

January 24, 2010

In the [Corner](#), [John Miller](#) lists all the reasons why liberals have had a tough week.

1. *The Democrats lost Ted Kennedy's seat, sending their health-care takeover efforts into a tailspin.*
2. *The Supreme Court wiped out the central feature of McCain-Feingold, in a victory for free speech.*
3. *Air America declared bankruptcy.*

UPDATE: A reader notes the arrival of this [anniversary](#):

Sec. 3. Closure of Detention Facilities at Guantánamo. The detention facilities at Guantánamo for individuals covered by this order shall be closed as soon as practicable, and no later than 1 year from the date of this order. ...

BARACK OBAMA

THE WHITE HOUSE,
January 22, 2009. ...

[Mark Steyn](#) discusses trucks and other liberal issues.

... "The same thing that swept Scott Brown into office swept me into office," said Obama. "People are angry, and they're frustrated, not just because of what's happened in the last year or two years but what's happened over the last eight years." ...

... Presumably, the president isn't stupid enough actually to believe what he said. But it's dispiriting to discover he's stupid enough to think we're stupid enough to believe it.

... As the headline in Der Spiegel put it: "The World Bids Farewell To Obama." ...

... The Barack Obama who showed up last Sunday to help out Martha Coakley was a sad and diminished figure from the colossus of a year ago. He had nothing to say, but he said it anyway. As he did with his Copenhagen pitch for the Olympics, he put his personal prestige on the line, raised the stakes, and then failed to deliver. All those cool kids on his speechwriting team bogged him down in the usual leaden sludge. He went to the trouble of flying in to phone it in. ...

[Mort Zuckerman](#) is one of the disenchanted liberals.

... In the campaign, he said he would change politics as usual. He did change them. It's now worse than it was. I've now seen the kind of buying off of politicians that I've never seen before. It's politically corrupt and it's starting at the top. It's revolting.

Five states got deals on health care—one of them was Harry Reid's. It is disgusting, just disgusting. I've never seen anything like it. The unions just got them to drop the tax on Cadillac plans in the health-care bill. It was pure union politics. They just went along with it. It's a bizarre form of political corruption. It's bribery. I suppose they could say, that's the system. He was supposed to change it or try to change it. ...

... One business leader said to me, "In the Clinton administration, the policy people were at the center, and the political people were on the sideline. In the Obama administration, the political people are at the center, and the policy people are on the sidelines." ...

[Der Spiegel](#) reviews commentary from German newspapers on the political landscape that Obama faces.

The center-right **Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung** writes:

"Of course the president rejects the interpretation that the Massachusetts election was a referendum on his first year in the White House. But he cannot ignore the fact that his health care reform package is not popular, the situation of the country's finances is seen as threatening and many voters blame the high unemployment rate on the party in power -- on the Democrats, led by Obama. The result is a second year in office full of very different challenges than the first. To save what there is to be saved, Obama will have to be prepared to fashion a bipartisan compromise on health care -- a compromise with a Republican Party which has tasted blood and can now dream once again about a return to power."

[Charles Krauthammer](#) shreds the liberal spin.

...After Coakley's defeat, Obama pretended that the real cause was a generalized anger and frustration "not just because of what's happened in the last year or two years, but what's happened over the last eight years."

Let's get this straight: The antipathy to George W. Bush is so enduring and powerful that ... it just elected a Republican senator in Massachusetts? Why, the man is omnipotent.

And the Democrats are delusional: Scott Brown won by running against Obama not Bush. He won by brilliantly nationalizing the race, running hard against the Obama agenda, most notably Obamacare. Killing it was his No. 1 campaign promise.

Bull's-eye. An astonishing 56 percent of Massachusetts voters, according to Rasmussen, called health care their top issue. In a Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates poll, 78 percent of Brown voters said their vote was intended to stop Obamacare. Only a quarter of all voters in the Rasmussen poll cited the economy as their top issue, nicely refuting the Democratic view that Massachusetts was just the usual anti-incumbent resentment you expect in bad economic times.

Brown ran on a very specific, very clear agenda. Stop health care. Don't Mirandize terrorists. Don't raise taxes; cut them. And no more secret backroom deals with special interests. ...

More bad news for Obama. [Yuval Levin](#) blogs about it in the [Corner](#).

... You know an administration is in trouble when prominent officials let it be known to the press that they disagreed with one of the president's major decisions. It happens to every president, and it's always a very bad sign. Usually it comes after some policy goes terribly awry, and sends senior advisors running for cover. But sometimes, in the very worst cases, it happens as soon as a decision is made, before the policy in question has even had a chance to be tested—and it reveals more than dissent about one particular decision, but a broader sense that things are not well at the top.

That is why [this](#) Reuters story from yesterday was so striking. It describes [Treasury Secretary](#) Tim Geithner's opposition to the bank limits President Obama announced. It seems that on the very day of the announcement, Geithner decided he needed to dispatch people close to him to make it known (anonymously) that he did not agree with the decision, and indeed that he agreed with the two key arguments offered by its staunchest critics. ...

[Jonah Goldberg](#) comments on Yuval Levin's post.

Reading Yuval's [post](#) about the Treasury Secretary's unease with the president's bank plan, it seems pretty obvious that the political shop is running policy at the [White House](#). ...

.... But it does remind me that a lot of folks thought it was just terrible for Karl Rove to have any role in policy formation in the White House. Whatever the merits of this bank plan, is there any doubt that [David Axelrod](#) is playing just such a role here?

However galling the cynicism, dishonesty, and hypocrisy of the White [House's](#) turn may be, I'm hardly scandalized that politics is influencing policy. That's what politics is all about. My bigger concern is that such populist scapegoating rarely makes for good policy over the long haul.

[Roger Simon](#) is concerned about Obama's next moves.

I don't think it's accident that the Stock Market is tanking after a very short rally that coincided with the then coming victory of Scott Brown. The business world is scared – as is evidently our [Secretary of the Treasury](#) who has wandered about as far off the reservation as cabinet officers normally go, allowing the world to know his skepticism about Obama's new reining in of the banks. (How long before Geithner goes under the bus now?)

The scary thing is that many of us believe the President hardly knows much of anything, certainly not economics, and is surrounded by an increasingly paranoid and defensive group of advisers. It's shades of Nixon, but worse. Tricky Dick, at least, knew what he was doing and could accomplish things. Obama is the biggest windbag to ever ascend to the presidency. He has no idea what he is doing and now things are getting rough. Frankly, I'm worried for our country because this man doesn't really understand what the public is telling him. He just thinks we're "angry." He's wrong – we're furious and we're furious because he blames everyone but himself and seems psychologically incapable of taking responsibility. One can imagine a ninety-year old Obama stumbling around in some rest home shaking his walking stick at George Bush. But for the moment Bush is being replaced boy. Now evidently it's the banks' fault. The evil bankers are to blame. It's capitalism, stupid.

