

June 17, 2012

Charles Krauthammer sums up the race.

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Matthew Continetti gets to the core of Obama's failures.

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Obama's overly long, repetitive, and by turns self-pitying and self-congratulatory address was so soaked through with nostalgia that MSNBC should have broadcast it in sepia tones. The speech—which even the liberal Obama biographer Jonathan Alter called one of the president's "least successful" political communications—revealed an incumbent desperately trying to replay the 2008 election. But no oratory will make up for a flawed record and a vague, fissiparous, and unappealing agenda.

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The very idea that Obama has the ability to shape his political fortunes through rhetoric is a backwards-looking myth. It is part of the pop narrative of Obama's 2008 candidacy, in which the young freshman senator was able to rescue his moribund campaign from the evil Clinton machine by giving a single speech at a Jefferson-Jackson dinner in November 2007. More likely it was Obama's antiwar stance in an antiwar party that gave him the edge in the Iowa caucuses the following January, but that has not stopped the president or his supporters from having an almost theological attachment to his oratorical prowess. ...

Politicker treats us to tweets from the White House press corps during the president's Cleveland snore.

... All of these points have already been featured in the president's other recent speeches. Between the pre-speech hype from the campaign, the lack of new material and the overall length of the speech reporters were clearly dissatisfied with end result. Read on for a sampling of Tweets from the political press slamming the president's speech.

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"In terms of politics, this speech could have ended about 20 minutes ago. Drive your message, take your ball, go home." ...

More on the speech from [Jennifer Rubin](#).

In the wake of President Obama's Ohio speech on Thursday the mainstream media figured out, or at least were willing to express, what conservatives have long known: President Obama is a bore, and his second-term agenda is his first term agenda. The Mitt Romney campaign gleefully circulated clips of reviews by liberal pundits savaging the speech. If the New York Times' [Andrew Rosenthal](#) panned the speech, you know it bombed. ("[W]ill someone edit the president's speeches? They're nearly Castro-length.")

One reason why Obama's speech was so poorly received by all but the Kool Aid-intoxicated set was that the man who once thrilled and wowed the liberal elites is no longer electrifying. Heck, he's not even interesting. ...

Using the results of the 2010 congressional election, [Michael Barone](#) shows why prospects are so good for Romney.

It seems to be a standard rule in assessing the prospects of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in particular states to use the November 2008 numbers as a benchmark. However, as I have pointed out, in the last three presidential elections, the winning candidate has won a percentage of the popular vote identical to or within 1% of the percentage of the popular vote for the House of Representatives in the election held two years before. In this case, the November 2010 results are very different from 2008. In 2008 Obama won 53% of the popular vote. In 2010 House Democrats won 45% of the popular vote.

To gauge where the race is now in the various states I have prepared the following table. It lists the 16 states where Obama's 2008 percentage was between 49% and 57%, ranked by Obama percentage. I have added Arizona, which the Obama campaign has reportedly been considering targeting; Obama got a higher percentage in Georgia and almost identical percentages to Arizona's in South Carolina and South Dakota, but no one considers any of them to be in play.

...

In [Pickings May 30th](#), Robert Samuelson appeared with the first part of his column on scrapping the idea of college for all. [Here is the second part.](#)

Let's resume the debate over who should go to college. Some weeks ago, I wrote a column arguing that the "[college for all](#)" philosophy is a major blunder of educational policy.

Its defects, as I outlined them, include:

- *The lowering of college entrance requirements, except at elite schools (in 2008, about 20 percent of four-year schools had "open admissions" policies, meaning that virtually anyone with a high-school diploma could get in).*
- *The [dumbing down of college standards](#) (one study I cited found that about a third of college seniors hadn't improved their analytical skills).*
- *Much human and financial waste — the [dropout rate](#) at four-year schools is roughly 40 percent, and many of these students leave with large debts.*
- *A monolithic focus on the college track in high school that ignores the real-life needs of millions of students who either won't start or won't finish college and would benefit more from vocational programs.*

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Washington Post

[Silly Season, 2012](#)

by Charles Krauthammer

Mitt Romney vs. Barack Obama is not exactly Jefferson-Adams or Lincoln-Douglas. No Harry Truman or Bill Clinton here, let alone FDR or Reagan. Indeed, it's arguable that neither party is fielding its strongest candidate. Hillary Clinton would run far better than Obama. True, her secretaryship of state may not remotely qualify as Kissingerian or Achesonian, but she's not Obama. She carries none of his economic baggage. She's unsullied by the past 3 1/2 years.

