

January 28, 2010

The election of Scott Brown was the most important event of the last year, and it came out of the blue. Today's Pickings starts out with a retrospective of our items on that Massachusetts race. The first mention was January 6th when John Fund had an piece in Political Diary, joined by John Steele Gordon with an item in Contentions. It was such a long shot, we almost failed to pass them on thinking there was no sense creating false hopes. It's fun to look back at these posts and watch things develop. Today we went without the normal pull quotes. We just did our introductions and then the complete posts are after the summary.

Afterwards there are some current items and a great day of cartoons.

January 6th ...

[**John Fund**](#) focuses our attention on the Senate race that could, if we are very lucky, be the undoing of Obamacare.

Comments on the same race from [**John Steele Gordon**](#) in Contentions.

January 10th ...

We opened with a piece by Mark Steyn about America in decline. Then posted this; *Maybe the country will decline the decline. New poll shows the Mass. US senate race a toss up. We shall see if voters in Massachusetts are going to send a thunderbolt to the White House.* [**Corner post**](#) by Daniel Foster with the details.

January 11th ...

[**Scott Rasmussen**](#) analyzes the Massachusetts race.

January 12th ...

[**Michael Barone**](#) looks at the polls in Massachusetts.

[**John Fund**](#) posts on that race.

[**Corner post**](#) too.

January 13th ...

Scott Brown, running for the senate in MA is fast on his feet. [**The Corner**](#) has the story.

January 14th ...

[**Politico**](#) gives us another view of the Mass. senate race by looking at the Dem candidate, Martha Coakley.

January 17th ...

Jennifer Rubin blogs about Martha Coakley and Tuesday's vote in Mass.

January 18th ...

Power Line posts on dueling rallies in Mass.

Jake Tapper has another report on the Mass. race.

January 19th ...

Mark Steyn posts on the Mass. race.

Back to the present day, there was a state of the union speech last night. Here's a Corner reaction from **Marc Thiessen** who led two state of the union writing teams.

... It was quite possibly the most partisan, condescending State of the Union address ever. Tonight, Obama was unpresidential. The permanent campaign continues. In the long run it will backfire.

Marty Peretz notices a stunning Obama omission. Seems the One, while listing the Haiti helping countries overlooked the extraordinary Israeli 500 bed hospital contribution David Warren wrote about in **January 26th Pickings**.

I've just read the transcript of the president's remarks about Haiti, the ones he made on January 15. He noted that, in addition to assistance from the United States, significant aid had also come from "Brazil, Mexico, Canada, France, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic, among others." Am I missing another country that truly weighed in with truly consequential assistance? Ah, yes. There it is. Right there "among others." Yes, the country to which I refer is "among others," that one.

The fact is that, next to our country, Israel sent the largest contingent of trained rescue workers, doctors, and other medical personnel. The Israeli field hospital was the only one on the ground that could perform real surgery, which it did literally hundreds of times, while delivering--as of last week--at least 16 babies, including one premature infant and three caesarians. The first 250-odd Israelis were real professionals, and they were supplemented by others, also professionals. And to these can be added the many organized Jews from the Diaspora who, in solidarity with Israel, also went on a work pilgrimage, an aliyah, in solidarity with Haiti. ...

According to **Beltway Confidential** in Washington Examiner Obama is now saying he had no part in any of the slimy deals for ObamaCare.

... But the Washington Post reported on December 20 that Obama's top aides were involved in the negotiations with Nelson:

"Schumer, who spent more than 13 hours in Reid's office Friday, said the Medicaid issue was settled around lunchtime, and the final eight hours of the talks focused on the abortion language. Boxer estimated she spent seven hours in Reid's offices -- without ever once sitting in the same room, even though they were all of 25 steps apart.

*Reid and Schumer kept up the "shuttle negotiation" between the leader's conference room and his top aide's office, Boxer said. Keenly aware how tense the talks were, **the White House dispatched two aides who together have decades of experience in the Senate -- Jim Messina and Peter Rouse -- to work with Nelson. They relayed their intelligence to White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, who monitored the talks from a dinner in Georgetown.**" ...*

The Corner provides [Krauthammer's Take](#) on the spending freeze.

It's not a hatchet. It's not a scalpel. It's a Q-tip. It's a fraud. This is a miniscule amount. It excludes Defense, Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs. It excludes all the entitlements, which are 60 percent of the budget. It excludes stimuli past and future — the two thirds of the near trillion-dollar stimulus that has not been spent. All of that is excluded.

[The Anchoress](#) has a post that explores some of the increasing strangeness of Obama.

Necessity being the mother of invention, it appears that Barack Obama has needed, and thus invented, the **Portable President Kit**, consisting of two teleprompters with accompanying equipment and a traveling Don't-You-Know-Who-I-Am-I-Am-The-President-That's-Who Podium With Presidential Seal, which Barack Obama takes with him, everywhere he goes.

That means he brings it to an elementary school, for use in addressing the press (something past-and-moronic presidents did not have to do), who are then weirdly dismissed and unable to witness his talk to the children. ...

[January 6th ...](#)

[John Fund](#)

[The Dream Will Never Die](#)

In the two months since voters gave Republican candidates impressive wins in the New Jersey and Virginia governor's races, unemployment has increased to 10% under a Democratic White House, and Democrats have focused on jamming an increasingly unpopular health care bill through Congress. Now comes another statewide race this month that will likely be read as a follow-up referendum on the Obama administration. Massachusetts holds a special election on January 19 to fill the U.S. Senate seat left open by the death of Ted Kennedy, and even in this bluest of states it may not be a cakewalk for the Democrat.

At first glance, the chances of an anti-Democratic tide here appear remote. The Bay State gave Barack Obama 62% of its vote last year, the state hasn't elected a Republican to the Senate since 1972, and Democrats hold seven out of every eight seats in the state legislature. But one of the few Republicans in that legislature, State Senator Scott Brown, is making a serious play to upset the conventional wisdom, which holds that Democratic Attorney General Martha Coakley is a shoo-in for the Kennedy seat. In the process, Mr. Brown is irritating Democrats to distraction.

His first TV ad begins in black and white with John F. Kennedy describing his 1962 tax cut bill: "The billions of dollars this bill will place in the hands of the consumer and our businessmen will have both immediate and permanent benefits to our economy." The screen slowly morphs into an image of Mr. Brown as he calls for a new tax cut by finishing Kennedy's remarks: "Every dollar released from taxation that is spent or invested will help create a new job and a new salary. And these new jobs and new salaries can create other jobs and other salaries, and more customers and more growth for an expanding American economy."

Democrats immediately squawked. Kennedy family friend Philip Johnston called any suggestion that the family would agree with Mr. Brown's statement "highly misleading." Mr. Brown responded that the reaction simply showed how today's Democratic Party differs from that of JFK, noting that the late president "was the president of everybody, and was the first person to call for across-the-board tax cuts." He points to the strong contrast with Ms. Coakley's position on taxes. During a November 30 appearance at Suffolk University, she had what Mr. Brown calls a "Walter Mondale" moment in which she flatly stated: "We need to get taxes up."

Surprisingly, no official polls have been taken in the race yet, though few are betting on a Brown victory. But an upset in a low-turnout election is always a possibility. Consider that in 2007, when support for the GOP was at dismal levels, Republican Jim Ogonowski was still able to hold the winning Democrat to 51% in a special election for a Massachusetts Congressional seat. A year later that same district gave Barack Obama 59% of its votes.

Independent groups are mulling plans to drive down Ms. Coakley's numbers by running ads that would point out that if she loses and Mr. Brown wins, Democrats would then be deprived of the 60th vote they need to pass a final health care bill. Candidate Brown is encouraging such thinking. "I could be the 41st senator that could stop the Obama proposal that's being pushed right now through Congress," he told reporters last week. Even holding Ms. Coakley to a narrow victory in uber-liberal Massachusetts would rattle Democratic cages and give members of Congress pause before a final health care vote.

