

December 30, 2013

John Fund thinks 2014 might be a Dem disaster.

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Mega Dittos from Byron York who says this is the year the Dems will pay for Obamacare.

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Peter Wehner on why we're tired of the president.

A new Gallup poll finds President Obama's approval rating at 39 percent and his disapproval rating at 54 percent. But it's not just that the public is increasingly displeased with the job Mr. Obama is doing; they are growing weary of the whole packaged deal. They are frustrated with the president, his style, his attitude, his approach to the job.

The Boston Herald reports:

President Obama's tanking approval rating in newly released polls shows Americans are tired of his whining, according to some experts, who also see a fighting chance for Republicans to rack up coast-to-coast victories in the 2014 midterm congressional races.

"We think of presidents as being morale leaders ... and he goes out and complains," according to Richard Benedetto, a retired White House correspondent and a journalism professor at American University. "He complains about the fact that he doesn't get enough cooperation from the other side. 'It's not my fault, it's the Republicans' fault.' And that message gets old for the American public. ... It's not a good sign for Democrats in Congress going into next year." ...

For some reason **Jennifer Rubin** posts on how the president can have a better 2014.

The president's final news conference of the year was hardly inspiring. One senses he's adrift, maybe even disoriented. The once political messiah is now widely derided, ignored and/or disliked. Still, we all have three years of this to go. What would help to make 2014 a better year for the president?

1. Stop accusing opponents of operating in bad faith. One of the low moments in a very low news conference was his accusation that senators advocating sanctions are only interested in their own reelection. This particular insult was aimed at Democrats as well as Republicans, but his accusations of mendacity make him look small and even mean. Moreover, it simply incentivizes his opponents to strike back.

2. A better staff. The most respected Cabinet official in his entire presidency arguably was defense secretary Robert Gates, with defense secretary and then CIA director Leon Panetta a distant second. Who does he have now? Literally no one who has credibility. One and all they are perceived as partisan and spinners. Obama needs to give up his security blanket of yes-men and flunkies, hire some esteemed advisers and then listen to them.

3. No more government by whimsy and fiat. ...

Paul Mirengoff calls attention to a Michael Barone column.

Michael Barone has written an important column about the relationship between the breakdown of the American family and income inequality and lack of social mobility. Barone relies in part on Nick Shultz's book Home Economics: The Consequences of Changing Family Structure which I have not read.

Barone's thesis — that growing up outside of a two-parent family means lower income, less social mobility, and less "human capital" — is not controversial among social scientists. It is affirmed, Barone says, by undoubted liberals such as Harvard's David Ellwood and Christopher Jencks.

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Naturally, we have Barone's piece.

Christmastime is an occasion for families to come together. But the family is not what it used to be, as my former American Enterprise Institute colleague Nick Schulz argues in his short AEI book Home Economics: The Consequences of Changing Family Structure.

It's a subject that many people are uncomfortable with. "Everyone either is or knows and has a deep personal connection to someone who is divorced, cohabiting, or gay," Schulz writes. "Great numbers of people simply want to avoid awkward talk of what are seen as primarily personal issues or issues of individual morality."

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Examiner Blog post on the losers in the Duck Dynasty flap.

Now that A&E executives have surrendered to the will of hundreds of thousands of "Duck Dynasty" fans and welcomed Phil Robertson back to the show nearly 10 days after creating a firestorm when they suspended him for expressing views about sexuality that are shared by many other conservative Christians, it's time to see who the winners and losers are.

The winners: Robertson and his family. They held fast to their values and learned how deep their fan base really is. The family's admission of regret about his statements to GQ was no surrender, given that his comments were never about hate as opponents had insinuated.

The losers: A&E executives, of course, who knew all along that the Robertson family members were conservative Christians, yet did the world's worst imitation of Claude Rains in "Casablanca" when gay rights groups complained.

