

October 9, 2014

Bill Kristol says there is actually some value to this presidency - as a teachable moment.

How to introduce students to conservative thought? It's hard. The colleges and universities aren't interested. The media and popular culture are hostile. What if young Americans nonetheless become aware of the existence of such a thing as conservative thought? How to convey its varieties and complexities? Even tougher. You can write articles and put things online, but there's an awful lot competing for young people's attention these days.

But there's good news nonetheless. Help has arrived. Its name? President Barack Obama.

The decomposition of the Obama presidency has created what Obama might call a teachable moment. This is, needless to say, a loathsome phrase, reeking as it does of liberal sanctimoniousness and professorial condescension. Still, who can resist appropriating it, if only for this one occasion? Because it is, really, a moment. It's a moment when minds can be opened to conservative truths, ears can be induced to hear conservative insights, eyes can be fitted with contact lenses so as better to see conservative arguments. ...

Along those lines, **Jennifer Rubin** says President Bystander has ruined things for inexperienced candidates.

... In a real sense, President Obama ruined things for the young, unaccomplished and inexperienced fast-talkers out there. Before he came along, wowed people with eloquence and then faltered again and again, voters in the 24/7 era had come to think of being president as, yes, commander in chief, but mostly as the giver of big speeches, a traveler abroad and the reader of a much-too-long State of the Union address. The Obama experience has reminded people that that is a fraction of what the president really does. And that's where the unprepared president faltered. The bias toward governors — as we say, any governor over any senator — increases as the incumbent president collapses in rubble of his own making. Truth be told, anyone can write a speech for a candidate, but governing is hard and messy. ...

Don Surber says;

... Every single thing this president has tried or promised has failed. The economy? Fail. Transparency in government? Fail. Easing racial tension? Fail. Ending war? Fail. Winning Afghanistan? Fail.

Hell, he could not even pull off the Beer Summit between Professor Gates and the white cop. It ended with no one conceding anything.

The only two things he got right in nearly 6 years is his 2009 NCAA bracket and killing that fly on TV.

The Democratic plan was simple: Hide behind the black guy, pass a bunch of socialist crapola and wait for the crowd to applaud. Anyone who doesn't like it will be branded a racist.

There was just one problem with the Democratic Party programs: They didn't work.

I hope to hell the election is referendum on this president's policies because not one has worked. Not one.

In the Corner, **John Fund** asks if the prez is his party's worst enemy.

Is President Obama subconsciously sabotaging his own party in the mid-term elections? He took to the stage at Northwestern University in Chicago yesterday to defend his economic record and declare: "I am not on the ballot this fall. Michelle's pretty happy about that. But make no mistake: these policies are on the ballot. Every single one of them."

The Washington Post noted that those words must have sent a chill down the spine of several Democratic Senate candidates from red states who have "spent much of the campaign insisting that this election is NOT about Barack Obama, that it is instead about a choice between themselves and their opponents." You can bet Obama's words will find their way into 30-second attack ads against those Democrats soon enough.

Power Line says perhaps he doesn't like his party.

What to make of Obama's head-scratchingly counterproductive statement that while he is not the on ballot next month, his policies are—every single one of them. Every red state Democrat is running for the hills, because they all know they are in trouble more because of Obama's policies than Obama himself. If Obama's approval ratings were based solely on his policies alone rather than the residual respect many Americans wish to maintain for all presidents, and especially our first black president, he might be down in the 20s somewhere.

Here's one hypothesis: Maybe Obama really isn't a very good politician after all. Sure, he was a great candidate in 2008, and lucky enough to run against a Republican with even more marginal political skills in 2012 (thus becoming the first president ever re-elected with fewer votes than his first election), but as Noemie Emery pointed out in 2011, look closely and you'll see someone who isn't very good at politics and doesn't even like politics very much. ...

And **John Fund** says many Dems are bailing.