Similarly, the Republican bench had several candidates stronger than Romney, but they chose not to run. Indeed, one measure of the weakness of the two finalists is this: The more each disappears from view, the better he fares. Obama prospered when he was below radar during the Republican primaries. Now that they're over and he's back out front, his fortunes have receded.

He is constantly on the campaign trail. His frantic fundraising — [160 events to date](#) — alternates with swing-state rallies where the long-gone charisma of 2008 has been replaced by systematic special-interest pandering, from cut-rate loans for indentured students to free contraceptives for women (the denial of which constitutes a “war” on same).

Then came the rush of bad news: terrible [May unemployment numbers](#), a crushing [Democratic defeat in Wisconsin](#), and that curious revolt of the surrogates, as Bill Clinton, Deval Patrick and Cory Booker — all dispatched to promote Obama — ended up contradicting, undermining or deploring Obama’s anti-business attacks on Romney.

Obama’s instinctive response? Get back out on the air. Call an impromptu Friday news conference. And proceed to commit the [gaffe of the year](#): “The private sector is doing fine.”

This didn’t just expose Obama to precisely the out-of-touchness charge he is trying to hang on Romney. It betrayed his core political philosophy. Obama was trying to attribute high unemployment to a paucity of government workers and to suggest that the solution was to pad the public rolls (with borrowed Chinese money). In doing so, though, he fatally undid his many previous protestations of being a fiscally prudent government cutter. (Hence his repeated, and [widely discredited](#), boast of the lowest spending growth since Eisenhower.)

He thus positioned himself as, once again, the big-government liberal of 2009, convinced that what the ailing economy needs is yet another bout of government expansion. A serious political misstep, considering the fate of the last stimulus: the weakest recovery since the Great Depression, with private-sector growth a minuscule 1.2 percent.

But that’s not the end of the tribulations that provoked a front-page Washington Post story beginning: “[Is it time for Democrats to panic](#)”? The sleeper issue is the cascade of White House leaks that have exposed significant details of the cyberattacks on Iran, the drone war against al-Qaeda, the double-agent in Yemen, and the Osama bin Laden raid and its aftermath.

This is not leak-business as usual. “I have never seen it worse,” said Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, 11 years on the Intelligence Committee. These revelations, clearly meant to make Obama look the heroic warrior, could prove highly toxic if current investigations bear out Sen. John McCain’s charges of leaks tolerated, if not encouraged, by a campaigning president placing his own image above the nation’s security. After all, Feinstein herself stated that these exposures were endangering American lives, weakening U.S. security and poisoning relations with other intelligence services.

Quite an indictment. Where it goes, no one knows. [Much will hinge](#) on whether Eric Holder’s Justice Department will stifle the investigation he has now handed over to two in-house prosecutors. And whether Republicans and principled Democrats will insist on a genuinely independent inquiry.

Nonetheless, there is nothing inexorable about the current Obama slide. The race remains 50-50. Republican demoralization after a primary campaign that blew the political equivalent of a seven-run lead has now given way to Democratic demoralization at the squandering of their subsequent post-primary advantage.

What remains is a solid, stolid, gaffe-prone challenger for whom conservatism is a second language vs. an incumbent with a record he cannot run on and signature policies — Obamacare, the stimulus, cap-and-trade — he hardly dare mention.

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Washington Free Beacon

Obama's Pity Party

The president lives increasingly in the past

by Matthew Continetti



Obama in Cleveland

/

Walter Sobchak

I can't be the only person in America who, at about minute 35 in President Obama's almost hour-long "framing" speech in Cleveland Thursday, wanted to tell the president, as the Dude famously screams at Walter Sobchak in *The Big Lebowski*, "You're living in the past!"

Obama's overly long, repetitive, and by turns self-pitying and self-congratulatory address was so soaked through with nostalgia that MSNBC should have broadcast it in sepia tones. The speech—which even the liberal Obama biographer Jonathan Alter called one of the president's "least successful" political communications—revealed an incumbent desperately trying to replay the 2008 election. But no oratory will make up for a flawed record and a vague, fissiparous, and unappealing agenda.

