

November 17, 2013

Every ten years or so during the continuing decline of our country, we are teased by a glimmer of hope. In 1994 it was the off year elections when Bill and Hillary got spanked by the voters. In the 2002 off year elections the voters rewarded W for his steadfast defense of our civilization. Now we witness the witless healthcare program in its death throes. We post early so all can enjoy this temporary halt to the march of the state.

It is Jonah Goldberg Day as he celebrates the collapse.

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First, the obligatory caveats. ...

... But come on, people.

If you can't take some joy, some modicum of relief and mirth, in the unprecedentedly spectacular beclowning of the president, his administration, its enablers, and, to no small degree, liberalism itself, then you need to ask yourself why you're following politics in the first place. Because, frankly, this has been one of the most enjoyable political moments of my lifetime. I wake up in the morning and rush to find my just-delivered newspaper with a joyful expectation of worsening news so intense, I feel like Morgan Freeman should be narrating my trek to the front lawn. Indeed, not since Dan Rather handcuffed himself to a fraudulent typewriter, hurled it into the abyss, and saw his career plummet like Ted Kennedy was behind the wheel have I enjoyed a story more.

Alas, the English language is not well equipped to capture the sensation I'm describing, which is why we must all thank the Germans for giving us the term "schadenfreude" — the joy one feels at the misfortune or failure of others. The primary wellspring of schadenfreude can be attributed to Barack Obama's hubris — another immigrant word, which means a sinful pride or arrogance that causes someone to believe he has a godlike immunity to the rules of life.

The hubris of our ocean-commanding commander-in-chief surely isn't news to readers of this website. He's said that he's smarter and better than everyone who works for him. His wife informed us that he has "brought us out of the dark and into the light" and that he would fix our broken souls. ...

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... Regardless, if Obama were a tenth as good a politician as he thinks he is, he could have blamed the delay he desperately needed on his political enemies, calling them "hostage-takers" even as he secretly understood they had rescued his most beloved hostage from his own incompetence. Instead, on September 26, he went out and told an adoring audience: "On October 1, millions of Americans . . . will finally be able to buy quality, affordable health insurance. In five days." "Starting Tuesday," he added, Americans will be able to "compare and purchase affordable health-insurance plans, side by side, the same way you shop for a plane ticket on Kayak — same way you shop for a TV on Amazon. You just go on and you start looking, and here are all the options."

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And yet the president strode out into the Rose Garden anyway and told millions of Americans they could buy their coverage by phone. He told them the 1-800 operators were standing by. He told them it would take only 25 minutes to apply. None of these things were true. In his mind, Obama surely thought he was putting the issue to rest, like Zeus declaring that Odysseus would make it home alive. But here's the thing: All that Zeus needs to do to make something happen is to say it. When Barack Obama says ...

... When a product is brought to market and the market discovers — as it eventually has to — that the advertising wasn't merely a tissue of lies but a geological stratum of lies, the utterly fair and justified response from the critics is "I told you so!" — not "Let's make this thing bipartisan now." That's particularly true when the president continues to lie. On September 26 he said, "If you already have health care, you don't have to do anything" to keep your plan. On November 3 he said, "What we said was you could keep [your plan] if it hasn't been changed." Who knew that dozens of flat declarative statements — "You can keep your plan. Period" — were trailed by a cloud of asterisks like so many invisible fireflies?

If Obamacare had been a shining success from Day One, do you think the Democrats would be in the mood to share the credit? Then why should Republicans be in more of a mood to share the blame?

Feel free to cross your fingers that reality will bend to the gravitational pull of Obama's stellar ego, his invincible hubris. As for me, I'll be sitting on the sidelines cheering on Nemesis, with joy in my heart. ...

Jonah says it's not just the administration that was telling lies. The Dems in congress were happy participants too.

... But whatever label you want to put on that untruth, Obama wasn't alone in offering it. Moreover, even though the legislation may go by the moniker "Obamacare," the fact is the president didn't write the law. Congress did, specifically congressional Democrats, with virtually no Republican input.

Senate majority leader Harry Reid insisted that the Affordable Care Act "means making sure you can keep your family's doctor or keep your health care plan, if you like it." His number two, Senate majority whip Dick Durbin, said, "We are going to put in any legislation considered by the House and Senate the protection that you, as an individual, keep the health insurance you have, if that is what you want." Senator Patty Murray, the chair of the Senate Budget Committee, said it too: "If you like what you have today, that will be what you have when this legislation is passed." Democratic senators Chuck Schumer, Max Baucus, Jeanne Shaheen, Jay Rockefeller, Bob Casey, and many, many other Democrats spouted the same talking points.

Heck, Nancy Pelosi's [website still says](#) that under Obamacare you can "Keep your doctor, and your current plan, if you like them." ...

... A great many Democrats voted for the Iraq war and then, when the war became unpopular, claimed they'd been lied to by President Bush. That was dishonorable enough. But at least the Democrats could claim they didn't have all of the information.

When it comes to the quagmire of Obamacare, the only liars they should be mad at are Democrats.

In his blog, **Jonah** deals with the Katrina comparison retailed by the gnomes at NY Times.