Marty Peretz, the editor-in-chief of the liberal New Republic magazine and a Coakley supporter, nonetheless thinks Mr. Brown "might actually defeat" the Democrat because "voters are scared." He notes that Democrats have gone "hysterical" over the Kennedy tax cut ad Mr. Brown is running. "Maybe their panic is apt," he notes.

Contentions

Could Massachusetts Save Us From Obamacare?

by John Steele Gordon

[Scott Brown](#) has the unenviable task of running for the U.S. Senate in Massachusetts as a Republican on Jan. 19. No Republican has won a Senate seat from that state since 1972. Massachusetts went 62 percent for Barack Obama in 2008.

But Brown is certainly making a game try. This [commercial](#) is, I think, nothing short of brilliant. It invokes the magic Kennedy name and uses John F. Kennedy's own words, calling for tax reductions as a way to boost the economy and create jobs. Democrats, naturally, are screaming bloody murder, probably because the ad is so effective, especially since the Democratic candidate, Martha Coakley, recently said on record, "We need to get taxes up."

The odds are still against Brown, but given the prospect of a low-turnout election, nervousness regarding Obama's tax plans, ever-rising opposition to the health-care bill, knowledge that Brown would be in office for less than three years until the expiration of the late Ted Kennedy's term, and a sense that there is too much power in the hands of one party in Washington, it's by no means impossible. I'm not [the only one who thinks so](#).

If a Republican were to win Ted Kennedy's old seat in ultra liberal Massachusetts, the political fallout would be huge. Every Democrat in Washington up for election in November would be reaching for the Maalox — or perhaps the Scotch bottle — and those in marginal districts or states might well begin to peel off the official line to save their own hides. Equally important, the balance in the Senate would shift from 60-40 to 59-41, and the filibuster-proof majority would be gone. The people of Massachusetts thus have it in their power to derail the health-care bill.

January 10th ...

The Corner

TOSS UP [Daniel Foster]

The Senate race in Massachusetts is a dead heat according to an extensive [new poll](#), with Republican Scott Brown leading Democrat [Martha Coakley](#) 48-47 among likely voters.

Brown enjoys a staggering 70/16 favorability ratio among independents, and 66-31 advantage over Coakley (thanks in part to a total lack of advertising from the latter). He also benefits from an "enthusiasm gap": 68 percent of Republicans polled said they were "very excited" about casting their vote, compared to just 48

percent of Democrats. This is due in large part to spreading dissatisfaction with Democrats, evinced by the shape of the electorate likely to turn out at the polls. In a state that [Barack Obama](#) won by 26 points in 2008, the president holds only a 16 point edge among likely voters in the special election.

The poll also shows widespread opposition to the [health-care reform](#) plan President Obama champions — just 27 percent of independents support it.

The race is far from over, and Brown could see his razor-thin lead evaporate and then some if Coakley starts to campaign in earnest. But, at least for today, the news is very good indeed for Scott Brown.

[January 11th ...](#)

[Rasmussen Reports](#)

[Looking Closer at the Massachusetts Senate Polls](#)

by Scott Rasmussen

On the surface, three recent polls on the upcoming Massachusetts special election to fill the Senate seat of the late Edward M. Kennedy seem to tell three different stories.

A [Rasmussen Reports poll](#), released last week, shows Democrat Martha Coakley leading Republican challenger Scott Brown by nine points. Two new polls released over the weekend show wildly different topline. A [Boston Globe poll](#) puts Coakley up by 17 points, while a survey by the [Public Policy Polling](#) (PPP) finds Brown ahead by a single point.

As always, it's important to look at what the polls have in common to learn the real lessons from the data. A closer look at all three shows a lot of common ground.

First, all three surveys show Coakley right around the 50% mark. The Rasmussen poll has her right at 50%, while the Globe shows her three points higher and PPP three points lower. If Coakley is truly right around the 50% mark, then the race is hers to lose, and Brown's best possible scenario is a very narrow victory.

Second, all the polls show that a lower turnout is better for Brown. In the Rasmussen poll, Coakley leads by nine overall, but Brown pulls to within two points among those who are certain to vote. In the Globe poll, Coakley leads by 17 overall, but among those who are "extremely interested" in the election, it's 47% for Brown and 47% for Coakley. PPP shows a toss-up but suggests it's close because of low turnout among Democrats.

Finally, the Globe poll and the Rasmussen poll show identical vote totals for candidates other than Coakley. The Rasmussen poll finds 41% for Brown and did not mention a third-party candidate by name. The Globe shows 36% for Brown and five percent (5%) for independent candidate Joe Kennedy. It's interesting that both polls show 41% of the vote going to a candidate other than Coakley.

That fact becomes even more interesting when you note that third-party candidates generally poll better than they actually perform. True to form, the Globe poll found that only a tiny percentage of voters are committed to actually sticking with the independent candidate. If those voters actually show up on election day, it's quite likely that most will vote for Brown.

One reason the race is a bit closer than expected is that all three polls show Massachusetts voters are divided over the health care plan before Congress. The Rasmussen poll shows a very slight majority of likely voters in favor of the plan. The Globe puts backing for the congressional effort 10 points lower but still enough to muster a plurality of support. The PPP poll suggests that among those likely to show up and vote, a plurality is opposed to the proposed health care legislation.

Still, if this were a regularly scheduled election with other races on the ballot, Coakley would win handily. The turnout questions would not be as challenging for pollsters, and other races would bring Democrats to vote regardless of their enthusiasm about the Senate race.

But in a special election, turnout is typically much lower and always much harder to project. Collectively, the data suggests that Coakley remains the favorite, but Brown has attracted enough support to remain competitive. With just over a week to go, it is possible that a candidate mistake could dramatically shake up the race.

As always, turnout in special elections is very difficult to project, so all projections must be made with caution. Absent a major event, it is still possible to envision a long-shot, low-turnout scenario where Brown pulls out a very narrow victory.

Clearly, his supporters are more enthusiastic about the race and that gives him a chance. But, as they have from the beginning, the dynamics of the race still make it likely that Massachusetts voters on January 19 will send another Democrat to Washington.

[January 12th ...](#)

[Washington Examiner](#)

[How to explain those divergent Massachusetts polls](#)

by Michael Barone

[Polls on the January 19 special Senate election in Massachusetts](#) are showing hugely different results: the Boston Globe has Democrat Martha Coakley ahead 53%-36%, Rasmussen has Coakley ahead 50%-41% and PPP, [as I noted Saturday](#), has Republican Scott Brown ahead 48%-47%. How to explain this? Pollster.com's [Mark Blumenthal has a characteristically first-rate analysis](#). His major point:

The big spread in results among the polls, and differences apparent within two of them, are all consistent in supporting one finding: The lower the turnout, the better the odds for Scott Brown. These differences indicate that the voters most interested and most likely to vote are Republican, while Democrats are more *blase*.

Pollsters always employ screening questions, as Blumenthal explains, and screens can be loose (all adults) or tight (those who have voted in past offyear elections and who say they are absolutely certain to vote). He notes that PPP's robocall has an instruction, "if you do not intend to vote, . . . please hang up," which presumably acts as a very tight screen, and so all three polls tend to agree that those who are most determined to vote are about evenly split between Coakley and Brown. The Brown campaign, by the way, is running a ["moneybomb" campaign](#) today to raise \$500,000 online.

[John Fund](#)

[Coakley Tries to Change the Subject](#)

Democrats have decided who they are running against in next Tuesday's special election to fill Ted Kennedy's Senate seat in Massachusetts, and it's not Republican Scott Brown.