Democrats are still reeling from President Obama's statement last week that "I'm not on the ballot this fall . . . but make no mistake, these policies are on the ballot — every single one of them." Republican attack ads are already making hay with that invitation to send Obama a message in next month's election.

A growing number of Democrats are already speaking as if the Obama administration is a spent force, with no agenda it can reasonably implement in its last two years. "It is safe to say that Obama has been a huge disappointment," admitted Democratic columnist Kirsten Powers on the Hugh Hewitt radio show last week. "I really don't think there's any comparison between him and Bill Clinton. I don't think we're even talking about the same universe." ...

Victor Davis Hanson says now Harding is looking good.

Many have described the Obama departure from the 70-year-old bipartisan postwar foreign policy of the United States as reminiscent of Jimmy Carter's failed 1977–81 tenure. There is certainly the same messianic sense of self, the same naïveté, and the same boasts of changing the nature of America, as each of these presidents was defining himself as against supposedly unpopular predecessors. But the proper Obama comparison is not Carter, but rather Warren G. Harding. By that I mean not that Obama's scandals have matched Harding's, but rather that by any fair standard they have now far exceeded them and done far more lasting damage — and without Obama's offering achievements commensurate with those that occasionally characterized Harding's brief, failed presidency.

The lasting legacy of Obama will be that he has largely discredited the idea of big government, of which he was so passionate an advocate. Almost every major agency of the federal government, many of them with a hallowed tradition of bipartisan competence, have now been rendered either dysfunctional or politicized — or both — largely because of politically driven appointments of unqualified people, or ideological agendas that were incompatible with the agency's mission.

The list of scandals is quite staggering. In aggregate, it makes Harding's Teapot Dome mess seem minor in comparison. ...

WSJ reviews a new history of Washington concentrating on the years between the end of the war and the adoption of the Constitution.

... If never considered exactly wilderness years, the span between the end of the war and Washington's presidency is often seen as a hiatus in which the Virginia planter put his estate in order and then shed legitimacy on the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia solely by his taciturn presence. But Mr. Larson, a history professor at Pepperdine University, engagingly argues that the stretch between 1783 and 1789 was as important to Washington—and to America—as all that preceded and followed it.

It is not that Washington wasn't quite sincere in his wish to recede from public life and, as he wrote, "become a private citizen of America, on the banks of the Potowmac; where under my own Vine and my own fig tree—free from the bustle of a camp & intrigues of a Court, I shall view the busy world, 'in the calm lights of mild philosophy.'"

But once he got under his fig tree he was vexed with worries about his fledgling nation. At first these took the form simply of wanting his former troops to be paid, and not in the increasingly debased paper money that the new states were spewing out. He had fought for his country from New England to the Carolinas, and his travails had given him a truly national vision. He wrote to Congress, then trying to wield the feeble powers established by the Articles of Confederation, that "it is indispensable to the happiness of the individual States, that there should be lodged somewhere, a Supreme Power to regulate and govern the general concerns of the Confederated Republic." ...

Weekly Standard
A Teachable Moment
by William Kristol

How to introduce students to conservative thought? It's hard. The colleges and universities aren't interested. The media and popular culture are hostile. What if young Americans nonetheless become aware of the existence of such a thing as conservative thought? How to convey its varieties and complexities? Even tougher. You can write articles and put things online, but there's an awful lot competing for young people's attention these days.

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Are the young struck by the dashed hopes of Obamacare? Give them a copy of Friedrich Hayek's *The Fatal Conceit*. They can't believe the Secret Service farce? Introduce them to James Q. Wilson on bureaucracy. They're befuddled by the exploitation of an unfortunate incident in Ferguson? Have them read Edward C. Banfield's *The Unheavenly City* (especially the chapter he titled "Rioting Mainly for Fun and Profit"). Liberalism's domestic policies aren't working quite the way they were supposed to? Acquaint them with Irving Kristol: "I have observed over the years that the unanticipated consequences of social action are always more important, and usually less agreeable, than the intended consequences."

