

October 15, 2014

Bret Stephens skewers two fatuous poseurs (Paul Krugman and the president) as he starts out today's column on how the world might survive two more years of the this presidency. In the last two days there were 8 bombing sorties against ISIS. As an aside, Pickerhead will point out 72 years ago today it was demonstrated what an unserious president we have. On October 14, 1942 the Luftwaffe made 2,000 sorties against the 5 square miles of Stalingrad not in their hands and the Soviet staging areas across the Volga.

So Paul Krugman, who once called on Alan Greenspan "to create a housing bubble to replace the Nasdaq bubble"; who, a few months before the eurozone crisis erupted, praised Europe as "an economic success" that "shows that social democracy works"; who, as the U.S. fracking revolution was getting under way, opined that America was "just a bystander" in a global energy story defined by "peak oil"; and who, in 2012, hailed Argentina's economy as a "remarkable success story"—this guy now tells us, in Rolling Stone magazine, that Barack Obama has been a terrific president.

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Stephen Hayes writes - Failure Upon Failure; The disintegration of a presidency. This is a long one, but worth reading.

A year before his first inauguration, Barack Obama laid out the objective of his presidency: to renew faith and trust in -activist government and transform the country. In an hourlong interview with the editorial board of the Reno Gazette-Journal on January 16, 2008, Obama said that his campaign was already "shifting the political paradigm" and promised that his presidency would do the same. His model would be Ronald Reagan, who "put us on a fundamentally different path," in a way that distinguished him from leaders who were content merely to occupy the office. "I think that Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that Richard Nixon did not. And in a way that Bill Clinton did not."

If Reagan sought to minimize the role of government in the lives of Americans, Obama set out to do the opposite. "We've had a federal government that I think has gotten worn down and ineffective over the course of the Bush administration, partly because philosophically this administration did not believe in government as an agent of change," he complained.

"I want to make government cool again," he said.

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The Obama presidency has seen many low points, but this has to have been one of the lowest—Jimmy Carter questioning Obama's competence and Bill Clinton questioning his integrity. ...

... The scandals and policy failures have had a devastating effect. With two years left in his presidency, Obama has no agenda. The major new investments and initiatives that he spoke of after his election never happened. Gun control measures he pushed went nowhere. Immigration reform—at least the comprehensive variety that Obama demanded—is dead. As the investigations of old scandals continue, new ones have taken their place on newspaper front pages across the country: the chronic failures of the VA and, most recently, a serious cover-up involving the Secret Service.

When he's not on the golf course, the president seems to spend most of his time fundraising for vulnerable Democrats, threatening executive action on those things he can't accomplish by leading, and working to minimize crises of his own making.

This is a failed presidency. ...

... Here, then, is the great irony of the Obama presidency: Barack Obama will be a transformative president, but not in the way he imagined when he spoke to the Reno Gazette-Journal a year before he took the oath of office. Rather than restore faith in government, the Obama presidency has all but destroyed it.

Despite himself, Obama has made the case for limited government more powerfully than his opponents. The biggest question in American politics over the next two years is a simple one: Can Republicans take advantage of it?

An amazing thing happened in Denver where the Post endorsed the GOP candidate. ... *In every position the Yuma Republican has held over the years — from the state legislature to U.S. House of Representatives — he has quickly become someone to be reckoned with and whose words carry weight. An analysis on ABC News' website, for example, singled out Gardner a year ago — before he declared for the Senate — as one of the party's "rising stars" who represented "a new generation of talent" and who had become a "go-to" member of leadership. ...*

Jonathan Tobin posts on the significance of the Denver Post's editorial.

... But the significance of the editorial is that it is one more indication that even liberals understand that the war on women smear is nothing more than empty sloganeering.

The country is deeply divided on social issues but, as they always have in the past, most voters are willing to agree to disagree on abortion provided the positions of candidates are rooted in principle and tempered by common sense. Gardner's support of over-the-counter birth control is not only, as the Post points out, proof that he isn't out to ban contraception. It's also a sensible proposal that would eliminate the need for the government to attempt to force religious employers to pay for free birth control coverage in violation, as the Supreme Court ruled in the Hobby Lobby case, of their First Amendment rights of free exercise of religion.

The paper's defection from the lockstep liberal smears of Republicans may be a watershed moment in American politics. ...

WSJ

Obama Survival Manual, Intl. Edition

If you think 2014 has been a year of unraveling and disorder, just wait.

by Bret Stephens



Refugees in eastern Ukraine, casualties of American retreat

So Paul Krugman, who once called on Alan Greenspan “to create a housing bubble to replace the Nasdaq bubble”; who, a few months before the eurozone crisis erupted, praised Europe as “an economic success” that “shows that social democracy works”; who, as the U.S. fracking revolution was getting under way, opined that America was “just a bystander” in a global energy story defined by “peak oil”; and who, in 2012, hailed Argentina’s economy as a “remarkable success story”—this guy now tells us, in Rolling Stone magazine, that Barack Obama has been a terrific president.

Which can only mean that the next two years are going to be exceptionally ugly. How to get through them?

I ask the question not as an exhortation to subscribe to Survivalist magazine, stock up on tuna fish and Zithromax, and master the arts of homolactic fermentation. In fact, if you’re a resident of the U.S., you’ll probably be OK. What Americans call a recession is what the rest of the world considers affluence. What we call disaster is what others know as existence.

But imagine if you are one of the pro-democracy student leaders in Hong Kong; or the president of Estonia or another country in Vladimir Putin’s sights; or an anti-ISIS Sunni tribal sheik in Iraq; or a commander in the Kurdish Peshmerga; or a fighter in what remains of the Free Syrian Army; or the new president of Afghanistan; or the prime minister of Israel: What are you going to do then? How do you navigate a world in which you can no longer expect the U.S. to serve as a faithful ally and reliable buffer between you and your enemies?