Martha Coakley, the Democratic candidate, couldn't seem to utter Mr. Brown's name yesterday at a news conference without tying him to a political boogie creature she labeled "Bush-Cheney." "Not only is Scott Brown a roadblock to progress, he wants to go back to the failed policies of the Bush-Cheney administration," she contended.

She kept up that drumbeat during their final debate last night, finally prompting Mr. Brown to tell her: "You can run against Bush-Cheney, but I'm Scott Brown. I live in Wrentham. I drive a truck, and yes, it's over 200,000 miles on it now. But you're not running against them."

When Democrats aren't raising the specter of the unpopular Bush administration, they're trying to tie Mr. Brown to Sarah Palin. The Democratic National Committee dispatched its top political spin artist, Hari Sevugan, to Massachusetts yesterday to help out the struggling Coakley campaign. He promptly sent out an email taunting Ms. Palin for not coming to Massachusetts to endorse Mr. Brown: "Come on, Sarah, why are you being so shy?" Within hours, he sent out another message headlined: "Has the Pit Bull lost her bark?" A third salvo late in the day demanded that reporters ask Mr. Brown a simple question: "Will you accept Sarah Palin's endorsement or won't you?"

There was no discussion of issues from Mr. Sevugan, much less any evidence that Mr. Brown has ever expressed an interest in having outsiders come into the state on his behalf. Democrats have apparently decided that hauling out fright masks beats trying to defend President Obama's record, much less Ms. Coakley's conventionally liberal positions.

The Corner

[Brown's Million](#) [Robert Costa]

What a day for [Scott Brown](#), the Massachusetts Republican vying for Teddy Kennedy's former U.S. Senate seat. In recent days, [polls](#) have shown Brown steadily closing the gap in what's become a surprisingly close race against Democrat Martha Coakley. To build on his momentum, Brown went to the web today to raise more cash for his surging campaign. Brown hoped to raise half-a-million dollars in a day, and boy, did his supporters come out in droves. As of 11:40 p.m., Brown has raised over \$1,117,000 dollars via his ["Red Invades Blue" campaign](#). Many Republicans have pitched in: To help Brown out, Mitt Romney and Tim Pawlenty both [sent out](#) fundraising appeals on his behalf.

Brown's million-dollar day is big news. Some context: In 2009, Brown raised \$1.2 million, nearly all of it coming from individuals. The new money gives Brown the cash he needs to take to the airwaves, especially since Coakley already has a strong war chest after raising \$5.2 million in 2009. Plus, think about this: At the beginning of 2010, Brown, according to FEC reports, had just \$367,000 in the bank. In one day he's tripled that number. His sum [is also inching close to](#), or possibly surpassing, Coakley, who, according to the FEC, had \$937,000 in her campaign account at the beginning of this year. As my friend Eric Kleefeld [points out](#) at TPM, things are looking great for Scott (and the GOP):

Regardless of whether Brown wins or loses in this Democratic state, one thing is clear: National conservative activists have been able to take a clear interest in this race, and they could mobilize themselves for a cause in a similar way to the liberal Netroots during the Bush years.

Rush Limbaugh also weighed in today [on his radio program](#):

"It is really, really bad for the Democrats out there all over the country electorally. In Massachusetts, the pollsters are kind of coalescing around the idea that Martha Coakley is going to win, but Scott Brown keeps raising money, big-time money. The fact that the Democrats are having to fight this hard... I mean, they're sending the union troops in there! The fact that the Democrats are having to fight at all for Ted Kennedy's seat! Wouldn't it be the most delicious irony if the Ted Kennedy seat were lost, preventing health care from passing?"

Now, I know that the Democrats, if Scott Brown wins, are going to delay his swearing in until after the health care vote. They'll delay it a couple of months if they have to, an emergency change to the law, but everybody's going to see this. The Democrats are now running naked through the streets. There's no cover. Everybody sees them for who they are: Job destroyers, private sector destroyers."

So did Mitt Romney on Fox News:

ROMNEY: Yes, I think this is surprising a lot of people. Most people expected that a Democrat would just roll into Ted Kennedy's seat, as Ted Kennedy has year after year after year. But Massachusetts is not as monolithic a liberal state as people think. Massachusetts voted for Ronald Reagan twice, elected the Republican governor 16 straight years. And right now, there's a lot of anger in Massachusetts, among independents in particular, about the Obama [health](#) care plan. And I think what you're seeing is people are flocking to Scott Brown. He's narrowed the race. It's a single-digit race now. And he's raising money from across the country. I think he's — he's a guy who very well could win this thing. And he's an independent-minded Republican. He's not just a, you know, rubber stamp kind of guy. But he brings an energy and a passion and some experience to this race that I think is galvanizing support in Massachusetts.

VAN SUSTEREN: And so it's so interesting because should he win on January 19, suddenly, the Senate isn't filibuster-proof, so it's so much more profoundly important to the nation. It's not just important to [Massachusetts](#). Whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, you've got to be watching this race.

ROMNEY: It would really say that Massachusetts would be in the catbird's seat. The senator from Massachusetts would be able to make the key calls on some of these key pieces of legislation, and with regards to [health care](#), to make sure that the lessons about the good in the Massachusetts plan and the bad is accommodated and understood before it's dealt with in a national plan. It would make all the sense in the world for the people of Massachusetts to elect Scott Brown, and frankly, for people across the country to send him a check for 25 bucks or whatever to say, Look, we care about that 41st vote.

**As the evening progressed, we chronicled the numbers:*

UPDATE I: As of 6:10 p.m., Brown's up to \$735,000. This is what we call a true "money bomb."

Some links:

— [Reid outlines swearing-in process for the next Bay State senator](#)

— [The Boston Herald endorses Brown.](#)

UPDATE II: As of 6:40 p.m., Brown's one-day total is now \$758,000. On another note, President Obama has decided to wade (electronically) into race, [reports Mark Murray](#):

It's not the equivalent of appearing at a rally or cutting a TV ad. But President Obama has now officially waded into next week's Martha Coakley-vs.-Scott Brown Senate contest in Massachusetts by penning a solicitation to his email list.

Obama continues, "You've worked so hard to organize around these and so many other critical issues. And now we're so close to passing health reform — finally realizing [Senator Kennedy's](#) life's work. But we cannot get the job done without Martha Coakley in the Senate. And that means it may well all come down to you. I'm asking you to pledge a few hours or as much time as you can spare in this last critical week to volunteer at an event near you to help Martha win."

An e-mail is nice, but President Obama [still seems disinterested](#) in making a trip up to Boston for Martha.

UPDATE III: Just finished watching the final debate, which was held at UMass-Boston and moderated by David Gergen. Checking back in with Brown's campaign, we can report that Brown has now raised \$918,000 and counting today. Can he raise \$1 million in one day? Seems like a good bet.

Here's Kathryn's take on the debate, [from the Corner](#):

The final debate in the Massachusetts Senate special election just ended. They did manage to interrupt David Gergen's (he was moderator) multiple thanks to the Kennedys for their public service to have a bit of a debate, albeit with an unbalanced distribution of questions and the distraction of the third-party non-Kennedy Kennedy. Perhaps most interesting is that Brown did not run with the "I'll stop Obamacare" idea but vowed to work to repeal it as soon as he gets there. Without spelling it out, he seemed to be saying: "Democrats will make sure I can't stop Obamacare."

UPDATE IV: As of 9:45 p.m., Brown has raised \$1,012,000 in one day. That's double the target he set for himself this morning.