Problem is, we've been there, done that, a thousand times. The alternative to capitalism is socialism and it has never worked. Not once, in all its myriad permutations. In fact, it most often hurts those it was intended to help, bankrupting the society and leaving the lower classes destitute. The Soviet Union collapsed. China was deeply impoverished until it turned essentially capitalistic . Everybody knows that now, and has for years, except maybe our president. He's after the banks and is so clueless he thinks that will impress us. Of course, it won't. Nobody believes anything he says anymore. But he is the President and he can take executive actions. And with those actions, like a wounded animal, he may pull all of us down with him. I am deeply afraid of that because Barack Obama has never had to deal with any personal adversity in his adult life. He has lived a completely privileged existence. This is a first for him. There's no telling how he will behave. Watch out, buckle up and hold on to your seats.

[Jennifer Rubin](#) discusses some comments that will make you cringe.

In an [interview this week](#) Obama admits that he really didn't have a clue on how the Middle East works:

I'll be honest with you. A: This is just really hard. Even for a guy like George Mitchell who helped bring about the peace in Northern Ireland. This is as intractable a problem as you get. ...

Really hard?? The hubris is remarkable, isn't it? One supposes that he imagined all the dolts who preceded him in the Oval Office to just not have been smart enough or him enough to get the job done. It seems as though he "overestimated" the impact of his mere presence on the parties. Really, who knew there were underlying political realities that would render the parties immune to his charms? But there is no sign he's going to do much, if anything, differently ("we are going to continue to work with both parties to recognize what I think is ultimately their deep-seated interest in a two-state solution"). But now he knows it's hard.

...He is, it seems, so fixed in his preconceptions of the world that basic geopolitical realities come as a surprise or disappointment. If only the world worked the way his university-professor pals and George Mitchell told him it would. ...

In [Commentary](#), [Michael Totten](#) says that the Middle East has been hard for a long time.

...The Middle East's "Berlin Wall," so to speak, may have cracked, but it didn't fall. Iraq all but dismembered itself after its successful election. Hezbollah blew up the Levant and put Lebanon's "March 14" revolution on ice. Palestinians elected Hamas and transformed Gaza into a suppurating jihad state. It could be a while before I allow myself to feel upbeat and sunny again. The Middle East makes suckers of everyone who feels upbeat and sunny.

*...The entire Middle East is difficult and dysfunctional. There is no peaceful political mainstream. Ethnic and religious violence is normal — not just between Arabs and Israelis, but also between Arabs and Persians, Arabs and Kurds, Kurds and Turks, Kurds and Persians, Muslims and Christians, and Sunnis and Shias. The idea that peace is likely to break out there any time soon was memorably ridiculed in the Adam Sandler comedy *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*. "They've been fighting for 2,000 years," said the main character's mother. "It can't be much longer." ...*

...If the "peace process" is sure to fail right now — and it is — announcing it as a foreign-policy priority only sets Obama up as a weak leader who can't deliver the goods. His credibility suffers, and so does America's leverage. He ought to focus on conflict management and damage control, and try not to make anything worse.

[David Harsanyi](#) hits a home run.

...Fifty-eight percent of those polled by The Washington Post recently claimed they preferred smaller government with fewer services, with only 38 percent favoring a larger government with more services (and, yes, it is a terrific struggle not to place ironic quotations marks around the word services).

This is the highest number for the "smaller government" category since 2002. ...

...Now, I am under no grand illusions about democracy. The electorate can be mercurial and irrational — as nearly every election proves. Nor do I believe any ethical politician should abandon his or her core values simply because polls tell them it would be expedient.

I say, keep fighting, Mr. President. Those of us who believe in capitalism need you. ...

[David Warren](#) offers his thoughts on Haiti and on giving.

...Yet if our intention is to help, both short term and longer, our emphasis should not be on doing things that make us feel good about ourselves, but instead on what works. ...

...This problem is exacerbated by our "culture of narcissism," which focuses on the happyface of good intentions. Good intentions are never enough, prudence is required to convert them into useful action, yet prudence is the last thing on the minds of people jostled by headlines into a need to "do something now."

The impulse to "write a cheque" to assuage conscience becomes more and more deeply engrained in our psyches, as we abandon the moral and spiritual underpinnings of our civilization, and indulge the habit of quantifying each issue by the amount of money we throw at it. My advice to the people who have asked me what they can most usefully do to help is, start thinking ahead to the next disaster. For Port-au-Prince is already bottlenecked with supplies. ...

Leading off the cartoons is a Corner Post from [Jack Fowler](#).

The Corner

[This Week in Liberalism](#) [John J. Miller]

1. The Democrats lost Ted Kennedy's seat, sending their health-care takeover efforts into a tailspin.
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THE WHITE HOUSE,
January 22, 2009.

UPDATE 2: Another reader points to [this](#):

The timetable to reach a global deal to tackle climate change lay in tatters on Wednesday after the United Nations waived the first deadline of the process laid out at last month's fractious Copenhagen summit.

Division of Labour

["Politics is getting so weird"](#)

A friend writes:

Politics is getting so weird.

Last month I was blessing the commies in China for killing the Copenhagen conference.

Now I'm blessing the most liberal state in the union for burying Ted Kennedy and Obama's agenda.

Brown's truckin', Obama shifts into reverse

by Mark Steyn

So what went wrong? According to Barack Obama, the problem is that he overestimated you dumb rubes' ability to appreciate what he's been doing for you. "That I do think is a mistake of mine," the president told ABC's George Stephanopoulos. "I think the assumption was if I just focus on policy, if I just focus on this provision or that law or if we're making a good rational decision here, then people will get it."

But you schlubs aren't that smart. You didn't get it. And Barack Obama is determined to see that you do. So the president has decided that he needs to start "speaking directly to the American people."

Wait, wait! Come back! Don't all stampede for the hills! He gave only (according to CBS News' Mark Knoller) 158 interviews and 411 speeches in his first year. That's more than any previous president – and maybe more than all of them put together. But there may still be some show out there that didn't get its exclusive Obama interview – I believe the top-rated "Grain & Livestock Prices Report – 4 a.m. Update with Herb Torpormeister" on WZZZ-AM Dead Buzzard Gulch Junction's Newstalk Leader is still waiting to hear back from the White House.

But what will the president be saying in all these extra interviews? In that interview about how he hadn't given enough interviews, he also explained to George Stephanopoulos what that wacky Massachusetts election was all about:

"The same thing that swept Scott Brown into office swept me into office," said Obama. "People are angry, and they're frustrated, not just because of what's happened in the last year or two years but what's happened over the last eight years."

Got it. People are so angry and frustrated at George W. Bush that they're voting for Republicans. In Massachusetts. Boy, I can't wait for that 159th interview.

Presumably, the president isn't stupid enough actually to believe what he said. But it's dispiriting to discover he's stupid enough to think we're stupid enough to believe it.