The president himself forced this abrupt re-launch of his reelection campaign. After a bad week that began with terrible job numbers, proceeded to Scott Walker's victory in the Wisconsin recall, and culminated in awful fundraising news, Obama tried to recover last Friday by addressing the press on the state of the economy. Except things went horribly wrong. The president uttered six words—"the private sector is doing fine"—that not only will plague him for the rest of the campaign, but also perfectly captured his complacent attitude toward all things outside the realm of government.

The moment prompted a burst of panic throughout the Democratic hive mind, with media types clucking their tongues at the president's campaign and party strategists questioning the salience of his message. Yesterday's event in Ohio was thus intended to serve as a sort of domestic analogue to President Obama's "reset" with Russia. By the looks of things, it will prove to be just as unsuccessful.

The very idea that Obama has the ability to shape his political fortunes through rhetoric is a backwards-looking myth. It is part of the pop narrative of Obama's 2008 candidacy, in which the young freshman senator was able to rescue his moribund campaign from the evil Clinton machine by giving a single speech at a Jefferson-Jackson dinner in November 2007. More likely it was Obama's antiwar stance in an antiwar party that gave him the edge in the Iowa caucuses the following January, but that has not stopped the president or his supporters from having an almost theological attachment to his oratorical prowess.

The evidence in this case, however, is decidedly on the side of the nonbelievers. The *Washington Post* counts over 500 speeches or appearances where the president has mentioned health care, but his overhaul remains remarkably unpopular. The president's campaign appearances on behalf of Creigh Deeds in Virginia, Gov. Jon Corzine in New Jersey, Martha Coakley in Massachusetts, and Rep. Tom Perriello in Virginia were unsuccessful, which may have been why he didn't even bother to campaign in Wisconsin for Tom Barrett (who lost anyway). A televised address last July did not win Obama his lusted-after tax increase on the rich, nor did remarks to a joint session of Congress win passage of his American Jobs Act. Eleven "major" speeches on the economy have not generated a full recovery or prevented economic indicators from backsliding. Indeed, one of President Obama's few accomplishments has been to prove, definitively, the worthlessness of the bully pulpit.

Obama puts his verbal talents to use by fashioning straw men who flatter his ideological prejudices. There are, for example, only two types of Republicans in the president's speeches: dead or defeated ones who happened to be reasonable people who acted in good faith, and living and successful ones who "believe that if you simply take away regulations and cut taxes by trillions of dollars, the market will solve all of our problems on its own," and who want to end "the guarantee of basic security we've always provided the elderly, and the sick, and those who are actively looking for work."

Surrounded by this army of hay, Obama and his staff have discovered a strange and newfound respect for Senator McCain, whom they defeated by seven points three and a half years ago, and who regularly denounced his own supporters when he disagreed with them. "I had some strong disagreements with John McCain," the president recalled wistfully at a Philadelphia fundraiser Tuesday, "but there were certain baselines that we both agreed on," such as immigration amnesty, global warming, and the regulation of political speech. And so McCain has become, in Obama's imagination, the perfect Republican: honorable, moderate, and unsuccessful.

This is part of the president's attempt to turn 2012 into a replay of 2008. In Obama's absurd telling, every Republican president prior to George W. Bush would have been comfortable with the economic agenda of the contemporary Democratic Party. Lincoln backed the transcontinental railroad, so obviously he would have supported a \$4 trillion government, most of which is spent on checks for old people. Eisenhower proposed the Interstate Highway System to maneuver troops, civilians, and missiles in case World War III broke out, which naturally suggests he would have supported stimulus bills that pay off public sector and construction unions and finance alternative energy moguls who donate to Democratic campaigns.

In his Cleveland speech, Obama preposterously invoked the memory of Nixon—Richard Nixon—because the second-most reviled Republican in modern memory “created the Environmental Protection Agency.” Ronald Reagan? Forget supply-side economics and the Strategic Defense Initiative and the 1986 tax reform and Iran-contra. “He worked with Democrats to save Social Security,” and “raised taxes to help pay down an exploding deficit.” All is forgiven.

Obama writes these fictional historical portraits not to pay tribute to his antecedents, but to explain, in a self-serving way, his lack of executive achievements. The economy is suffering and the deficit is hemorrhaging, he suggests, only because today's GOP is so radical and unreasonable. (This is the same party, incidentally, that won 51 percent of the national House vote in the most recent election.)