... [The New York Times today compares](#) the Obamacare debacle to Bush's problems with Katrina. It's a comparison I've made several times myself. But the obvious difference is that George W. Bush didn't spend years forcing the Affordable Hurricane Act on the American people. And he didn't have three years to plan for its arrival, either. Nor did he have a national press corps desperate to minimize the downside of the storm. Unless you're Louis Farrakhan or Spike Lee, nobody entertains the idea that flooding New Orleans has been a goal of conservatism for decades. Oh and conservatives didn't go around saying that they had completely and totally mastered all of the nuances of meteorology and climate. And -- wait -- I should also mention that Republicans never said that any criticism of their Affordable Hurricane Act was racist and extremist. Aha! I almost forgot. Bush didn't promise every single living American: "You can keep your current weather if you like it. Period."

But other than that, I guess the comparison is spot on.

We depart from Jonah for a short from [Jason Riley](#) who posts in Political Diary about the hypocrisy of a president who allows the US justice department to continue the jihad against school vouchers.

... President Obama, who has never found a public school that was good enough for his own children, wants poor blacks consigned to the absolute worst schools that the system has to offer. Even, apparently, if that requires bringing to bear the full force of the U.S. Justice Department.

And the cartoons continue to be great.

National Review

[Obamacare Schadenfreudarama](#)

It feels pretty good to watch the whole thing fail.

by Jonah Goldberg

To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, you'd have to have a heart of stone not to laugh at the unraveling of Obamacare.

First, the obligatory caveats. It is no laughing matter that millions of Americans' lives have been thrown into anxious chaos as they lose their health insurance, their doctors, their money, or all three. Nor is it particularly amusing to think of the incredible waste of time and tax dollars that has gone into Obamacare's construction. And the still-unfolding violence that this misbegotten legislation will visit on the economy and our liberties is not funny either. This very magazine has been downright funereal about the brazen and unconstitutional seizure of one-sixth of the economy, and rightly so.

But come on, people.

If you can't take some joy, some modicum of relief and mirth, in the unprecedentedly spectacular beclowning of the president, his administration, its enablers, and, to no small degree, liberalism itself, then you need to ask yourself why you're following politics in the first place. Because, frankly, this has been one of the most enjoyable political moments of my lifetime. I wake up in the morning and rush to find my just-delivered newspaper with a joyful expectation of worsening news so intense, I feel like Morgan Freeman should be narrating my trek to the front lawn. Indeed, not since Dan Rather handcuffed himself to a fraudulent typewriter, hurled it into the abyss, and saw his career plummet like Ted Kennedy was behind the wheel have I enjoyed a story more.

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The hubris of our ocean-commanding commander-in-chief surely isn't news to readers of this website. He's said that he's smarter and better than everyone who works for him. His wife informed us that he has "brought us out of the dark and into the light" and that he would fix our broken souls. The man defined sin itself as "being out of alignment with my values." We may be the ones we've been waiting for, but at the same time, everyone has been waiting for him. Or as he put it in 2007, "Every place is Barack Obama country once Barack Obama's been there."

In every tale of hubris, the transgressor is eventually slapped across the face with the semi-frozen flounder of reality. The Greeks had a god, Nemesis, whose scythe performed the same function. It was Nemesis who lured Narcissus to the pool where he fell in love with his own reflection. Admittedly, most of Nemesis's walk-on roles were in the Greek tragedies, but in the modern era, comeuppance-for-the-arrogant is more often found in comedies, and the "rollout" of Healthcare.gov has been downright hilarious. (I put quotation marks around "rollout" because the term implies actual *rolling*, and this thing has moved as gracefully as a grand piano in a peat bog.) But, as the president says, "it's more than a website." Indeed, the whole law is coming apart like a papier-mâché yacht in rough waters. The media feeding frenzy it has triggered from so many journalistic lapdogs has been both so funny and so poignant, it reminds me of nothing more than the climax of the classic film *Air Bud*, when the lovable basketball-playing golden retriever finally decides to maul the dog-abusing clown.

During the government shutdown, Barack Obama held fast, heroically refusing to give an inch to the hostage-taking, barbaric orcs of the Tea Party who insisted on delaying Obamacare. It was a triumph for the master strategist in the White House, who finally maneuvered the Republicans into revealing their extremism. But we didn't know something back then: Obama desperately needed a delay of Healthcare.gov. In his arrogance, though, he couldn't bring himself to admit it. The other possibility is that he is such an incompetent manager, who has cultivated such a culture of yes-men, that he was completely in the dark about the problems. That's the reigning storyline right now from the White House. Obama was betrayed. "If I had known," he told his staff, "we could have delayed the website."

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In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, it took about five minutes for liberals to cast the chaos and confusion of the disaster as a searing indictment of not just the Bush administration but of conservatism itself. Whatever the merits of that argument (and there are not many), Katrina was at least a surprise. The October 1 deadline for Obamacare was set by Obama's own administration years ago — and it caught them completely off guard. The president may now claim that he knew nothing, but he must have wondered why Henry Chao, Healthcare.gov's chief project manager, set the bar of success at sea level last March: "Let's just make sure it's not a Third World experience." At this point, it could only be more of a Third World experience if Healthcare.gov required enrollees to pay with chickens.

