

January 25, 2012

[City Journal](#) says Walker's Wisconsin reforms are working.

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It turned out to be a tough year. The state immediately erupted into a national spectacle, with tens of thousands of citizens, led by Wisconsin's public-employee unions, seizing control of the capitol for weeks to protest the reforms. By early March, the crowds grew as big as 100,000, police estimated. Protesters set up encampments in the statehouse, openly drinking and engaging in drug use beneath the marble dome. Democratic state senators fled Wisconsin to prevent a vote on Walker's plan. Eventually, the Senate did manage to pass the reforms, which survived a legal challenge and became law in July.

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Appleton isn't alone. According to a report by the MacIver Institute, as of September 1, "at least 25 school districts in the Badger State had reported switching health care providers/plans or opening insurance bidding to outside companies." The institute calculates that these steps will save the districts \$211.45 per student. If the state's other 250 districts currently served by WEA Trust follow suit, the savings statewide could reach hundreds of millions of dollars.

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Spengler says Obama is toast.

President Obama thinks that the improving economy will win him a second term, the [New York Times reports today](#). Whatever he's drinking, order me a double. His poll numbers look a little better because the Republicans have spent the past several months in a fratricidal bloodbath. Fortunately, the memory of the American electorate for such antics is short. Once we choose a candidate (and I am happy with Romney, Santorum, or Gingrich) and unite behind him, we will win, unless, of course, we find a way to sabotage ourselves.

People are hurting, and badly. The official unemployment rate may have fallen, slightly, but the real unemployment rate — the number of working-age Americans who aren't working — rose from about 12% before the 2008 crisis, to about 23%, and hasn't come down. That includes people who have retired early because they can't find work, spouses who used to earn a second income but have gone back to homemaking because work isn't available, self-employed people whose businesses have collapsed, young people who live in their parents' basement because they can't afford tuition and can't find work. ...

Turns out the Scrooge of Omaha will benefit from the pipeline spike. [Bloomberg News](#) has the story.

Warren Buffett's Burlington Northern Santa Fe LLC is among U.S. and Canadian railroads that stand to benefit from the Obama administration's decision to reject [TransCanada Corp. \(TRP\)](#)'s Keystone XL oil pipeline permit.

With modest expansion, railroads can handle all new oil produced in western Canada through 2030, according to an [analysis](#) of the Keystone proposal by the U.S. State Department.

"Whatever people bring to us, we're ready to haul," Krista York-Wooley, a spokeswoman for Burlington Northern, a unit of Buffett's Omaha, Nebraska-based [Berkshire Hathaway Inc. \(BRK/A\)](#), said in an interview. If Keystone XL "doesn't happen, we're here to haul."

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environmentally sensitive region of Nebraska, something the Obama administration encouraged. ...

Putting more BS to the administration, [New Editor](#) has a map of the oil and gas pipelines in the US.

[Michael Barone](#) says even some of the left can't stomach high speed rail BS.

Three cheers for [Kevin Drum](#), blogging at the left-wing Mother Jones website. Drum, who is based in California, has been opposing the ridiculously expensive California high-speed rail project still supported, against all common sense, by Governor Jerry Brown. In this blogpost he takes aim at the high-speed rail authority's estimate that it would cost \$171 billion to produce highway and airport infrastructure to replace that which would be provided by high-speed rail service. Drum notes that the authority's well compensated consulting firm bases that projection on an assumption that "the high-speed rail system could carry 116 million passengers a year, **based on running trains with 1,000 seats both north and south every five minutes, 19 hours a day and 365 days a year.** The study assumes the trains would be 70% full on average." ...

There was a SOTU address last night. [Jennifer Rubin](#) fills us in.

President Obama's third State of the Union address was, as expected, a transparently partisan kick-off speech for his 2012 election campaign.

The president began shamelessly by hyping the complete withdrawal of all troops from Iraq. ("For the first time in nine years, there are no Americans fighting in Iraq. ") This is an applause line for him, but his failure or unwillingness to negotiate an agreement with Iraq to keep troops present has unleashed a wave of violence, considerable angst among allies, and cheers in Tehran.