And while we're on that subject, the other big loser is GLAAD, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Discrimination, which showed how far it had strayed off the path of encouraging tolerance into the dark woods where conformity is enforced by witch hunts and demands for blood sacrifices. GLAAD's intolerance sparked what its leaders called the worst backlash they'd ever seen — a backlash that included prominent members of the gay community such as Andrew Sullivan and Camille Paglia.

That's right: Two groups of smug, urban sophisticates got outsmarted by a backwoodsman who shoots ducks for a living.

Heckuva job, folks.

National Review

2014: Democrats' Disaster?

The numbers look very bad and they may get worse.

by John Fund

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A new CNN poll this week found that support for Obamacare is down to an all-time low of 35 percent. That helps explain the dramatic partisan reversal in another question CNN asked — about which party respondents would vote for in their congressional district. Two months ago, Democrats had a 50–42 percent lead on that critical “generic ballot” question. Now, Republicans have taken a 49–44 lead. Other private polls taken in the last few days confirm the trend of the CNN poll.

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Pelosi and Reid have a point: A lot can happen politically over the next ten months. The economy could pick up significantly, although that's unlikely given all of the economic uncertainty President Obama has injected into business decisionmaking. Obamacare might stabilize and start to report enough success stories that public confidence improves, although that's more likely to happen *after* the midterm elections than before it. Republicans in some key states could repeat some of their 2012 mistakes: They could nominate either inartful disasters (think Todd Akin) or establishment moderates who prompt some Tea Party voters to drift into backing third-party candidates (think Denny Rehberg of Montana, who saw a Democratic senator win reelection with 48.6 percent of the vote while a Libertarian won nearly 7 percent).

But then again, things could always get worse for Democrats. At this same point before the 2010 midterms, Democrats held a six-point advantage in the generic-ballot test. Then Obamacare was rammed through Congress in the spring of 2010 and, as its details came to be known, Democrats became more unpopular. In the November elections it was Republicans who won the nationwide House vote by six points, picking up an astonishing 63 seats.

What worries Democrats the most is that their base voters will be unenthusiastic about voting in a year when President Obama isn't himself on the ballot. The CNN poll has some evidence

backing up that fear. It finds that only 22 percent of Democrats are currently extremely or very enthusiastic about voting. At the same time, 36 percent of Republicans can't wait to find a polling booth and register their discontent.

President Obama is, as of now, a drag on Democratic candidates. A full 55 percent of adults say they are more likely to vote for a congressional candidate who opposes Obama than for one who backs his program.

Numbers like that can have a real impact in swing states. Take Colorado, which was a key to Obama's victory in 2012 when he won it with 51.5 percent of the vote. But this month's Quinnipiac poll found Obama's approval in the state at just 36 percent. That has helped make Democratic senator Mark Udall's seat competitive. His "deserves re-election" number has tumbled down to 41 percent, with 47 percent now saying he doesn't deserve a second term.

Right now, Democratic control of the House looks more out of reach than ever and the Democrats' Senate majority is more in jeopardy than ever before. So far, Democrats are relying on patchwork fixes to Obamacare and they are refusing to address the internal contradictions of the Rube Goldberg machine they've built. We'll see just how long Democrats who see themselves as vulnerable to defeat continue to accept the "happy talk" of leaders like Pelosi and Reid. My guess is that their survival instinct will eventually trump Democratic unity.

Washington Examiner

[Democrats will pay political price for Obamacare in 2014](#)

by Byron York

As Democrats survey a troubled 2014 political landscape, it's easy to forget how optimistic they seemed less than a year ago.

"I would expect that Nancy Pelosi is going to be speaker again pretty soon," President Obama told cheering House Democrats at a party retreat last February.

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When Obama spoke to the House retreat, polls consistently showed Democrats leading in the so-called "generic ballot" question, that is, whether voters will choose a Democratic or a

Republican representative in the next election. Now, however, there's been a big swing away from Democrats and toward Republicans.