Are they horrified by the results of Obama's foreign policy? Let them study Churchill: "For five years I have talked to the House on these matters—not with very great success. I have watched this famous island descending incontinently, fecklessly, the stairway which leads to a dark gulf. It is a fine broad stairway at the beginning, but after a bit the carpet ends. A little farther on there are only flagstones, and a little farther on still these break beneath your feet." Do they wonder what happened to the virtue of courage? They can ponder Solzhenitsyn: "A decline in courage may be the most striking feature that an outside observer notices in the West today. The Western world has lost its civic courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, in each government, in each political party, and, of course, in the United Nations. Such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling and intellectual elite, causing an impression of a loss of courage by the entire society."

Does it sometimes seem no one is saying what is obviously true? Read Orwell: "We have now sunk to a depth at which restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men." Does it sometimes seem no one is doing what is obviously right? Consider C. S. Lewis: "We make men without chests and expect from them virtue and enterprise."

So seize the day. Grasp the moment. Don't let the collapse of the Obama presidency go to waste.

Right Turn

Obama ruined it for unqualified candidates

by Jennifer Rubin

A writer for the [Dallas Morning News](#) decided to contrast the reaction to the Ebola scare from Gov. Rick Perry and Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.). I'll cut to the chase:

On Monday, [Perry] announced the formation of a 17-member task force to better the state's readiness to deal with pandemic diseases. "We have learned a lot about the unique challenges of situations like this, and it's important that we continue to adapt our response to these realities," Perry said.

Who would you rather have in charge? Perry, hands down. He's the leader of the state and choosing to calmly navigate this situation. Cruz is working to amp up the panic, fomenting fear in the face of expert opinions (which say, for example, that shutting down flights is exactly the wrong thing to do).

I don't know which is the more politically smart play for 2016, but I know who I'd rather have at the helm of a crisis.

That's not fair to compare a governor who can and must run things to a senator, you might say. Well, if you were running an academic exercise, you would want a level playing field, but voters take candidates as they come. Some have more experience, others more charm and still others more D.C. experience.

There may be another intrastate matchup if Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) faces off against former Florida governor Jeb Bush. How can you compare a two-term governor who passed a lot of conservative policies with a freshman senator in the minority? Again, fair-shmair. Voters will look at the candidates as they are.

Candidates are not compelled to run for president with slight experience. Mike Pence, now governor of Indiana, had served in the House for five terms. Many Republicans wanted him to run for president in 2012. But likely for a myriad of reasons he chose to go get some executive experience and now has a few years at the helm in Indiana under his belt. Rather than a rash man in a hurry, he looks like a guy who has been a lawmaker, led a state and learned a lot along the way.

Whatever you think of New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's bridge troubles now, he was under intense pressure to run for president in 2012. He declined and said he did not feel he was ready. At least he was honest.

In short, if you want to run for president before you've gained much experience and learned how to govern, go ahead. But then don't complain that voters are judging you on experience and governing prowess.

In a real sense, President Obama ruined things for the young, unaccomplished and inexperienced fast-talkers out there. Before he came along, wowed people with eloquence and then faltered again and again, voters in the 24/7 era had come to think of being president as, yes, commander in chief, but mostly as the giver of big speeches, a traveler abroad and the reader of a much-too-long State of the Union address. The Obama experience has reminded people that that is a fraction of what the president really does. And that's where the unprepared president faltered. The

bias toward governors — as we say, any governor over any senator — increases as the incumbent president collapses in rubble of his own making. Truth be told, anyone can write a speech for a candidate, but governing is hard and messy.

If the senator-governor face-offs come to be (whether within state lines or across them) you will hear every senator argue that it is what you know and what you believe that matter. And you will hear every governor argue that it mostly is about what you have *done* and know how to *do*. Until Obama, it was a debatable proposition. Now? It is a bit ludicrous when you come to think of it. Ready to replace one wild card with another one? Not so much.

Don Surber

Every single thing this president has tried has failed

"I am not on the ballot this fall," President Obama told voters in Evanston, Illinois, on Thursday. "Michelle's pretty happy about that. But make no mistake: these policies are on the ballot. Every single one of them."