After an easy applause line for killing Osama bin Laden, Obama then plunged into his economic defense. He then reviewed the financial collapse, making sure we all knew it wasn't on his watch that the banks and economy melted down. From there it was bromides mixed with attacks on Republicans. ("As long as I'm president, I will work with anyone in this chamber to build on this momentum. But I intend to fight obstruction with action, and I will oppose any effort to return to the very same policies that brought on this economic crisis in the first place.")

Fairness, of course, was much on his mind: "Or we can restore an economy where everyone gets a fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules. What's at stake are not Democratic values or Republican values, but American values. We have to reclaim them." By that, he is talking about equality of income and outcome. He's not talking about a flat tax (which would truly be treating all taxpayers alike), but a redistribution of wealth.

His actual agenda was meager, however. Yes, he asked for tax reform and breaks for manufacturing companies, but presented no plan of his own.

It's Working in Walker's Wisconsin

The governor's controversial labor reforms are already saving taxpayers millions.

by Christian Schneider

Public unions around the country have poured money into an effort to vote Walker out of office.

One morning last February, Wisconsin governor Scott Walker called his staff into his office. "Guys," he warned, "it's going to be a tough week." Walker had recently sent a letter to state employees proposing steps—ranging from restricting collective bargaining to requiring workers to start contributing to their own pension accounts—to eliminate the state's \$3.6 billion deficit. That day in February was when Walker would announce his plan publicly.

It turned out to be a tough *year*. The state immediately erupted into a national spectacle, with tens of thousands of citizens, led by Wisconsin's public-employee unions, seizing control of the capitol for weeks to protest the reforms. By early March, the crowds grew as big as 100,000, police estimated. Protesters set up encampments in the statehouse, openly drinking and engaging in drug use beneath the marble dome. Democratic state senators fled Wisconsin to prevent a vote on Walker's plan. Eventually, the Senate did manage to pass the reforms, which survived a legal challenge and became law in July.

The unions aren't done yet: they're now trying to recall Walker from office. To do so, they will try to convince Wisconsin voters that Walker's reforms have rendered the state ungovernable. But the evidence, so far, contradicts that claim—and Wisconsinites seem to realize it.

Back in 1959, Wisconsin became the first state to let public employees unionize. The unions spent the next half-century productively, generating lavish benefits for their members. By the time Walker took office in 2011, the overwhelming majority of state and local government workers paid nothing toward the annual contributions to their pension accounts, which equaled roughly 10 percent of their salaries per year. The average employee also used just 6.2 percent of his salary on his health-insurance premium. Among Walker's reforms, therefore, was requiring employees to start paying 5.8 percent of their salaries, on average, toward their pensions and to double their health-insurance payments to 12.4 percent of their salaries. These two changes, Walker estimated, would save local governments \$724 million annually, letting him cut state aid to localities and reduce Wisconsin's \$3.6 billion biennial deficit.

These measures angered unions, but Walker's other moves were even more controversial. One was to allow government employees to bargain collectively only when negotiating wages; in other areas, collective bargaining would no longer be part of the contract-making process. The unions screamed bloody murder, decrying the loss of what they called their "right" to collective bargaining. "We are prepared to implement the financial concessions proposed to help bring our state's budget into balance, but we will not be denied our God-given right to join a real union," said Marty Beil, head of the Wisconsin State Employees Union, back in February. "We will not—I repeat we will not—be denied our rights to collectively bargain."

What had the unions most up in arms, however, was a reform that ended mandatory dues for members. Wisconsin unions were collecting up to \$1,100 per member per year in these obligatory payments, which they then spent on getting sympathetic politicians elected. In the last two elections, for instance, the state's largest teachers' union spent \$3.6 million supporting candidates. Walker's reform meant that government workers could now opt out of paying these dues—savings that could help offset those workers' newly increased health and pension payments, the governor said. The unions knew that, given the option, many of their members would indeed choose not to write a check—and that this would strangle union election spending.