In addition, a new CNN poll found that 55 percent of voters surveyed said that when it comes to congressional races, they're more likely to vote for a candidate who opposes Obama than one who supports the president. "Those kind of numbers spelled early trouble for the Democrats before the 1994 and 2010 midterms, and for the GOP before the 2006 elections," CNN polling director Keating Holland reported on the network's website.

Meanwhile, support for Obamacare, already low, could fall further as more middle-income Americans — voters — figure out that they are the ones who will be paying for the Democrats' national health care scheme.

In 2009 and 2010, Obama, Pelosi and their fellow Democrats sold Obamacare as a kind of miracle. It would give health insurance to 30 million previously uncovered people and cut the federal deficit by more than a trillion dollars at the same time. And the only taxes needed to pay for it all would fall on the very wealthy. It seemed impossible, but that's what they claimed.

Now, millions of middle-income Americans who probably felt safe from Obamacare's taxes are learning that they will pay for the program after all, in the form of higher premiums. Democrats constructed a system in which insurance companies would be forced to cover more people and then spread the cost around among those who had coverage all along, meaning many middle-income Americans will have to pay more for what they already had. Taxpayer-paid subsidies would go to lower-income Americans.

"The Affordable Care Act was not designed to reduce costs or, the law's name notwithstanding, to make health insurance coverage affordable for the vast majority of Americans," health care consultant Kip Piper told USA Today. "The law uses taxpayer dollars to lower costs for the low-income uninsured but it also increases costs overall and shifts costs within the marketplace."

It was a clever strategy, allowing Democrats to sell their bill as a deficit cutter that wouldn't raise taxes on the vast majority of Americans. But the public had to find out eventually. "ACA taxes were imposed only on high-income people," the conservative writer David Frum noted recently in a series of tweets. "But large costs fall on the middle class, too, in the hidden, kludgy form of rate hikes. 'Obamacare is deficit neutral' wasn't technically a lie, but it was highly misleading. The middle class will pay and is paying."

Did most Americans understand that when Obamacare was passed and signed into law? Unlikely. But 2014 will be the year they find out.

And they are unlikely to be kind to the people who sold them that bill of goods. Democrats can comfort themselves by noting that the public disapproves of Republicans, too. But if Obamacare is a major political issue in November 2014 — and indications are that it will be — then Democrats will be the party that pays. And all their optimism of 2013 will seem like it was a long, long time ago.

Contentions

Obama's Tedious Act Grown Old and Stale

by Peter Wehner

A new [Gallup poll](#) finds President Obama's approval rating at 39 percent and his disapproval rating at 54 percent. But it's not just that the public is increasingly displeased with the job Mr. Obama is doing; they are growing weary of the whole packaged deal. They are frustrated with the president, his style, his attitude, his approach to the job.

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President Obama's tanking approval rating in newly released polls shows Americans are tired of his whining, according to some experts, who also see a fighting chance for Republicans to rack up coast-to-coast victories in the 2014 midterm congressional races.

"We think of presidents as being morale leaders ... and he goes out and complains," according to Richard Benedetto, a retired White House correspondent and a journalism professor at American University. "He complains about the fact that he doesn't get enough cooperation from the other side. 'It's not my fault, it's the Republicans' fault.' And that message gets old for the American public. ... It's not a good sign for Democrats in Congress going into next year."

No, it's not. And here's one of the many challenges facing Mr. Obama: Can he alter the patterns of a presidency? I ask because the president is a chronic whiner, a habitual complainer and excuse-maker. He relied on blame shifting for his entire first term, and I suspect it's not merely a tactic for Obama. It is how he's been conditioned, how he views the world and his place in it. He believes deep in his bones that every setback he encounters is due to outside forces. And so he has laid the blame for his failures on his predecessor, the congressional GOP, the Tea Party, conservative talk radio hosts, millionaires and billionaires, Wall Street, Japanese tsunamis, the Arab Spring, Fox News, and more. Those excuses no longer work—and because they don't, one of the main political arrows has been removed from the Obama quiver.