The country's troubles, we are told, were caused by Obama's direct predecessor, whose decapitated head recently made a cameo appearance on HBO. “It's like somebody goes to a restaurant, orders a big steak dinner, martini and all that stuff, and then just as you're sitting down, they leave and accuse you of running up the tab,” Obama told Baltimore donors during one of the six fundraisers he held Tuesday. Of course, not 24 hours later, he stiffed the BBQ restaurant where he had held a Father's Day lunch with two servicemen and two barbers.

“The problems we're facing right now have been more than a decade in the making,” he told his audience in Cleveland. He mentioned our “decade” of problems eight times, subtly excusing his inability to improve the domestic situation by diminishing any role he may have had in creating or prolonging it.

The president's grossest use of nostalgia, however, has to be in his appeals to the aftermath of the Second World War, when “there was a general consensus that the market couldn't solve all of our problems on its own; that we needed certain investments to give hardworking Americans skills they needed to get a good job, and entrepreneurs the platforms they needed to create good jobs; that we needed consumer protections that made American products safe and American markets sound.”

Here Obama conjures up a progressive Eden, when Democrats and liberal Republicans shared the presidency, and Democrats ruled Congress practically without interruption. He holds this rather peculiar and problematic historical situation as a scenario that might be replicated. It can't. It shouldn't. One of the reasons America was doing well economically at that time was that much of the rest of the world was a rubble-strewn junkyard. Nor did women or African Americans or gay people exactly participate in this time of “shared prosperity.” Oddly for someone with intellectual pretensions, Obama never asks *why* the politics of the New Frontier and Great Society came to a fairly disastrous end. He wouldn't like the answer.

We are left with the paradox of a backward-looking progressive calling on the American people to march forward. No wonder the public is anxious, and worried about the future. Our incumbent president is holding a giant pity party, while failing to address the nation's challenges in a responsible manner. Like *Lebowski's* Walter Sobchak, Barack Obama is a man living in the past. And there is no Dude or Donny to save him.

Politiker

[President Obama's Speech Gets A Thumbs Down From Political Press Corps](#)

by Hunter Walker

Prior to President Barack Obama's marathon 54 minute speech in Ohio today, the Obama campaign sent out several statements promising the speech would be a major address framing the campaign going forward. Despite the hype, the speech was mainly a rehash of themes and ideas from the president's recent stump speeches and his remarks were widely panned as overly long by the political press corps.

In the speech, President Obama outlined his view that this election is a choice between "two fundamentally different views of which direction America should take." He characterized Mitt Romney's vision as being the same as the "policies of the last decade," specifically deregulation and tax cuts for the wealthy while he described his own "vision for America" as boiling down to five things: "Education. Energy. Innovation. Infrastructure. And a tax code focused on American job creation and balanced deficit reduction." President Obama also stressed that the economic crisis began during the Bush administration and that is "started growing again" after he took office and has since "continued to grow."

All of these points have already been featured in the president's other recent speeches. Between the pre-speech hype from the campaign, the lack of new material and the overall length of the speech reporters were clearly dissatisfied with end result. Read on for a sampling of Tweets from the political press slamming the president's speech.

Before the speech was over, [MSNBC's Mike O'Brien](#) begged the president to stop.

"In terms of politics, this speech could have ended about 20 minutes ago. Drive your message, take your ball, go home."

On the air, [MSNBC's Jonathan Alter](#) said it was "one of the worst speeches I've ever heard Barack Obama make." He refused to back down.

"Just cheerleading BO doesn't help him. He needs a sharper, more cogent message with some memorable lines. I ain't walking my criticism back"

[ABC News reporter Devin Dwyer](#) felt like we were all being lectured.

"Obama speech in Ohio felt more lecture or courtroom arg than rally. He streamlined pitch, imbued urgency, said voters will break stalemate."

[John Hayward of Human Events](#) compared the speech to a filibuster.

"This Obama speech is so long-winded it might be the first attempt to filibuster an election."

Yahoo! News White House correspondent [Olivier Knox](#) took note of the massive word count of the speech (for the record, the official White House transcript clocked in at just under 6,500 words).

"I ask colleague for CQ transcript of Obama speech. Response: "Sure, but it looks like they only have the first 45,000 words."

The long running time of President Obama's speech made [Politico's Jennfier Epstein](#) think of a new inspirational maxim for the country.

"In America we don't quit til we've spoken for 54 minutes."

[Buzzfeed's Zeke Miller](#) was clearly unimpressed.

"There is nothing new in this speech."