The unions' battle against Walker's reforms has rested on the argument that the changes would damage public services beyond repair. The truth, however, is that the reforms not only are saving money already; they're doing so with little disruption to services. In early August, noticing the trend, the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* reported that Milwaukee would save more in health-care and pension costs than it would lose in state aid, leaving the city \$11 million ahead in 2012—despite Mayor Tom Barrett's prediction in March that Walker's budget "makes our structural deficit explode."

The collective-bargaining component of Walker's plan has yielded especially large financial dividends for school districts. Before the reform, many districts' annual union contracts required them to buy health insurance from WEA Trust, a nonprofit affiliated with the state's largest teachers' union. Once the reform limited collective bargaining to wage negotiations, districts could eliminate that requirement from their contracts and start bidding for health care on the open market. When the Appleton School District put its health-insurance contract up for bid, for instance, WEA Trust suddenly lowered its rates and promised to match any competitor's price. Appleton will save \$3 million during the current school year.

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Over the summer, a sign surfaced that the public wasn't as alarmed by the Walker agenda as the unions would have liked. In August, six Republican state senators who had supported the

reforms were forced to defend their seats in recall elections. Democrats, in the minority by a 19–14 margin, needed to pick up three seats to take back the Senate. In the days before the election, Wisconsin Democratic Party chairman Mike Tate touted poll numbers showing Democrats leading in three races and in a dead heat in the rest. “Independents are moving towards the Democratic candidates in strong numbers,” he told a group of national reporters. Every race, he claimed, was “eminently winnable.”

The manner in which the public unions ran the campaigns was telling. Because they realized that public-sector collective bargaining wasn’t the wedge issue that they’d expected, not a single union-backed ad mentioned it— even though it was the reason that the unions had mobilized for the recall elections in the first place. Instead, the union ads cried that Scott Walker had “cut \$800 million from the state’s schools.” This was true, but the ads neglected to mention that the governor’s increased health-care and pension-contribution requirements made up for those funds, just as Walker had planned. That the unions poured nearly \$20 million into the races, by the way, validated another argument of Walker’s: that mandatory dues are a conduit through which taxpayer money gets transferred to public-sector unions, which use it to elect Democrats, who then negotiate favorable contracts with the unions. In this case, the newly strapped Wisconsin unions had to rely heavily on contributions from unions in other states.

In the end, Republicans held four of the six seats and retained control of the Senate. Democrats nevertheless bragged about defeating two incumbents, but that achievement was more modest than it appeared. One of the Republican incumbents was in a district that Barack Obama had won by 18 points in 2008. The other losing Republican had been plagued by personal problems relating to his 25-year-old mistress. Meanwhile, two of the challenged Republicans, Alberta Darling and Sheila Harsdorf, won more decisively than they had in 2008, suggesting that the reforms might be *strengthening* some Republican incumbents. (The other two senators who kept their seats, Luther Olsen and Rob Cowles, ran unopposed three years ago, so it’s harder to tell whether their popularity has grown.)

The unions’ cause has been hurt by some widely reported stories of public-sector mischief. The most outrageous was the saga of Warren Eschenbach, an 86-year-old former school crossing guard from Wausau. After he retired, Eschenbach, who lives two doors down from Riverview Elementary, kept helping kids cross the road every morning; it gave him a reason to get up each day, he told a local TV station. But the Wausau teachers’ union didn’t see it that way: it filed a grievance with the city to stop him, since he was no longer a unionized employee.

Such stories of union malfeasance may not be enough to save Walker. If the governor’s opponents succeed in mounting a recall election, it would take place at some point between April and June. A poll conducted in October for the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, where I work, found that Walker had a fairly low personal approval rating of 42 percent. Further, the public opposed recalling the governor from office by a troublingly slim 49 percent to 47 percent margin.