It'll be interesting to see if Mr. Obama is emotionally able to adjust to this new situation. My guess is he'll try the same lines of attack—including portraying himself again and again as the only adult in a room of unruly children—even as most Americans believe his act has grown old and stale. And as the failures of the Obama presidency continue to multiply and his record of incompetence becomes even more indisputable, will Mr. Obama become more aggrieved, more prickly, and more detached from reality? The new year will go some distance toward answering whether you can teach a hubristic president new tricks. This much we know: the old ones have become tedious and monotonous.

Right Turn

Six steps to a better 2014 for Obama

by Jennifer Rubin

The president's [final news conference of the year](#) was hardly inspiring. One senses he's adrift, maybe even disoriented. The once political messiah is now widely derided, ignored and/or disliked. *Still, we all have three years of this to go.* What would help to make 2014 a better year for the president?

1. *Stop accusing opponents of operating in bad faith.* One of the low moments in a very low news conference was his accusation that senators advocating sanctions are only interested in their own reelection. This particular insult was aimed at Democrats as well as Republicans, but his accusations of mendacity make him look small and even mean. Moreover, it simply incentivizes his opponents to strike back.
2. *A better staff.* The most respected Cabinet official in his entire presidency arguably was defense secretary Robert Gates, with defense secretary and then CIA director Leon Panetta a distant second. Who does he have now? Literally no one who has credibility. One and all they are perceived as partisan and spinners. Obama needs to give up his security blanket of yes-men and flunkies, hire some esteemed advisers and then listen to them.
3. *No more government by whimsy and fiat.* The never-ending series of Obamacare changes enacted from the White House briefing room are an [abuse of executive authority](#) and, worse, a sign of abject panic. He's made the law a moving target and incomprehensible to average people. If his signature legislation is to be changed, he should do so deliberately and legally. The result is likely to command more respect and less confusion.
4. *Get 1/2 a loaf on immigration reform.* A comprehensive immigration scheme with a pathway to citizenship for the vast majority of 11 million illegal immigrants already here is the ideal, but most likely an unattainable one. The president should sit down with his best Democratic deal-maker on this topic, Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), and figure out how to pull out a few provisions for which there is widespread support (DREAM Act, high-skilled workers, visa overstay remedies) and make a deal. Obama badly needs to accomplish something and merely blaming Republicans for failure is of limited utility (both because the public no longer gives him the benefit of the doubt and because he now needs a win for himself more than a defeat for his opponents.)
5. *Less is more.* The president is overexposed and increasingly disliked. The two are not unrelated. Fewer appearances and a lower profile may actually help his standing and give his critics less material to use against him. His fans like to say he is his own best spokesman. It just isn't true.
6. *Understand 2014 is it.* Barring a miracle — retention of the Senate majority and recapture of the House — 2014 will be the last year in which he can accomplish much of anything. After the midterms, Obama may face a Republican majority in the Senate and, in any case, we'll be off to the races, the 2016 presidential race specifically. If he has a mini-bargain on entitlements and taxes or a passable energy bill, 2014 will be the time to do it. If he wastes 2014 on unattainable items to please the far left, Obama will have effectively ended his presidency with nothing to show but a crumbling health-care plan.

Power Line

[Home economics](#)

by Paul Mirengoff

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Nick Shultz's book [*Home Economics: The Consequences of Changing Family Structure*](#) which I have not read.

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Yet this fact seems vastly underappreciated in public policy debates. For example, President Obama is now avowedly focused on addressing income inequality and lack of upward mobility. But neither he nor anyone else of his political persuasion (or even much closer to the center) seems very interested in focusing on the relationship between these phenomena and the breakdown of the American family.

