October 29, 2009

Peter Wehner has kudos for Obama's visit to Dover.
... Barack Obama did the right thing in the right way, and he deserves credit for it.

There are three big races in the elections next week. The polls, for all of them, took good turns in the last few days. What will this mean? Jennifer Rubin has ideas.
... If — BIG if — these margins hold, next Tuesday may be an eye-opening vote for the Washington crowd. They have gone blithely on their way, spending and spending and churning this and that plan to take over health care. Meanwhile, the country is fuming. Voters, especially independents, didn’t think that this was what hope-n-change was all about. If Republicans win big next week on messages of fiscal conservatism and opposition to big-government liberalism, maybe the inside-the-Beltway set will wake up. ...

Michael Barone saw the first three races and raised one more.
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All four of these constituencies voted for Barack Obama 51 weeks ago. Obama won 57 percent of the vote in New Jersey, 53 percent (his national average) in Virginia, 52 percent in New York 23 and 65 percent in California 10.

Yet all of this territory was once Republican. Suburb-dominated New Jersey voted 56 percent for George H.W. Bush in 1988. Southern-accented Virginia hadn’t voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1964. The last time the territory covered by New York 23 elected a Democratic congressman was in 1870. And the incumbent who is being replaced in California 10 won her seat by beating a Republican in 1996.

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Karl Rove's fourth race was for the PA's Supreme Court.
... Finally, the Republican-endorsed candidate for Pennsylvania's Supreme Court, Judge Joan Orie Melvin, is mounting a strong effort against Democrat Jack Panella, despite a $1 million ad blitz targeting her that’s bankrolled by Philadelphia trial lawyers. A GOP victory would indicate trouble for Democrats in a state Mr. Obama carried by 10 points.

A year ago, Democrats crowed that Mr. Obama had reshaped the political landscape to their advantage. Voters have lived under Democratic rule for nine months, and many of them, especially independents, don't like what they're seeing.

Tuesday's election will provide the most tangible evidence so far of how strong a backlash is building—and just how frightened centrist Democrats should be of 2010. For Republicans, it looks as if hope and change are on the way.
German magazine *Der Spiegel* interviewed Charles Krauthammer.

**SPIEGEL:** Mr. Krauthammer, did the Nobel Commitee in Oslo honor or doom the Obama presidency by awarding him the Peace Prize?

**Charles Krauthammer:** It is so comical. Absurd. Any prize that goes to Kellogg and Briand, Le Duc Tho and Arafat, and Rigoberta Menchú, and ends up with Obama, tells you all you need to know. For Obama it's not very good because it reaffirms the stereotypes about him as the empty celebrity.

**SPIEGEL:** Why does it?

**Krauthammer:** He is a man of perpetual promise. There used to be a cruel joke that said Brazil is the country of the future, and always will be; Obama is the Brazil of today's politicians. He has obviously achieved nothing. And in the American context, to be the hero of five Norwegian leftists, is not exactly politically positive.

**SPIEGEL:** It hardly makes sense to blame him for losing the Olympic bid in one week, and then for winning the Nobel Prize the next.

**Krauthammer:** He should have simply said: "This is very nice, I appreciate the gesture, but I haven't achieved what I want to achieve." But he is not the kind of man that does that.

**SPIEGEL:** Should he have turned down the prize?

**Krauthammer:** He would never turn that down. The presidency is all about him. Just think about the speech he gave in Berlin. There is something so preposterous about a presidential candidate speaking in Berlin. And it was replete with all these universalist clichés, which is basically what he's been giving us for nine months.

**SPIEGEL:** Why do Europeans react so positively to him?

**Krauthammer:** Because Europe, for very understandable reasons, has been chaffing for 60 years under the protection, but also the subtle or not so subtle domination of America. Europeans like to see the big guy cut down to size, it's a natural reaction. You know, Europe ran the world for 400 or 500 years until the civilizational suicide of the two World Wars. And then America emerged as the world hegemon, with no competition and unchallenged. The irony is America is the only hegemonic power that never sought hegemony, unlike, for example, Napoleonic France. Americans are not intrinsically imperial, but we ended up dominant by default: Europe disappeared after the Second World War, the Soviet Union disappeared in 1991, so here we are. Of course Europeans like to see the hegemon diminished, and Obama is the perfect man to do that.

**John Stossel** columns again on Elinor Ostrom's Economic Nobel.

... Ostrom made her mark through field studies that show people solving one of the more vexing problems: efficient management of a common-pool resource (CPR), such as a pasture or fishery. With an unowned "commons," each individual has an incentive to get the most out of it without putting anything back.

If I take fish from a common fishing area, I benefit completely from those fish. But if I make an investment to increase the future number of fish, others benefit, too. So why should I risk making the investment? I'll wait for others to do it. But everyone else faces the same free-rider incentive. So we end up with a depleted resource and what Garrett Harden called "the tragedy of the commons".

Except, says Ostrom, we often don't. There is also an "opportunity of the commons." While most politicians conclude that, depending on the resource, efficient management requires either privatization or government
ownership, Ostrom finds examples of a third way: "self-organizing forms of collective action," as she put it in an interview a few years ago. Her message is to be wary of government promises.

"Field studies in all parts of the world have found that local groups of resource users, sometimes by themselves and sometimes with the assistance of external actors, have created a wide diversity of institutional arrangements for cooperating with common-pool resources." ...