But if Walker’s task is to convince the public that the state hasn’t devolved into unfunded anarchy, he may have an easier case to make than you’d think. According to the same poll, 71 percent of Wisconsinites believe that the state’s public schools have either stayed the same or improved over the previous half-year. More than three-quarters of Wisconsinites expect the state’s economy either to get better or to stay the same in the next year, up from 60 percent during the height of the union tumult in March. And while just 23 percent of Wisconsinites think

that “things in the country are generally going in the right direction,” 38 percent of them believe that that’s the case in Wisconsin, up from 27 percent in November 2010.

At his inauguration in 1959—and shortly before he created public-sector collective bargaining—Wisconsin’s newly elected Democratic governor, Gaylord Nelson, quoted Abraham Lincoln: “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. . . . We must think anew and act anew.” It’s a good thing Scott Walker took his advice. It’s imperative for Wisconsin’s fiscal future that voters take it, too.

Christian Schneider is a senior fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute.

Spengler at Pajamas Media

[Forget about Economic Recovery: Obama Is Toast](#)

by David P. Goldman

President Obama thinks that the improving economy will win him a second term, the [New York Times reports today](#). Whatever he’s drinking, order me a double. His poll numbers look a little better because the Republicans have spent the past several months in a fratricidal bloodbath. Fortunately, the memory of the American electorate for such antics is short. Once we choose a candidate (and I am happy with Romney, Santorum, or Gingrich) and unite behind him, we will win, unless, of course, we find a way to sabotage ourselves.

People are hurting, and badly. The official unemployment rate may have fallen, slightly, but the real unemployment rate — the number of working-age Americans who aren’t working — rose from about 12% before the 2008 crisis, to about 23%, and hasn’t come down. That includes people who have retired early because they can’t find work, spouses who used to earn a second income but have gone back to homemaking because work isn’t available, self-employed people whose businesses have collapsed, young people who live in their parents’ basement because they can’t afford tuition and can’t find work. The chart below, courtesy of the [Shadow Government Statistics](#) website, shows (in the blue line labelled “SGS alternative”) the way unemployment feels to Americans: one in four Americans who could be working, isn’t. That’s roughly twice the pre-recession level.

Another way to gauge the pain factor is the so-called Civilian Employment-Population Ratio. Prior to the recession, nearly 65 percent of working-age Americans (not in the military or in prison) had jobs. Now it’s down to 58%. The difference is 16 million people who should be working, but aren’t — about the same as the entire working-age population of Australia. The slight increase in employment during the past few months barely tracks the natural increase in population.

Roughly one out of eight Americans who presumably want to work, and were working before 2007, can’t find work today. On top of this, the great American nest egg was crushed by the collapse of home prices. The real estate assets of American households have lost a quarter of their value since the crash and show little sign of recovery. More than a fifth of American mortgages are underwater.

But no-one has suffered more from Obama's mishandling of the economy than African-Americans. The unemployment rate for black teenagers doubled during the recession and shows no sign of improvement:

It's hard to imagine that African-Americans, college students, and other constituencies who hailed Obama as a savior in 2008 will provide the same enthusiasm, not to mention turnout, in 2012.

Update: Sen. Mitch Daniels made a similar argument in his response to Obama's State of the Union address: "The percentage of Americans with a job is at the lowest in decades. One in five men of prime working age, and nearly half of all persons under 30, did not go to work today."

Bloomberg News

Buffett's Burlington Northern Among Pipeline Winners

by Jim Efstathiou, Jr.

[Warren Buffett](#)'s Burlington Northern Santa Fe LLC is among U.S. and Canadian railroads that stand to benefit from the Obama administration's decision to reject [TransCanada Corp. \(TRP\)](#)'s Keystone XL oil pipeline permit.

With modest expansion, railroads can handle all new oil produced in western Canada through 2030, according to an [analysis](#) of the Keystone proposal by the U.S. State Department.

"Whatever people bring to us, we're ready to haul," Krista York-Wooley, a spokeswoman for Burlington Northern, a unit of Buffett's Omaha, Nebraska-based [Berkshire Hathaway Inc. \(BRK/A\)](#), said in an interview. If Keystone XL "doesn't happen, we're here to haul."