So who's panting for that 412th speech? Not the American Left. As Paul Krugman, The New York Times' "Conscience of a Liberal," put it: "He Wasn't The One We've Been Waiting For."

Not the once-delirious Europeans, either. As the headline in Der Spiegel put it: "The World Bids Farewell To Obama."

And not any beleaguered Democratic candidates trying to turn things around in volatile swing states like, er, Massachusetts. The Barack Obama who showed up last Sunday to help out Martha Coakley was a sad and diminished figure from the colossus of a year ago. He had nothing to say, but he said it anyway. As he did with his Copenhagen pitch for the Olympics, he put his personal prestige on the line, raised the stakes, and then failed to deliver. All those cool kids on his speechwriting team bogged him down in the usual leaden sludge. He went to the trouble of flying in to phone it in.

The most striking aspect of his performance was how unhappy he looked, as if he doesn't enjoy the job. You can understand why. He ran as something he's not, and never has been: A post-partisan centrist transformative healer. That'd be a difficult trick to pull off even for somebody with any prior executive experience, someone who'd actually run something, like a state, or even a town, or even a commercial fishing operation, like that poor chillbilly boob Sarah Palin. At one point late in the 2008 campaign, when someone suggested that if Gov. Palin was "unqualified" then surely he was, too, Obama pointed to as evidence to the contrary his ability to run such an effective campaign. In other words, running for president was his main qualification for being president.

That was the story of his life: Wow! Look at this guy! Wouldn't it be great to have him ...as community organizer, as state representative, as state senator, as United States senator. He was wafted ever upwards, staying just long enough in each "job" to get another notch on the escutcheon, but never long enough to leave any trace.

The defining moment of his doomed attempt to prop up Martha Coakley was his peculiar obsession with Scott Brown's five-year-old pickup:

"Forget the ads. Everybody can run slick ads," the president told an audience of out-of-state students at a private school. "Forget the truck. Everybody can buy a truck."

How they laughed! But what was striking was the thinking behind Obama's line: that anyone can buy a truck for a slick ad, that Brown's pickup was a prop – like the herd of cows Al Gore rented for a pastoral backdrop when he launched his first presidential campaign. Or the "Iron Chef" TV episode featuring delicious healthy recipes made with produce direct from Michelle Obama's "kitchen garden": The cameras filmed the various chefs meeting the first lady and then picking choice organic delicacies from the White House crop, and then, for the actual cooking, the show sent out for stunt-double vegetables from a grocery back in New York. Viewed from Obama's perspective, why wouldn't you assume the truck's just part of the set? "In his world," wrote The Weekly Standard's Stephen Hayes, "everything is political, and everything is about appearances."

Howard Fineman, the increasingly loopy editor of the increasingly doomed Newsweek, took it a step further. The truck wasn't just any old prop but a very particular kind: "In some places, there are codes, there are images," he told MSNBC's Keith Olbermann. "You know, there are pickup trucks, you could say there was a racial aspect to it one way or another."

Ah, yes. Scott Brown has over 200,000 miles on his odometer. Man, he's racked up a lot of coded racism on that rig. But that's easy to do in notorious cross-burning KKK swamps like suburban Massachusetts.

Whenever aspiring writers ask me for advice, I usually tell 'em this:

Don't just write there, *do* something. Learn how to shingle a roof, or tap-dance, or raise sled dogs. Because if you don't do anything, you wind up like Obama and Fineman – men for whom words are props and codes and metaphors but no longer expressive of anything real.

America is becoming a bilingual society, divided between those who think a pickup is a rugged vehicle useful for transporting heavy-duty items from A to B, and those who think a pickup is coded racism.

Unfortunately, the latter group forms most of the Democratic-media one-party state currently running the country. Can you imagine Bill Clinton being so stupid as to put down pickup trucks while standing next to John Kerry? And what's even more extraordinary is that those lines were *written* for Obama by paid professionals.

But fine, have it your way. Tuesday's vote was really a plea by a desperate people for even more Obama. We're going to need even more Obama teleprompters, even more Obama speeches, even more sonorous banalities unrelated to action, even more "Let me be clear..." prefacing even more tinny generalities, on even more reams of even more double-spaced paper. And we're gonna need a really heavy duty rig to carry all that verbiage.

Maybe Scott Brown can sell 'em his truck.

Daily Beast

He's Done Everything Wrong

Obama punted on the economy and reversed the fortunes of the Democrats in 365 days.

by Mort Zuckerman

He's misjudged the character of the country in his whole approach. There's the saying, "It's the economy, stupid." He didn't get it. He was determined somehow or other to adopt a whole new agenda. He didn't address the main issue.

This health-care plan is going to be a fiscal disaster for the country. Most of the country wanted to deal with costs, not expansion of coverage. This is going to raise costs dramatically.

In the campaign, he said he would change politics as usual. He did change them. It's now worse than it was. I've now seen the kind of buying off of politicians that I've never seen before. It's politically corrupt and it's starting at the top. It's revolting.

Five states got deals on health care—one of them was Harry Reid's. It is disgusting, just disgusting. I've never seen anything like it. The unions just got them to drop the tax on Cadillac plans in the health-care bill. It was pure union politics. They just went along with it. It's a bizarre form of political corruption. It's bribery. I suppose they could say, that's the system. He was supposed to change it or try to change it.

Even that is not the worst part. He could have said, "I know. I promised these things, but let me try to do them one at a time." You want to deal with health care? Fine. Issue No. 1 with health care was the cost. You know I think it was 37 percent or 33 who were worried about coverage. Fine, I wrote an editorial to this effect. Focus on cost-containment first. But he's trying to boil the ocean, trying to do too much. This is not leadership.

Obama's ability to connect with voters is what launched him. But what has surprised me is how he has failed to connect with the voters since he's been in office. He's had so much overexposure. You have to be selective. He was doing five Sunday shows. How many press conferences? And now people stop listening to him. The fact is he had 49.5 million listeners to first speech on the economy. On Medicare, he had 24 million. He's lost his audience. He has not rallied public opinion. He has plunged in the polls more than any other political figure since we've been using polls. He's done everything wrong. Well, not everything, but the major things.

I don't consider it a triumph. I consider it a disaster.

One business leader said to me, "In the Clinton administration, the policy people were at the center, and the political people were on the sideline. In the Obama administration, the political people are at the center, and the policy people are on the sidelines."

I'm very disappointed. We endorsed him. I voted for him. I supported him publicly and privately.

I hope there are changes. I think he's already laid in huge problems for the country. The fiscal program was a disaster. You have to get the money as quickly as possible into the economy. They didn't do that. By end of the first year, only one-third of the money was spent. Why is that?

He should have jammed a stimulus plan into Congress and said, "This is it. No changes. Don't give me that bullshit. We have a national emergency." Instead they turned it over to Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi who can run circles around him.