[January 13th ...](#)

[The Corner](#)

[Gergen: Brown 'Stuffed Me' With His Kennedy-Seat Quip](#) [Robert Costa]

In Monday night's senatorial debate in Massachusetts, David Gergen, the moderator, looked straight at Scott Brown, the Republican nominee, and asked him this question:

GERGEN: You said you're for [health-care reform](#), just not this bill. We know from the Clinton experience that if this bill fails, it could well be another 15 years before we see health-care reform efforts in Washington. Are you willing under those circumstances to say, I'm going to be the person, I'm going to sit in Teddy Kennedy's seat and I'm going to be the person who's going to block it for another 15 years?

Brown, in what I call his '[Nashua moment](#),' responded with what's become the remark that's defining this race:

BROWN: Well, with all due respect, it's not the Kennedys' seat, and it's not the Democrats' seat, it's the people's seat. And they have the chance to send somebody down there who is an independent voter, and an independent thinker, and going to look out for the best interests of the people of Massachusetts. And the way that this bill is configured, I'd like to send it back to the drawing board because I believe people should have [insurance](#) — [just not] this particular bill because it's not good for the entire country.

In a conversation with NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE today, Gergen, a noted White House adviser to four presidents and professor of public service at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of [Government](#), admitted, with good humor, that Brown smoked him with his sharp retort. "He stuffed me on that," said Gergen. "Scott Brown gave a very good impression of who he was and what he stood for. He was fast on his feet."

Gergen added that the importance of the Kennedy legacy in this race is quickly fading. "While he remains a beloved figure, especially to Massachusetts Democrats, he's certainly not at the center of the dynamics shaping this race. This campaign has become much more of a referendum on Washington . . . That's the real issue here. The trend lines in Washington on issues such as [health](#) care could be souring the moods not only of conservatives, moderate Republicans, and right-leaning independents, but spreading into the views of both left-leaning independents and Democrats themselves."

Still, Gergen said that Democrat Martha Coakley "has to be considered the frontrunner at this point." While Brown was strong during last night's debate, Gergen said that Coakley came across "as more accessible as a person." Plus, he believes that many Massachusetts Democrats, though unhappy with Coakley and Washington, will ultimately decide to vote for her over Brown next week because "they want to show their frustration, but they aren't willing or ready, yet, to send a Republican to the Senate." Gergen also noted that he's still "as puzzled by the polls as everyone else, and just as fascinated by how this race is playing out."

[January 14th ...](#)

Politico

[Is Coakley committed to justice?](#)

by Radley Balko

Though polls show the race tightening, Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley still seems the likely heir to the seat of the late Sen. Ted Kennedy. Coakley is commonly described as a traditional liberal, but in one policy area she's far to the right of her predecessor. It also happens to be the policy area in which Coakley has built her career: criminal justice.

Last year, Coakley chose to personally argue her state's case before the Supreme Court in *Melendez-Diaz v. Massachusetts*. Despite the recent headlines detailing forensic mishaps, fraudulent testimony and crime lab incompetence, Coakley argued that requiring crime lab technicians to be present at trial for questioning by defense attorneys would place too large a burden on prosecutors. The Supreme Court found otherwise, in a decision that had Justices Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia coming down on Coakley's left.

The *Melendez-Diaz* case wasn't an anomaly. Coakley has made her reputation as a law-and-order prosecutor. More troubling, she's shown a tendency to aggressively push the limits of the law in high-profile cases and an unwillingness to cop to mistakes — be they her own or those of other prosecutors. Coakley's most recent high-profile case was the "Aqua Teen Hunger Force" hoax, in which she defended Boston authorities' massive overreaction to harmless light-emitting-diode devices left around the city as a promotional gimmick.

But Coakley first made national headlines for her role in the prosecution of Louise Woodward, a British nanny convicted of shaking to death infant Matthew Eappen in 1997. Woodward was eventually convicted of second-degree murder. A judge promptly reduced Woodward's charge to manslaughter. Coakley's role in the Woodward case helped raise her profile enough for a successful run for district attorney. Soon after taking office, Coakley found herself in the midst of another high-profile child abuse case, the Fells Acres day care convictions.

In the 1980s, Violet Amirault and her children, Gerald Amirault and Cheryl Amirault LeFave, were convicted of sexually abusing several children at their day care facility. The cases came at the height of the 1980s sex abuse panic, leading to false convictions across the country based on improper questioning of children, mass hysteria about sex abuse and Satan worship, and bogus "recovered-memory" psychotherapy. Coakley didn't prosecute the Amiraults; her former boss Scott Harshbarger did. But the case against the family began to come apart during her tenure as district attorney. Despite a parole board's 5-0 recommendation to grant Gerald Amirault clemency and mounting doubts about the evidence against him, Coakley publicly and aggressively lobbied then-Gov. Jane Swift to deny Amirault relief. Amirault remained in prison.

Wall Street Journal reporter Dorothy Rabinowitz, who won a Pulitzer Prize for her coverage of bogus sex abuse cases, recently told *The Boston Globe* of the Amirault case, "Martha Coakley was a very, very good soldier who showed she would do anything to preserve this horrendous assault on justice." According to journalist Mark Pendergrast, Coakley herself prosecuted another questionable child abuse case in 1993, using the same recovered-memory testimony and now-discredited methods of questioning children to convict Ray and Shirley Souza of molesting their grandchildren.

It's probably not surprising, then, that as DA in Middlesex County, Coakley opposed efforts to create an innocence commission in Massachusetts, calling the idea "backward-looking instead of forward-looking." Of course, that's sort of the point — to find people who have been wrongfully convicted. So far, there have been at least 23 exonerations in Massachusetts, including several in Coakley's home county.

I had my own exchange with Coakley in the letters section of *The Boston Globe* a few years ago over the issue of prescription pain medication. Coakley had told the paper that "accidental addiction" to opiate pain medications such as OxyContin was a common problem among chronic pain patients, despite considerable medical evidence to the contrary. Such wrongheaded statements by law enforcement officials and the

policies that go with them are a big reason why doctors have become increasingly reluctant to treat pain patients. Coakley conceded that she's "no medical expert" but then went on to question the body of medical literature showing accidental addiction to be a myth. Coakley cited only her own experience as a DA to contradict the litany of peer-reviewed medical research.

As a member of the Senate, not only would Coakley be creating new federal criminal laws; given her record as a prosecutor, there's a good chance she'd serve on committees with oversight over the Justice Department and the judiciary. She'd also be casting votes to confirm or deny federal judicial appointments. Advocates for criminal justice reform should be wary. Coakley may share Kennedy's opposition to the death penalty, but her record as a prosecutor leaves plenty of doubt about her commitment to justice.

[January 17th ...](#)

[Contentions](#)

[Coakley: The Buzzards Gather](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

Just as [I suggested this week](#), Democrats are now attempting, according to [Byron York](#), to Creigh Deeds-ize Martha Coakley. If she is in fact tanking, now is the time to write her off as a damaged and enfeebled candidate, lest anyone suspect that this is a reflection on Democrats' political liabilities. York suggests that Coakley's own polls show her trailing by 5 points. So the buzzards are circling:

"This is a Creigh Deeds situation," the Democrat says. "I don't think it says that the Obama agenda is a problem. I think it says, 1) that she's a terrible candidate, 2) that she ran a terrible campaign, 3) that the climate is difficult but she should have been able to overcome it, and 4) that Democrats beware — you better run good campaigns, or you're going to lose."

They do have a point. Not only is she a lackluster candidate, she has, as [Dorothy Rabinowitz](#) documents in painstaking fashion, shown herself to be profoundly lacking in judgment, as evidenced by her conduct in a sensational child-sexual-abuse case in which horrifying, and ultimately unsubstantiated, accusations were made against the Amirault family. Rabinowitz describes Coakley's role in the case's unraveling as Gerald Amirault was spared his full 30-to-40-year sentence:

In 2000, the Massachusetts Governor's Board of Pardons and Paroles met to consider a commutation of Gerald's sentence. After nine months of investigation, the board, reputed to be the toughest in the country, voted 5-0, with one abstention, to commute his sentence. Still more newsworthy was an added statement, signed by a majority of the board, which pointed to the lack of evidence against the Amiraults, and the "extraordinary if not bizarre allegations" on which they had been convicted.