Don’t think those questions aren’t on foreign minds. The other day, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the Russian oil oligarch turned political prisoner turned (since his release earlier this year) democracy activist, paid a visit to the Journal’s offices in New York. We asked him how Vladimir Putin would react if the U.S. were to arm the Ukrainians or send forces to the Baltics.

“In Russia,” he replied, “everyone understands that America is not ready to fight. End of discussion.”

Or here’s what Vlad Filat, the pro-American former prime minister of Moldova—on which Russia has clear territorial designs—told me a few months ago. “Right now, Russia is fighting two wars, an energy war and an information war. Nobody is fighting back.”

Or here’s what Saudi Prince al-Waleed bin Talal told us last November. “The U.S. has to have a foreign policy. Well defined, well structured. You don’t have it right now, unfortunately. It’s just complete chaos.”

Each comment makes the same essential point: Don’t fear America, don’t trust America, don’t wait for American rescue. A corollary point, surely not lost on Mr. Putin, Ayatollah Khamenei and other rogues is that they have a free hand at least until January 2017. The conclusion: If ever there was a time to revise their regional orders in ways more to their liking, better to do so now, when there’s a self-infatuated weakling in the White House.

As for those on whom the rogues are likely to prey, there are two choices. One is to fight, as Ukraine bravely attempted to do in Donetsk and Luhansk earlier this year. The other is to seek whatever terms their adversaries are willing to offer, as Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko now finds he has no choice but to do after Russia openly invaded his country and the U.S. refused to supply him with arms.

Afghanistan’s new president, the capable and decent Ashraf Ghani, will soon find himself facing a similar invidious choice with the Taliban and its backers in Islamabad as Mr. Obama completes the

U.S. withdrawal by the end of 2016. In those circumstances it will not be unreasonable for Mr. Ghani to look for succor in Tehran, just as Baghdad has done, thereby giving Iran the opportunity to gain clients both to its east and west.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and so does power: American retreat means someone else—someone we don't like—is going to step in.

Meanwhile, not all of our allies will capitulate so readily. Do not expect the Saudis to sit still if Iran and the West sign a nuclear deal that only John Kerry thinks is credible. Do not expect Japan to stick indefinitely to its nonnuclear pledges as cuts to the U.S. military increasingly hollow out the promise of the pivot, and as China becomes increasingly aggressive. Do not expect the Egyptians to resist the blandishments of potential strategic alliances with China or Russia as Washington holds Cairo at arms length.

This is a world of rambunctious rogues and fretful freelancers. If you think 2014 has been a year of unraveling and disorder, just wait till next year. In a time when the U.S. remains a bystander the wreckage can be immense.

Weekly Standard

Failure Upon Failure

The disintegration of the Obama presidency

by Stephen F. Hayes

A year before his first inauguration, Barack Obama laid out the objective of his presidency: to renew faith and trust in -activist government and transform the country. In an hourlong interview with the editorial board of the *Reno Gazette-Journal* on January 16, 2008, Obama said that his campaign was already “shifting the political paradigm” and promised that his presidency would do the same. His model would be Ronald Reagan, who “put us on a fundamentally different path,” in a way that distinguished him from leaders who were content merely to occupy the office. “I think that Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that Richard Nixon did not. And in a way that Bill Clinton did not.”

If Reagan sought to minimize the role of government in the lives of Americans, Obama set out to do the opposite. “We’ve had a federal government that I think has gotten worn down and ineffective over the course of the Bush administration, partly because philosophically this administration did not believe in government as an agent of change,” he complained.

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Obama believed in government, and he was confident that his election would signal that the American people were ready to believe again, too.

As we approach the sixth anniversary of his election, the Obama presidency is in tatters. Obama's policies, foreign and domestic, are widely seen as failed or failing. His approval rating is near its lowest point. Obama's base of support is loyal and fierce and shrinking. Much of the country sees him as incompetent or untrustworthy, and government, far from being “cool,” is a joke on good days and a threat on bad ones.

Barack Obama came to office with hugely ambitious goals for transforming the country, changing its trajectory, and putting America on a fundamentally different path. He advertised his audacity and boasted of his boldness. He told audiences he was compelled to run for president by what Martin Luther King Jr. had called “the fierce urgency of now.” He launched his campaign in Springfield, Illinois, and invited flattering comparisons to that other president from Springfield, Abraham Lincoln.

Obama sought to portray himself as a new kind of politician—a “post-partisan,” pragmatic problem-solver, not so much a centrist as someone who couldn’t be pinpointed on the left-right ideological spectrum because he floated above it. Traditional labels were anachronistic constructs that didn’t apply to such a transcendent political figure.

Journalists not only swallowed this legend, many of them promoted it. Obama didn’t appear ideological to influential political reporters because they shared his views. He wasn’t liberal, he was right.

And yet Obama didn’t attempt to conceal his embrace of big government. In nearly every stump speech, he touted government as the answer to virtually every problem facing the country.

The economic crisis that shook the nation shortly before his election gave him an early opportunity to use government as an agent of change. A stunned populace that had long been skeptical of the ever-growing state was suddenly open to the kind of overachieving government that Obama had been promising. His inauguration had even some conservatives wondering if man and moment had come together in such a singular way that a slide from American welfare state to European-style socialism was inevitable.

Obama’s first Inaugural Address—equal parts inspiration, confidence, and grandiosity—sought to take advantage of and shape this national mood. Looking out at the nearly two million people who had come to Washington for the ceremony, Obama proclaimed: “Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin the work of remaking America.”

The words that make it into an Inaugural Address are those that survive dozens and dozens of drafts. They do not appear by accident. For Obama, the project of his presidency was one of remaking the country—not improving it, not recovering historical greatness, not restoring past glory, but *remaking* America.

On his first day in office, Obama issued executive orders on transparency and ethics—to “ensure the public trust” and, importantly, to “restore faith in government, without which we cannot deliver the changes that we were sent here to make.”