Right Turn

Obama makes the case — for Republicans

by Jennifer Rubin

In the wake of President Obama's Ohio speech on Thursday the mainstream media figured out, or at least were willing to express, what conservatives have long known: President Obama is a bore, and his second-term agenda is his first term agenda. The Mitt Romney campaign gleefully circulated clips of reviews by liberal pundits savaging the speech. If the New York Times' [Andrew Rosenthal](#) panned the speech, you know it bombed. ("[W]ill someone edit the president's speeches? They're nearly Castro-length.")

One reason why Obama's speech was so poorly received by all but the Kool Aid-intoxicated set was that the man who once thrilled and wowed the liberal elites is no longer electrifying. Heck, he's not even interesting.

As [Matthew Continetti](#) of the Washington Free Beacon writes: "Obama's overly long, repetitive, and by turns self-pitying and self-congratulatory address was so soaked through with nostalgia that MSNBC should have broadcast it in sepia tones." He's become the relative at the family gathering whom you do your best to avoid, lest you be forced to endure his endless prattle that leaves you both drained and annoyed that you let yourself get waylaid by the family bore.

Then there is the substance of what he is saying. Democratic operatives and media handmaidens who have urged the president to ignore his three-plus years as president and focus on the future learned the future is as dreary as the last three-plus years. His vision is identical to the caricature of [modern liberalism that conservatives have sketched out](#):

"Democrats want to control or influence an ever-larger slice of our nation's commerce. They want to oversee, for instance, the insurance companies, drug producers, hospitals, banks, coal miners, oil producers, pipeline operators and auto suppliers. By way of ramped-up regulation, subsidies and energized litigators, they seek to impose their priorities on businesses large and

small – their rapture over green energy, their deference to organized labor, their indifference to profits.” Yup, that’s about it.

There is not an innovative idea within a mile of this guy. No debt plan and an itsy-bitsy more in taxes. (Does he actually imagine that the Buffett tax will pay for his burgeoning welfare state? Well, yes.) But the key to economic nirvana — are you sitting down? — is the same laundry list he’s been pushing in most every speech (and most of which was tried in Stimulus 1, which he essentially ignored in his speech so as not to remind us this has all been tried). Hire teachers, build bridges, etc. No wonder Bill Clinton, master of the “Third Wave” of centrist politics, can’t contain himself these days.

[Mickey Kaus](#) recapped what is obvious to most observers about Stimulus 1 and would certainly impair the effectiveness of Stimulus 2:

- 1) The “shovel ready” jobs weren’t shovel ready (as Obama himself has admitted), leading to a delay in the stimulating effect;
- 2) The money to save the jobs of “firemen ... and policemen ... and ... teachers” did not just go to firefighters and policemen and teachers. It also went to non-essential bureaucrats (e.g., headquarters paper shufflers, “diversity coordinators”);
- 3) The money bailed out states that were paying unsustainable pensions and benefits, enabling them to keep paying those benefits, so that when the federal subsidy ran out the states couldn’t afford to keep workers on the payroll and laid them off.

If this is Obama’s best argument — let me repeat, what didn’t work in the last three years — he should stop giving major speeches. It won’t help to advertise this.

Washington Examiner

2010 results bode well for Romney in 2012

by Michael Barone



Republican presidential candidate, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney

It seems to be a standard rule in assessing the prospects of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in particular states to use the November 2008 numbers as a benchmark. However, as I have pointed out, in the last three presidential elections, the winning candidate has won a percentage of the popular vote identical to or within 1% of the percentage of the popular vote for the House of Representatives in the election held two years before. In this case, the November 2010 results are very different from 2008. In 2008 Obama won 53% of the popular vote. In 2010 House Democrats won 45% of the popular vote.

To gauge where the race is now in the various states I have prepared the following table. It lists the 16 states where Obama's 2008 percentage was between 49% and 57%, ranked by Obama percentage. I have added Arizona, which the Obama campaign has reportedly been considering targeting; Obama got a higher percentage in Georgia and almost identical percentages to Arizona's in South Carolina and South Dakota, but no one considers any of them to be in play.

The first column of figures is Obama's percentage in 2008. The second column is his percentage in the realclearpolitics.com [average of recent polls](#) (or the most recent results in states where RCP doesn't calculate an average. An old rule of political interpretation is that an incumbent tends to get the same percentage in an election as he is getting in polls; 100% know him and if less than 50% say they'll vote for him, he'll tend to get less than 50%. Of course it's entirely possible for an incumbent like Obama to run a few points better, there is a margin of error in polls and current polling is testing opinion at a point in time and it may change later. But I think Obama's poll numbers are within reasonable range of being commensurate with the results of the 2008 and 2010 elections. The third column of figures shows the Democratic percentage for House of Representatives in 2010.