Republicans should be shaking in their boots -- with laughter. His presidency is one failure after another.

There was the \$787 billion stimulus.

On January 10, 2009, the New York Times reported: "One day after the nation's unemployment rate was reported to be at a 16-year high, President-elect Barack Obama on Saturday again raised the estimate of how many jobs would result from his economic recovery plan, saying it would create or save three million to four million, nearly 90 percent of them in the private sector."

And the report later said: "Without an economic recovery plan, the report warned, the unemployment rate could hit 9 percent, up from 7.2 percent now. If the plan is adopted, unemployment is still expected to rise but then fall late this year."

Unemployment topped 10% within months of passage of this boondoggle that enriched Obama's pals and political cronies. I rank that Three Fails.



There was his Cash for Clunkers program.

It clunked: "Researchers at Texas A and M, in a recently released report, measured the impact of Cash for Clunkers on sales and found the program actually decreased industry revenue by \$3 billion over a nine-to-11-month period. Meanwhile, the "stimulus" also cost taxpayers \$3 billion."

Three More Fails although if I did it by the billion, the stimulus would get 787.



There was Solyndra.

On September 4, 2009, the White House announced: " Vice President Joe Biden, appearing via satellite from Washington D.C., today announced the Department of Energy has finalized a \$535 million loan guarantee for Solyndra, Inc., which manufactures innovative cylindrical solar photovoltaic panels that provide clean, renewable energy. The funding will finance construction of the first phase of the company's new manufacturing facility. Annual production of solar panels from the first phase is expected to provide energy equivalent to powering 24,000 homes a year or over half a million homes over the project's lifetime. Solyndra estimates the new plant will initially create 3,000 construction jobs, and lead to as many as 1,000 jobs once the facility opens. Hundreds more will install Solyndra's solar panels on rooftops around the country."

Within a year, Solyndra -- owned in part billionaire Obama fundraiser George P. Kaiser -- was no more. On May 24, 2011, ABC reported: "The Obama administration bypassed procedural steps meant to protect taxpayers as it hurried to approve an energy loan guarantee to a politically-connected California solar power startup, ABC News and the Center for Public Integrity's iWatch News have learned."

Three More Fails.



Obamacare.

You can keep your doctor. Period.

One Joe Wilson.



You lie!

You can keep your plan. Period.

Another Joe Wilson.



You lie!

The average family will save \$2,500.

One more Joe Wilson.



You lie!

All in all, as most Americans now want this damned thing repealed, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is the largest political disaster in the nation since Prohibition.

Four Fails.



Then there was the execution of Osama bin Laden. A great moment in American history.

That President Obama somehow managed to screw up.

How? By identifying his killers. [Within three months, most of them were killed.](#) Loose lips still sink ships.

Another Fail.



On October 21, 2011, [President Obama announced the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Iraq:](#) "After nearly 9 years, America's war in Iraq will be over."

Troops remain in Germany, Italy and Japan nearly 70 years after we defeated them in World War II.

But not Iraq.

Five Fails.



Every single thing this president has tried or promised has failed. The economy? Fail. Transparency in government? Fail. Easing racial tension? Fail. Ending war? Fail. Winning Afghanistan? Fail.

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The only two things he got right in nearly 6 years is his 2009 NCAA bracket and killing that fly on TV.

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The Corner

Is Obama His Own Party's Worst Enemy?

by John Fund

Is President Obama subconsciously sabotaging his own party in the mid-term elections? He took to the stage at Northwestern University in Chicago yesterday to defend his economic record and declare: "I am not on the ballot this fall. Michelle's pretty happy about that. But make no mistake: these policies are on the ballot. Every single one of them."

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Power Line

Does Obama Secretly Hate His Own Party?