**Ed Morrissey** on the latest silliness from global warming freaks.

*If people want a glimpse of what the world will be like with global-warming hysterics in charge, Lord Stern of Brentford lets the veil slip in an interview with the Times of London. Stern admits that the upcoming Copenhagen talks would produce a pact on energy usage that would send the cost of meat “soaring.” That suits Stern just fine, because he wants to push the world into vegetarianism anyway: ...*

... Seven hundred years ago, man farmed and raised cows and pigs on the entire island of Greenland. When they do that again, perhaps I’ll worry about bovine flatulence as a global threat. Until then, I consider creeping elitism from horse’s asses a much more elitist threat than methane from cow’s butts.

It’s hard to overstate how stupid governments are. Some perfect examples are the simple scams in the first time housing tax-credit. **WSJ Editors** have the story.

... As a “refundable” tax credit, it guarantees the claimants will get cash back even if they paid no taxes. A lack of documentation requirements also makes this program a slow pitch in the middle of the strike zone for scammers. The Internal Revenue Service and the Justice Department are pursuing more than 100 criminal investigations related to the credit, and the IRS is reportedly trying to audit almost everyone who claims it this year.

Speaking of the IRS, apparently its own staff couldn't help but notice this opportunity to snag an easy $8,000. One day after explaining to Congress how many “home-buyers” were climbing aboard this gravy train, Mr. George appeared on Neil Cavuto’s program on the Fox Business Network. Mr. George said his staff has found at least 53 cases of IRS employees filing "illegal or inappropriate" claims for the credit. "In all honesty this is an interim report. I expect that the number would be much larger than that number," he said.

*The program is set to expire at the end of November, so naturally given its record of abuse, Congress is preparing to extend it. Republican Senator Johnny Isakson of Georgia is so pleased with the results that he wants to expand the program beyond first-time buyers and double the income limits. ...*
Contentions

A Dignified Act
by Peter Wehner

President Obama visited Dover Air Force Base early this morning and met with some of the families of the fallen. It was a dignified and appropriate act by the president. And I know from the experience of George W. Bush, who met with hundreds of family members over the course of his presidency, that it is an emotionally wrenching one as well, though nothing compared with what the families themselves suffer. In watching this, one is reminded of the awful costs of war — and of the unique place the president plays in our national life.

Barack Obama did the right thing in the right way, and he deserves credit for it.

Contentions

What Happens Then?
by Jennifer Rubin

Next Tuesday we'll have three closely watched races. Bob McDonnell is on track to win big in the Virginia gubernatorial race. Now two new polls suggest a late surge for Chris Christie in New Jersey, which is not surprising given that anti-incumbent votes tend to break late in races. (The independent Chris Daggett is closer to 10 percent than 20 percent in both polls. If voters who really can’t abide Jon Corzine decide they really want him out, Daggett’s total is likely to decline further.) Then, in the NY-23 race, Doug Hoffman is surging into the lead. (Dede “Call the Cops” Scozzafava is down to 14 percent, which tells you something about the electoral smarts of the Republican establishment.)

If — BIG if — these margins hold, next Tuesday may be an eye-opening vote for the Washington crowd. They have gone blithely on their way, spending and spending and churning this and that plan to take over health care. Meanwhile, the country is fuming. Voters, especially independents, didn’t think that this was what hope-n-change was all about. If Republicans win big next week on messages of fiscal conservatism and opposition to big-government liberalism, maybe the inside-the-Beltway set will wake up. In a year, most of them will have to face the voters too. They may want to begin to take their opinions into consideration.
Six days from now the voters of New Jersey and Virginia will elect governors. Voters in the 23rd district of New York and the 10th district of California will elect new members of the House of Representatives to replace incumbents, a Republican and a Democrat, who were appointed to positions in the Obama Defense and State departments.

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Yes, the character of the individual candidates and local issues can make a difference. But the basic issues in these four contests are reasonably congruent with the national issues now being debated in Congress and debated this summer in town halls across the nation.

The result in Virginia is not much in doubt. Republican Bob McDonnell has campaigned on transportation, education and taxes and holds a wide lead in polls. Democrat Creigh Deeds, though from a rural area, opted not to follow the rural strategy that elected Democrat Mark Warner governor in 2001 and senator in 2008, but instead sought to use cultural issues -- a 20-year-ago graduate school thesis of McDonnell's helpfully unearthed by The Washington Post -- to capture the big majorities Democrats won in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington in 2005, 2006 and 2008.

It hasn't worked. No one believes that a McDonnell victory will result in women being expelled from their workplaces and sent back to their ironing boards. Bigger things -- the size and scope of government -- are at stake this year.

In New Jersey things are murkier. Democratic Gov. Jon Corzine's approval numbers are stuck around 40 percent, but he has used his wealth to pummel Republican Chris Christie with negative ads and hopes that Independent Chris Daggett will steal anti-Corzine votes from the Republican. If Corzine wins because he is perceived to be the lesser of three evils, it will hardly be an endorsement of Democratic policies.
The situation in New York 23 is simply bizarre. Local Republican leaders nominated an assemblywoman who has been endorsed by the ACORN-allied Working Families party and who backs the unions’ card check bill. One of the Republicans passed over was nominated by the Conservative party and has picked up endorsements from Sarah Palin and Tim Pawlenty. He has raised money on the Internet and from the anti-tax Club for Growth. He's now leading in two polls commissioned by his supporters.