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The rail option, though costlier, would lessen the environmental impact, such as a loss of wetlands and agricultural productivity, compared to the pipeline, according to the State Department analysis. Greenhouse gas emissions, however, would be worse.

If completed, Keystone XL would deliver 700,000 barrels a day of crude from Alberta's oil sands to refineries along the [Gulf of Mexico](#), crossing 1,661 miles (2,673-kilometers) over Montana, [South Dakota](#), Nebraska, Kansas, [Oklahoma](#) and [Texas](#).

Tanker Car Bottleneck

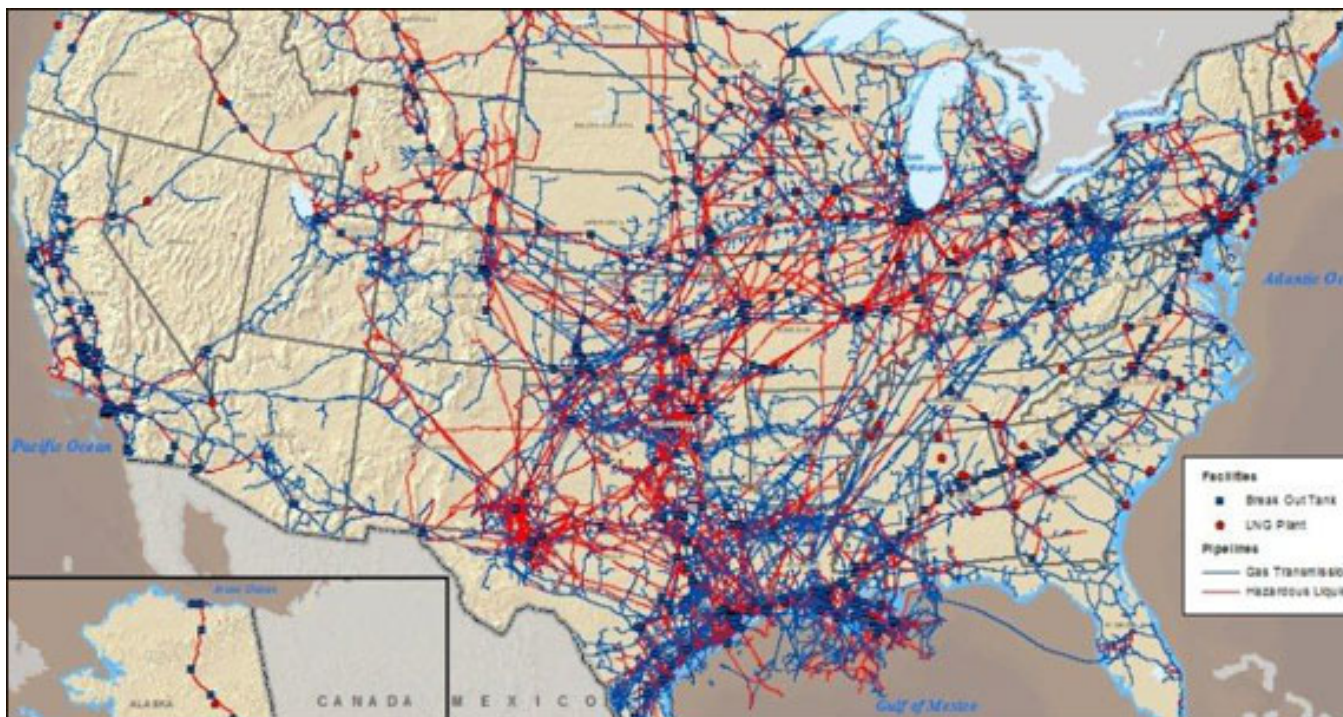
Investors such as John Stephenson, who helps manage \$2.7 billion for First Asset Management Inc. in Toronto said he anticipated the project would move forward next year. Pipeline shipping costs remain lower than rail, and a lack of readily available tanker cars may create a bottleneck.