It's very sad. It's really sad.

He's improved America's image in the world. He absolutely did. But you have to translate that into something. Let me tell you what a major leader said to me recently. "We are convinced," he said, "that he is not strong enough to confront his enemy. We are concerned," he said "that he is not strong to support his friends."

The political leadership of the world is very, very dismayed. He better turn it around. The Democrats are going to get killed in this election. Jesus, look what's happening in Massachusetts.

It's really interesting because he had brilliant, brilliant political instincts during the campaign. I don't know what has happened to them. His appointments present somebody who has a lot to learn about how government works. He better get some very talented businesspeople who know how to implement things. It's unbelievable. Everybody says so. You can't believe how dismayed people are. That's why he's plunging in the polls.

I can't predict things two years from now, but if he continues on the downward spiral he is on, he won't be reelected. In the meantime, the Democrats have recreated the Republican Party. And when I say Democrats, I mean the Obama administration. In the generic vote, the Democrats were ahead something like 52 to 30. They are now behind the Republicans 48 to 44 in the last poll. Nobody has ever seen anything that dramatic.

Mortimer B. Zuckerman is chairman and editor in chief of U.S. News & World Report and publisher of the New York Daily News.

Der Spiegel

[The World Bids Farewell to Obama](#)

US President Barack Obama suffered a painful defeat in Massachusetts on Tuesday. With mid-term elections looming, it means that Obama will have to fundamentally re-think his political course. German commentators say it is the end of hope.



US President Barack Obama has had a number of difficult weeks during his first year in the White House. Right after he took office, he had to wade through a week full of partisan bickering over his economic stimulus package combined with a tax scandal surrounding Tom Daschle, the man Obama had hoped would lead his health care reform team.

Then there was the last week of 2009, when a failed terror attack on a flight inbound for Detroit exposed major flaws in US efforts to identify and stop potential terrorists.

This week, though -- a week when Obama should have been celebrating the first anniversary of his inauguration -- may have been the president's worst yet. Scott Brown, an almost unknown Republican

member of the Massachusetts Senate, defeated the Democratic candidate Martha Coakley for the US Senate seat vacated by the death of Senator Edward M. Kennedy. The defeat in a heavily Democratic state not only highlights Obama's massive loss of popular support during his first year in office, but it also could spell doom for his signature effort to reform the US health care system.

There were immediate calls for a suspension of health care votes in the Senate until Brown is sworn in. The loss of the Massachusetts seat means that the Democrats no longer control the 60 Senate seats necessary to avoid a filibuster. Obama's reform package, which aims to provide health insurance to most of the over 40 million Americans currently lacking coverage, may ultimately fail as a result.

More than that, though, the vote shows just how quickly the political pendulum has swung back to the right following Obama's election. The seat Brown won had been in Democratic hands for all but six years since 1926. Now, its new occupant is a man who not only opposes the health care bill, but also favors waterboarding as a method of interrogation for terrorism suspects and rejects carbon cap-and-trade as a means of limiting carbon emissions.

The omen could be a dark one for the Obama administration heading into a mid-term election year. German commentators take a closer look.

Center-left daily **Süddeutsche Zeitung** writes on Thursday:

"Obama made a serious misjudgement. Right at the beginning of his first year in office, he saved the banks, rescued the automobile industry from collapse and passed a huge economic stimulus package. He had hoped that these enormous deeds would give him the space to address those issues which are dearest to him: health care reform, climate change and investment in education."

"Those issues, however, are clearly not priorities for people in the US at the moment. Scott Brown campaigned on two promises, both of which apparently struck a nerve with the electorate. He wants to block health care reform and he wants to find ways to reduce the enormous budget deficit. It is here where the roots of dissatisfaction with Obama are to be found. His reform agenda, in its current form, is highly suspect to Americans. And they have the impression that, if he continues piling up debt, he will be gambling away the country's future."

The **Financial Times Deutschland** writes:

"For Obama, the election in Massachusetts means that he will have to re-evaluate his political style. He could now focus his concentration on his political base and push through his policy agenda. After all, he still has a majority in Congress -- he could back away from his strategy of bipartisanship ... which would mean giving up much of what he spent his first year in office creating."

"More likely, however, is that Obama will interpret the Massachusetts loss as a signal that he should move further toward the middle and make more concessions to the conservatives -- even if this alienates his base even further, a base which had high expectations from the 'yes we can' candidate."

"For everyone else in the world, this means that they will have to bid farewell to a candidate for whom the hopes were so high. They will have to say goodbye to the charisma they fell in love with. Obama will be staying home after all."

The left-leaning daily **Die Tageszeitung** writes:

"In addition to health care reform, Obama's reputation has primarily been harmed by the high unemployment rate and the increasingly unpopular war in Afghanistan. It will become even more difficult in the future for the president to push projects through successfully. Not just because Republicans now have a means of preventing it, but also because the Democratic camp is deeply divided. Some would like to see the party shift toward the center -- wherever that may be -- whereas others want the party to position itself to the left.

Such a battle is hardly a good sign for the mid-term elections in November. Massachusetts could prove to be an omen."

The center-right **Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung** writes:

"Of course the president rejects the interpretation that the Massachusetts election was a referendum on his first year in the White House. But he cannot ignore the fact that his health care reform package is not popular, the situation of the country's finances is seen as threatening and many voters blame the high unemployment rate on the party in power -- on the Democrats, led by Obama. The result is a second year in office full of very different challenges than the first. To save what there is to be saved, Obama will have to be prepared to fashion a bipartisan compromise on health care -- a compromise with a Republican Party which has tasted blood and can now dream once again about a return to power."

Washington Post **The Meaning of Brown** by Charles Krauthammer

WASHINGTON -- On Jan. 14, five days before the Massachusetts special election, President Obama was in full bring-it-on mode as he rallied House Democrats behind his health care reform. "If Republicans want to campaign against what we've done by standing up for the status quo and for insurance companies over American families and businesses, that is a fight I want to have."

The bravado lasted three days. When Obama campaigned in Boston on Jan. 17 for Obamacare supporter Martha Coakley, not once did he mention the health care bill. When your candidate is sinking, you don't throw her a millstone.

After Coakley's defeat, Obama pretended that the real cause was a generalized anger and frustration "not just because of what's happened in the last year or two years, but what's happened over the last eight years."

Let's get this straight: The antipathy to George W. Bush is so enduring and powerful that ... it just elected a Republican senator in Massachusetts? Why, the man is omnipotent.

And the Democrats are delusional: Scott Brown won by running against Obama not Bush. He won by brilliantly nationalizing the race, running hard against the Obama agenda, most notably Obamacare. Killing it was his No. 1 campaign promise.