What to make of Obama's head-scratchingly counterproductive statement that while *he* is not the on ballot next month, his policies are—every single one of them. Every red state Democrat is running for the hills, because they all know they are in trouble more because of Obama's policies than Obama himself. If Obama's approval ratings were based solely on his policies alone rather than the residual respect many Americans wish to maintain for all presidents, and especially our first black president, he might be down in the 20s somewhere.

Here's one hypothesis: Maybe Obama really isn't a very good politician after all. Sure, he was a great candidate in 2008, and lucky enough to run against a Republican with even more marginal political skills in 2012 (thus becoming the first president ever re-elected with fewer votes than his first election), but as Noemie Emery pointed out in 2011, [look closely](#) and you'll see someone who isn't very good at politics and doesn't even like politics very much.

The gap between sizzle and steak never seemed so large or alarming, and inquiring minds want to know what went wrong.

Did the prince (assuming he was one) turn into a frog? Did he use all his luck up in winning his office? Did he, once in power, see his governing skills fade away? The answers to these things are no, yes, and no. The record suggests that he was never a prince (merely a fantasy); that his luck went away once his free ride had ended; and that he had few political, that is, governing, skills to begin with, a fact that is now more than clear. . .

Good politicians create coalitions and then tend them carefully, draw people in from the opposite party, and make their own party (like Reagan and Roosevelt) both bigger and different than it was before. Obama inherited a coalition by chance and dismantled it during his first years in office, having never understood what it was made of, how it developed, how fragile it was, and what it would take to maintain. . . An adept politician would have looked at the polls and realized he had a frail coalition that had to be nudged along carefully, knowing schism would destroy his majority.

This is how Bill Clinton fought back after the 1994 election: tacking to the center, retrieving ground for his party in the 1998 election, and severely limiting Republican gains in the 2000 election. But for 9/11 one wonders how poorly the GOP might have fared in the 2002 and 2004 elections.

I think Noemie's article holds up very well, and will be vindicated further if, as I expect, Republicans control both houses of Congress the next two years. But there's another explanation: maybe Obama really doesn't like his own party, or care very much about it.

But maybe we needn't go any further than the obvious explanation, which is not exclusive of these two: his epic narcissism. Remember that Obama has been told relentlessly how great he is, how he is "clean and articulate" ([Joe Biden](#)), who can speak "with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one" ([Harry Reid](#)), how he is "the magic negro" ([Los Angeles Times](#)). (Hey, I'm just borrowing the liberal "get-out-jail-free" race card.) Most importantly, Obama never really lost a big stakes election (his one run for Congress being an unserious venture). The best thing that ever happened to Bill Clinton was losing his first race for re-election in 1980; Reagan was a better candidate (and president) for having lost in 1976, and for having lost some high profile political battles in California (Proposition 1).

Instead, what we get from Obama are gifts like this:

"I think that I'm a better speechwriter than my speechwriters. I know more about policies on any particular issue than my policy directors. And I'll tell you right now that I'm gonna think I'm a better political director than my political director."

Reagan's approval ratings were somewhere in 60s before the 1986 mid-terms, along with an economy that was roaring along. The GOP still lost the Senate badly, losing just about every close Senate race that year. My prediction is we will see much the same this year.

The Corner

[Leading Democrat: Obama Is Disconnected from His Own Government](#)

by John Fund

Democrats are still reeling from President Obama's statement last week that "I'm not on the ballot this fall . . . but make no mistake, these policies are on the ballot — every single one of them."

Republican attack ads are already making hay with that invitation to send Obama a message in next month's election.

A growing number of Democrats are already speaking as if the Obama administration is a spent force, with no agenda it can reasonably implement in its last two years. "It is safe to say that Obama has been a huge disappointment," admitted Democratic columnist Kirsten Powers on the Hugh Hewitt radio show last week. "I really don't think there's any comparison between him and Bill Clinton. I don't think we're even talking about the same universe."