The change came quickly. And it came big. With Democrats in control of both House and Senate, Obama shortly signed into law an “economic stimulus” package that would cost nearly \$1 trillion and would, in the administration’s telling, keep unemployment under 8 percent and prompt a robust economic recovery.

A month into office Obama released his first budget. It reflected a deep belief in government—and was bold enough to surprise even delighted liberals. Robert Reich, Bill Clinton’s left-wing secretary of labor, called the proposal “audacious” because “it represents the biggest redistribution of income from the wealthy to the middle class and poor that this nation has seen in more than 40 years.”

Republicans, well aware of Obama's popularity, were surpassingly polite in their criticism, often choosing to express concern about "Washington spending" rather than target the new president directly.

Then came health care reform. Obama was determined to go big. He was undeterred by growing public skepticism about the comprehensive reforms he favored and unpersuaded by arguments that he should lower his expectations. As some moderate Democrats in Congress expressed misgivings about aspects of the bill, and the prospects for passage looked uncertain, several top Obama advisers, including White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, urged the president to consider a more incremental approach. The president said no, and after he successfully employed precisely the kinds of inside-Washington tricks he had pledged to end, the Affordable Care Act became law.

Obamacare was a momentous achievement. As Justice Anthony Kennedy noted with evident concern when the ACA came before the Supreme Court, the law would change the relationship between the citizen and the state "in a very fundamental way." Kennedy was correct, but for Obama that wasn't a flaw—that was one of his objectives.

When moderate Democrats expressed concern that Obama's aggressive liberalism would threaten congressional majorities, as had happened in 1994, the White House was dismissive. "The big difference between here and in '94 was you've got me," Obama told a group of lawmakers.

The August congressional recess in 2010 brought angry protests to town halls across the country. Democrats in competitive races struggled to defend the president and their support for him. The summer offered the first hint that despite Obama's legislative successes, there had not been a corresponding shift in public opinion about the size and scope of government.

Confirmation came three months later with historic Republican gains in the midterm elections. Obama's party lost 63 seats in the House and 6 seats in the Senate. Democrats lost 6 gubernatorial seats and control of nearly two-dozen state legislatures.

In a front-page news analysis, Peter Baker of the *New York Times* wrote that the results "effectively put an end to his transformational ambitions and left him searching for a way forward with a more circumscribed horizon of possibilities." Bill Clinton, Baker wrote, had responded to the 1994 midterms by "tacking to the middle and cutting deals with Republicans on welfare while outmaneuvering them during a government shutdown." Obama, he noted with admirable prescience, "has not shown the same sort of centrist tendencies Mr. Clinton did."

Obama offered some postelection platitudes about bipartisanship. He brought on a chief of staff with a reputation of being friendly to business and held a high-profile meeting at the Chamber of Commerce. For a moment, Obama seemed to consider changing course. But that moment, if it occurred, didn't last long. In his 2011 State of the Union address, Obama called for a temporary freeze on domestic, nonsecurity discretionary spending in what was meant to be an acknowledgment of the election results. But such spending was already at inflated levels after the influx of new money from the stimulus, and whatever the political value of such posturing, it was undermined by Obama's repeated calls for new "investments" in research, infrastructure, education, and green energy.

In reality, the 2010 elections did nothing to convince Obama to move to the center. If large chunks of the country thought Obama had been too uncompromising and too liberal, Obama was frustrated that he hadn't been as progressive as he'd hoped.

At a meeting with top White House advisers in the fall of 2011, Obama unloaded. “All too often, Obama felt as if he were driving with his foot on the brake,” wrote Mark Halperin and John Heilemann in *Double Down*, their account of the 2012 election. Obama believed “that over the past three years his progressive impulses had too often been trumped by the demands of pragmatism—that he had trimmed his sails in just the way his critics on the left had charged.” Obama made clear that he would run for reelection even further to the left on issues like climate change, immigration, income inequality, gay marriage, and Guantánamo Bay.

This was not Bill Clinton redux. There would be no move to the center. Obama would run against a do-nothing Congress and the Tea Party. He would run as a proud liberal.

Both Obama and Clinton would use the final State of the Union address of their first term to frame their bid for reelection. Clinton famously declared: “The era of big government is over.” Obama, in effect, declared: *The era of big government is here to stay, and I’m the man who will guarantee it.*

Obama asked anxious voters to give him more time to fix the nation’s problems. His reelection would turn on his ability to convince voters that his policies hadn’t failed—they just hadn’t succeeded quite yet. The stagnant recovery, he argued, was not an indication that his economic policies hadn’t worked, as Mitt Romney claimed, but a reflection of the depth of the problems caused by George W. Bush and Republicans. Obama said he was willing to work with reasonable Republicans to address these challenges if the voters would give him more time.

To clinch that argument, Obama turned to Bill Clinton, who had done precisely those things. Clinton worked with Republicans and saw real growth in his second term. In a primetime speech at the Democratic convention, Clinton insisted that Obama favored bipartisanship and “constructive cooperation.” Clinton told voters that he understood their frustration at the slow recovery—“too many people don’t feel it yet”—but promised that good times were just ahead. Obama had “inherited a deeply damaged economy” from Republicans, Clinton said, “and no president, not me, not any of my predecessors, no one could have fully repaired all the damage that he found in just four years.”

There are many reasons Obama won a second term: an energized base; a major advantage in electoral technology; a weak Republican field that produced a poor nominee who ran an uninspired campaign. Beyond that, though, many voters bought Obama’s claims, endorsed by Clinton, that he just hadn’t had enough time to succeed. Obama won despite the fact that exit polls showed more voters favored Romney’s positions on the three most important issues facing the country—the economy, health care, and the deficit. By a margin of 52-46, voters said the country was going in the wrong direction. But when asked who deserves more blame for “current economic conditions,” 53 percent of voters said George W. Bush and just 38 percent faulted Barack Obama.