Bull's-eye. An astonishing 56 percent of Massachusetts voters, according to Rasmussen, called health care their top issue. In a Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates poll, 78 percent of Brown voters said their vote was intended to stop Obamacare. Only a quarter of all voters in the Rasmussen poll cited the economy as their top issue, nicely refuting the Democratic view that Massachusetts was just the usual anti-incumbent resentment you expect in bad economic times.

Brown ran on a very specific, very clear agenda. Stop health care. Don't Mirandize terrorists. Don't raise taxes; cut them. And no more secret backroom deals with special interests.

These deals -- the Louisiana purchase, the Cornhusker kickback -- had engendered a national disgust with the corruption and arrogance of one-party rule. The final straw was the union payoff -- in which labor bosses smugly walked out of the White House with a five-year exemption from a ("Cadillac") health insurance tax Democrats were imposing on the 92 percent of private-sector workers who are *not* unionized.

The reason both wings of American liberalism -- congressional and mainstream media -- were so surprised at the force of anti-Democratic sentiment is that they'd spent Obama's first year either ignoring or disdaining the clear early signs of resistance: the tea-party movement of the spring and the town-hall meetings of the summer. With characteristic condescension, they contemptuously dismissed the protests as the mere excrescences of a redneck, retrograde, probably racist rabble.

You would think lefties could discern a proletarian vanguard when they see one. Yet they kept denying the reality of the rising opposition to Obama's social democratic agenda when summer turned to fall and Virginia and New Jersey turned Republican in the year's two gubernatorial elections.

The evidence was unmistakable: Independents, who in 2008 had elected Obama, swung massively against the Democrats: dropping 16 points in Virginia, 21 in New Jersey. On Tuesday, it was even worse: Independents, who had gone 2-to-1 Republican in Virginia and New Jersey, now went 3-to-1 Republican in hyper-blue Massachusetts. Nor was this an expression of the more agitated elements who vote in obscure low-turnout elections. The turnout on Tuesday was the highest for any nonpresidential Massachusetts election in 20 years.

Democratic cocooners will tell themselves that Coakley was a terrible candidate who even managed to diss Curt Schilling. True, Brown had Schilling. But Coakley had Obama. When the bloody sock beats the presidential seal -- of a man who had them swooning only a year ago -- something is going on beyond personality.

That something is substance -- political ideas and legislative agendas. Democrats, if they wish, can write off their Massachusetts humiliation to high unemployment, to Coakley or, the current favorite among sophisticates, to generalized anger. That implies an inchoate, unthinking lashing-out at whoever happens to be in power -- even at your liberal betters who are forcing on you an agenda that you can't even see is in your own interest.

Democrats *must* so rationalize, otherwise they must take democracy seriously, and ask themselves: If the people really don't want it, could they possibly have a point?

"If you lose Massachusetts and that's not a wake-up call," said moderate -- and sentient -- Democratic Sen. Evan Bayh of Indiana, "there's no hope of waking up."

I say: Let them sleep.

The Corner

[Geithner's Advance Cover](#) [Yuval Levin]

You know an administration is in trouble when prominent officials let it be known to the press that they disagreed with one of the president's major decisions. It happens to every president, and it's always a very bad sign. Usually it comes after some policy goes terribly awry, and sends senior advisors running for cover. But sometimes, in the very worst cases, it happens as soon as a decision is made, before the policy in question has even had a chance to be tested—and it reveals more than dissent about one particular decision, but a broader sense that things are not well at the top.

That is why [this](#) Reuters story from yesterday was so striking. It describes [Treasury Secretary](#) Tim Geithner's opposition to the bank limits President Obama announced. It seems that on the very day of the announcement, Geithner decided he needed to dispatch people close to him to make it known (anonymously) that he did not agree with the decision, and indeed that he agreed with the two key arguments offered by its staunchest critics. Here's Reuters:

Geithner is concerned that the proposed limits on big banks' trading and size could impact U.S. firms' global competitiveness, the sources said, speaking anonymously because Geithner has not spoken publicly about his reservations.

He also has concerns that the limits do not necessarily get at the root of the problems and excesses that fueled the recent [financial](#) meltdown, the sources said.

After the story first appeared, the [White House](#) dispatched someone to offer comment to Reuters, so the second version (which is the one now posted at that link) includes an update with those quotes. But clearly they could not get Geithner himself to tell Reuters that their story was wrong about his views. Geithner was out selling the decision here and there yesterday, to be sure, but very tepidly (as in [this](#) NewsHour interview, where he looks like a man making the case for his own beheading).

It all suggests serious dissension in the senior ranks—not what the White House would want as they “pivot” to the [economy](#). Just a great week all around for these guys.

The Corner

[None Dare Call It Rovian](#) [Jonah Goldberg]

Reading Yuval's [post](#) about the Treasury Secretary's unease with the president's bank plan, it seems pretty obvious that the political shop is running policy at the [White House](#).

Of course, this was already obvious given the president's turn from a creased-pants Niebuhrian pragmatist who mocks truck-owners (even though he runs the company that makes those trucks) and attributed his lack of support among Western Pennsylvania boom-stick owners to their distracting faith in a sky god and into a William Jennings Bryan cross-of-bonuses populist. But it does remind me that a lot of folks thought it was just terrible for Karl Rove to have any role in policy formation in the White House. Whatever the merits of this bank plan, is there any doubt that [David Axelrod](#) is playing just such a role here?

However galling the cynicism, dishonesty, and hypocrisy of the White [House's](#) turn may be, I'm hardly scandalized that politics is influencing policy. That's what politics is all about. My bigger concern is that such populist scapegoating rarely makes for good policy over the long haul.

Roger L. Simon

[Scary Times in Obama High](#)

I don't think it's accident that the Stock Market is tanking after a very short rally that coincided with the then coming victory of Scott Brown. The business world is scared – as is evidently our [Secretary of the Treasury](#) who has wandered about as far off the reservation as cabinet officers normally go, allowing the world to know his skepticism about Obama's new reining in of the banks. (How long before Geithner goes under the bus now?)

The scary thing is that many of us believe the President hardly knows much of anything, certainly not economics, and is surrounded by an increasingly paranoid and defensive group of advisers. It's shades of Nixon, but worse. Tricky Dick, at least, knew what he was doing and could accomplish things. Obama is the biggest windbag to ever ascend to the presidency. He has no idea what he is doing and now things are getting rough. Frankly, I'm worried for our country because this man doesn't really understand what the public is telling him. He just thinks we're “angry.” He's wrong – we're *furious* and we're furious because he blames everyone but himself and seems psychologically incapable of taking responsibility. One can imagine a ninety-year old Obama stumbling around in some rest home shaking his walking stick at George Bush. But

for the moment Bush is being replaced boy. Now evidently it's the banks fault. The evil bankers are to blame. It's capitalism, stupid

Problem is, we've been there, done that, a thousand times. The alternative to capitalism is socialism and it has *never worked*. Not once, in all its myriad permutations. In fact, it most often hurts those it was intended to help, bankrupting the society and leaving the lower classes destitute. The Soviet Union collapsed. China was deeply impoverished until it turned essentially capitalistic. Everybody knows that now, and has for years, except maybe our president. He's after the banks and is so clueless he thinks that will impress us. Of course, it won't. Nobody believes anything he says anymore. But he is the President and he can take executive actions. And with those actions, like a wounded animal, he may pull all of us down with him. I am deeply afraid of that because Barack Obama has never had to deal with any personal adversity in his adult life. He has lived a completely privileged existence. This is a first for him. There's no telling how he will behave. Watch out, buckle up and hold on to your seats.