Editorials in every major and minor paper in the state applauded the Board's findings. District Attorney Coakley was not idle either, and quickly set about organizing the parents and children in the case, bringing them to meetings with Acting Gov. Jane Swift, to persuade her to reject the board's ruling. Ms. Coakley also worked the press, setting up a special interview so that the now adult accusers could tell reporters, once more, of the tortures they had suffered at the hands of the Amiraults, and of their panic at the prospect of Gerald going free.

Rabinowitz argues that if Coakley believed the preposterous allegations in that case, which "no serious citizen does," then "that is powerful testimony to the mind and capacities of this aspirant to a Senate seat. It is little short of wonderful to hear now of Ms. Coakley's concern for the rights of terror suspects at Guantanamo—her urgent call for the protection of the right to the presumption of innocence."

Perhaps, then, there's a measure of truth to Democrats' whispering campaign. Coakley may simply be in over her head, a woman of flawed judgment and limited political skills. In any other year, that might not be a barrier to election for a Democrat in a deep Blue State. But this is no ordinary year.

[January 18th ...](#)

[Power Line](#)

[Dueling rallies in Massachusetts](#)

by Paul Mirengoff

President Obama came to Massachusetts yesterday in a last-minute effort to preserve his party's filibuster proof majority in the Senate. He did so at a rally at the campus of Northeastern University in Boston which featured the Massachusetts political establishment. Scott Brown countered with a rally in Worcester which featured Massachusetts sports legends Curt Schilling and Doug Flutie.

I didn't watch the dueling rallies, but [this report by Politico](#) leaves the impression that Brown may well have won the duel, or at least that if Martha Coakley needed a big day, she probably came up short.

Politico's account has Scott Brown driving home a straightforward message, the same one that's been behind his remarkable surge:

Brown took the stage at his own capacity rally in Worcester and surrounded himself with a group of New England underdogs to underline his theme as a political insurgent taking on a Democratic "machine."

"This Senate seat does not belong to no one person and no one political party - it belongs to the people of Massachusetts," Brown said, repeating what has become the message of his campaign since a debate last Monday when he was asked about "the Kennedy seat."

Promising independence at a time when voters are increasingly disgusted at the political establishment, Brown said: "I will be nobody's senator but yours."

By contrast, Obama and the Massachusetts establishment appeared before "a college heavy crowd" to engage in what sounds like hand-wringing over the fact that, now that they are in power, they can no longer pose as outsiders.

Obama and a parade of Democrats who appeared on stage before a crowd a local fire official put at 1,100 at Northeastern's modest gymnasium spent much of their time trying to explain to the audience, and to themselves, how they had lost their grip on the public "anger" - a word that has replaced "hope" as the emotion Democrats are trying to channel.

"The people of Massachusetts are angry, like they should be," said Rep. Michael Capuano, a fiery Boston-area liberal who lost in the Democratic primary while running a different, more combative campaign that many local party officials now wish Coakley had run.

"They need to focus that anger in the right direction" - at "the people who put us in this position," Capuano said.

Obama offered his own analysis of the voters' anger.

"There were going to be some who stood on the sidelines, who were protectors of the big banks, protectors of the big insurance companies, protectors of the big drug companies who were going to say, 'You know what, we can take advantage of this crisis,'" he told the crowd.

When the Dems find themselves explaining to a friendly "college heavy crowd" that folks shouldn't hate them, they could be in trouble. A campaign rally for an embattled Senatorial candidate seems like the wrong venue for Obama and company to be asking "why do they hate us." Nor will many undecided voters be impressed by an answer that does not include the Dems' efforts to ram through Congress an unpopular health care plan.

Obama did attack Brown, but not very powerfully:

Obama also aimed to sow doubts about the likeable Brown, who has flummoxed Democrats with a regular-guy image underscored by a commercial that features him driving his GMC pickup truck.

"He's driving his truck around the Commonwealth, and he says that, you know he gets you, he fights for you, that he'll be an independent voice," said Obama.

"Well, you've got to look under the hood, because what you learn makes you wonder," Obama said. "When you listen closely to what he's been saying, it's very clear that he's going to do exactly the same thing in Washington. So look, forget the ads, everybody can run slick ads. Forget the truck. Everybody can buy a truck."

It's not clear what Obama gains by reminding voters of Brown's message -- that he's a man of the people who promises independence.

Obama hit Brown on one issue:

Obama also attacked Brown for opposing his proposed fee on big banks, a populist strand that the White House and its allies began driving in earnest late last week.

"Martha's opponent is already walking in lockstep with Washington Republicans opposing that fee and defending the same fat cats who are being rewarded for their failure," Obama said.

Not a bad shot, but probably not worth a trip to Boston to deliver.

The bottom line, I think, is that today's events did nothing to stem the tide in favor of Brown among independents, who make up more than half of the Massachusetts electorate. If anything, the gathering of Massachusetts pols would have reinforced the view that Brown is the best choice for independent voters.

Any headway Obama may have made on Coakley's behalf would consist of increasing turnout among the faithful, especially those who might otherwise be unlikely to show up on election day. But can one appearance in a college gym accomplish this to any appreciable extent?

ABC News - Political Punch

[Martha Coakley: A Democratic Canary in a Coalmine?](#)

by Jake Tapper

Political operatives say the Senate race in Massachusetts between Democratic state attorney general Martha Coakley and Republican state senator Scott Brown is too close to call. But the fact that President Obama felt the need to fly to the Bay State to campaign for a Democrat in one of the most Democratic states in the nation speaks volumes about the ugly climate for Democratic candidates.

Coakley has run an imperfect campaign and has had a rough couple weeks. But, as one senior White House official acknowledged to me, "in Massachusetts, even after a rough couple weeks the Democrat should be ahead." Polls have Coakley and Brown neck and neck.

At the rally in Boston for Coakley yesterday, President Obama said a few things worth paying attention to:

1) Feigned Nonchalance:

The president said of Brown: "I don't know him, he may be a perfectly nice guy. I don't know his record, but I don't know whether he's been fighting for you up until now."

But he also revealed some fairly intimate knowledge of Brown and the race: "He voted with the Republicans 96 percent of the time," the president said of Brown's time in the Massachusetts legislature. "Ninety-six percent of the time." He took on one of Brown's best lines during the campaign, when he pushed back on a debate question about sitting in "Teddy Kennedy's seat" and said it's "the people's seat."

"There's been a lot said in this race that this is not the Kennedy seat it's the people's seat," President Obama said. "And let me tell you that the first person who would agree with that is Teddy Kennedy."

And he went after one of Brown's signature shticks, his old pickup truck, used to convey Everyman appeal. "You've got to look under the hood," President Obama said. "Forget the truck. Everybody can buy a truck."

Clearly President Obama -- as he should -- is well aware of Brown's record.

2) Health Care Reform? What Health Care Reform?:

Last week [President Obama attempted to reassure House Democrats](#) that health care reform would be a political winner.

"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," he said. "I'll be out there waging a great campaign from one end of the country to the other, telling Americans with insurance or without what they stand to gain about the arsenal of consumer protections; about the long-awaited stability that they're going to begin to experience. And I'm going to tell them that I am proud we are putting the future of America before the politics of the moment -- the next generation before the next election."

But in Boston -- a fairly hospitable "one end of the country" -- the president did not directly mention the health care reform legislation, opposition to which Brown has made one of the signatures of his campaign. He talked about Coakley being on the side of the people, and Brown on the side of the insurance industry, but there was no direct reference to Brown being the key vote against passage of the health care reform bill.