The availability of tank cars may create a temporary “hiccup” in transport capacity, according to Tony Hatch, an independent railroad analyst in [New York](#). Rail cars are “a pretty hot commodity,” as a result of demand from oil producers in [North Dakota](#), he said.

Rail car production is already at a three-year high as manufacturers such as [Greenbrier Cos Inc. \(GBX\)](#) and [American Railcar Industries Inc. \(ARII\)](#) expand to meet demand for sand used in oil and gas exploration, according to Steve Barger, an analyst at Keybank Capital Markets Inc. in Cleveland, citing Railway Supply Institute statistics. ...

The New Editor **[Oil and Gas Pipelines in the US](#)**

This is [a map of the thousands of oil and gas pipelines in the US](#).



(Source: US Dept. of Transportation's [Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration](#))

Why exactly is the Keystone Pipeline being held up again?

Washington Examiner **[Liberal blogger on high speed rail: "pure fantasy"](#)** by Michael Barone

Three cheers for [Kevin Drum](#), blogging at the left-wing Mother Jones website. Drum, who is based in California, has been opposing the ridiculously expensive California high-speed rail project still supported, against all common sense, by Governor Jerry Brown. In this blogpost he takes aim at the high-speed rail authority's estimate that it would cost \$171 billion to produce highway and airport infrastructure to replace that which would be provided by high-speed rail

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Of course this is preposterous. Among the assumptions that these trains would be 70% full on average is an assumption that more people would board trains in Modesto in the Central Valley than currently board trains every day in Manhattan's Penn Station. Modesto is in Stanislaus County (2010 Census population 514,453), in flat country laced with highways. Manhattan is a densely populated island with a working population of about 2,000,000 in a metropolitan area of (depending on how you define its boundaries) 19,000,000. The idea that Modesto would generate as many train riders as Manhattan is crazy.

Drum goes on to conclude: "We are rapidly exiting the realm of rose-colored glasses and entering the realm of pure fantasy here. If liberals keep pushing this project forward in the face of plain evidence that its official justifications are brazenly preposterous, conservatives are going to be able to pound us year after year for wasting taxpayer money while we retreat to ever more ridiculous and self-serving defenses that make us laughingstocks in the public eye. And unless we put this project on hold until we can get some genuinely independent and plausible estimates of costs, ridership, and alternatives, we'll deserve it."

Amen.

Right Turn

[State of the Union address: plenty of partisanship, few ideas](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

President Obama's third [State of the Union address](#) was, as expected, a transparently partisan kick-off speech for his 2012 election campaign.

The president began shamelessly by hyping the complete withdrawal of all troops from Iraq. ("For the first time in nine years, there are no Americans fighting in Iraq.") This is an applause line for him, but his failure or unwillingness to negotiate an agreement with Iraq to keep troops present has unleashed a wave of violence, considerable angst among allies, and cheers in Tehran.

After an easy applause line for killing Osama bin Laden, Obama then plunged into his economic defense. He then reviewed the financial collapse, making sure we all knew it wasn't on his watch that the banks and economy melted down. From there it was bromides mixed with attacks on Republicans. ("As long as I'm president, I will work with anyone in this chamber to build on this momentum. But I intend to fight obstruction with action, and I will oppose any effort to return to the very same policies that brought on this economic crisis in the first place.")

Fairness, of course, was much on his mind: "Or we can restore an economy where everyone gets a fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules. What's at stake are not Democratic values or Republican values, but American values. We have

to reclaim them.” By that, he is talking about equality of income and outcome. He’s not talking about a flat tax (which would truly be treating all taxpayers alike), but a redistribution of wealth.

His actual agenda was meager, however. Yes, he asked for tax reform and breaks for manufacturing companies, but presented no plan of his own. (“Send me these tax reforms, and I’ll sign them right away.”)

Perhaps hearing Mitt Romney’s footsteps, he, too, offered to get tough with trade-cheating countries. The big idea? “[A] Trade Enforcement Unit that will be charged with investigating unfair trade practices in countries like China.” Wow.