Regardless, if Obama were a tenth as good a politician as he thinks he is, he could have blamed the delay he desperately needed on his political enemies, calling them "hostage-takers" even as he secretly understood they had rescued his most beloved hostage from his own incompetence. Instead, on September 26, he went out and told an adoring audience: "On

October 1, millions of Americans . . . will finally be able to buy quality, affordable health insurance. In five days.” “Starting Tuesday,” he added, Americans will be able to “compare and purchase affordable health-insurance plans, side by side, the same way you shop for a plane ticket on Kayak — same way you shop for a TV on Amazon. You just go on and you start looking, and here are all the options.”

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And yet the president strode out into the Rose Garden anyway and told millions of Americans they could buy their coverage by phone. He told them the 1-800 operators were standing by. He told them it would take only 25 minutes to apply. None of these things were true. In his mind, Obama surely thought he was putting the issue to rest, like Zeus declaring that Odysseus would make it home alive. But here’s the thing: All that Zeus needs to do to make something happen is to say it. When Barack Obama says things, reality doesn’t bend to his will. Somehow, Barack Obama has been led to believe that his job is simply to go out and say things, as if saying things alone could change facts on the ground. So while I’m sure he thinks he sounded like the voice of eternal truth, in reality he sounded like the infomercial spokesman played by Chevy Chase in the old *Saturday Night Live* skit:

WIFE (GILDA RADNER): New Shimmer is a floor wax!

HUSBAND (DAN AYKROYD): No, new Shimmer is a dessert topping!

WIFE: It’s a floor wax!

HUSBAND: It’s a dessert topping!

WIFE: It’s a floor wax, I’m telling you!

HUSBAND: It’s a dessert topping, you cow!

SPOKESMAN (Chevy Chase) [enters quickly]: Hey, hey, hey, calm down, you two. New Shimmer is a floor wax and a dessert topping! Here, I’ll spray some on your mop . . . and some on your butterscotch pudding . . .

HUSBAND [eating while wife mops]: Mmmmm, tastes terrific!

WIFE: And just look at that shine! But will it last?

SPOKESMAN: Hey, outlasts every other leading floor wax, two to one. It’s durable, and it’s scuff-resistant.

HUSBAND: And it’s delicious!

But not as delicious as the tears of his praetorian guard. First of all, every day Jay Carney looks even more like a little boy who put on his dad’s suit. You have to wonder what goes on in his mind, as a former journalist, when he tells his former colleagues that “the American forces have been completely destroyed with minimal Iraqi casualties.” (Oh, wait, that was Baghdad Bob. I get them confused.) And what about Dan Pfeiffer going on the Sunday shows to insist that no American should believe his or her lying eyes?

On October 1, Media Matters for America — David Brock's sweatshop for twentysomethings who couldn't get an internship at the DNC — raced to defend the crashed website as a sign of success, in keeping with the idea that all Obama failures are further proof of his awesomeness: "Right-Wing Media Frantically Spin Obamacare Exchange Success Into Failure." Taking their cues from the White House, MMFA insisted that the administration's only mistake was failing to appreciate just how popular the program would be. "Right-wing media were quick to jump on the problems, declaring them a sign of the law's shortcomings rather than its popularity," cackled MMFA's Samantha Wyatt. She went on to mock various Fox News journalists and, of course, Rush Limbaugh for calling the disastrous launch a disaster. Meanwhile, Ezra Klein called the initial popularity of the site exactly "what the Republicans were afraid of." Now even Klein has turned on the White House — more in sorrow than in anger, to be sure. When the White House has lost Ezra Klein . . . well, it still has the cast of *Morning Joe*. No, wait — even they have abandoned the president. Heh.

To be sure, there was some apparent plausibility to the claim that the website was working only too well, because the White House lied so confidently about what was going on. Few critics grasped at first that this was going to be the Charlie Sheen of IT launches — a spectacularly mortifying failure, punctuated with desperate shrieks of "Winning!"

It wasn't until later that we learned that, of the uncountable hordes flocking to the federal exchanges that first day, the number who actually registered for an insurance plan totaled exactly six. At that rate, Obamacare would reach its target of 7 million enrollees around the year 5013, or 3022 a.o. (Anno Obamae).

Obviously, the website will get better. It could hardly get worse, short of a finding that it causes irritable bowel syndrome. Indeed, on the second day, the number of enrollees hit 248, according to the same leaked contractor memos. But the site needs to be able to handle tens of thousands of enrollees per day.

More recent numbers suggest that the federal exchange has enrolled about 27,000 customers since October 1, which amounts to about half an enrollee for each Obamacare "navigator." (Someone in the White House is surely thinking, "Hey, let's just hire another 14,000,000 navigators! Problem solved.) In order to rationalize that dismal performance the White House now must insist that they always knew the numbers would be tiny at the outset.

Here's a number that isn't tiny: Five million people — and counting — have *lost* their health insurance, despite the president's years of "you can keep your plan" promises. The president has apologized, sort of. He says he's "sorry" that people have found themselves in a bad situation because of "assurances" he made. But no one has lost their insurance because of the president's *assurances*, they've lost their insurance because of the president's *law*. If a captain has the lifejackets filled with cement, his assurance that "you can keep your lifejacket" is only half the crime. Obama knew the lifejackets wouldn't work. In 2010 he admitted that 8 to 9 million people in the individual market might "have to change their coverage" because of the law. And that's just the individual market. Millions more will eventually lose the insurance they like because of Obamacare, according to the administration's own internal estimates.