All of which highlights, in exaggerated form, the distrust of tea party protesters for Republican insiders and could result in a plurality for the Democrat. As William Galston points out in his New Republic blog, during Obama's presidency voters have been growing more conservative but remain disdainful of Republicans.

The California 10 results will come in last, and just about everyone will be astonished if the Democrat, Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, doesn't win in this San Francisco Bay area district. But many things are possible in special elections.

Both parties will try to spin the results seven days from now. But one thing seems clear. None of the Democrats seems likely to equal Barack Obama's 2008 percentages in these states or districts. None may even come close. But Republicans may find it difficult to convert the increasing unease with Democratic policies into Republican (or Conservative) victories across the board.

WSJ
Tuesday's Elections and the Democratic Agenda
Losses in New Jersey or Virginia could spook Congress.
by Karl Rove

Democratic enthusiasm for President Barack Obama's liberal domestic agenda—particularly for a government-run health insurance program—could wane after the results of the gubernatorial elections next Tuesday in Virginia and New Jersey. GOP victories in either state will tell Democrats in red states and districts that support for Obama's policies is risky to their political health.

The more significant is the open race for governor in Virginia, a purple state. The Washington Post poll released Monday showed 55% support for Republican Attorney General Bob McDonnell and 44% for Democratic State Senator Creigh Deeds. The president is trying to reverse these numbers by stumping the state for Mr. Deeds.

Mr. McDonnell has relentlessly focused on the economy, transportation and education. Mr. Deeds tried to make the race about abortion and his opponent's supposed animus toward working women. But Mr. McDonnell understood that anti-Obama, anti-Washington sentiment was not enough to win and bent the contest back to jobs, roads and schools. He also has a good ground game to turn out the vote, which the GOP hasn't done for too many years in Virginia.

If Republicans also win the races for lieutenant governor and attorney general by five points or more, it will strengthen the case of those predicting a GOP "wave" in 2010.

Also watch the races for the 100-member Virginia House of Delegates. Republicans are hoping to add four seats to the 53 they now have. The bigger the GOP gains, the larger the warning for Democrats nationally.

Reaction against Mr. Obama and his policies plays a smaller role in the New Jersey governor's race. There, voters are principally concerned with whether they should keep incumbent Democrat Jon Corzine.

In 59 public surveys since January, Mr. Corzine has been at or above 42% just six times, normally a terminal condition for an incumbent. But Mr. Corzine opted out of New Jersey's campaign finance system, spending at least $24 million so far to Republican Chris Christie's $9 million.
Neither major party candidate in New Jersey has offered a compelling or comprehensive agenda. At times the independent candidate, Chris Daggett, has appeared the only contender with an agenda to rein in property taxes. But the GOP is arguing there is too much corruption, too many taxes, and too few jobs under Mr. Corzine. It may be working: In one of America’s bluest states the race is too close to call. If Mr. Christie pulls out a win, it would badly shake Democratic confidence.

The Republican Governor’s Association has played what could be a decisive role in both states, spending $13 million on early and extensive TV blitzes. In Virginia, the association tattooed Mr. Deeds as a tax raiser and slippery liberal. In New Jersey, they cut Mr. Daggett’s support in half by arguing a vote for him is a vote for Mr. Corzine.

Two other elections on Tuesday’s ballot have national implications: the New York Congressional District 23 special election and the Pennsylvania Supreme Court race. The special election in New York’s nominally Republican district 23 was brought about when the White House lured an otherwise unbeatable GOP Congressman, John McHugh, into giving up his seat to become Secretary of the Army.

The contest shows the danger of smoke-filled backrooms in the age of tea parties and town-hall angst. New York law says each party’s 11 county chairmen in the district pick their candidate. The local GOP chieftains settled on Dede Scozzafava, a five-term liberal Republican state assemblywoman. This led one of the disappointed nomination seekers, accountant Doug Hoffman, to mount a red meat campaign for the seat on the Conservative Party line.

With the GOP vote split, the lackluster Democrat standard-bearer, Bill Owens, is likely to win. If that happens, the combined vote of Ms. Scozzafava and Mr. Hoffman will signal what a GOP candidate chosen in a primary could get in the 2010 general election. House Republican leaders could help unite the party by saying now, before the election, that Mr. Hoffman is welcome to caucus with the GOP if he wins.

Finally, the Republican-endorsed candidate for Pennsylvania’s Supreme Court, Judge Joan Orie Melvin, is mounting a strong effort against Democrat Jack Panella, despite a $1 million ad blitz targeting her that’s bankrolled by Philadelphia trial lawyers. A GOP victory would indicate trouble for Democrats in a state Mr. Obama carried by 10 points.

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Mr. Rove is the former senior adviser and deputy chief of staff to President George W. Bush.
Interview with Charles Krauthammer

'Obama Is Average'

In a SPIEGEL interview, Charles Krauthammer, the leading voice of America's conservative intellectuals, discusses Barack Obama's Nobel Peace Prize, the president's failures and the state of the United Nations and the international community.

Charles Krauthammer is one of the most influential conservative commentators in the United States. On foreign policy issues Krauthammer, 59, is considered a neoliberal. But as a proponent of the right to have an abortion and an opponent of the death penalty, he is more liberal in many respects than the mainstream of the Republican Party. His regular column for the Washington Post is syndicated by around 200 newspapers. He won the Pulitzer Prize for his work in 1987.