This was an obvious sign that the White House knows just how unpopular the legislation currently is, regardless of what the president told House Democrats last week.

3) I Feel Your Anger:

The president acknowledged voter anger in a more stark way than I can recall him ever doing. (And again: this is in Massachusetts!)

"The anger there is real," a White House official told me, and it's replicated all over the country.

"People are frustrated and they're angry, and they have every right to be," President Obama said, "I understand. Because progress is slow, and no matter how much progress we make, it can't come fast enough for the people who need help right now, today."

He went on to paint Brown and the GOP as exploiting that "pain and anger to score a few political points. There are always folks who think that the best way to solve these problems are to demonize others. And, unfortunately, we're seeing some of that politics in Massachusetts today.

"You know, we always knew that change was going to be hard. And what we also understood -- I understood this the minute I was sworn into office -- was that there were going to be some who stood on the sidelines, who were protectors of the big banks, and protectors of the big insurance companies, protectors of the big drug companies, who would say, 'You know what, we can take advantage of this crisis -- because it's going to be so bad, even though we helped initiate these policies, there's going to be a sleight of hand here

because we're going to let Democrats take responsibility. We're going to let them make the tough choices. We're going to let them rescue the economy. And then we can tap into that anger and that frustration.'

"It's the oldest play in the book," the president said.

It's not that the White House has been unaware of how ugly the 2010 midterms could be for Democrats. But however this race turns out, the closeness of the Coakley-Brown race is an ominous sign for Democrats.

4) Planning for a Brown Win:

This was unsaid at the rally, but one other thing worth noting is that the White House is obviously preparing a strategy for health care reform in case Coakley loses.

[As we reported previously](#), the White House would want the House pass the Senate bill, so the Senate doesn't have to vote any more on the matter in the new post-supermajority Senate with Scott Brown.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has told the White House that she's skeptical the House would pass that legislation, given the stark differences in some areas, but Senate Democrats and White House officials would push hard the notion that the bills are 90 percent similar and not doing so would be allowing the insurance companies to win. House Democrats would want Senate Democrats force the bill through by bypassing normal Senate rules and passing the legislation through the "reconciliation" process -- requiring only 50 votes. That would even allow some moderates to peel away.

But White House officials note that reconciliation is only for budget matters so the most popular parts of the bill involving insurance reforms -- banning the denial of coverage based on pre-existing conditions, for instance -- would not be part of that bill.

[January 19th ...](#)

The Corner

[The Scott Heard Round The World](#) [Mark Steyn]

Well, as a wintry election day dawns in [Massachusetts](#), I'll believe it when I see it. If all but one of [those polls](#) are right, Scott Brown now has a lead well beyond the margin of error. But, as that *Boston Globe* "Dead Heat!" headline suggests, it's not necessarily beyond the margin of Acorn, the margin of lawyer, and the margin of Franken-style recounts. On the other hand, if you're minded to (as MSNBC's electokleptomaniac Ed Schultz [recommends](#)) steal the vote, you don't really want to have to steal it big, on a Mugabe-esque scale.

However things turn out, the Dems have got a fright. I would be surprised if many candidates in November are quite the same spectacular combination of gaffe-prone stupidity and arrogance as [Martha Coakley](#). But, granted that, I was surprised at how incompetent the Democrat machine was. On Sunday, the President veered between dull and really, really lousy. He did what he did with his Olympics pitch in Copenhagen - he took the extraordinary step of flying in to save the day, and then when he got there thought he could wing it. He, or at any rate his minders, should know by now that his rhetoric is seriously underperforming - "[incoherent without his teleprompter and a bore with it](#)". Yet his staff allow him to stagger around as the last believer in his own magic. What sort of functioning pol would be so careless as to say "Everybody can own a truck"? He should talk to any New England dealership about that. As it happens, I bought a new truck last month and I've never seen the place so empty.

At the start of this campaign, the issues were [health](#) care and the economy. After "Ted Kennedy's seat" and "Curt Schilling the Yankees fan" and "only the little people campaign at Fenway", the genius Dems succeeded in making their own assumptions about one-party rule a very potent secondary issue. Very foolishly, Obama both underlined the regal hauteur of the Massachusetts machine - and simultaneously nationalized the election by portraying it as a referendum on the Hopeychange. If Martha now loses, he can't plead it's nothing to do with him.

Back to the News

The Corner

Unpresidential [Marc Thiessen]

I have a reaction to the [State of the Union](#) in this morning's *Washington Post* "[Topic A](#)," but a few additional thoughts.

The speech began with an elegant and elevated opening, but quickly descended into scolding and condescension.

He scolded the justices of the Supreme Court in front of their faces and led the entire Democratic side of the aisle into cheering his taunts. The justices sat there stone-faced (save Justice Alito, whose reaction probably betrayed what the rest were thinking).

He scolded Republicans for obstruction and declared "we can't wage a perpetual campaign" — even as he continued, in his speech, his perpetual campaign against President Bush. The fact is, by this time in their presidencies, both of his predecessors had reached across the aisle to seek opposition support for a major initiative (Clinton on NAFTA, Bush on [No Child Left Behind](#)). Obama has not one single significant bipartisan initiative to speak of. He has tried to ram through his agenda along strict party-line votes. But the Republicans are obstructionist.

He scolded [Scott Brown](#) (without mentioning his name) and all those who have criticized his handling of the Christmas Day bomber, declaring that "all of us love this country" and warning critics to "put aside the schoolyard taunts about who is tough." If you disagree with Obama's policies, you are questioning his patriotism. Imagine what the reaction would have been if Bush had tried that in a State of the Union with those who criticized the surge in Iraq. The howls of the liberal media would have been deafening.

His one moment of "humility" came when he acknowledged his biggest mistake of the past year: his failure to adequately explain his policies to all of us. This was a State of the Union for the slow learners. His message to all of us was: "Let me speak slowly for you."

It was quite possibly the most partisan, condescending [State of the Union address](#) ever. Tonight, Obama was unpresidential. The permanent campaign continues. In the long run it will backfire.

— *Marc Thiessen was the lead writer on the last two State of the Union addresses. His new book, [Courting Disaster: How the CIA Kept America Safe and How Barack Obama Is Inviting the Next Attack](#), was just published by Regnery. For more information go to: www.courtingdisaster.com.*

The Spine

Maybe I'm Getting Paranoid ... About Obama

by Marty Peretz

I've just read the [transcript](#) of the president's remarks about Haiti, the ones he made on January 15. He noted that, in addition to assistance from the United States, significant aid had also come from "Brazil, Mexico, Canada, France, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic, among others." Am I missing another country that weighed in with truly consequential assistance? Ah, yes. There it is. Right there "among others." Yes, the country to which I refer is "among others," that one.

The fact is that, next to our country, Israel sent the largest contingent of trained rescue workers, doctors, and other medical personnel. The Israeli field hospital was the only one on the ground that could perform real

surgery, which it did literally hundreds of times, while delivering--as of last week--at least 16 babies, including one premature infant and three caesarians. The first 250-odd Israelis were real professionals, and they were supplemented by others, also professionals. And to these can be added the many organized Jews from the Diaspora who, in solidarity with Israel, also went on a work pilgrimage, an *aliyah*, in solidarity with Haiti.

It's not that Israeli participation in the Haiti horror was being kept secret. I myself saw it reported several times on television—on [ABC](#), [NBC](#), [CBS](#), and [CNN](#).

So didn't Obama notice? For God's sake, everybody noticed the deep Israeli involvement. I understand that Obama doesn't like Middle East narratives that do not contain "one side and the other side" equal valence. But he couldn't have that here. The Arabs don't care a fig, not for their impoverished and backward own, and certainly not for strangers. That's why their presence in Haiti amounted to a couple of bucks from Saudi Arabia and maybe from some other sheikhs.