Then there's Elaine Kamarck, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a former aide to Al Gore when he created the National Performance Review of government agencies during the Clinton years. On Saturday, she [explained](#) to the Los Angeles Times her own theory for Obama's failures:

This administration has been disconnected from the government it's supposed to be running. . . . They keep getting surprised by stuff. And the surprise is almost worse than anything else. It conveys the sense that the White House doesn't know what its own government is doing. You can't prevent all these problems from happening, but you can certainly get ahead of the curve on some of them. . . .

Today, presidents travel nonstop and talk nonstop. That wasn't always true. This addiction to PR has been terrible for the presidency. Every hour he's on the campaign trail is an hour he could be talking with members of Congress. My advice to any president would be: Stop talking, start working. . . .

When a president suffers an implementation meltdown, those are far worse than legislative losses. Legislative losses, there's always another party to blame. Implementation problems, voters are going to blame the president — because they think part of his job is running the government. And Americans expect competence.

And that's one thing a growing number of Americans are convinced they're not getting from this administration — which is why his party is so nervous about next month's elections.

National Review

[Making Harding Look Good](#)

The Obama administration has tarnished nearly every major federal agency.

by Victor Davis Hanson

Many have described the Obama departure from the 70-year-old bipartisan postwar foreign policy of the United States as reminiscent of Jimmy Carter's failed 1977–81 tenure. There is certainly the same messianic sense of self, the same naïveté, and the same boasts of changing the nature of America, as each of these presidents was defining himself as against supposedly unpopular predecessors. But the proper Obama comparison is not Carter, but rather Warren G. Harding. By that I mean not that Obama's scandals have matched Harding's, but rather that by any fair standard they have now far exceeded them and done far more lasting damage — and without Obama's offering achievements commensurate with those that occasionally characterized Harding's brief, failed presidency.

The lasting legacy of Obama will be that he has largely discredited the idea of big government, of which he was so passionate an advocate. Almost every major agency of the federal government, many of them with a hallowed tradition of bipartisan competence, have now been rendered either dysfunctional or politicized — or both — largely because of politically driven appointments of unqualified people, or ideological agendas that were incompatible with the agency's mission.

The list of scandals is quite staggering. In aggregate, it makes Harding's Teapot Dome mess seem minor in comparison.

There is now no Border Patrol, at least as Americans have understood the agency whose job was enforcing federal immigration statutes. It died as an enforcement bureau sometime in 2013, not long after the reelection of Barack Obama, in a way that it could not have before the election. Instead, in Orwellian fashion, at a time of plague and terrorism abroad, it is now the Border-Crossing Enabling Service, whose chief task is facilitating the illegal entry of thousands from Latin America and Mexico, largely to further the political agenda of the Obama administration, contrary to the law, the will of Congress, and the wishes of the majority of the American people. Mention the phrase "immigration law" or "Border Patrol," and Americans sigh that neither any longer exists. Yet such a perversion of the mission of a federal agency for political purposes has become thematic of this administration. Perhaps the end of border enforcement is emblemized best by Obama's own uncle and late aunt, who in open defiance broke federal immigration law and did so with impunity, resided illegally in the United States, broke various state laws, and ended up either on public assistance or mired in the U.S. judicial system.

No one quite knows how to deal with the deadly threat of the Ebola virus. We can assume, however, that the Obama administration's policy will be predicated foremost on some sort of predetermined ideological concern. Unlike many European countries, the United States still allows foreign nationals from countries with pandemics of Ebola to enter the country freely. What the administration has so far told us about Ebola — that a case here was unlikely, and then, after it happened, that probably only a handful of people had been exposed — was almost immediately proven false.

If this seems a harsh judgment, consider the policy of restricting flights to and from foreign countries because of national-security concerns. During the controversial Gaza War, the FAA ordered U.S. airlines to suspend flights to Ben Gurion Airport — the best protected airport in the world — supposedly because of a rocket that exploded in the general proximity of the facility. Hamas claimed the step as a psychological victory and proof of the efficacy of its strategy of targeting Israeli civilian centers, and as further evidence of growing U.S. anger at Israeli war conduct. In contrast, the FAA has not shut down flights to and from African countries in which Ebola has reached pandemic status. Which threat — a deadly virus or a stray rocket — posed the greatest danger to the American public? Perhaps if infected Liberian nationals send their child to Sidwell Friends, radical changes in FAA policy will follow; or, in contrast, if Israel had been gripped by an Ebola pandemic, then Americans might have been allowed to fly in and out of Ben Gurion.