SPIEGEL: Mr. Krauthammer, did the Nobel Committee in Oslo honor or doom the Obama presidency by awarding him the Peace Prize?

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SPIEGEL: Maybe Europeans want to just see a different America, one they can admire again.
Krauthammer: Admire? Look at Obama's speech at the UN General Assembly: "No one nation can or should try to dominate another nation." Take the first half of that sentence: No nation can dominate another. There is no eight year old who would say that -- it's so absurd. And the second half? That is adolescent utopianism. Obama talks in platitudes, but offers a vision to the world of America diminished or constrained, and willing to share leadership in a way that no other presidency and no other great power would. Could you imagine if the Russians were hegemonic, or the Chinese, or the Germans -- that they would speak like this?

SPIEGEL: Is America's power not already diminished?

Krauthammer: Relative to what?

SPIEGEL: To emerging powers.

Krauthammer: The Chinese are rising, the Indians have a very long way to go. But I'm old enough to remember the late 1980s, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers" by Paul Kennedy and the prevailing view that America was in decline and Japan was the rising power. The fashion now is that the Chinese will overtake the United States. As with the great Japan panic, there are all kinds of reasons why that will not happen.

Look, eventually American hegemony will fade. In time, yes. But now? Economically we now have serious problems, creating huge amounts of debt that we cannot afford and that could bring down the dollar and even cause hyperinflation. But nothing is inevitable. If we make the right choices, if we keep our economic house in order, we can avert an economic collapse. We can choose to decline or to stay strong.

SPIEGEL: Do you really believe that Obama deliberately wants to weaken the US?

Krauthammer: The liberal vision of America is that it should be less arrogant, less unilateral, more internationalist. In Obama's view, America would subsume itself under a fuzzy internationalism in which the international community, which I think is a fiction, governs itself through the UN.

SPIEGEL: A nightmare?

Krauthammer: Worse than that: an absurdity. I can't even imagine serious people would believe it, but I think Obama does. There is a way America will decline -- if we choose first to wreck our economy and then to constrain our freedom of action through subordinating ourselves to international institutions which are 90 percent worthless and 10 percent harmful.

SPIEGEL: And there is not even 1 percent that is constructive?

Krauthammer: No. The UN is worse than disaster. The UN creates conflicts. Look at the disgraceful UN Human Rights Council: It transmits norms which are harmful, anti-liberty, and anti-Semitic among other things. The world would be better off in its absence.

SPIEGEL: And Obama is, in your eyes, …

Krauthammer: He's becoming ordinary. In the course of his presidency, Obama has gone from an almost magical charismatic figure to an ordinary politician. Ordinary. Average. His approval ratings are roughly equal to what the last five presidents' were at the same time in their first term. Other people have already said he's done and finished because his health care plans ran into trouble; but I say they're wrong. He's going to come back, he will pass something on health care, there's no question. He will have a blip, be somewhat rehabilitated politically, but he won't be able to pass anything on climate change. He will not be the great transformer he imagines himself to be. A president like others -- with successes and failures.

SPIEGEL: Every incoming president to the White House has to confront reality and disappoint voters.
Krauthammer: True. But what made Obama unique was that he was the ultimate charismatic politician -- the most unknown stranger ever to achieve the presidency in the United States. No one knew who he was, he came out of nowhere, he had this incredible persona that floated him above the fray, destroyed Hillary, took over the Democratic Party and became president. This is truly unprecedented: A young unknown with no history, no paper trail, no well-known associates, self-created.

There was tremendous goodwill, even I was thrilled on Election Day, even though I had voted against him and argued against him.

SPIEGEL: What moved you that day?

Krauthammer: It's redemptive for a country that began in the sin of slavery to see the day, I didn't think I would live to see the day, when a black president would be elected.

Now he was not my candidate. I would have preferred the first black president to have been somebody ideologically congenial to me, say, Colin Powell (whom I encouraged to run in 2000) or Condoleezza Rice. But I felt truly proud to be an American as I saw him sworn in. I remain proud of this historic achievement.

SPIEGEL: What major mistakes has Obama made?

Krauthammer: I don't know whether I should call it a mistake, but it turns out he is a left-liberal, not center-right the way Bill Clinton was. The analogy I give is that in America we play the game between the 40-yard lines, in Europe you go all the way from goal line to goal line. You have communist parties, you have fascist parties, we don't have that, we have very centrist parties.

So Obama wants to push us to the 30-yard line, which for America is pretty far. Right after he was elected, he gave an address to Congress and promised to basically remake the basic pillars of American society -- education, energy and health care. All this would move America toward a social democratic European-style state. It is outside of the norm of America.

SPIEGEL: Yet, he had promised these reforms during the campaign.

Krauthammer: Hardly. He's now pushing a cap-and-trade energy reform. During the campaign he said that would cause skyrocketing utility rates. On healthcare, the reason he's had such resistance is because he promised reform, not a radical remaking of the whole system.

SPIEGEL: So he didn't see the massive resistance coming?

Krauthammer: Obama misread his mandate. He was elected six weeks after a financial collapse unlike any seen in 60 years; after eight years of a presidency which had tired the country; in the middle of two wars that made the country opposed to the Republican government that involved us in the wars; and against a completely inept opponent, John McCain. Nevertheless, Obama still only won by 7 points. But he thought it was a great sweeping mandate and he could implement his social democratic agenda.