Obama had won a second term, and with an impressive margin of victory. But it wasn’t because he had succeeded in restoring faith in government or convinced Americans to embrace the kind of activist government he favored. In fact, when asked about the size and scope of government, the same electorate that reelected Obama told exit pollsters that they believed government “is doing too much” (51 percent) rather than “should do more” (43 percent).

Obama’s second inaugural offered a sweeping vision of a progressive second term. His State of the Union provided details. Obama spoke of deficits and entitlement reform. “It is not a bigger government we need,” he said, “but a smarter government that sets priorities and invests in broad-based growth.” The rest of his speech, though, was a blueprint for bigger government—“job-creating investments” and “investments in American energy” and investments in “the best ideas”

and investments in “high-quality early childhood education” and even “investments” in new defense capabilities.

It was a highly ideological speech, an unmistakable call for government to do more still—a lot more. “Thirty-two years after President Ronald Reagan proclaimed that ‘government is the problem’ and 17 years after President Bill Clinton offered a surrender of sorts on that issue by stating that the ‘era of big government is over,’ President Obama made a case Tuesday for closing out the politics of austerity,” Dick Stevenson wrote in an analysis published the next day in the *New York Times*.

If reasonable people could disagree on whether Obama had been restrained by the “politics of austerity,” there was broad consensus that he was beginning his second term with a determination to cast aside any such constraints.

This was the moment. With the triumphant consolidation of Obama’s progressive agenda, the popular embrace of a new liberalism was at hand. Government, to borrow Obama’s phrase, would be cool again.

And then it all collapsed.

The problems came in waves. The attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities in Benghazi, Libya, took place eight weeks before the election, but the many inconsistencies in the administration’s narrative dogged Obama into his second term. On May 9, 2013, *The Weekly Standard* reported on emails sent between senior Obama administration and intelligence officials as they put together talking points for the administration’s public story about the attacks. Top administration officials had repeatedly characterized the flawed talking points as a product of the intelligence community and insisted the White House and State Department had no significant role in shaping them. The emails made clear those claims were false.

Senior administration officials, including top White House and State Department advisers, had objected to language from the intelligence community that was subsequently removed. The initial draft of the talking points had included references to al Qaeda, but after input from Obama administration political appointees those references had all been scrubbed, presumably because the president was campaigning as the man who had al Qaeda on the run.

The emails “directly contradict what White House press secretary Jay Carney said about the talking points in November,” reported Jonathan Karl of ABC News, who obtained all 12 versions of the talking points. The emails “show that the State Department had extensive input into the editing of the talking points.” What’s more, the first draft was far more accurate than the final, scrubbed one.

The controversy over the talking points revived a scandal that the administration had hoped was behind them. At a press briefing just days before the new revelations, Carney had dismissed a question about the attacks six months earlier by claiming, “Benghazi happened a long time ago.”

The following day, on May 10, the director of the Internal Revenue Service’s Exempt Organizations office responded to a question from an audience member at an American Bar Association conference in Washington. The question concerned the IRS’s handling of applications made by conservative and Tea Party groups for tax-exempt status.

The answer from Lois Lerner lasted several minutes. IRS employees—“line people in Cincinnati who handled the applications”—had targeted for scrutiny groups whose names included “Tea

Party” and “Patriots.” Lerner abruptly condemned the practice. “That was wrong, that was absolutely incorrect, insensitive, and inappropriate—that’s not how we go about selecting cases for further review.”

It wasn’t just the selection process that was inappropriate, she said. The IRS requests to these conservative groups “were far too broad” and included “questions that weren’t really necessary for the type of application” they sought. The IRS even “asked for contributor names,” something Lerner said was “not appropriate.”

The question, it turns out, was planted. Lerner had a friend ask it so that she could preempt the scandal before a damning report from the Treasury Department inspector general was made public. And those responsible for the targeting, it soon became apparent, were not “line officials in Cincinnati” but senior IRS officials in Washington.

Top Democrats in Washington had been publicly calling for the IRS to scrutinize Tea Party groups. But White House officials denied any role in the targeting, and President Obama was quick to condemn it. “Americans have a right to be angry about it,” he said. “And I’m angry about it.” The targeting, Obama said, was “inexcusable.”

Three days later, the public learned that the federal government was spying on reporters. The Department of Justice had obtained phone records for nearly two dozen reporters and editors from the Associated Press as part of an investigation into alleged leaks of classified information. The records went back two months and included both home and office lines. Gary Pruitt, the president and CEO of the AP, blasted the “massive and unprecedented intrusion” into newsgathering operations of the global wire service.

Days later, the *Washington Post* reported that the Department of Justice had gone even further in another investigation, closely monitoring the activities of Fox News correspondent James Rosen, who had scored a series of exclusives involving North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. In an unprecedented move, the FBI and Justice Department—in a search warrant application improperly kept secret for 18 months—branded Rosen a “co-conspirator” with his source in a violation of the Espionage Act. Under that flimsy pretext, the government obtained access to Rosen’s phone records and emails, along with phone records from his parents’ home on Staten Island. Amid the ensuing controversy, Attorney General Eric Holder, who had previously testified to Congress that he had never contemplated the prosecution of a member of the media for disclosing classified information, admitted having approved the Rosen warrant application and formally revised DOJ’s guidelines for the treatment of reporters in such investigations so that such a situation, in theory, would never recur.

Obama pronounced himself “troubled” by the revelations. “Journalists should not be at legal risk for doing their jobs,” he said. “Our focus must be on those who break the law.” The White House announced that Obama had instructed Attorney General Holder to investigate the abuses. NBC News reported the same day that Holder had signed off on the Rosen search warrant.

These scandals, revealed to the public in rapid succession, captured the attention of Washington and at least initially generated a stream of news reports on the malfeasance.

Conservatives had long alleged that the IRS targeted Tea Party groups. Congressional Republicans had asked IRS officials about targeting in hearings and had begun to look into the matter. The same was true on Benghazi. Republicans alleged that the administration’s account of the attacks was misleading and meant to deflect blame from Obama six weeks before the presidential election.