The combination of Lois Lerner's taking the Fifth Amendment and Barack Obama's characterizing the IRS's partisan targeting of conservatives as involving not a "smidgen" of corruption sum up the current status of the tax agency. So far no one has been held accountable for the corruption. Most Americans now assume that any high-profile political activity or contribution deemed inimical to the Obama administration will earn an audit or at least additional IRS scrutiny — a Machiavellian gambit that has discouraged contributions to conservative candidates. The agency that relies on voluntary tax compliance now holds taxpayers to standards of transparency, record-keeping, and honesty that it cannot itself meet. That too will be a lasting legacy of the Obama administration.

Eric Holder has politicized the Justice Department in a way not seen since the scandals of Nixon appointee John Mitchell. Holder's prior ethical lapses – notably, as deputy attorney general in the Clinton administration, the disreputable eleventh-hour pardon for fugitive (and Democratic contributor) Marc Rich — were well known. But in less than six years, he has managed to trump them. Holder was held in contempt by Congress for withholding subpoenaed documents about the Fast and Furious scandal, and he editorialized on pending criminal cases, such as the Trayvon Martin and the Ferguson cases. He arbitrarily chose not to enforce existing laws, whether elements of Obamacare or immigration statutes. He was forced to pay back the government for using a Gulfstream to junket to the Belmont Stakes with family and friends. He sought to try terrorists in civilian courts, and he demonized the idea of Guantanamo, which earlier, when it was politically expedient, he had praised. He caricatured his critics and made race essential rather than incidental to his tenure (e.g., “my people,” “nation of cowards,” and the false charges of racism against critics of the administration) in a way that would have gotten anyone else fired. Had any other attorney general monitored reporters' communications as Holder did those of AP reporters, and, even more so, James Rosen, he would also have been summarily dismissed. Even the media will not be able to prevent Holder's legacy from being seen as one of the Justice Department's no longer enforcing the law without prejudice, but instead choosing haphazard compliance in order to advance partisan ideas of social justice.

The Secret Service used to be unimpeachable. Not now. Agents have been caught patronizing prostitutes while on assignment in Latin America. They have allowed an armed former felon to enter an elevator with the president. They had no clue that gunshots may well have hit the White House. They allowed an unhinged and armed intruder to not just enter the White House grounds, but make his way into the White House itself — and the agency then tried to cover up its laxity. Its reputation is now in shreds. One day a confused White House expresses full confidence in the Secret Service's incompetent director, and the next gladly accepts her resignation.

Then there is the unfortunate alphabet soup of scandals. The GSA junketeering is now the stuff of caricature, but the sad thing about the agency's fraud was the utter contempt for the taxpayers shown by its vacationing grandees, who are supposedly watchdogs of the public infrastructure. Former VA director Eric Shinseki, appointed largely for his banner opposition to the Iraq war, proved inept. The VA has shown itself to be not just incompetent but lethally so: It has allowed dozens of veterans to die for lack of adequate treatment. Like other Obama administration agencies such as the IRS and the Secret Service, the VA sought to cover up its near-criminal negligence. No one knows quite what the NSA is doing or should be doing, but most agree that it should not be tapping the private cell phones of allied foreign leaders. Nor should the director of national intelligence, James Clapper, lie before Congress that the government does not track the communications of ordinary Americans.