SPIEGEL: Part of the problem when it comes to health care is the lack of solidarity in the American way of thinking. Can a president change a country?

Krauthammer: Yes. Franklin D. Roosevelt did it. Back then, we didn't have a welfare state, we didn't have old age pensions, we didn't have unemployment insurance. This country was the Wild West until FDR. Yes, you can change the spirit of America.

SPIEGEL: If Obama is so radical, why is the left wing of the Democratic Party so unhappy with him?
Krauthammer: They are disillusioned because he has ignored some of their social agenda, such as gay rights; continued some of the Bush policies he had once denounced, such as the detention without trial for terrorists; and on his large agenda for education and energy, where he has had no success.

SPIEGEL: How could Obama still win Republican support for healthcare reform?

Krauthammer: He should finally realize that we need to reform our insane malpractice system. The US is spending between $60 and $200 billion a year on protection against lawsuits. I used to be a doctor, I know how much is wasted on defensive medicine. Everybody I practiced with spends hours and enormous amounts of money on wasted tests, diagnostic and procedures -- all to avoid lawsuits. The Democrats will not touch it. When Howard Dean was asked why, he said honestly and explicitly that Democrats don't want to antagonize the trial lawyers who donate huge amounts of money to the Democrats.

SPIEGEL: What would be your solution?

Krauthammer: I would make Americans pay half a percent tax on their health insurance and create a pool to socialize the cost of medical errors. That would save hundreds of billions of dollars that could be used to insure the uninsured. And second, I would abolish the absurd prohibition against buying health insurance in another state -- that reduces competition and keeps health insurance rates artificially high.

SPIEGEL: But you also need to cut back on healthcare expenses.

Krauthammer: It is absolutely crazy that in America employees receive health insurance from their employers -- and at the same time a tax break for this from the federal government. It's a $250 billion a year loophole in the government's budget. If you taxed healthcare benefits, you would have enough revenue for the government to give back to the individual to purchase their own insurance. If you did those two reforms alone, you would have the basis for affordable health insurance in America.

What the Democrats seem to be aiming for, however, is something somewhat different: the government gets control of the healthcare system by proxy; you heavily regulate the insurance companies, you subsidize the uninsured. That kind of reform would also work, but less efficiently -- and because of its unsustainable costs, we would, in the end, have to go to a system of rationing, the way the British do, the way the Canadians do, there is no other way. Obama can't say any of that, the word rationing is too unpopular.

SPIEGEL: Mr. Krauthammer, can a Nobel Peace Prize winner send more troops to Afghanistan?

Krauthammer: Sure, I don't see why not. The prize could have two contrary effects. It could give him an incentive to send more troops to show his own people that he is not an instrument of five Norwegian leftists. Or it can work the other way where in order not to lose the popularity he obviously feels from Europe, he would be less inclined. I think whatever impulses come out of those considerations neutralize each other. The prize will have zero effect on his decision.

'What the Obama Administration Pretends Is Realism Is Naïve Nonsense'

SPIEGEL: You have called him a "young Hamlet" over his hesitation about making a decision on Afghanistan. However, he's just carefully considering the options after Bush shot so often from the hip.

Krauthammer: No. The strategy he's revising is not the Bush strategy, it's the Obama strategy. On March 27, he stood there with a background of flags, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on one side and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on the other, and said: "Today, I'm announcing a comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan." So don't tell me this is revising eight years of Bush, he's not. For all these weeks and months he's been revising his own strategy, and that's okay, you're allowed to do that. But if you're president and you're commander-in-chief, and your guys are getting shot and killed in the field, and you think "maybe the strategy I myself announced with great fanfare six months ago needs to be revised," do it in quiet. Don't show the world that you're utterly at sea and have no idea what to do! Your European allies
already are skittish and reluctant, and wondering whether they ought to go ahead. It's your own strategy, if it's not working, then you revise it and fix it. You just don't demoralize your allies.

SPIEGEL: Is Afghanistan still a war of necessity, still a strategic interest?

Krauthammer: The phrase "war of necessity and war of choice" is a phrase that came out of a different context. Milan Kundera once wrote, "a small country is a country that can disappear and knows it." He was thinking of prewar Czechoslovakia. Israel is a country that can disappear and knows it. America, Germany, France, Britain, are not countries that can disappear. They can be defeated but they cannot disappear. For the great powers, and especially for the world superpower, very few wars are wars of necessity. In theory, America could adopt a foreign policy of isolationism and survive. We could fight nowhere, withdraw from everywhere -- South Korea, Germany, Japan, NATO, the United Nations -- if we so chose. From that perspective, every war since World War II has been a war of choice.

So using those categories -- wars of necessity, wars of choice -- is unhelpful in thinking through contemporary American intervention. In Afghanistan the question is: Do the dangers of leaving exceed the dangers of staying.

SPIEGEL: General Stanley McCrystal is asking for more troops. Is that really the right strategy?

Krauthammer: General Stanley McCrystal is the world expert on counterterrorism. For five years he ran the most successful counterterrorism operation probably in the history of the world: His guys went after the bad guys in Iraq, they ran special ops, they used the Predators and they killed thousands of jihadists that we don't even know about, it was all under the radar. And now this same general tells Obama that the counterterrorism strategy in Afghanistan will fail, you have to do counterinsurgency, population protection. That would seem an extremely persuasive case that counterterrorism would not work.