The cancellations aren't a bug, they're a feature, and the president lied about it over and over again.

And now the Democratic panic has begun. Terry McAuliffe almost lost his bid for Virginia governor because of Obamacare. Senator Kay Hagan of North Carolina has seen her double-digit lead against a generic Republican all but vanish. Henry “let’s avoid a Third World experience” Chao is now insisting he never got the memo warning of “limitless” security problems. And, just this week, the big dog himself, Bill Clinton, announced he thinks Obama should honor the “commitment” the federal government made to Americans that they can keep their health insurance. Clinton’s brazenness is a marvel to behold, given that he surely knew all along that Obama’s “incorrect promise” — to borrow the *New York Times*’ latest desperate euphemism — was a lie and yet he happily defended the law. Moreover, he knows that honoring that commitment would, in fact, permanently gut Obamacare.

Which is one reason why Republicans are proposing a law that would do exactly that with the “Keep Your Health Care Plan” Act. This creates a miserable predicament for Democrats. As Jim Geraghty writes: “Can you picture the ads? *Senator [Insert Democrat Here] voted for the Obamacare law that took away your health insurance . . . and then voted against the Keep Your Health Plan Act.*”

Democrats are in the opening stages of the crab-in-a-trap phase. When crabs are caught in a trap they will try to climb out of their predicament. The problem is that other crabs will grab the would-be-escapee and pull them down. When the really nasty infighting starts, as countless Democrats look to fix or delay the law, I’m looking forward to pointing out that such an agenda was once considered “extreme,” even “racist,” by Democrats. Or to quote Harry Reid from last September: “Obamacare has been the law for four years. Why don’t they get a life and talk about something else?”

It would be great fun to watch Reid say something similar to the throngs of panicked fellow Democrats racing for the exits like the Irish peasants below decks on the Titanic. Reid, of course, is just desperate to buy time. He hopes to make it to November 30, the appointed date when the White House still insists it will be able to say, “Behold the power of this fully functional website!” Politically speaking, with every day still producing another terrible story for the White House, that is the sort of timeline that would make Godot look punctual. And that’s if they hit the deadline. So far, the press has been unable to produce a prominent IT expert willing to say on the record that the target date is feasible. Jay Carney is sticking to that promise, but the musky stench of fear, sweat, and urine wafting from the podium makes it hard for all but the true believers to put much stock in his words.

But let’s assume HHS secretary Kathleen Sebelius makes the most of that copy of *Web Sites for Dummies* that a protester handed her at a town-hall meeting last week. Then what?

We have a hint from Colorado, where the state’s own version of Healthcare.gov has been up and running. Al Jazeera America interviewed one of Colorado’s exchange navigators a month after the debut. When asked how many people she had signed up, she replied, “So far, no one. Thus far everybody has taken a look at the rates and they’ve walked out the door. There’s sticker shock. They just can’t afford it.” Medicaid has been driving most of the enrollments, and those who have ended up in private plans are older and poorer on average than the planners had hoped.

Every day, the supposedly conspiratorial right-wing smear that Obama cared more about economic redistribution than he did about the middle class or economic growth looks more reasonable. Surely we’re allowed to say, “We told you so”?

As a matter of public policy and fiscal health, this is a mixed bag. It's good that poor sick people without insurance coverage are getting something. On the other side of the scale, we have the fact that the country is racing toward entitlement-fueled bankruptcy. So if you can overlook that, yippee!

But as a political and ideological matter, this is beyond fantastic. For years we've been told that Democrats were more "reality-based," that "facts have a liberal bias," in the words of Paul Krugman, and that if they could just have their way, they could fix all of our problems. No one represented this arrogant promise more than Barack Obama himself. But, with an irony so rich it would be made of Corinthian leather if it was a car seat, the only way he could get his signature legislation passed was to baldly and brazenly lie about it, over and over and over again. He created a rhetorical cloud castle where no one would lose his insurance, every family would save thousands of dollars, and millions of the uninsured would suddenly get coverage. Anyone who doubted this was called a fool or a liar, or even a racist. It was, in the parlance of liberalism, a "false choice" to assert that Obamacare couldn't be a floor wax *and* a dessert topping.

And all of this — every bit of it — is their own fault. The bedraggled cadres of Obama's defenders are valiantly trying to blame it all on Republican sabotage: The Obama administration had to keep the whole thing secret for fear of "feeding the opposition," in the words of a *Washington Post* reconstruction of the debacle. But when you read the stories, if you replace phrases like "keep the Republicans from finding out" with the more accurate "keep the public from finding out," you'll get a better sense of things. The Obama White House, by which I mean the Obama campaign, was desperate to keep voters from grasping the scope of its misinformation campaign until after the election. And then, after the election, it was afraid to let the public know what they'd been misinformed about.

The argument against gloating holds that conservatives should want Obamacare to succeed even though we said all along it couldn't. It's such an odd argument, particularly since the Democrats' lies were of the first order, in that Obama's aides actually debated and discussed them, no doubt presenting them to focus groups like a jar of "new Shimmer, now an erectile-dysfunction treatment and paint thinner all in one!"