Most Washington reporters had ignored or dismissed these complaints, agreeing with the White House that this was partisan carping. But the revelations changed things. With new evidence that the administration would abuse its power by investigating journalists as “co-conspirators,” Republican claims that the IRS had been politicized and that the administration had built its Benghazi defense on a false narrative suddenly seemed plausible. And the evidence of malfeasance was indisputable: The IRS admitted that its officials had targeted conservatives groups. Emails between top administration and intelligence officials made clear that the White House and State Department had carefully sculpted the Benghazi talking points.

Less than a month later, the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post*, working from documents stolen by Edward Snowden, published detailed accounts of surveillance programs conducted by the National Security Agency. One described the bulk collection of phone records of U.S. citizens, and the other provided details about the agency sweeping up massive amounts of information from Yahoo, Google, Facebook, and other major Internet firms. The stories stoked fears of an all-knowing government with access to revealing data on most Americans. The companies involved protested that they were powerless to resist and that they had not known the scope of the collection. Dozens of similar stories followed over the course of the summer.

The NSA controversy was different in kind from the scandals involving Benghazi, the IRS, and the Department of Justice. The programs are defensible and, many still argue, necessary. Nobody today defends the IRS targeting, the Benghazi fabrications, or treating reporters as criminals. But the disclosure of these programs heightened growing concern about the powers of the federal government. The government that had targeted political opponents of the president, had lied about a terrorist attack in the weeks before an election, and had gone after reporters who revealed things the government wanted secret—that same government had access to the details of who we communicate with and what we do online?

What’s more, Barack Obama had run for office on a promise to end the excesses of George W. Bush’s war on terror and had spent two years insisting that the threats to the American people were diminishing. If al Qaeda was on the run, what was the NSA up to?

These controversies were one part of Obama’s collapse. His failing policies were the other. Four years after Obama signed the stimulus into law, unemployment remained high and economic growth was anemic. In the weeks before the 2009 stimulus vote in Congress, White House economists had projected that the boost it would give the economy would keep unemployment below 8 percent. It soared well above that and six months after Obama’s reelection was still at 7.5 percent. The labor force participation rate flirted with all-time lows, and underemployment became chronic.

When the economy grew, it did so in fits and starts. The “Recovery Summer” that the White House first touted in 2010 was a distant memory and a punchline. The president himself joked that they had overestimated the number of “shovel-ready” jobs. The Obama recovery would go down as the most anemic in history.

And then came health care. The Obamacare rollout in October 2013 was an unmitigated disaster. The front-end of the HealthCare.gov website didn’t work. The back-end hadn’t even been built. Serious security issues made potential enrollees reluctant to sign up. And many of those who signed up did not initially make premium payments.

The promise that President Obama made more than three dozen times as he worked to pass Obamacare—“if you like your plan, you can keep it, period”—was inoperative. Worse, it was clear that Obama knew when he made the promise that he would break it. Analyses the White House

itself conducted had concluded that millions of Americans would not be able to keep their health care plans, whether they liked them or not. The very structure of Obamacare requires the cancellation of plans that do not meet the standards of coverage mandated by Washington.

Obama knew this. So did his aides. And so did Republicans, who warned repeatedly and with great urgency that people would lose plans they liked.

The problems with Obamacare were so bad that they elicited public criticism from Obama's two living Democratic predecessors. "His major accomplishment was Obamacare and the implementation of it is now questionable at best," said Jimmy Carter. Bill Clinton urged Obama to keep his word. "The president should honor the commitment the federal government made to those people and let them keep what they got."

The Obama presidency has seen many low points, but this has to have been one of the lowest—Jimmy Carter questioning Obama's competence and Bill Clinton questioning his integrity.

The administration scrambled to avoid a full collapse of the law. They suspended enforcement of the employer mandate. They granted the IRS authority to provide tax credits to those insured through the federal exchange despite the fact that the plain language of the law provided tax credits only to those who were insured through state exchanges. They provided carve-outs and exceptions to other aspects of the law on an ad hoc basis.

The scandals and policy challenges that shaped Obama's fifth year have derailed his sixth. New revelations about the IRS and Benghazi scandals—widespread "computer crashes" among IRS employees investigated by Congress and Benghazi documents that further undermine the administration's claims—have kept the stories alive despite the flagging attention of the establishment media.

Many of the policy decisions of yesterday have become the crises of today, particularly overseas. In the months before the 2012 election, Obama made the imminent defeat of al Qaeda a central part of his campaign. Top Obama advisers predicted the terror group would not even exist at the end of the decade. And administration officials, including the president, delivered speeches effectively announcing the end of the global war on terror.

Obama boasted that he had ended the war in Iraq. The administration erected obstacles to an agreement with Baghdad that would have left a residual force in Iraq, and Obama celebrated the fact that he was the president who had brought all U.S. troops home from Iraq.

A year before he began his second term, Obama sent Robert Ford to serve as the U.S. ambassador to Syria with the hope that Bashar al-Assad would be a reformer. Instead, Assad responded to peaceful protests with the systematic slaughter of moderate rebels who opposed him. Obama called for Assad's ouster but declined to do anything that would produce that result. He insisted that the movement or use of chemical weapons would be a "red line" for the United States, but balked when presented with evidence that Assad had repeatedly used those weapons.

In the face of U.S. inaction, moderate rebels turned to Islamic extremists for help, and jihadists flocked to Syria to join the fight. With better weapons, more experience, superior organization, and steadily flowing funds, the jihadists began to crowd out other elements in the Syrian opposition. Al Qaeda and likeminded groups saw an opportunity to seize territory and expand their efforts, and in due time the Islamic State controlled vast sections of Iraq and Syria.

The Obama administration dismissed or sidelined intelligence officials who contradicted the official line by warning about the growing threat from al Qaeda and the Islamic State. But that threat soon became too big to ignore.