An afterthought: Who would want Arab participation in the rescue effort? This was serious work and dangerous work. Amateurs weren't welcome.

Yes, I think that the labors of the Israelis were edited out of Obama's speech, either by his speechwriters (who have made dissing Israel their *forté*) or by his own oh-so-delicate but dishonest censoring mechanism.

Washington Examiner - Beltway Confidential

Obama: 'I didn't sign off on those shady health care deals.' Really?

by John McCormack

Mary Katharine Ham notes that [President Obama tells ABC](#):

"Let's just clarify. I didn't make a bunch of deals [on health care]. ... There is a legislative process that is taking place in Congress and I am happy to own up to the fact that I have not changed Congress and how it operates the way I would have liked."

But the [Washington Post](#) reported on December 20 that Obama's top aides were involved in the negotiations with Nelson:

Schumer, who spent more than 13 hours in Reid's office Friday, said the Medicaid issue was settled around lunchtime, and the final eight hours of the talks focused on the abortion language. Boxer estimated she spent seven hours in Reid's offices -- without ever once sitting in the same room, even though they were all of 25 steps apart.

Reid and Schumer kept up the "shuttle negotiation" between the leader's conference room and his top aide's office, Boxer said. Keenly aware how tense the talks were, **the White House dispatched two aides who together have decades of experience in the Senate -- Jim Messina and Peter Rouse -- to work with Nelson. They relayed their intelligence to White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, who monitored the talks from a dinner in Georgetown.**

Perhaps Messina and Rouse just showed up to provide the "[Christmas cookies](#)" that Reid and Schumer chowed down to sustain themselves during the tense negotiations, but it's hard to believe that Obama's aides didn't sign off on both the abortion and Medicaid backroom deals.

[Michelle Malkin](#) sums it up:

The unmitigated chutzpah here is so blinding that I don't just need sunglasses to protect my eyes. I need blackout curtains. Watch President Obama blame Congress for Demcare bribery and sabotage of transparency. As if Rahm and all the senior goons in the White House weren't twisting arms and cracking heads to ensure that the deal met their boss's timeline. As if the Cadillac tax break for unions hadn't been hashed out at [1600 Pennsylvania](#).

The Corner

[Krauthammer's Take](#) [NRO Staff]

On President Obama's "spending freeze":

It's not a hatchet. It's not a scalpel. It's a Q-tip. It's a fraud. This is a miniscule amount. It excludes Defense, Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs. It excludes all the entitlements, which are 60 percent of the budget. It excludes stimuli past and future — the two thirds of the near trillion-dollar stimulus that has not been spent. All of that is excluded.

It excludes the \$1 trillion that would end up being spent on [health care](#) if it were passed.

What it is, is a \$15 billion reduction in a year, 2011, in which the CBO has just announced we are going to have a deficit of \$1.35 trillion, which means it is — it's a rounding error, it's lunch [money](#). . . .

This isn't a real cut. It's an appearance of cuts. It's a maneuver as a response to what happened in Massachusetts because he lost the independents — Obama — 3-1, and he knows independents worry about debt and deficits and spending. . . .

So he announces a freeze which is meaningless. Remember, these departments enjoyed a 20 percent increase in budget as a result of what Obama and the Democrats had done in 2009. So you are freezing [discretionary spending] at an extraordinarily high and unusual [level].

The Anchoress - First Things Blog

[Obamaporta-prompsta; Symptom of Distress?](#)

The Anchoress



A Shrinking Presidential Perspective

Necessity being the mother of invention, it appears that Barack Obama has needed, and thus invented, the [Portable President Kit](#), consisting of two teleprompters with accompanying equipment and a traveling *Don't-You-Know-Who-I-Am-I-Am-The-President-That's-Who* Podium With Presidential Seal, which Barack Obama takes with him, *everywhere* he goes.

That means he brings it to an elementary school, for use in addressing the press (something past-and-moronic presidents did not have to do), who are then weirdly dismissed and unable to witness his talk to the children.



It means that he brings his Obamaprompta w/ Podium to a what is essentially a staff meeting.



I'll be honest, my first reaction to both of those pictures was that they were photoshops. Whoever is choosing what photos get released by the White House needs to be fired. Do they think these pictures reassure us, or that it makes Obama look commanding? They're quite wrong. These pictures make the President look like an insecure fool.

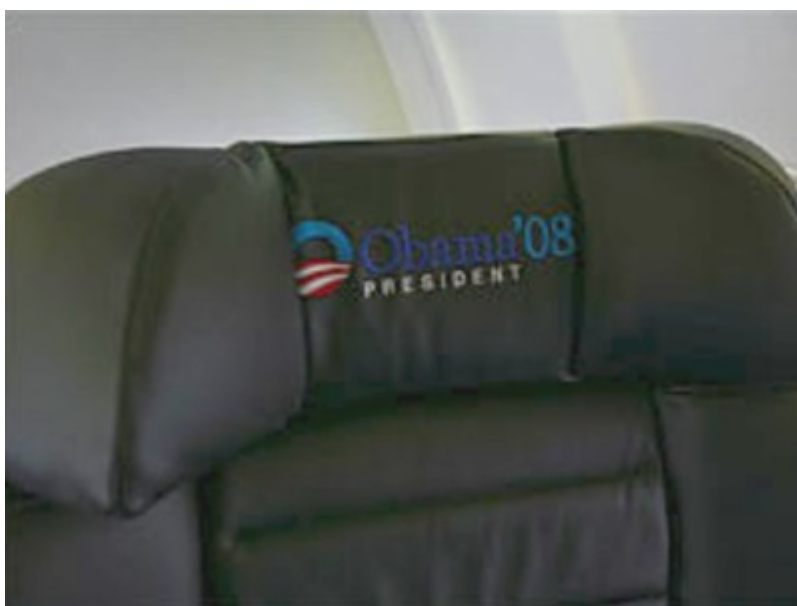
For all we know -since *we don't know very much at all about Barack Obama*, after all- perhaps the president *is* an insecure fool. Perhaps that was why he needed a *pre-presidential seal*,



and a ubiquitous, dreamy logo



and a rather special seat, just for him, on his campaign plane:



and a truly *unprecedented* sign identifying him as President-Elect



The blogs (and Jon Stewart) are having a lot of fun at the president's expense, every time another one of these weird teleprompter-and-podium sightings turns up, and well they should. We can be very certain that if President Bush had needed a teleprompter in an elementary school (whether it was meant for-the-press-only, or not) or if he'd needed one to address a "task force" of ten people, the press and most Americans would be ridiculing him without mercy (and with some justification), while his supporters winced.

Mockery and cynicism is all part of modern day politics, but I am beginning to worry that Obama is showing evidence of a real problem, and it is a problem of insecurity, identity, aloofness, self-protection and, I am sorry to say it, but delusion.

Is Barack Obama headed for some sort of meltdown? Is he clinging to his podium and teleprompters because he has lost his protective shields and does not trust himself without them? The starry-eyed adulation of the press has simmered down to a mere gaze of hopefulness and longing, accompanied by the barest of criticisms, and Obama translates that as the press being "against" him.

Barack Obama is making flimsy excuses or outright lying; he is saying downright weird things like "I am happy to own up to the fact that I have not changed Congress and how it operates..." He has become more self-referential than Bill Clinton. He is throwing transparent boondoggles and doublespeaks at an American public he clearly thinks is too stupid to understand much of anything.

Some are talking about Linus and his security blanket. To me Obama more accurately resembles the responsibility-shirking Captain Queeg, with this marbles. What is going on with him? The teleprompter protects him from a slip of the tongue. The Podium creates a barrier between him and his "audience" such as it is, and all of it keeps everything at a distance. Even in this picture, the desk is a barrier, the legs outstretched to the max create distance, the soles of the feet denote a measure of disregard. This president is voluntarily isolating himself, even from his advisers. And again, the White House must think this makes Obama appear in control, but one could just as easily argue that he is surrounded by men who are standing above and looking down upon him.