When a product is brought to market and the market discovers — as it eventually has to — that the advertising wasn't merely a tissue of lies but a geological stratum of lies, the utterly fair and justified response from the critics is "I told you so!" — not "Let's make this thing bipartisan now." That's particularly true when the president continues to lie. On September 26 he said, "If you already have health care, you don't have to do anything" to keep your plan. On November 3 he said, "What we said was you could keep [your plan] if it hasn't been changed." Who knew that dozens of flat declarative statements — "You can keep your plan. Period" — were trailed by a cloud of asterisks like so many invisible fireflies?

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National Review

Obama in the Dark

Dems have only themselves to blame for Obamacare quagmire.

by Jonah Goldberg

Watching President Obama's press conference Thursday, I almost started humming the old ditty "The Farmer in the Dell" because all I could think was: "The cheese stands alone."

The president did his level best to explain that he was as in the dark as anybody about the problems with his signature legislation.

He explained that he was not "informed directly" that the Healthcare.gov website was about as ready to run as a three-legged horse at the Preakness Stakes. Apparently, the old saw that the "buck stops" with the president never took into account the possibility that the buck could get lost in interoffice mail.

While all of the attention has been focused on the executive branch's spectacular failure, it's worth taking a moment to note that Obama was not the sole author of this disaster.

You can absolve Congress — Democrats and Republicans alike — of blame for the website's dysfunction. The record is pretty clear that the White House froze them out of that process. That was why Democratic senator Max Baucus, an architect of the law, finally went public with his prediction of a "train wreck" — because he was sick of being kept out of the loop on the site's progress.

In our system, Congress allocates money for stuff it wants and then lets the executive branch implement the law. If the president messes up, Congress gets to come in afterward to criticize and offer ways to clean up the mess.

But you can't let Congress off the hook for the underlying driver of this calamity: the lie that "if you like your health plan, you can keep it. Period." This is now beyond dispute, though there's still some squabbling about the "L" word itself. It wasn't a lie, Obama and his defenders insist, it was simply an "incorrect promise," in the words of the *New York Times*. I somehow doubt that locution would provide much cover for an adulterer who tells his wife, "Honey, I didn't break my wedding vows. That was just an incorrect promise."

But whatever label you want to put on that untruth, Obama wasn't alone in offering it. Moreover, even though the legislation may go by the moniker "Obamacare," the fact is the president didn't write the law. Congress did, specifically congressional Democrats, with virtually no Republican input.

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it too: "If you like what you have today, that will be what you have when this legislation is passed." Democratic senators Chuck Schumer, Max Baucus, Jeanne Shaheen, Jay Rockefeller, Bob Casey, and many, many other Democrats spouted the same talking points.

Heck, Nancy Pelosi's [website still says](#) that under Obamacare you can "Keep your doctor, and your current plan, if you like them."

There's a lot of chatter in Washington that Democrats on the Hill feel like they were lied to or misled by the White House. But if you understand how our Constitution works — and they should, given that they only took an oath to defend it — it's Obama who should feel lied to.

The law is really quite clear. It was so clear that the Congressional Budget Office — their own in-house think tank — said that millions would lose their health-care plans. Obama even said so with the Democratic leadership in the room.

More to the point, the law was intended to cause millions of people to lose their existing plans so they would enter the exchanges.

Now the same people who literally wrote the law feel betrayed when the law does exactly what they intended. That's like getting mad at a remote-control car when you crash it. Yes, the website's failures make the panic more acute, but the fact remains that the Affordable Care Act is doing precisely what it's supposed to do.

A great many Democrats voted for the Iraq war and then, when the war became unpopular, claimed they'd been lied to by President Bush. That was dishonorable enough. But at least the Democrats could claim they didn't have all of the information.

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National Review
[The Goldberg File](#)
by Jonah Goldberg

So yesterday Barack Obama in effect borrowed a line from Darth Vader. He told the insurance companies, "I am altering the deal. Pray I don't alter it any further."

Now one doesn't have to have sympathy for the insurance companies -- I don't -- to still acknowledge they're being screwed. If you've ever watched a mob movie you'd understand that bad guys can betray other bad guys.

I'm not saying that the insurance companies are outright villains, but they are fools of a sort. Like a prostitute who agrees to go to bed with a total stranger for a certain price to do a certain thing, the insurance companies are suddenly balking when the John decides to get creative. "Whoa, whoa, whoa. We didn't say anything about a capuchin monkey and a salad spinner!"

That, in a nutshell, is the problem when Big Business and Big Government get into bed together. The government, like a Toronto mayor in a stupor, thinks it's free to take whatever liberties it can get away with. Big Business keeps telling itself, "Just one more degrading act and this will all be over and I can take the money off the bedside table."

But the john will always have more money and *at least* one more degrading act to go along with it. And at some point, it's very hard to suddenly draw a line and say, "I was fine with the capuchin monkey, and I said okay to the thing with the salad spinner filled. But this thing with the chocolate sauce and Anthony Weiner in the corner saying 'Can you hear me now?' No way. What kind of a girl do you think I am?"

The Sid Goldberg Rule

Whenever one of my friends gets offered a new job or has to negotiate a salary, I always bring up the Sid Goldberg rule. If you don't know, Sid Goldberg was my dad. And he was brilliant and funny and I loved him dearly. Among his gifts: He could cut through vast swaths of BS with a few words.