The reasons for this reticence are obvious. First, Obama does not want to offend unmarried parents, an important portion of his base. Second, Obama does not want to open up a discussion about the extent to which liberal policies and attitudes have contributed to family breakdown.

Nonetheless, the numbers demonstrate the centrality of family breakdown in the lack of social mobility. According to a study cited by Shultz, 50 percent of children who start off in the bottom third of the income distribution, but whose parents are married, move out of the bottom third. Those aren't bad odds. But for children from “broken” homes, the number is only 26 percent.

The other side of the coin is that family breakdown is far more prevalent at the lower end of the economic spectrum than higher up. As Barone observes, citing Charles Murray, “rates of divorce and single parenthood among college-educated whites, after increasing in the 1970s, are down almost to 1960s levels” while “among low-education, low-income whites, as well as blacks and Hispanics, family disintegration has become the norm.”

“Nurture,” then, is creating a vicious cycle that undermines upward mobility. Low income family arrangements tend to be less nurturing because of the lack of two parents. And the lack of two parents perpetuates low income.

“Nature,” may also be undermining upward mobility. People are marrying later in life than they did decades ago. This probably means they are selecting their partners at college, graduate school, or in their profession to a greater degree than in the old days.

If so, the offspring of the intellectual elite may well be intermarrying more than in the old days. This pattern of selection might mean that, as a matter of nature, their offspring have become increasingly equipped to remain in the upper end of the income distribution scale.

This thesis is highly speculative, of course. However, there is no doubt about the “nurture” thesis. Family breakdown is a major driver of income inequality and declining social mobility.

For me, then, the remedy for these phenomena does not consist of income redistribution, [regional planning](#) that causes people to live where they rather wouldn't, or other items from the traditional leftist wish list. The remedy consists in more responsible behavior.

There are ways that public policy can encourage such behavior, but only at the margin. Fortunately, as Barone reminds us at the end of his piece, history shows that the relevant types of behavioral patterns do change, and not just for the worst.

Examiner

Uncomfortable Truths about Family Breakdown

Children without married parents miss out on more than just income.

by Michael Barone

Christmastime is an occasion for families to come together. But the family is not what it used to be, as my former American Enterprise Institute colleague Nick Schulz argues in his short AEI book *Home Economics: The Consequences of Changing Family Structure*.

It's a subject that many people are uncomfortable with. "Everyone either is or knows and has a deep personal connection to someone who is divorced, cohabiting, or gay," Schulz writes. "Great numbers of people simply want to avoid awkward talk of what are seen as primarily personal issues or issues of individual morality."

Nonetheless, it is an uncomfortable truth that children of divorce and children with unmarried parents tend to do much worse in life than children of two-parent families. (I'll leave aside the sensitive issue of children of same-sex marriages because these haven't existed in a non-stigmatized atmosphere long enough to produce measurable results.)

As Schulz points out, that uncomfortable truth is not controversial among social scientists. It is affirmed by undoubted liberals such as Harvard's David Ellwood and Christopher Jencks.

Growing up outside a two-parent family means not just lower incomes and less social mobility, Schulz argues. It also reduces human capital — "the knowledge, education, habits, willpower — all the internal stuff that is largely intangible — a person has that helps produce an income."

While children are born with certain innate capacities, those capacities can be broadened or narrowed by their upbringing. The numbers indicate that single or divorced parents — however caring and dedicated — are unable, on average, to broaden those capacities as much as married parents can.

These differences have sharp implications for upward mobility. Schulz points to an Economic Mobility Project analysis showing that, among children who start off in the bottom third of the income distribution, only 26 percent with divorced parents move up, compared with 42 percent born to unmarried mothers (who may marry later, of course) and 50 percent who grow up with two married parents.

All this matters more than it used to because two-parent families are much more uncommon than they used to be. In 1960 about three-fourths of Americans 18 and over were married. In 2011, less than half were.

One reason is that people are getting married later in life. Back in 1959, one of the last years of the Baby Boom, most American women got married before they turned 21.

