of the Democratic Party need to move back toward the center -- and in doing so, set the stage for the many years' worth of leadership necessary to produce the sort of pragmatic change the American people actually want.

Contentions

The Beginning of the End

by Jennifer Rubin

Democrats declare themselves unconcerned about a "backlash" in 2010. The public will come to appreciate their health-care handiwork, they suppose. And somehow their supporters will be re-engaged to match the enthusiasm of the apoplectic conservative coalition that is more motivated to defeat Obamaism in 2010 than it was to defeat Obama in 2008. Maybe by then unemployment will have drifted downward. Oh, and there might be a grand bargain with the Iranian mullahs rather than the prospect of a nuclear-armed revolutionary Islamic state.

Yes, it sounds far-fetched. Very. And it suggests that the public — which couldn't be convinced of the benefits of a failed stimulus plan — can be talked into believing the wonders of ObamaCare, talked out of its concerns about taxes and debt, and talked into ignoring the Obami's leftward lurch. That's a lot of spinning and misdirection. And who will do it? Obama seems to have lost his ability to sway the public on much of anything (except the Afghanistan surge, suggesting he is more effective in the role of resolute commander in chief than as health-care salesman). All the talk-show appearances and all the speeches haven't sold the public on a big government takeover of health care. Quite the opposite.

So how is this transformation of the electorate supposed to come about, exactly? Well, starting over or severely downsizing the grossly unpopular health-care bill would help. A pro-jobs agenda (that is more than weatherizing subsidies) with a moratorium on new taxes might help. And a serious determination to control domestic spending might soothe independent voters. It's not impossible, just unlikely, unless there is a wholesale revolt among vulnerable Democratic congressmen, senators, and governors to turn the agenda back from. . . what's the word?.. ah. . . the *precipice*.

And if the Democrats refuse to heed the voters and their own nervous members? Then we will have a major course correction on Election Day 2010. It is now conceivable that the House may fall back into Republican hands and that the Democrats will lose their filibuster-proof majority. And that will be the end of the untrammled experiment in Obamaism, which can loosely be described as the endeavor to campaign as a moderate and race as far Left as possible until the voters notice.

We will see in 2010 whether the Democrats pull back from that precipice, or whether the voters shove a good number of them over it. Either way, 2010 will be the beginning of a new phase in the Obama presidency. Polls indicate that the public will be relieved, whether that new beginning comes from a voluntary course adjustment or a tidal wave election.

Forbes

[The Case Against 'Avatar'](#)

by Reihan Salam

For the last 200 years, humans have grown taller, stronger and healthier. This progress has been fastest in the countries that gave rise to the Industrial Revolution, yet it has spread throughout the world, sparking a transformation that economists Robert Fogel and Dora Costa call techno-physio evolution, "a synergism between technological and physiological improvements that is biological, but not genetic, rapid, culturally transmitted, and not necessarily stable."

After thousands of years of ignorance and stagnation, a kind of miracle happened that radically transformed humanity's relationship to the wider world. This explosion of wealth has been periodically interrupted by war and famine, yet it has never been fully undone. And though it has involved serious downsides, the prospect of returning to a primeval state strikes most of us as insane. Modern life can be exhausting and even demeaning. It is, however, preferable to spending most of one's waking moments foraging and hunting in a desperate struggle for survival.

Or is it? That is the question James Cameron asks in his brilliant science-fiction epic *Avatar*. The villains of *Avatar* are, well, you and me. Rapacious humans from an environmentally devastated Earth have arrived on an alien moon called Pandora in search of a precious resource called "unobtainium." The only hiccup is that the richest source of unobtainium lies beneath the habitat of the Na'vi, a race of long-limbed humanoids who live in blissful harmony with their environment. So naturally the humans, being ruthless and acquisitive by nature, decide that corporate profits matter more than the lives of the Na'vi, and they launch a brutal military assault that, as you can no doubt guess, ends in tragedy. Throughout the film, the Na'vi are portrayed as superior to the humans. The irony of *Avatar* is that Cameron has made a dazzling, gorgeous indictment of the kind of society that produces James Camerons.

Though the Na'vi are at least as intelligent as the humans, they have not built a technologically advanced civilization. Rather, they rely on the forest in which they live to provide them with sustenance and mental stimulation. Vicious predators constantly engage the senses, so there is little time to, say, write novels or play videogames. All flora and fauna are linked together in a shared consciousness that tribal leaders can access through concentration and chant. The only Na'vi we ever meet are part of this ruling caste, and so we have no sense of what keeps the Na'vi masses occupied. One has to assume that they live in a constant state of trembling awe at the beautiful world that surrounds them.

At the risk of sounding needlessly negative, I'm pretty sure that I'd prefer baking bricks in the hot sun, guzzling motor oil, or jumping rope with barbed wire to spending an afternoon living among the Na'vi, perhaps the most sanctimonious and frankly boring humanoids ever portrayed on film. But the Na'vi are actually worse than just boring. Because the struggle for survival is the only source of meaning in their lives, the Na'vi celebrate physical courage and martial valor above all else, with the possible exception of mastering the admittedly cool ability of talking to trees.

In a sense, capitalism is the villain of *Avatar*. Yet what Cameron fails to understand is that capitalism represents a far more noble and heroic way of life than that led by the Na'vi. As Abraham Lincoln noted in

1858, the unique thing about the industrial revolution wasn't that humans invented steam-power and other ingenious inventions. In fact, a steam engine was manufactured in ancient Alexandria without ever being used. But that society didn't value the invention and spread of labor-saving devices. Instead, it valued physical courage and martial valor. The truly revolutionary thing about the industrial revolution was the rise of entrepreneurship. An entrepreneurial society doesn't value the ability to murder mammoths or members of the neighboring tribe above all else. It values the ability to develop useful ideas and devices and practices that had never been seen before.

In 1976, Stanford economist Tibor Scitovsky wrote an incredible book called *The Joyless Economy*, which, among other things, argued that we place too much emphasis on acquiring "comforts" that lose their meaning--think of the endless quest for new cars, new houses, and new shoes--instead of pursuing the "pleasures" of building fulfilling relationships and discovering and creating new things. The essential difference between entrepreneurial societies vs. the Na'vi society portrayed in *Avatar* isn't that we're rich and they're not. Despite being chased around by space-panthers and serpentine dog-wolves all day, the Na'vi do seem pretty tall, strong, healthy and well-fed. Entrepreneurial societies are in a deep sense better than other societies because they give everyone an opportunity to learn, discover, and explore, and to change the world around us. No tree whispers into our ears to tell us what to do or how to live. And that is a sublimely wonderful thing.

[How's this for a different time?](#)