In the 1990s when I was a TV producer/policy gnome, I was offered a job I really, really didn't want. There's no need to get deep into the specific circumstances since some of the people involved probably read this "news"letter. But the salient point was I was being offered good money to do a job I didn't want to do. So I called my dad. I explained everything, including the fact that I really didn't want to take the job. And like many a twentysomething is wont to do, I imbued my anxiety with Great Cosmic Significance, as if never before in human history had a young man faced the dilemma of a job offer.

Anyway, after hearing me out and after I said for the nth time that I didn't want to do this other job, my dad said, "So ask for a lot of money." I responded, "Dad, you don't understand. I really don't want the job! Can you not grasp the bottomless abyss of dread I am conjuring at the prospect of taking it!" (Okay, I'm probably embellishing, but I was being quite dramatic.)

My dad sighed. And said, "Well then ask for a *lot more* money."

"Dad you don't understand!" I erupted.

"No, Jonah, you don't understand," he said, cutting me off. "Look. If a task or job doesn't violate your morals or your principles, there's a price you can charge that will make you happy to do it."

"But Dad, I blah blah blah, wah wah wah."

He cut me off again. "How do I explain this to you?" he asked rhetorically. And then he said in a total deadpan, "Look: I would be very happy to eat dogsh** for one billion dollars."

The Sid Goldberg Rule and Big Business

Maybe because he was my dad and I understood what he was getting at better than a stranger might, let me expand on that. My dad was a terribly dignified and reserved guy. He also was a fastidious sort who hated messiness, stickiness, and all kinds of ickiness. He almost never cursed either. So when he said he'd *happily* eat the Affordable Care Act (heh) for one billion

dollars it immediately clarified things for me. His point was that just because something is distasteful or unpleasant -- even if stings your pride -- that doesn't mean there's a moral or principled reason not to do it. At the same time, just because you *can* do something, doesn't mean you have to. That's where price comes in -- what's it worth to you?

In a situation where your conscience is silent, there is always an amount of money that would make you not only willing, but happy, to do something you'd never do for free or a little money. Barring some dire circumstance, I would not clear road kill from highways in Alabama for minimum wage. But, I have no moral or principled objection to such a job. It's honorable labor after all. I just don't need the money that bad. So therefore, if you told me that I would be paid 10 million dollars for each putrefied dead skunk and every moldering possum, I'd be out there with a grin on my face grabbing them like I was a Walmart shopper and they were the last GI Joes with the Kung Fu Grip on Christmas Eve.

But, in situations where your conscience is an issue, price should be irrelevant (barring some Thomistic hypotheticals where you need the money to save your child's life or some such).

The moral of the old Churchill story is that a prostitute is a prostitute regardless of price. If you have no moral opposition to being a whore, then all that's left to talk about is price. But if you *do* have a principled problem with being a whore, price shouldn't be an issue. Or, put another way, if you have a moral objection to selling your soul in the process of throwing Thomas More under the bus, the fact that you'll get to run Wales as a reward shouldn't change your thinking. ("I think they phrased it better in the movie" -- *The Couch*).

As a broad generalization, big businesses have no moral objections to being whores. Getting into bed with Uncle Sam is all a question of price, not principle.

Obviously, there are exceptions and degrees to all this. I'm sure Koch Industries takes whatever tax write-offs they're entitled to under the law, but I'm also sure they're not going to burst out of a cake at a Vegas-penthouse stag party for Uncle Sam either. The problem for the insurance companies is that they've been willing concubines for several years now and suddenly they're discovering that this isn't what they bargained for.

On Corporate Responsibility

Milton Friedman was famously opposed to the whole idea of "corporate social responsibility." His argument was that corporations have a single obligation: to maximize profits for shareholders. When CEOs spend money on gitchy-goo feel-good projects, they are exceeding their authority and wandering outside the lines of their job description. I've always been very sympathetic to this view. If you asked me to invest \$10,000 dollars in your startup company and then I found out you spent \$5,000 of it to sponsor a program to teach prison-gang members to settle their disagreements by acting out scenes from *Little Women*, I'd be pretty pissed. That's not why I gave you the money. And it's pretty shabby of you to buy fame and praise for your generosity while spending someone else's money. Indeed, it's not much less selfish than blowing it on a three-day bender with the mayor of Toronto.

There are lots of different takes on this argument and, because this is my "news"letter, I choose not to deal with most of them. My problem with the profit-maximizing-über-alles creed for Big Business is that it offers no principled or moral reason for Big Business to stay out of Uncle

Sam's bed. If the federal government can make it rain Benjamins for any business willing to twerk for its amusement, why should GE or Big Pharma or the insurance companies demur?

Of course, some businessmen understand the risks of getting in bed with the government. But, since there's lots of money to be made, there will always be *other* businessmen perfectly happy to put on the French-maid uniform and bark like a dog.

Even Adam Smith said, "people of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices." That's true. What's even more true is that when government officials and business leaders sit down to talk, the inevitable result is a new "public-private partnership" that uses government force to limit competition from non-whorish corporations. Railroad magnates lobbied for the Interstate Commerce Commission. AT&T asked the government to make them a monopoly in the name of "efficiency" so they could clear the field of competition. Andrew Carnegie *wanted* government control of the steel industry so he could rely on Uncle Sam to guarantee his profit margins. GE loves Obama's green-energy stuff, because without the inherent subsidies and regulations, it couldn't make money off of its green tech.