SPIEGEL: You famously coined the term "Reagan Doctrine" to describe Ronald Reagan's foreign policy. What is the "Obama Doctrine?"

Krauthammer: I would say his vision of the world appears to me to be so naïve that I am not even sure he's able to develop a doctrine. He has a view of the world as regulated by self-enforcing international norms, where the peace is kept by some kind of vague international consensus, something called the international community, which to me is a fiction, acting through obviously inadequate and worthless international agencies. I wouldn't elevate that kind of thinking to a doctrine because I have too much respect for the word doctrine.

SPIEGEL: Are you saying that diplomacy always fails?

Krauthammer: No, foolishness does. Perhaps when he gets nowhere on Iran, nowhere with North Korea, when he gets nothing from the Russians in return for what he did to the Poles and the Czechs, gets nowhere in the Middle East peace talks -- maybe at that point he'll begin to rethink whether the world really runs by international norms, consensus, and sweetness and light, or whether it rests on the foundation of American and Western power that, in the final analysis, guarantees peace.

SPIEGEL: That is the cynical approach.

Krauthammer: The realist approach. Henry Kissinger once said that peace can be achieved only one of two ways: hegemony or balance of power. Now that is real realism. What the Obama administration pretends is realism is naïve nonsense.

SPIEGEL: How do you solve problems like climate change if international institutions are failing?

Krauthammer: It's not the institution that does it, it's the confluence of interests. Where there is a confluence of interests among nations, as, for example the swine flu or polio, you can get well functioning
international institutions like the World Health Organization. And you can act. Climate change is different, because the science remains hypothetical and the potential costs staggering.

SPIEGEL: You think it's a speculative theory?

Krauthammer: My own view is that there is man-made warming. On several occasions I have written that I don't think you can pump carbon dioxide into the atmosphere indefinitely and not have a reaction. But there are great scientists such as Freeman Dyson, one of the greatest physicists of the last hundred years, who has studied the question, who believes quite the opposite. The reason transnational action is so difficult is because the major problem with climate change is, A, that there is no consensus, and, B, that the economic cost is simply staggering. Reversing it completely might mean undoing the modern industrial economy.

I'm not against international institutions that would try to tackle it. But the way to go, at least in the short run, is to go to nuclear power. It's amazing to me that people who are so alarmed about global warming are so reluctant to adopt the obvious short-term solution -- the bridge until the day when we have affordable renewable energy -- of nuclear power. It seems to me intellectually dishonest. Nuclear is obviously not the final answer because it produces its own waste -- but you have a choice. There's no free lunch. If you want an industrial economy, you need energy. If you want energy, it will produce pollution. You can have it in two forms. You can have it dissipated in the atmosphere -- like carbon dioxide -- which then you cannot recover, or you can have the waste concentrated in one small space like nuclear. That is far easier to deal with. The idea that you can be able to create renewable energy at a price anywhere near the current price for oil or gas or coal is a fantasy.

SPIEGEL: Do you basically think Obama is going to be a one-term president?

Krauthammer: No, I think he has a very good chance of being reelected. For two reasons. First, there's no real candidate on the other side, and you can't beat something with nothing. Secondly, it'll depend on the economy -- and just from American history, in the normal economic cycles, presidents who have their recessions at the beginning of their first term get reelected (Reagan, Clinton, the second Bush), and presidents who have them at the end of their first term don't (Carter, the first Bush). Obama will lose a lot of seats in next year's Congressional election, but the economy should be on the upswing in 2012.

SPIEGEL: Is the conservative movement in the United States in decline?

Krauthammer: When George W. Bush won in 2004, there was lots of stuff written that about the end of liberalism and the death of the Democratic Party. Look where we are now.

SPIEGEL: A Democrat is back in the White House, the party also controls Congress.

Krauthammer: Exactly. We see the usual overreading of history whenever one side loses. Look, there are cycles in American politics. US cycles are even more pronounced because we Americans have a totally entrepreneurial presidential system. We don't have parliamentary opposition parties with a shadow prime minister and shadow cabinets. Every four years, the opposition reinvents itself. We have no idea who will be the Republican nominee in 2012. The party structures are very fluid. We have a history of political parties being thrown out of the White House after two terms -- as has happened every single time with only one exception (Ronald Reagan) since World War II. The idea that one party is done in the US is silly. The Republicans got killed in 2006 and 2008, but they will be back.

SPIEGEL: The party lacks a strong, intelligent leader.

Krauthammer: Yes. And if the Republicans don't have one by 2012, they'll lose and they'll have to wait till 2016. It could take eight years to develop. You know, people say -- the White House was pushing this idea -- that the radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh is the leader of the opposition because there's no other leader. Well, ask yourself, in 2001 and 2002 and 2003, who was the leader of the Democratic Party? There was none. We don't have a parliamentary system in which opposition leaders are designated.
Krauthammer: I'm just getting to an age where a lot of my contemporaries are retiring or dying. So I'm on default a voice of authority. I don't attribute very much to that.

SPIEGEL: Who will be the next leader of the Republican Party?