State	Obama % 08	Obama % 12	Demo % 10
Michigan (16 EVs)	57	48	43
New Jersey (14)	57	50	48
New Mexico (5)	57	51	52
Wisconsin (10)	56	48	44
Nevada (6)	55	50	45
Pennsylvania (20)	54	48	48
New Hampshire (4)	54	49	45
Minnesota (10)	54	50	48
Iowa (6)	54	46	43
Colorado (9)	54	47	45

Virginia (13)	53	48	42
Ohio (18)	51	46	42
Florida (29)	51	46	36
North Carolina (15)	50	44	45
Indiana (11)	50	40	39
Missouri (10)	49	43	37
Arizona (11)	45	42	42

The first thing to note is that Obama's current percentage is closer to the 2010 Democratic percentage than to Obama's 2008 percentage in every state but three. The exceptions are Nevada and Arizona, where the current Obama percentage is right in the middle of the two, and Florida, where the Democratic percentage in 2010 was very low because Democrats failed to contest three of the then 25 districts and because the Republican districting plan then in effect left few target seats for Democrats to seriously contest.

Second, it's worth noting that in only four states is Obama at 50% or 51%. It should be added that he leads Romney by double digits in New Jersey, New Mexico and Minnesota; for the moment, at least, those look pretty safe for Obama.

However, and this is the third point, it's pretty clear that Indiana, Missouri and Arizona, where Obama is polling in the low 40s, are out of reach for him as things stand now. The Democratic victory in the Arizona 8th district yesterday is surely less a reflection of opinion on issues generally than it is a tribute to the gallantry of former Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, who campaigned in person for her former staffer.

Finally, and this is the most important point, these numbers indicate that 11 of these 17 states are currently in play, in the sense that it's reasonably easy to imagine either Obama or Romney carrying them: Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Iowa, Colorado, Virginia, Ohio, Florida, North Carolina. Obama carried every single one of them in 2008, when they had 148 electoral votes; they have 146 electoral votes this year. Without them, and without Indiana and the single electoral vote he won in Nebraska, Obama would win only 201 electoral votes and Romney would win 339.

Republicans won the popular vote for the House in 2010 in every one of these states, and Obama is at the 50% mark in only one, Nevada. Perhaps more important, Obama's current poll numbers in each one but Florida is closer to or equally far from the Democrats' 2010 percentage in the House vote than Obama's 2008 percentage. Although one suspects that the two candidates will split some of these 11 states, it's possible to imagine Romney—or Obama—carrying every one of them.

Washington Post

Scrapping college for all (Part 2)

by Robert J. Samuelson

Let's resume the debate over who should go to college. Some weeks ago, I wrote a column arguing that the "[college for all](#)" philosophy is a major blunder of educational policy.

Its defects, as I outlined them, include:

- The lowering of college entrance requirements, except at elite schools (in 2008, about 20 percent of four-year schools had "open admissions" policies, meaning that virtually anyone with a high-school diploma could get in).
- The [dumbing down of college standards](#) (one study I cited found that about a third of college seniors hadn't improved their analytical skills).
- Much human and financial waste — the [dropout rate](#) at four-year schools is roughly 40 percent, and many of these students leave with large debts.
- A monolithic focus on the college track in high school that ignores the real-life needs of millions of students who either won't start or won't finish college and would benefit more from vocational programs.

Naturally, this critique didn't please the barons of higher education. One of them — William Kirwan, chancellor of the University System of Maryland — penned a long rebuttal [["Not college for all, but college for more"](#)], which ran in The Washington Post June 8.

Let me summarize Kirwan's arguments and show why they're wrong.

For starters, he says my premise is a straw man. "Those who are serious about education policy have never proposed anything remotely close to 100 percent college attendance or college completion," he writes.

This is true — but also irrelevant and misleading. It's correct that education experts have rarely, if ever, suggested that everyone would go to college. But they've created a climate in which going to college is the main or only standard of success in high school. If you don't go to college, you're judged second-rate and a failure. From students' perspective, college-for-all is the reigning ethos. And it's the students, not the experts, who matter most.