I have no problem with contractors doing work for the government. It's better that the guys building roads and bridges work for the private sector. But when big businesses agree to make the country less free, the market less competitive, Americans less prosperous, and the state more powerful just to make a few more bucks for their shareholders, it makes me think that Milton Friedman was wrong. We need a free-market version of corporate social responsibility. We need to equip businessmen with an ethical code that tells them there's a principled reason not to get in bed with the government. They'd still be free to violate that principle, of course, but if they did, I hope they'd have the good sense not to come running to us to complain that the government has asked them to eat a bowl of dogsh**t.

Obamacare vs. Katrina

The New York Times today compares the Obamacare debacle to Bush's problems with Katrina. It's a comparison I've made several times myself. But the obvious difference is that George W. Bush didn't spend years forcing the Affordable Hurricane Act on the American people. And he didn't have three years to plan for its arrival, either. Nor did he have a national press corps desperate to minimize the downside of the storm. Unless you're Louis Farrakhan or Spike Lee, nobody entertains the idea that flooding New Orleans has been a goal of conservatism for decades. Oh and conservatives didn't go around saying that they had completely and totally mastered all of the nuances of meteorology and climate. And -- wait -- I should also mention that Republicans never said that any criticism of their Affordable Hurricane Act was racist and extremist. Aha! I almost forgot. Bush didn't promise every single living American: "You can keep your current weather if you like it. Period."

But other than that, I guess the comparison is spot on.

WSJ - Political Diary Obama vs. Black Kids

by Jason L. Riley

When the Justice Department sued to stop Louisiana's school voucher program earlier this year, it claimed that school choice "frustrates and impedes the desegregation process." But what does the evidence show?

The Louisiana program gives vouchers to low-income children to attend private institutions. Around 90 percent of the recipients are black, and 86 percent of them otherwise would be assigned to public schools that received a D or F grade from the state. In its lawsuit, the Obama administration argued that allowing children to leave these awful schools could make the public school system less white in composition and thus hamper school desegregation efforts. In other words, the Justice Department's position is that the racial balance of a school is more important than whether anyone is learning.



Young students at Fannie C. Williams Elementary School in New Orleans, 2008.

Forcing poor blacks to attend the state's worst schools strikes me as something out of the Jim Crow South. But even if you share Justice's twisted priorities, the premise of its argument is questionable at best. "Louisiana hired Boston University political science Professor Christine Rossell to analyze the effect of vouchers in 34 districts in the state under desegregation orders," reported Politico recently. "Rossell found that in all but four of the districts—some of which are majority white, some majority black and some more evenly split—vouchers improved or had no effect on racial imbalance. And in the districts where racial imbalance worsened, the effects were 'miniscule.'"

A separate study out of the University of Arkansas also questions the notion that school choice reduces integration. "The evidence suggests that use of private school vouchers by low-income students actually has positive effects on racial integration," write Anna J. Egalite and Jonathan N. Mills in *Education Next*. "Among the subset of students for whom data are available, we find that

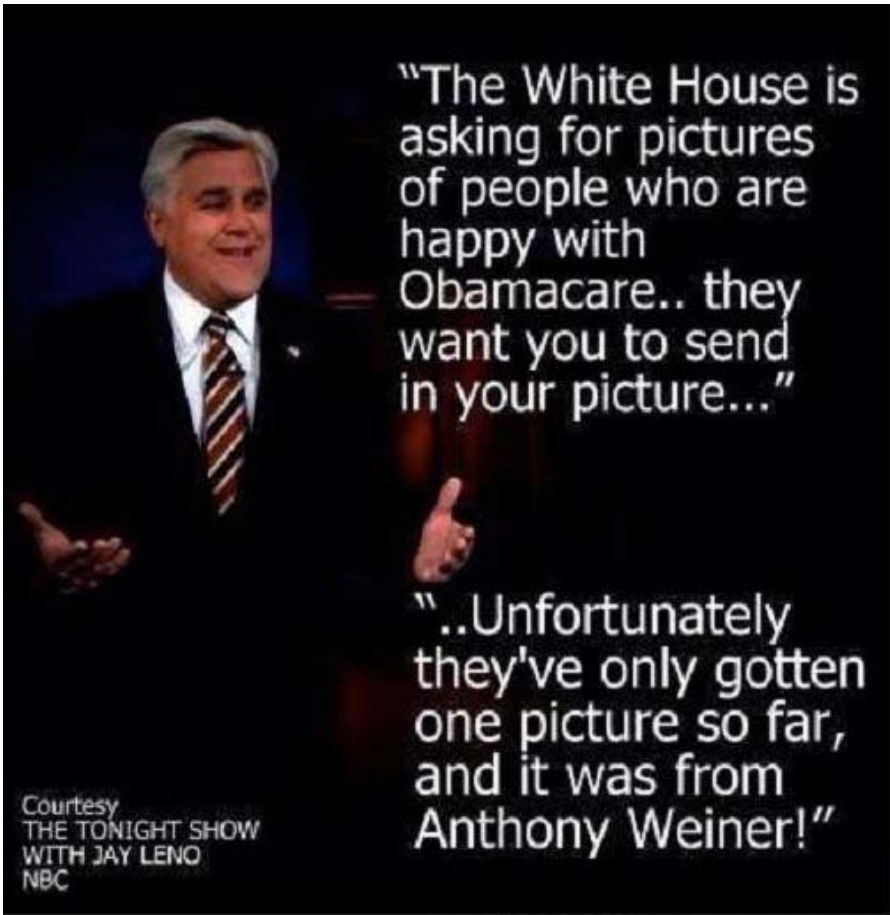
transfers made possible by the school-choice program overwhelmingly improve integration in the public schools that students leave (the sending schools), bringing the racial composition of the schools closer to that of the broader communities in which they are located."