Contentions

Really Hard?!

by Jennifer Rubin

In an [interview this week](#) Obama admits that he really didn't have a clue on how the Middle East works:

I'll be honest with you. A: This is just really hard. Even for a guy like George Mitchell who helped bring about the peace in Northern Ireland. This is as intractable a problem as you get. B: Both sides—I think the Israelis and Palestinians—have found that the political environment, the nature of their coalitions, or the divisions within their societies were such that it was very hard for them to start engaging in a meaningful conversation. And I think that we overestimated our ability to persuade them to do so when their politics ran contrary to that. From Abbas' perspective, he's got Hamas looking over his shoulder and I think an environment generally within the Arab world that feels impatient with any process.

Really hard?? The hubris is remarkable, isn't it? One supposes that he imagined all the dolts who preceded him in the Oval Office to just not have been smart enough or *him* enough to get the job done. It seems as though he "overestimated" the impact of his mere presence on the parties. Really, who knew there were underlying political realities that would render the parties immune to his charms? But there is no sign he's going to do much, if anything, differently ("we are going to continue to work with both parties to recognize what I think is ultimately their deep-seated interest in a two-state solution"). But now he knows it's hard.

That's not the worst of it, however. On Iran he declares:

Both in our engagement strategy, but also now as we move into the other track of a dual-track approach. Which is if they don't accept the open hand, we've got to make sure they understand there are consequences for breaking international rules. It's going to be tough, but I think the relationship we've developed with Russia will be very helpful. The outreach we've done to our traditional NATO allies will be very helpful. The work that we've done with China—including the work we've done with China to enforce sanctions against North Korea—will help us in dealing more effectively with Iran.

No hint of the fact that engagement has been an abject failure, no mention of the opportunity for regime change, and certainly no indication that he has learned that the Iranians don't want to be engaged. Indeed quite the opposite — we aren't giving up! Maybe, maybe we can sweet talk the mullahs out of their nukes. And as for any help from China and Russia, does he not read the papers? (Maybe he thinks we don't.) China and Russia *aren't* being helpful.

We all keep waiting for the foreign-policy learning curve to deliver results and for experience to inform Obama's policies. This sort of interview reveals that such an outcome likely isn't in the cards. He is, it

seems, so fixed in his preconceptions of the word that basic geopolitical realities come as a surprise or disappointment. If only the world worked the way his university-professor pals and George Mitchell told him it would. George W. Bush is gone and *he* is there — and what has it gotten us? Well, the reputation for irresolution, unreliability, and naiveté. And interviews like this don't help.

Commentary

The Middle East Has Always Been Hard

by Michael J. Totten

As Jennifer Rubin [pointed out yesterday](#), President Barack Obama [admitted in an interview](#) with Joe Klein at *Time* magazine that he was "too optimistic" about his ability to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that it's "just really hard." Those of us with experience in the region are thinking, "Well, duh," right about now, but at the same time, I sympathize. In the first half of the last decade, I felt naively optimistic about the region myself.

Things were looking up after the demolition of Saddam Hussein's Baath party regime in Iraq, the termination of the second Palestinian intifada, and the Beirut Spring that ousted the Syrian military occupation from Lebanon. I was hardly alone in getting carried away. Middle Easterners felt it too — or at least some did. "It's strange for me to say it," Lebanon's Druze leader Walid Jumblatt said shortly after the uprising against Bashar Assad's overlordship in his country began, "but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq. I was cynical about Iraq. But when I saw the Iraqi people voting three weeks ago, 8 million of them, it was the start of a new Arab world. The Syrian people, the Egyptian people, all say that something is changing. The Berlin Wall has fallen. We can see it."

The Middle East's "Berlin Wall," so to speak, may have cracked, but it didn't fall. Iraq all but dismembered itself after its successful election. Hezbollah blew up the Levant and put Lebanon's "March 14" revolution on ice. Palestinians elected Hamas and transformed Gaza into a suppurating jihad state. It could be a while before I allow myself to feel upbeat and sunny again. The Middle East makes suckers of everyone who feels upbeat and sunny.

Nothing happened in the region when Obama took office that justified a renewed sense of optimism. If the Green Revolution in Iran replaces the Islamic Republic regime with something more civilized, that will be something. Even then I'd be careful. Violent conflict is the default state of affairs in that part of the world, and it always has been.

Most Westerners who get involved in the Middle East come away disappointed and disillusioned after a while. One common problem is a kind of projection, a belief that the region is more like our part of the world than it actually is. For instance, [Obama said](#), as though it surprises him, that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is hard "even for a guy like George Mitchell who helped bring about the peace in Northern Ireland."

Northern Ireland is in Western Europe — in the United Kingdom even. The two conflicts resemble each other in a couple of ways, but Ireland is nothing like Gaza. The people of Belfast are no less inheritors of the liberal Western tradition than residents of Dublin and London. No part of the world at the turn of the 21st century was more amendable to conflict resolution than Western Europe, and that included even the rough parts of Western Europe. The war there was barely even a war compared with the Middle East's wars. [Slightly more than 100 people](#) were killed on average each year in Northern Ireland during "the troubles" between 1969 and 2001, fewer than the number murdered in many American cities during peace time. Each year of the second intifada, by contrast, was 10 times as deadly. (Each year of the Lebanese civil war, meanwhile, was 100 times deadlier.)

Northern Ireland was a ways outside the Western mainstream, but it had that peaceful mainstream it could join. The entire Middle East is difficult and dysfunctional. There is no peaceful political mainstream. Ethnic

and religious violence is normal — not just between Arabs and Israelis, but also between Arabs and Persians, Arabs and Kurds, Kurds and Turks, Kurds and Persians, Muslims and Christians, and Sunnis and Shias. The idea that peace is likely to break out there any time soon was memorably ridiculed in the Adam Sandler comedy *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*. "They've been fighting for 2,000 years," said the main character's mother. "It can't be much longer."

I've been critical of some of the president's Middle East policies, but it isn't his fault the Arab-Israeli conflict has now lasted 62 years instead of winding down in the 61st. It may not be as intractable as the one between Sunnis and Shias — that one has lasted for more than 1,000 years — but nobody can fix this right now. The Middle East doesn't need a diplomatic process; it needs a revolutionary transformation of its political culture, like what we saw in Western Europe after World War II and in Eastern Europe after the real Berlin Wall fell. Something similar may very well occur in the Middle East at some point, but it's not going to happen all of a sudden because Barack Obama or any other American president tweaks our foreign policy.