Here's Kirwan's own mushy standard of who should go: "All kids who want to go to college and are capable of handling college-level work (should) have the opportunity to do so." The trouble is that many students incapable of doing college-level work — even with diluted standards — are already going. The proof of this lies not only in high dropout rates but also in remedial classes, mostly in English and math, required of many freshmen. For freshmen in 2007, [36 percent took at least one remedial class](#), reports the Department of Education.

Next, Kirwan asserts that a more technologically advanced society requires a more skilled workforce, and a more skilled workforce means more years of schooling. For Maryland, he says, "economists tell us that by 2020, 60 percent of jobs will require at least a two-year or four-year

degree.” Well, maybe Maryland is dramatically different from the rest of the country or maybe this statistic is questionable. Whatever, it does not reflect the national situation.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that only 20 percent of U.S. jobs require a bachelor’s degree or more. About another 10 percent require some post-high school instruction, including an associate’s degree. Against this need, the United States is already producing a workforce with about 30 percent holding a bachelor’s degree and another 10 percent with an associate’s degree.

[Here are the BLS’ detailed numbers for 2010](#): 3.1 percent of jobs required a professional degree (law, medicine) or a Ph.D.; 1.4 percent, a master’s degree; 15.5 percent, a bachelor’s degree; 5.6 percent, an associate’s degree; and 5.2 percent, some schooling beyond high school, including some college. The grand total: 30.8 percent. Projecting ahead to 2020, the BLS concluded that these jobs would grow slightly faster than all jobs but would still represent only 31.6 percent of the total.

[Put differently](#): More than two-thirds of jobs would require a high-school diploma or less. These include retail sales workers (4.3 million in 2010), truck drivers (1.6 million), cashiers (3.4 million), teachers’ assistants (1.3 million) and waiters and waitresses (2.3 million). For these students, the crying need is for high school to give them a solid foundation in basic knowledge and skills.

Finally, Kirwan warns that we’re losing the international educational sweepstakes: Among 25- to 34-year-olds, the United States’ [41 percent of post-high school degree](#) holders ranks only 14th. This is, he says, a formula for failure in today’s “innovation-centered, globally connected world.” Sounds convincing. It isn’t.

Successful economies result from many sources, not just an educated workforce, though that’s important. Other crucial influences include flexible markets, management competence, work ethic, government policies and an entrepreneurial culture. Some robust economies have workforces with a much smaller share of college degree-holders than the United States: Germany’s rate is 26 percent. Some other countries with higher rates (Japan: 56 percent) are floundering. And some with higher rates (Russia: 55 percent) lag well behind the United States economically.

What matters is the quality of our graduates — at both the high school and college levels — as much as their quantity. Here is where Kirwan is virtually silent. Nowhere does he mention tougher standards for colleges. Nowhere does he acknowledge that we are shortchanging millions of high school students for whom the [college track ignores their needs](#). These students receive a poor high-school education and are unprepared for the adult world of work.

Vocational education is controversial, because it smacks of channeling poor and minority students into lower-paying jobs. It looks bad. But in the real world, many of these non-college jobs — car mechanics, welders, plumbers, machinists — pay well. Moreover, the alternative is to condemn students to courses that bore them and disengage them from school altogether. Designing vocational programs that motivate students to learn and help connect them with the job market is a daunting task. But the main obstacle is a college-for-all mindset that, in the end, discriminates against the very students it’s supposed to help.

It's rank hypocrisy that justifies Kirwan's solution — and that of President Obama: Send more students to college and proclaim a target of having 55 percent to 60 percent of the population hold some sort of college degree, up from today's roughly 40 percent. This would compound all the flaws of the current system. It would cost billions — money we don't have — to disappoint more students with degrees they don't need and probably will never get, while saddling them with debt they can't repay.

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GOVERNMENT IS NOT REASON; IT IS NOT ELOQUENT; IT IS A FORCE. LIKE FIRE, IT IS A DANGEROUS SERVANT AND A FEARFUL MASTER.



ONE MAN WITH COURAGE IS A MAJORITY.



FOUR SCORE AND SEVEN YEARS AGO...



SPEAK SOFTLY AND CARRY A BIG STICK.



THE ONLY THING WE HAVE TO FEAR IS FEAR ITSELF.



ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU-ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR COUNTRY.



MR. GORBACHEV, TEAR DOWN THIS WALL.



IT'S ALL GEORGE W. BUSH'S FAULT.



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