In an announcement that at once made clear the administration's failures on Iraq, Syria, and al Qaeda, Obama ordered airstrikes on jihadist targets in the region. The tide of war was rising once again.

The scandals and policy failures have had a devastating effect. With two years left in his presidency, Obama has no agenda. The major new investments and initiatives that he spoke of after his election never happened. Gun control measures he pushed went nowhere. Immigration reform—at least the comprehensive variety that Obama demanded—is dead. As the investigations of old scandals continue, new ones have taken their place on newspaper front pages across the country: the chronic failures of the VA and, most recently, a serious cover-up involving the Secret Service.

When he's not on the golf course, the president seems to spend most of his time fundraising for vulnerable Democrats, threatening executive action on those things he can't accomplish by leading, and working to minimize crises of his own making.

This is a failed presidency.

In December 2008, a month after Obama was elected, CNN asked voters if they believed he would be an effective manager of the government. Nearly 8 in 10 respondents said that he would. When CNN asked the same question earlier this summer, only 4 in 10 answered in the affirmative. A strong majority said Obama could not be an effective manager of government.

Every month, Gallup asks Americans to name the issue causing them the greatest concern. Last month, and throughout most of the year, the most popular response was "dissatisfaction with government/abuse of power." What came next? Other top answers, month after month in 2014: "The economy," then "unemployment and jobs," then "poor health care/high cost of health care." (Immigration spiked this summer, with the influx of children from Central America and the coverage that generated.)

The top concern of Americans today, more than six years after Barack Obama vowed to "make government cool again," is that they don't trust their government. When Obama took office, 43 percent of Americans told Gallup that they were satisfied with the way the country was being governed, while 56 percent said they were dissatisfied. Today, just 27 percent say they're satisfied and 72 percent say they're dissatisfied.

A CNN poll taken in July found that trust in government is at an all-time low, with just 13 percent saying they trust government all or most of the time. Keating Holland, the director of polling at CNN, framed the results this way: "The number who trust government all or most of the time has sunk so low that it is hard to remember that there was ever a time when Americans routinely trusted government."

This lack of trust isn't all Obama's fault. Trust in government has been on the decline since Watergate, with a brief reprieve after the 9/11 attacks. And there's little doubt that Congress, with its approval at near-record lows, bears some responsibility for pessimism about government.

But Obama's approval ratings have closely tracked the trust-in-government numbers over the course of his time in office. And not surprisingly, those numbers are today near the low point of his

presidency. In the *Real Clear Politics* average of polls, 42 percent of Americans approve of the job Obama is doing, while 52 percent disapprove.

The disapproval of Obama is widespread. A *New York Times*/CBS/YouGov poll released on October 9 found that Obama's disapproval ratings are higher than his approval ratings in 43 of 50 states. Obama's approval rating is above 50 percent in only three states.

Here, then, is the great irony of the Obama presidency: Barack Obama will be a transformative president, but not in the way he imagined when he spoke to the *Reno Gazette-Journal* a year before he took the oath of office. Rather than restore faith in government, the Obama presidency has all but destroyed it.

Despite himself, Obama has made the case for limited government more powerfully than his opponents. The biggest question in American politics over the next two years is a simple one: Can Republicans take advantage of it?

Denver Post - Editorial **[Cory Gardner for U.S. Senate](#)**

Congress is hardly functioning these days. It can't pass legislation that is controversial and it often can't even pass legislation on which there is broad agreement. Its reputation is abysmal, and even its members rarely dispute the popular indictment.

It needs fresh leadership, energy and ideas, and Cory Gardner can help provide them in the U.S. Senate.

In every position the Yuma Republican has held over the years — from the state legislature to U.S. House of Representatives — he has quickly become someone to be reckoned with and whose words carry weight. An analysis on ABC News' website, for example, singled out Gardner a year ago — before he declared for the Senate — as one of the party's "rising stars" who represented "a new generation of talent" and who had become a "go-to" member of leadership.

And this was about someone who wasn't elected to Congress until 2010. Nor is Gardner a political time-server interested only in professional security. He is giving up a safe seat in the House to challenge a one-term Senate incumbent, Democrat Mark Udall, in what is typically an uphill effort.

It's time for a change

Fortunately for Gardner, the polls are showing the contest a tossup. Voters may be sensing the time has come for change.

Udall is a fine man with good intentions, and on some issues our views are closer to his than to Gardner's. But he is not perceived as a leader in Washington and, with rare exceptions such as wind energy and intelligence gathering, he is not at the center of the issues that count — as his Democratic colleague, Sen. Michael Bennet, always seems to be.

Rather than run on his record, Udall's campaign has devoted a shocking amount of energy and money trying to convince voters that Gardner seeks to outlaw birth control despite the congressman's call for over-the-counter sales of contraceptives. Udall is trying to frighten voters

rather than inspire them with a hopeful vision. His obnoxious one-issue campaign is an insult to those he seeks to convince.

One-two punch in Senate

If Gardner's past is any guide, he would very likely match Bennet's influence in the upper chamber, providing Colorado with a powerful one-two punch and pairing two young, energetic senators with clout on both sides of the aisle.

If Gardner wins, of course, it could mean the Senate has flipped to Republicans. However, that doesn't mean it will simply butt heads with President Obama as the Republican House has done. As *The Wall Street Journal's* Gerald Seib recently pointed out, "A look back shows that eras of evenly divided power — Congress fully controlled by one party, the presidency by the other — have turned out to be among the most productive" because both sides temper their policies.

By contrast, we can be sure of what will happen in the next two years on issues such as immigration, tax reform, entitlement reform and military spending if the status quo persists: little to nothing. And yet these issues are critical to the nation's economic health and a long-awaited boost for middle-class incomes.

Gardner has sound ideas on tax reform that could help the economy take off and has expressed willingness to compromise on immigration despite a fairly hard line over the years. And his stance on defense spending appears closer to those of Rep. Mike Coffman, who favors restraint, than to those in the GOP who view the military as sacrosanct.