Krauthammer: Some presidential candidates from last year will return in 2012. Sarah Palin is not a serious contender, but somebody like Mitt Romney will be. He is a serious guy, he understands the economy. There will also be some young people many haven't yet heard about, such as Rep. Paul Ryan or Gov. Tim Pawlenty. Or outsiders like the mastermind behind the surge in Iraq, General David Petraeus, who might retire from the military and run for President on the Republican ticket.

SPIEGEL: Many people, however, currently think the Republicans are the party of "no."

Krauthammer: That perception is a serious problem for them.

SPIEGEL: At the end of Bush's second term, he granted you a long interview. Afterwards, you wrote that history would judge Bush kindly. Why?

Krauthammer: Basically I think Bush will have the same historical rehabilitation that Harry Truman did.

SPIEGEL: And why is that?

Krauthammer: Truman left in the middle of an unpopular war, to use your phrase, a war of choice. Truman didn't have to go into South Korea. And he was reviled and ridiculed for the stalemate that resulted. Now, he's seen as one of the great presidents of the 20th century.

I think Bush actually handled the Iraq War better than Truman handled the Korean War. For one thing, the number of losses is about one-tenth. Secondly, he made the right decision with the surge. Thirdly, if Iraq turns out well, meaning becomes a country fairly self-sufficient and fairly friendly to the West, it will have a more important effect on the West than having a non-communist South Korea. The Middle East is strategically a far more important region.

Bush's worst mistake was the conduct of the Iraq war in the middle years -- 2004-2006 -- and the attempt to win on the cheap, with a light footprint.

On the other hand, I think he did exactly the right thing after 9/11. Look at the Patriot Act, which revolutionized how we deal with domestic terrorism, passed within six weeks of 9/11 in the fury of the moment. Testimony to how well Bush got it right is that Democrats, who now control Congress and had been highly critical of it, are now after eight years reauthorizing it with almost no significant changes.

Afghanistan is more problematic. Our success in overthrowing the Taliban in 100 days was remarkable. It's one of the great military achievements of all time. On the other hand, holding Afghanistan is a lot harder than taking it, and to this day we are not sure how to do it. But the initial success in 2001-2002 did decimate and scatter al-Qaida. It is no accident that we have not suffered a second attack -- something no one who lived in Washington on Sept. 11 thought possible.

I'm sure he will be rehabilitated in the long term.

Clare Booth Luce once said that every president is remembered for one thing, and that's what Bush will be remembered for. He kept us safe.

SPIEGEL: Is it too early to foresee what Obama will be remembered for?
Much of what government does is based on the premise that people can't do things for themselves. So government must do it for them. More often than not, the result is a ham-handed, bumbling, one-size-fits-all approach that leaves the intended beneficiaries worse off. Of course, this resulting failure is never blamed on the political approach — on the contrary, failure is taken to mean the government solution was not extravagant enough.

We who have confidence in what free people can achieve have long believed that government should not venture beyond its narrow sphere of providing physical security. It should not attempt to cure every social ill. So it's good to learn that serious scholars have demonstrated that our intuitions are right. Free people, given the chance, solve what many "experts" think are problems that require state intervention.

For that reason, Elinor Ostrom's winning of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences ought to kindle a new interest in freedom. (See my earlier column here)

Ostrom made her mark through field studies that show people solving one of the more vexing problems: efficient management of a common-pool resource (CPR), such as a pasture or fishery. With an unowned "commons," each individual has an incentive to get the most out of it without putting anything back.

If I take fish from a common fishing area, I benefit completely from those fish. But if I make an investment to increase the future number of fish, others benefit, too. So why should I risk making the investment? I'll wait for others to do it. But everyone else faces the same free-rider incentive. So we end up with a depleted resource and what Garrett Harden called "the tragedy of the commons".

Except, says Ostrom, we often don't. There is also an "opportunity of the commons." While most politicians conclude that, depending on the resource, efficient management requires either privatization or government ownership, Ostrom finds examples of a third way: "self-organizing forms of collective action," as she put it in an interview a few years ago. Her message is to be wary of government promises.

"Field studies in all parts of the world have found that local groups of resource users, sometimes by themselves and sometimes with the assistance of external actors, have created a wide diversity of institutional arrangements for cooperating with common-pool resources."

She has studied, for example, self-governing irrigation systems in Nepal and found successes never anticipated in the textbooks. "Irrigation systems built and governed by the farmers themselves are on average in better repair, deliver more water, and have higher agricultural productivity than those provided and managed by a government agency. ... (F)armers craft their own rules, which frequently offset the perverse incentives they face in their particular physical and cultural settings. These rules may be almost invisible to outsiders. ..."

In "Governing the Commons," she writes about self-governed commons in Switzerland, Japan, the Philippines and elsewhere that date back hundreds of years. For example, in the alpine village of Tobel, Switzerland, herdsmen "tend village cattle on communally owned alpine meadows" under rules of an
association created in 1483. The rules govern who has access to the grazing lands and how many cows a herdsman can place there, preventing overgrazing. The cattle owners themselves run the association and handle the monitoring. Sanctions are imposed for violation of the rules, but compliance is high.

Don't mistake the association for government. Rather, it is a private co-op designed for a narrow purpose. "All of the Swiss institutions used to govern commonly owned alpine meadows have one obvious similarity — the appropriators themselves make all the major decisions about the use of the CPR."

She found something similar in Japanese villages, where residents use private property for some agricultural purposes and self-managed common forests for others.