If the "peace process" is sure to fail right now — and it is — announcing it as a foreign-policy priority only sets Obama up as a weak leader who can't deliver the goods. His credibility suffers, and so does America's leverage. He ought to focus on conflict management and damage control, and try not to make anything worse.

Denver Post

[The problem is the idea](#)

by David Harsanyi

Generally speaking, would you favor smaller government with fewer services, or larger government with more services?

Fifty-eight percent of those polled by The Washington Post recently claimed they preferred smaller government with fewer services, with only 38 percent favoring a larger government with more services (and, yes, it is a terrific struggle not to place ironic quotations marks around the word services).

This is the highest number for the "smaller government" category since 2002. And a full year into President Barack Obama's term, most polls, and state elections, tell us that the electorate is walking — maybe sprinting? — back from the progressive economic policies that now dominate Washington.

Some Democrats believed grouching about (the fully imagined) wild and unregulated days of the Bush years would be sufficient to pass sweeping top-down economic controls. Yet, for all the presidential election-time happy talk, Americans have this sturdy historic aversion to "fundamental" reorganizations of their society.

Still other Democrats convinced themselves that surging opposition to their big plans was fabricated, paid for by insurance companies or oil companies or some other reprehensible profit-motivated bogeyman they'd conjured up. They overestimated their mandate and underestimated the electorate.

Many more Democrats continue to persuade themselves that the party's problem is flawed candidates or poorly communicated messages, as White House spokesman Robert Gibbs conceded this week — because, presumably, the idea of socializing medicine is too nuanced and intellectually rigorous for the average voter to digest.

Hardly. The predicament Democrats face is the opposite. Too many voters appreciate exactly what health care legislation entails.

This is why Congress conducts clandestine negotiations on legislation and trashes promises of transparency. This is why leading Democrats have embraced procedural tricks and senatorial bribery — and now the possibility of "reconciliation," so they can adjust health care reform and pass it with a 51-vote majority. You're gonna get it whether you want it or not.

That's what happens when these Democrats lose a debate. According to the latest NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, only 33 percent believe the health reform effort is a "good" idea, while 46 percent consider it a "bad" idea — with 55 percent disapproving of Obama on health care.

What's most striking about this poll is that opposition to Obama's plan has increased 20 percentage points since April — coinciding, not surprisingly, with the president's big push to convince us that it's needed. The more people learn, apparently, the less they like.

Now, I am under no grand illusions about democracy. The electorate can be mercurial and irrational — as nearly every election proves. Nor do I believe any ethical politician should abandon his or her core values simply because polls tell them it would be expedient.

I say, keep fighting, Mr. President. Those of us who believe in capitalism need you.

But, the fact is, we have one party controlling both houses of Congress — with historically impressive margins. We have an opposition political party Americans have lost confidence in. We have endured a frightening downturn that allowed the far left to advance a menu of stunning regulatory intrusions that would normally be non-starters.

Finally, we have a charismatic and articulate president who, armed with near-national landslide, was given the stage to make his pitch on health care reform.

If, with all that, the progressives could not convince voters that the central cause of their movement was necessary, then it is not a messaging problem, it is not a leadership problem, it is not a Republican problem, it is an idea problem — a terrible idea problem.

Ottawa Citizen

Problems that dollars can't fix

by David Warren

The media and political response to Haiti's disaster was as predictable as the effect of a 7.0-magnitude earthquake on Port-au-Prince. The pictures and emotions are still running high, and people are giving generously to more than 10,000 charitable agencies. The scale of that is bewildering; the opportunities for corruption are proportionally large.

A natural disaster is the prime fundraising opportunity for any NGO, and the posters go up on their websites right away. Yet very few will have means of immediate delivery to the stricken location. It does not follow that they will immediately forward all receipts to agencies that do have feet on the ground.

Haiti is an especially difficult case, because its government and infrastructure were entirely dysfunctional even before the earthquake, and its social conditions such that military force is necessary to distribute goods.

The country has no match in the Western Hemisphere: it is more comparable to the 20 or more failed states in Africa, which endure natural disasters with much less international attention because they are not tourist destinations.

That the various aid agencies on the ground in Haiti are doing their best under the circumstances, to sort out who is delivering what to where and how, goes almost without saying. Proximity to real human suffering can bring out the best in people, even lifelong bureaucrats. This is not the issue in Haiti, or anywhere else that immediate disaster relief is being delivered. Nor need we worry, at first, about waste, when the priority is to save lives.

Yet if our intention is to help, both short term and longer, our emphasis should not be on doing things that make us feel good about ourselves, but instead on what works.

A number of reviews were conducted of aid after the Asian tsunami, five years ago. I was struck by one that Laura Freschi cited on the Forbes magazine website. It answered the question, "How can you go wrong by sending drugs?"

This study showed that most of the drugs donated to Aceh province in Indonesia -- the region which sustained most damage -- were of kinds not needed by the survivors. Compounding this, more than two-thirds were labelled in languages which local aid workers could not read. "These drugs wasted health workers' time, took up limited storage space in hospitals, and cost millions of dollars to destroy safely."

My impression has long been that donations in kind are almost always counter-productive, and donations in money can be useful only if people with direct knowledge of needs at the location are dictating the urgent spending decisions. The rest of the effort is getting in the way.

This problem is exacerbated by our "culture of narcissism," which focuses on the happyface of good intentions. Good intentions are never enough, prudence is required to convert them into useful action, yet prudence is the last thing on the minds of people jostled by headlines into a need to "do something now."

The impulse to "write a cheque" to assuage conscience becomes more and more deeply engrained in our psyches, as we abandon the moral and spiritual underpinnings of our civilization, and indulge the habit of quantifying each issue by the amount of money we throw at it. My advice to the people who have asked me what they can most usefully do to help is, start thinking ahead to the next disaster. For Port-au-Prince is already bottlenecked with supplies.

Love is not a declaration, but instead an action, and those who are troubled by the hideous conditions in which so many on our planet live and die had better devote more time than is required by PayPal.

A hard and unwelcome truth (to those who want the charitable equivalent of instant gratification) is the limit on the amount of money that can be usefully spent on a disaster, before counter-productive efforts begin to dominate all spending. By counter-productive I mean, especially, in a case like Haiti, restoring the circumstances that keep its people in desperation, including the power of a kleptocracy to create political obstacles to any direct human enterprise -- whether profitable or charitable.

The first part of disaster relief is uncontroversial: food, water, medicine, shelter. Surprisingly, that doesn't cost a whole lot, nor take very long. It's the "peace and development" programs that follow which absorb the big money -- the growing of permanent new branches of bureaucracy to mind the population thus saved.