If Gardner had been a cultural warrior throughout his career, we would hesitate to support him, because we strongly disagree with him on same-sex marriage and abortion rights. But in fact he has emphasized economic and energy issues (and was, for example, an early supporter among Republicans of renewable energy).

For that matter, his past views on same-sex marriage are becoming irrelevant now that the Supreme Court has let appeals court rulings stand and marriage equality appears unstoppable. And contrary to Udall's tedious refrain, Gardner's election would pose no threat to abortion rights.

Credit to Udall on spying

We'd be remiss in not giving credit to Udall for using his position on the Senate Intelligence Committee to crusade against spying activities that encroach on individual freedom and privacy. Gardner himself has praised the senator's efforts there. But the congressman hasn't been oblivious to this issue, either. He was a co-sponsor last year of the USA Freedom Act, which the ACLU praised as "real spying reform."

Many Coloradans are no doubt sick of the overload of negative ads that have assaulted them from both sides, painting Gardner as an extremist and Udall as a mindless vote for the president's policies. Neither portrait is fair. But in their irritation with the campaigns, voters should not lose sight of the fact that a great deal is at stake. A dysfunctional Congress calls for action when voters have an attractive option to the gridlocked status quo. And in Colorado, thankfully, they do in Cory Gardner.

Contentions

Colorado and the End of the War on Women

by Jonathan S. Tobin

For the last two election cycles, Democrats have been banking on their endless harping on what they termed a “war on women” allegedly being conducted by their Republican foes. The strategy worked like a charm in 2012 against some comically flawed GOP candidates and seemed, at least to Democrats, to be a gift that could keep on giving indefinitely into the future. But like all good gimmicks, the war on women had a limited shelf life. In an unlikely development, [even one of the bastions of the liberal mainstream media has noticed](#) that the attempt to use it to batter credible conservatives is not only inaccurate but also evidence that the Democrats have run out of ideas.

Democrats went into 2014 confident about Mark Udall's prospects for reelection to the Senate. Nor were they daunted when Republicans nominated their strongest possible contender—Rep. Cory Gardner—to be his opponent. Their optimism was based on faith in Colorado's changing demographics that supposedly made the state more hostile to the GOP. But they were primarily counting on the utility of the war on women tactic. Wrongly thinking Gardner to be a clone of Missouri Republican Todd Akin whose moronic comments about rape and pregnancy handed the Democrats an undeserved Senate victory in 2012, liberals believed any pro-life conservative could be effectively labeled an enemy of women.

Gardner, an able legislator, rightly thought of as one of his party's rising stars, has not been so easy to smear. But rather than re-think their strategy, Democrats have doubled down on the attacks attempting to convince voters that the personable and thoughtful Republican was troglodyte misogynist. [If the polls are to be believed](#), the fact Udall has little to say about his own tissue-thin record and that the attacks on Gardner are as illogical as they are nasty have helped put Gardiner in the lead. Just as disconcerting for Democrats is the fact that even the leading liberal media organ in the state has also noticed that their one-issue negative campaign is intellectually bankrupt.

The reliably pro-Democrat *Denver Post* shocked their readers and the state political establishment on Friday [when it endorsed Gardner](#). The paper not only praised Gardner as a source of “fresh leadership, energy and ideas” but also denounced the Democratic campaign against him:

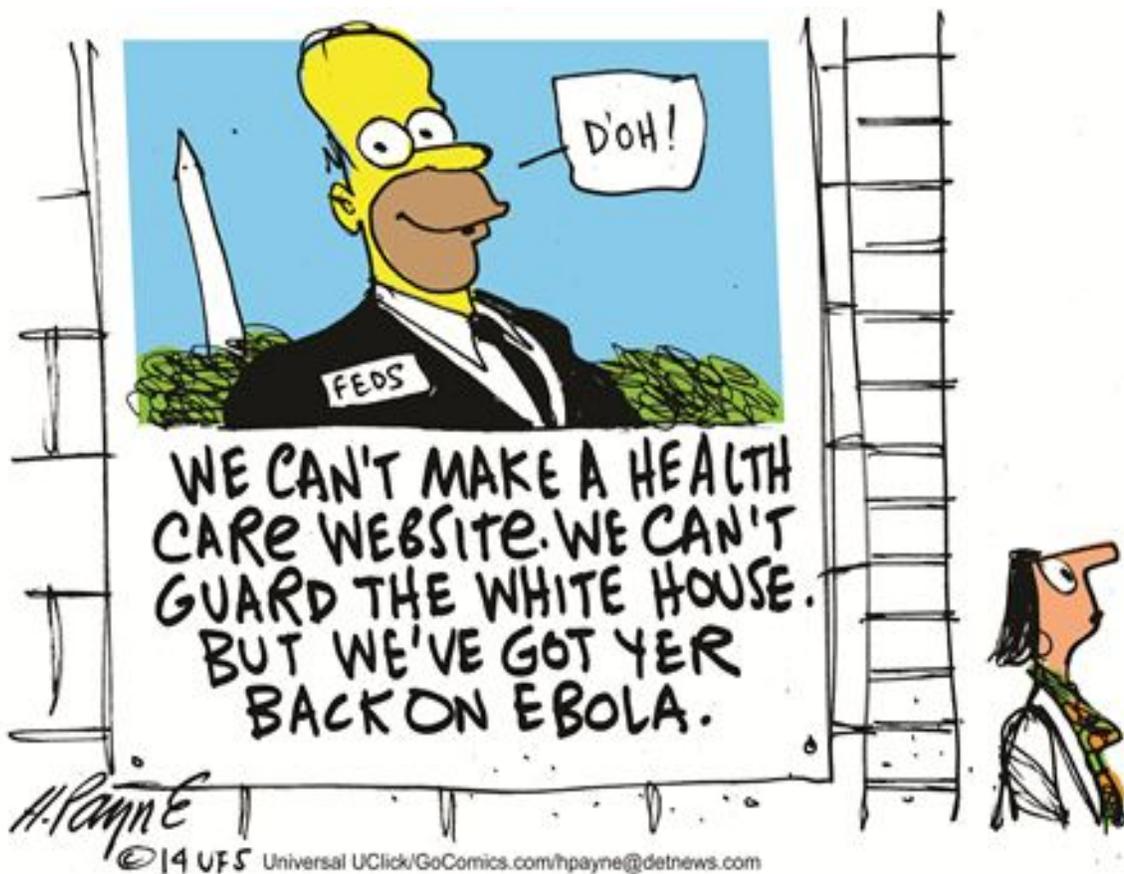
Rather than run on his record, Udall's campaign has devoted a shocking amount of energy and money trying to convince voters that Gardner seeks to outlaw birth control despite the congressman's call for over-the-counter sales of contraceptives. Udall is trying to frighten voters rather than inspire them with a hopeful vision. His obnoxious one-issue campaign is an insult to those he seeks to convince.