Solutions imposed by external authority were not necessary — and usually self-defeating: "Academics, aid donors, international nongovernmental organizations, central governments, and local citizens need to learn and relearn that no government can develop the full array of knowledge, institutions and social capital needed to govern development efficiently and sustainably. …"

How about that? Freedom works.

**Hot Air**

**Global warming goes … vegan**

by Ed Morrissey

If people want a glimpse of what the world will be like with global-warming hysterics in charge, Lord Stern of Brentford lets the veil slip in an interview with the Times of London. Stern admits that the upcoming Copenhagen talks would produce a pact on energy usage that would send the cost of meat "soaring." That suits Stern just fine, because he wants to push the world into vegetarianism anyway:

People will need to consider turning vegetarian if the world is to conquer climate change, according to a leading authority on global warming.

In an interview with The Times, Lord Stern of Brentford said: "Meat is a wasteful use of water and creates a lot of greenhouse gases. It puts enormous pressure on the world’s resources. A vegetarian diet is better." …

Lord Stern, the author of the influential 2006 Stern Review on the cost of tackling global warming, said that a successful deal at the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December would lead to soaring costs for meat and other foods that generate large quantities of greenhouse gases.

He predicted that people’s attitudes would evolve until meat eating became unacceptable. "I think it’s important that people think about what they are doing and that includes what they are eating," he said. “I am 61 now and attitudes towards drinking and driving have changed radically since I was a student. People change their notion of what is responsible. They will increasingly ask about the carbon content of their food.”

Climate change is just another lever for the same old busybodies to run people’s lives. Lord Stern explains that his tastes and philosophy have changed since he was a student — and assumes therefore he has the right to dictate everyone else’s choices. Global-warming hysterics want to use this as an excuse to gain control and power for their idea of a benevolent despotism.

The health-care overhaul debate in the US has the same dynamics. Its advocates want to control the delivery of health care and make it more public in order to use it to insert themselves into private choices. Call it “creeping elitism,” but it’s creeping from all directions these days.
Seven hundred years ago, man farmed and raised cows and pigs on the entire island of Greenland. When they do that again, perhaps I'll worry about bovine flatulence as a global threat. Until then, I consider creeping elitism from horse’s asses a much more elitist threat than methane from cow’s butts.

WSJ - Editorial
First-Time Fraudsters
A tax credit so silly even a four-year-old can exploit it.

It's hard not to laugh when viewing the results of the federal first-time home-buyer tax credit. The credit, worth up to $8,000 for the purchase of a home, has only been available since April of last year. Yet news of the latest taxpayer-funded mortgage scam has traveled fast. The Treasury's inspector general for tax administration, J. Russell George, recently told Congress that at least 19,000 filers hadn't purchased a home when they claimed the credit. For another 74,000 filers, claiming a total of $500 million in credits, evidence suggests that they weren't first-time buyers.

Among those claiming bogus credits, at least some of them were definitely first-timers. The credit has already been claimed by 500 people under the age of 18, including a four-year-old. This pre-K housing whiz likely bought because mom and dad make too much to qualify for the full credit, which starts to phase out at $150,000 of income for couples, $75,000 for singles.

As a "refundable" tax credit, it guarantees the claimants will get cash back even if they paid no taxes. A lack of documentation requirements also makes this program a slow pitch in the middle of the strike zone for scammers. The Internal Revenue Service and the Justice Department are pursuing more than 100 criminal investigations related to the credit, and the IRS is reportedly trying to audit almost everyone who claims it this year.

Speaking of the IRS, apparently its own staff couldn't help but notice this opportunity to snag an easy $8,000. One day after explaining to Congress how many "home-buyers" were climbing aboard this gravy train, Mr. George appeared on Neil Cavuto's program on the Fox Business Network. Mr. George said his staff has found at least 53 cases of IRS employees filing "illegal or inappropriate" claims for the credit. "In all honesty this is an interim report. I expect that the number would be much larger than that number," he said.

The program is set to expire at the end of November, so naturally given its record of abuse, Congress is preparing to extend it. Republican Senator Johnny Isakson of Georgia is so pleased with the results that he wants to expand the program beyond first-time buyers and double the income limits.

This is the point in the story when a taxpayer's sense of humor is bound to give way to a different emotion. The credit's cost is running at about $1 billion a month and $15 billion for the year. Also, even when employed by an honest buyer, it's another distortion that drives capital into housing and away from other more productive uses. For America's tens of millions of tax-paying renters, it's another subsidy they provide for their neighbors to be able to sell their houses at a higher price.

While the credit seems to have boosted home sales, many of those sales would have happened anyway and have merely been stolen from the future. Meanwhile, the credit continues to distort the housing market and postpone the day when home prices can find a floor that is a basis for a stable recovery.

More than two years into the housing bust, trillions of dollars in taxpayer losses or guarantees via Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and amid an ongoing plague of redefaults in federal programs to prevent foreclosures, politicians are still trying to manipulate housing prices. And leave it to Congress to design a program that even a four-year-old can scam.
WE JUST GOT WORD FROM WASHINGTON... OBAMA DECLARED SWINE FLU AN EMERGENCY.

"NO REINFORCEMENTS. THEY'VE ALLOCATED ALL AVAILABLE ASSETS TOWARDS ATTACKING FOX NEWS...."