Haiti is not a basket case from the absence of foreign aid. Quite the contrary.

I lived many years in Asia, and much of my journalistic work was focused on "development issues." I've seen the consequences of aid dependency with my own eyes. It is the same story everywhere, where people are desperately poor: they have no freedom, they are landless, everything belongs to an exploiting class. And that exploiting class is, almost invariably, "leftist," and the nearly-exclusive beneficiary of foreign aid.

The Corner

[Goodwin's Perfect Thumb-Nail of Obama](#) [Jack Fowler]

Boy oh boy does *New York Post* columnist Michael Goodwin ever nail it today. From "End of O's Cowardly Lyin'":

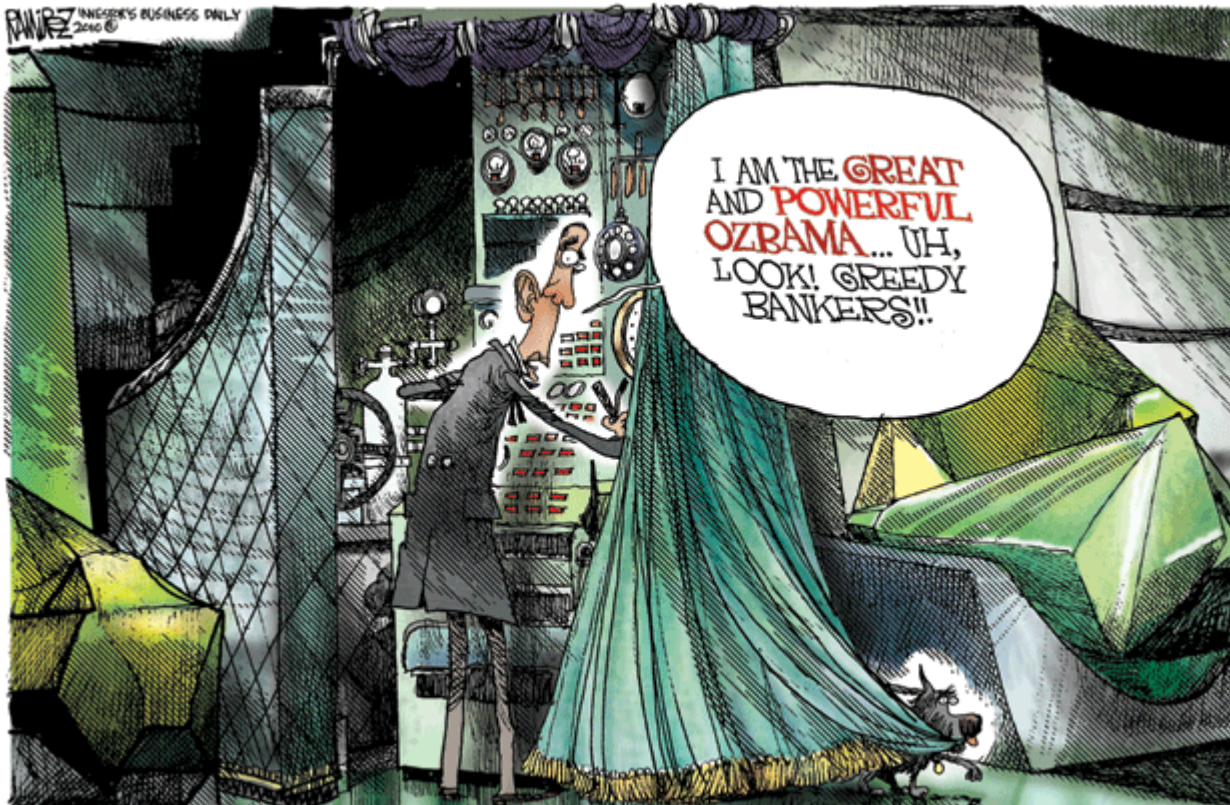
We the people of the United States owe Scott Brown's supporters a huge debt of gratitude. They didn't merely elect a senator. They ripped the façade off the [Obama](#) presidency. ...

... Just as Dorothy and Toto exposed the ordinary man behind the curtain in "The Wizard of Oz," the voters in Massachusetts revealed that, in this [White House](#), there is no there there.

It's all smoke and mirrors, bells and whistles, held together with glib talk, Chicago politics and an audacious sense of entitlement.

At the center is a young and talented celebrity whose worldview, we now know, is an incoherent jumble of poses and big-government instincts. His self-aggrandizing ambition exceeds his ability by so much that he is making a mess of everything he touches.

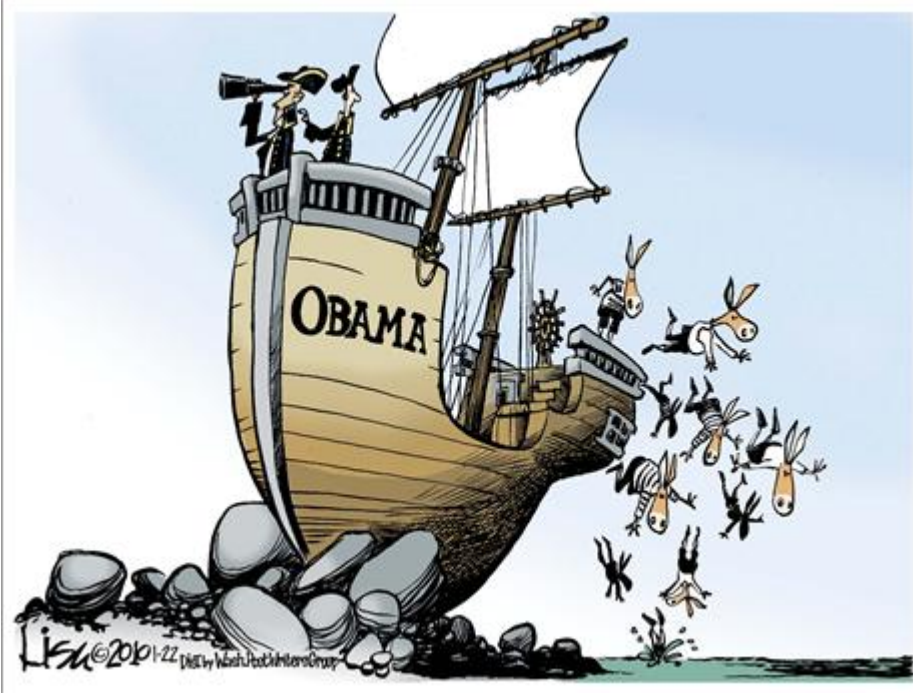
He never advances a practical idea. Every proposal overreaches and comes wrapped in ideology and a claim of [moral](#)



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Pickerhead assumes we are looking at canaries in a coal mine.



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ON THE GROUND...

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Fool
with your

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