He talked about training programs, ordering states to keep kids in school until they are 18 years old, and more college aid. Then came a cynical call for immigration reform -- after three years of inaction on his part. Even that didn’t seem serious: “We should be working on comprehensive immigration reform right now. But if election-year politics keeps Congress from acting on a comprehensive plan, let’s at least agree to stop expelling responsible young people who want to staff our labs, start new businesses, and defend this country. Send me a law that gives them the chance to earn their citizenship. I will sign it right away.”

Then there was a long plea for domestic energy development -- a truly nervy demand given his rejection of the Keystone Pipeline. The hypocritical call for an “all of the above” energy strategy brought some incredulous looks to the face of Republicans. He then got revved up with the prospect of more taxes on big, bad oil companies.

Next was the equally cynical call to reduce regulation. This comes from the author of Obamacare, the fan of Dodd-Frank, and the cheerleader for the EPA. He then celebrated all the financial regulations he’s implemented and rubbed the legislators’ noses in his legally questionable non-recess appointment. “So if you’re a big bank or financial institution, you are no longer allowed to make risky bets with your customers’ deposits. You’re required to write out a ‘living will’ that details exactly how you’ll pay the bills if you fail – because the rest of us aren’t bailing you out ever again. And if you’re a mortgage lender or a payday lender or a credit card company, the days of signing people up for products they can’t afford with confusing forms and deceptive practices are over. Today, American consumers finally have a watchdog in Richard Cordray with one job: To look out for them.”

Then, nearly three quarters of the way through the speech, he got to our fiscal trainwreck. But once again it was little of substance and more partisan cheers to tax the rich:

When it comes to the deficit, we’ve already agreed to more than \$2 trillion in cuts and savings. But we need to do more, and that means making choices. Right now, we’re poised to spend nearly \$1 trillion more on what was supposed to be a temporary tax break for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans. Right now, because of loopholes and shelters in the tax code, a quarter of all millionaires pay lower tax rates than millions of middle-class households. Right now, Warren Buffett pays a lower tax rate than his secretary. . . .

The American people know what the right choice is. So do I. As I told the Speaker this summer, I’m prepared to make more reforms that rein in the long term costs of Medicare and Medicaid, and strengthen Social Security, so long as those programs remain a guarantee of security for seniors.

But in return, we need to change our tax code so that people like me, and an awful lot of Members of Congress, pay our fair share of taxes. Tax reform should follow the Buffett rule: If you make more than \$1 million a year, you should not pay less than 30 percent in taxes. And my Republican friend Tom Coburn is right: Washington should stop subsidizing millionaires. In fact, if you're earning a million dollars a year, you shouldn't get special tax subsidies or deductions. On the other hand, if you make under \$250,000 a year, like 98 percent of American families, your taxes shouldn't go up. You're the ones struggling with rising costs and stagnant wages. You're the ones who need relief.

Where is his entitlement reform? Where is his tax-reform plan? He can't be bothered with actual governance.

There were the mandatory "I am really not going after the rich" lines. He declared: "When Americans talk about folks like me paying my fair share of taxes, it's not because they envy the rich. It's because they understand that when I get tax breaks I don't need and the country can't afford, it either adds to the deficit, or somebody else has to make up the difference – like a senior on a fixed income; or a student trying to get through school; or a family trying to make ends meet." (Left unsaid is the reality that the tax code is already extremely progressive.)

Again, the math is phony; all the tax increase he could stomach would not make a dent in the debt without meaningful entitlement control. In a line worthy of Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul, he hollered to cut defense and to instead nation-build at home. Eliminating the entire defense budget wouldn't do the trick, given the rate at which he spends money.

At the tail end, he came back to foreign policy. With a straight face he declared: "Our oldest alliances in Europe and Asia are stronger than ever. Our ties to the Americas are deeper. Our iron-clad commitment to Israel's security has meant the closest military cooperation between our two countries in history."

On Iran he insisted that his diplomacy was working, although he recited his determination to leave all options on the table.