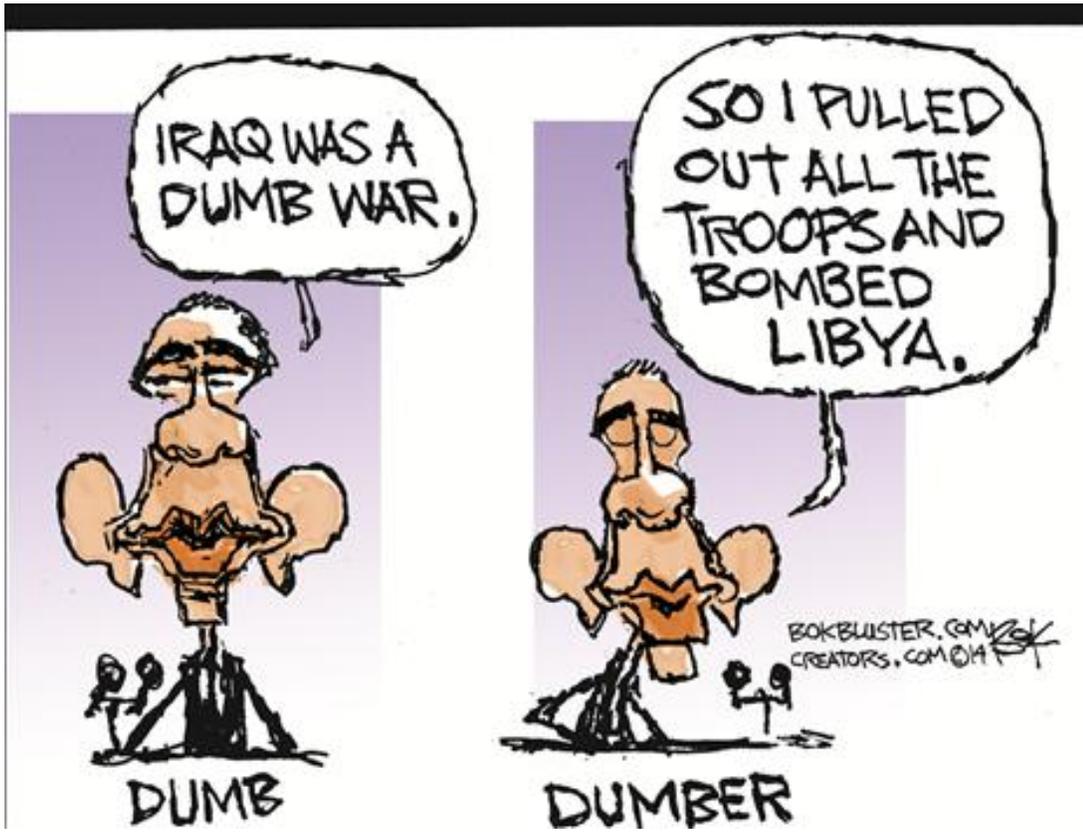
The *Post* rightly thinks their state will be better served by having an influential and bright Republican in the Senate rather than a Democratic dead weight like Udall. It also believes that if the GOP controls both Houses of Congress there will be a better chance of getting things done than the current stalemate with Democrats in control of the upper body, an optimistic evaluation that probably overrates President Obama's willingness to work with Republicans under any circumstances.

But the significance of the editorial is that it is one more indication that even liberals understand that the war on women smear is nothing more than empty sloganeering.

The country is deeply divided on social issues but, as they always have in the past, most voters are willing to agree to disagree on abortion provided the positions of candidates are rooted in principle and tempered by common sense. Gardner's support of over-the-counter birth control is not only, as the *Post* points out, proof that he isn't out to ban contraception. It's also a sensible proposal that would eliminate the need for the government to attempt to force religious employers to pay for free birth control coverage in violation, as the Supreme Court ruled in the *Hobby Lobby* case, of their First Amendment rights of free exercise of religion.

The paper's defection from the lockstep liberal smears of Republicans may be a watershed moment in American politics. After years of ignoring their responsibility to govern, Democrats may be belatedly learning that even some of their usual cheerleaders are no longer willing to acquiesce, let alone participate in their ad hominem attacks on Republicans. The war on women had a good run as a bulletproof method for rallying single female voters to the Democrats. But even the best of tactics is no substitute for a coherent economic agenda or a workable foreign policy. Nor can it allow a weak Democrat to beat a strong Republican. The race in Colorado is still close and the ability of Democrats to turn out their key constituencies should never be underestimated. But the Gardner-Udall contest may be the one that proves that liberal lies about a bogus war on women no longer work.





HOW TO AVOID OBAMA VIRUS

- ① WASH HANDS OF HIS RECORD
- ② WEAR PROTECTIVE GEAR
- ③ NO TRAVEL TO WHITE HOUSE.



H. Payne







SEC. KERRY



TODAY'S LECTURE:
WHY GLOBAL WARMING
IS GREATEST THREAT
TO AFRICA