In the past half-century, the age of first marriage has crept upward. In 1970, only 11 percent of men and 7 percent of women age 30 to 34 had never been married. In 2008, the corresponding figures were 37 percent of men and 28 percent of women.

In 1970, only 12 percent of Americans age 35 to 44 were unmarried. In 2009, 33 percent were.

Many see increased divorce as the explanation for this change. True, divorce rates spiked upward in the 1970s. But they peaked in the 1980s. Most of the change represents people not getting married at all.

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then–assistant labor secretary, won fame — and vicious criticism — for his report lamenting that 24 percent of black births were to unmarried mothers. By 2009, that rate had risen to 72 percent — and the rate of unmarried births to all American mothers was 41 percent.

These changes have not affected all social classes uniformly. In his 2012 book *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960–2010*, my AEI colleague Charles Murray showed that rates of divorce and single parenthood among college-educated whites, after increasing in the 1970s, are down almost to 1960s levels.

But among low-education, low-income whites, as well as blacks and Hispanics, family disintegration has become the norm.

Will these trends go on forever? Not necessarily. Schulz looks back to the 1950s, years of unusually high marriage rates. Go back further, to the years around 1900, and Americans were marrying later, and larger percentages than today never married at all.

Increasing affluence and changing mores reinforced by universal media such as movies and television helped produce the mid-century America with well-nigh-universal married parenthood.

People learn from experience. In surveys, children of divorce express disapproval of divorce — and the decline in divorce rates since the 1980s suggests they divorce less often than their parents' generation did.

So it's at least possible that those most familiar with the ill effects of family disintegration will choose in their own lives to take a different course.

Examiner Blogs

[Who are the losers in the 'Duck Dynasty' flap?](#)

by Charles Hoskinson

Now that A&E executives have [surrendered to the will](#) of hundreds of thousands of "Duck Dynasty" fans and welcomed Phil Robertson back to the show nearly 10 days after creating a

firestorm when they suspended him for expressing views about sexuality that are shared by many other conservative Christians, it's time to see who the winners and losers are.

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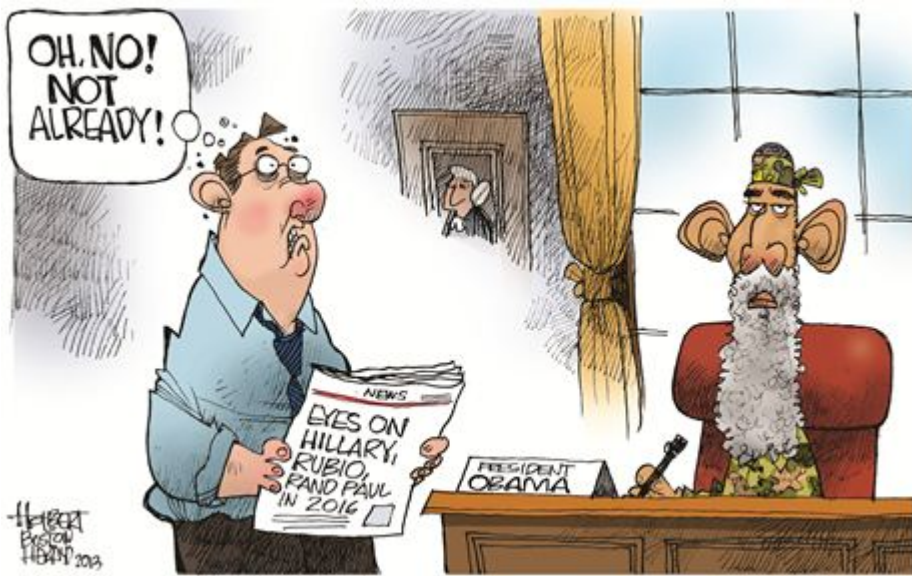
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LAME-DUCK DYNASTY