But we are at war in Afghanistan, and the sum total of his remarks was this: "From this position of strength, we've begun to wind down the war in Afghanistan. Ten thousand of our troops have come home. Twenty-three thousand more will leave by the end of this summer. This transition to Afghan lead will continue, and we will build an enduring partnership with Afghanistan, so that it is never again a source of attacks against America." No mention of sacrifices and no call for victory. Shameful.

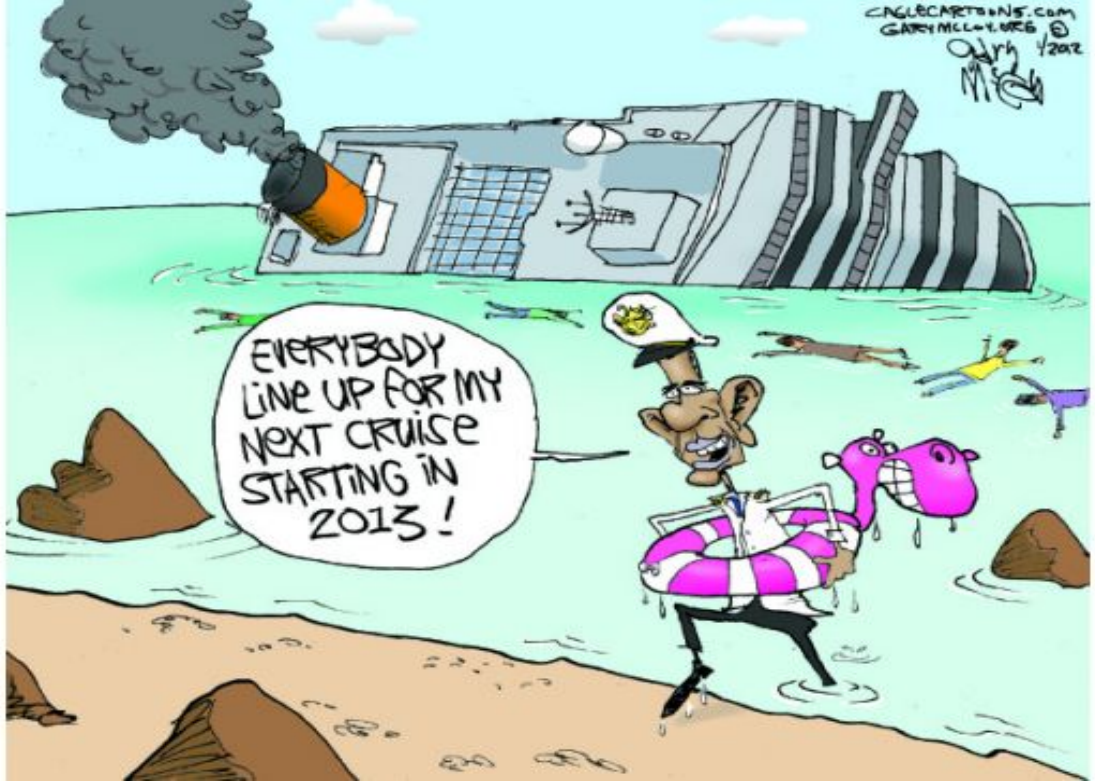
It was a painfully long and shapeless speech, designed to cheer Democrats and stick his finger in the eyes of Republicans. (He's not going to let them poison kids with mercury, thank goodness.) He talks about Washington being broken as if he were a passive observer -- which I suppose he is. He decries nasty partisanship, as if he had not accused Republicans of putting party over country.

As far as his own policy initiatives, however, it was a shockingly barren speech. But of course, it's not about governing. It's about getting re-elected.

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"CAPTAIN OBAMA SAYS ITS THE FAULT OF THE ARAB SPRING, EUROPE AND WALL STREET."



AND WE WILL
CHANGE HOW THE
GOVERNMENT
TREATS SMALL
BUSINESSES AND
ENTREPRENEURS.

HE'S
GOING FROM
SLOTTED
TO
PHILLIPS
HEAD.