The optics are terrible, indeed, but the message being communicated in these photos is downright worrisome. Our nation is in serious trouble, and the man in charge of it all seems content to misread every signal and only reluctantly engage. His own party has been in control of Congress (and therefore in control of spending) for two solid years, and yet all he can do is blame the predecessor (with whom he should -at this point- really have a little sympathy) and throw that same congress under the bus because all of his illusions have crumbled, and someone must be blamed.

Well, yes, there must be blame and there is plenty to go around. For my money, the press needs to be made to explain how it can justify having never asked this man a difficult question during his two-year campaign; they need to explain why they were so happy to promote Barack Obama into the presidency when they really did not know him, and did not want to know him. They wanted an idea of a president, and I suspect the press did not look too deeply at Barack Obama, because they did not want their idea shattered; they did not want to find out he was not what they imagined. Even Howard Fineman now admits we do not know this man.

So, we do not know much about Barack Obama. We do not even know the minimal stuff -school records, health records, known associates- because the press never troubled themselves with those same urgent demands they made of his predecessor. All we have is the media-built narrative, and the example of Obama in his first year as president, during which he resembled nothing of the man we saw in 2007 and 2008.

The president does not seem to know himself, either, which is perhaps why he needs to surround himself with cultural elitists, the trappings of his office, and the constant reminder of his title. Whether the highly-insulated Obama knows who his allies are, or even who the majority of his countrymen are is also a question worth asking.



Another WH issued picture that I thought was a photoshop

Referencing that photo, Bookworm, has called Barack Obama as **a “malignant narcissist”, incapable of considering anything, except in reference to himself.** She may well be right, but I’ll leave that to the experts. I do worry about his isolation, though, and his delusion that the press is “against” him. There is no president in my memory who has been more carefully **protected and kid-gloved** by the press.

But I think Bookworm is right to wonder what is wrong with Barack Obama. I think many Americans are wondering what is the story with this stranger-president, with the affable (if **eerily unchanging**) smile, and the instinct to blame others and then **slip away**. Is he a victim of his own success? Has he made the ultimate mistake of a politician, and believed his own hype, only to find that reality trumps hype, every time, and leaves the adored object unmercifully exposed as being merely mere?

All I know is, I keep seeing these awful White House approved photos, and they daily jar me because they seem to reveal the president in very unflattering, troubling ways, like the work of an obsessed and Obama-hating photoshop expert.

I look at the photos and see a man who seems not to know himself, or -perhaps- **to love himself too much**. And I can’t help thinking, “this man has about **40 ‘czars’ busily working** under the radar; most of them are unaccountable to congress, or to the people, or to the press. They answer only to Barack Obama, whose presidency may be a voyage of self-discovery joined with immense but **unfocused** power.

Who knows where it will land us?

Ann Althouse links and notes:

[the pictures] are mostly unflattering when seen by people who don’t like Obama — admittedly, that’s an increasing group. People who like him look at those pics and think they are wonderful.

And this reminds me of something I was saying the other day about liberals. Liberals — I’m generalizing — are so engulfed in their belief that they are the good people, the smart people, that they forget to step back and look at things from the perspective of people who don’t agree with them.



WWW.IBpedforia.com/cartoon



San Diego Union-Tribune 3/27/09
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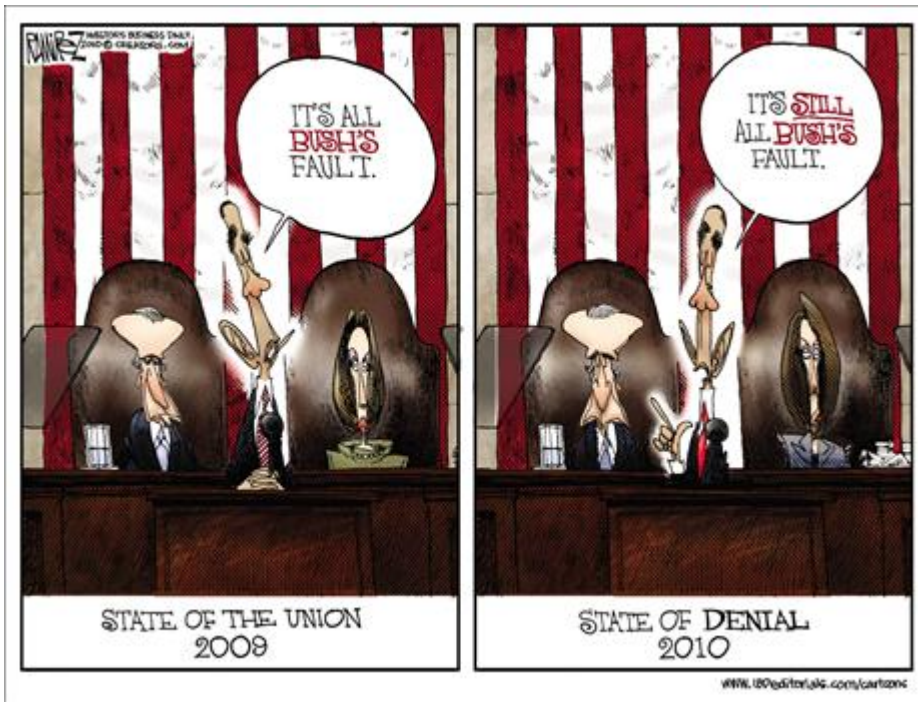
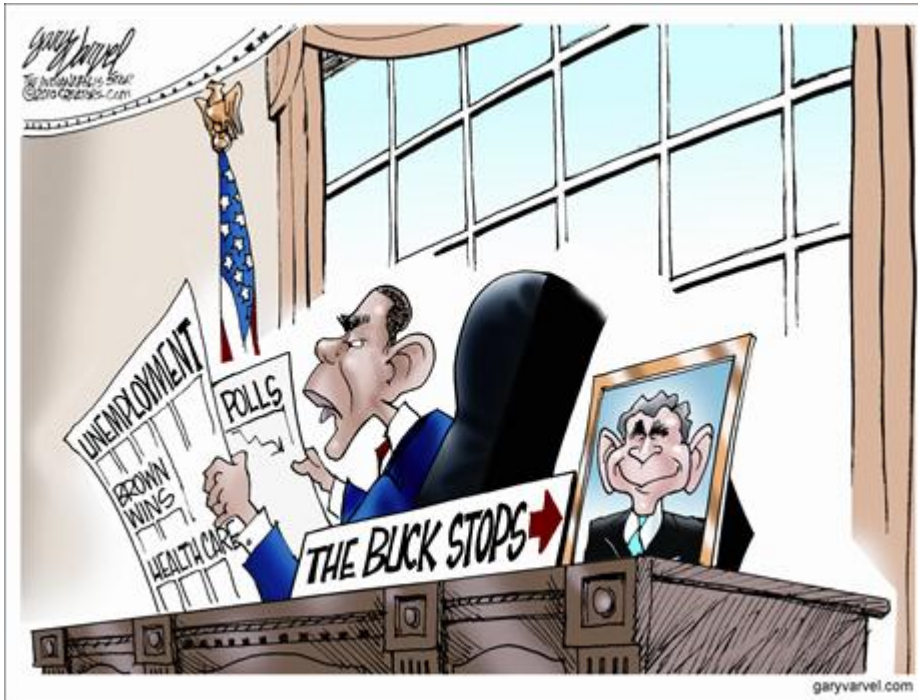




PULLING THE CURTAIN BACK ON THE WIZARD.

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THE AUDACITY OF NOPE