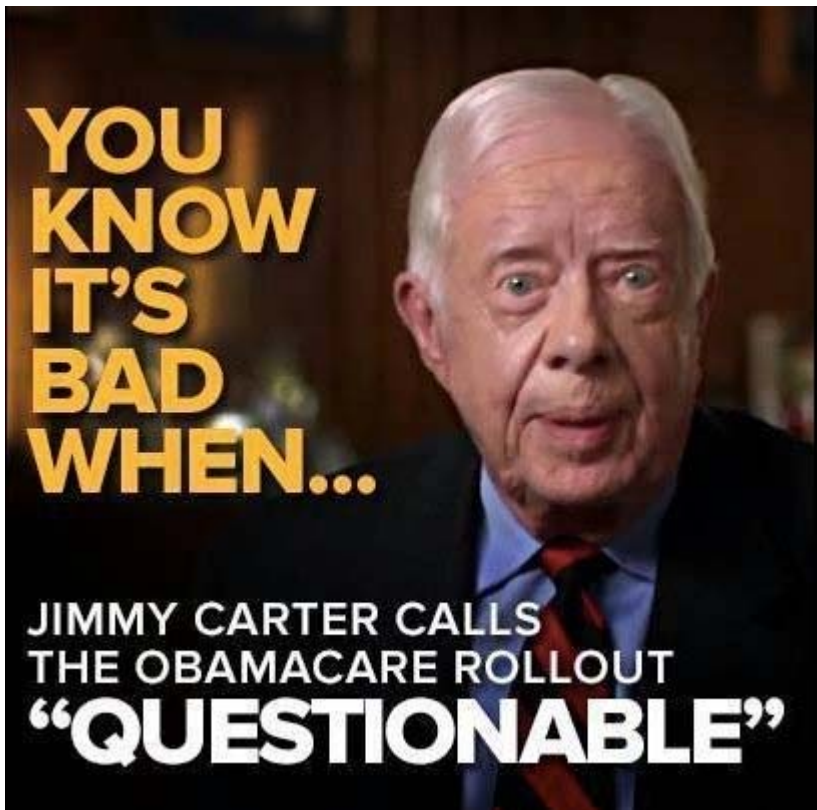
President Obama, who has never found a public school that was good enough for his own children, wants poor blacks consigned to the absolute worst schools that the system has to offer. Even, apparently, if that requires bringing to bear the full force of the U.S. Justice Department.

THE PRESIDENT'S "FIX" FOR OBAMACARE:



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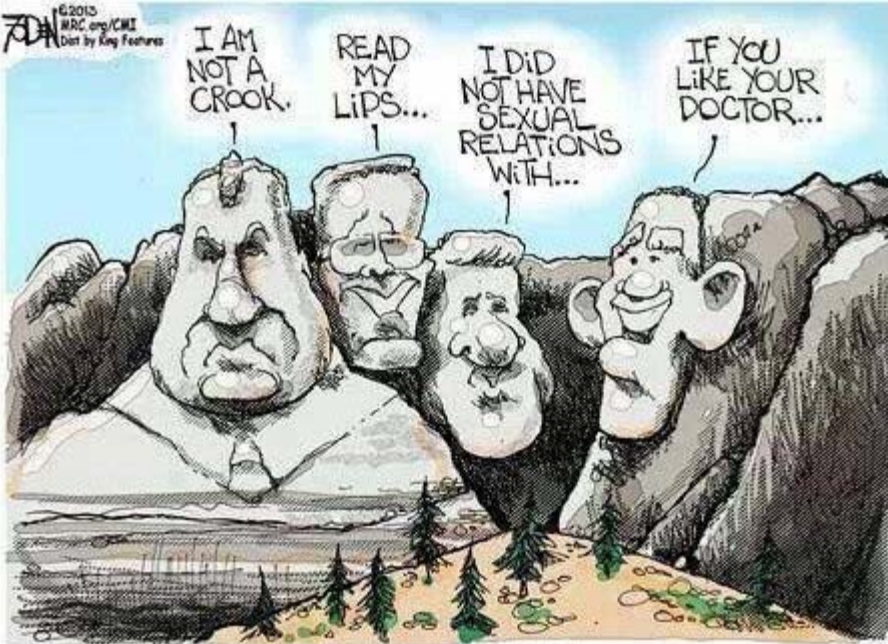






YOU should NEVER
LIE to the AMERICAN
PEOPLE...

AND THEN HE HIT ROCK BOTTOM...



I AM
NOT A
CROOK.

READ
MY
LIPS...

I DID
NOT HAVE
SEXUAL
RELATIONS
WITH...

IF YOU
LIKE YOUR
DOCTOR...

MOUNT STUPID