Obama recently scapegoated the intelligence agencies for his own laxity in addressing the Islamic State in its early ascendance. True, his appointees may well be incompetent, but if so, it is in a way that reflects the president's own politically driven narratives. Thus Clapper assured us that Qaddafi would not fall and that the Muslim Brotherhood was largely secular. John Brennan, head of the CIA, once offered a rant about the innocuous nature of jihad that was delusional, as was his characterization of the radical Islamic agenda of forming a worldwide caliphate “absurd.” Would that Brennan had been as up on the circumstances of the arrest of would-be underwear bomber Umar Abdulmutallab as he is on the nuances of jihad. Do we even remember now how the secretary of homeland security, Janet Napolitano, helped usher in the euphemisms that became the stuff of ridicule (from overseas contingency operations and man-caused disasters to workplace violence). Under her directorship, we were told that right-wingers and returning veterans were greater threats to our security than radical Islamists.

The State Department has been even more tarnished. No one was held to account for serial untruths about the Benghazi killings, even though no one now defends the yarn of a video causing spontaneous riots or denies that the consulate was sorely unprotected. U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton assiduously peddled demonstrable falsehoods, massaging the truth to fit within reelection parameters. The president bragged about pulling troops out of Iraq when it was convenient for his reelection campaign, and then blamed others when that foolish move proved one of the most disastrous decisions in the last decade. Add in reset with Russia, leading from behind in Libya, constant contextualizing of American sins, and pseudo red lines, step-over lines, and deadlines, and you see that our foreign policy has become a serious embarrassment abroad. Indeed, Obama suffers from the paradox of the Cretan Liar (who assured everyone he spoke with that all Cretans lie): He seeks to bask in adulation abroad as U.S. head of state even as he tells his worshipers that the U.S. is culpable and by implication thus does not deserve such adulation.

Then there are the departed Cabinet secretaries. No one really knew exactly what Labor Secretary Hilda Solis was doing other than that she abruptly departed the administration and was quickly mired in all sorts of post-tenure financial scandals. Ditto EPA Director Lisa Jackson, who mysteriously drifted out of office once it was learned that she had created a false e-mail identity to pound her own drum. No one has ever explained why NASA Administrator Charles Bolden believed that the primary mission of the space agency should be Muslim outreach, and everyone still is puzzled about why the nation that reached the moon first is now dependent on Vladimir Putin for sending its astronauts into space. Kathleen Sebelius left the Department of Health and Human Services under a cloud of suspicions, after serially misleading the public about Obamacare. Her chief defense is that she was merely parroting the untruths of the President of the United States (you can keep your health plan and your doctors, and premiums and deductibles will go down, along with the deficit). Does anyone remember Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, now infamous for his quirky ideas about wanting gasoline prices to rise to European levels (e.g., \$9 a gallon), and for hoping to shut down coal-fired electricity generation — along with approving crony-capitalist loans to the green lobbyists who gave us a subsidized and bankrupt Solyndra.

Obama has set the standard that the purpose of government is to facilitate his version of social change, regardless of protocols, laws, or traditions. And the result is a scandal-ridden administration that exceeds that of Warren G. Harding — one that has now convinced the public that their government agencies are not lawful, competent, or to be trusted.

NRO contributor Victor Davis Hanson is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the author, most recently, of [The Savior Generals](#).

WSJ

[Book Review: 'The Return of George Washington, 1783-1789,' by Edward J.](#)

[Larson](#)

George Washington's years of retirement shaped the republic as much as the victories he won on the battlefield.

by Richard Snow

One day toward the end of the Revolution, the expatriate American painter Benjamin West fell into a conversation about the war with George III (although one would think His Majesty would hardly have welcomed the topic). West said he believed that when the fighting was done, George

Washington would retire. The king was incredulous: "If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world."

When Washington did just that in 1783, another American artist, John Trumbull, wrote from London to say that the resignation "excites the astonishment and admiration of this part of the world. 'Tis a Conduct so novel, so inconceivable to People, who, far from giving up powers they possess, are willing to convulse the Empire to acquire more."

In a career eventful enough to include the attack on Trenton that saved his cause, the siege of Yorktown that put an end to the war he led, and his tenure as the first president of the United States, Washington's withdrawal to private life might seem a rather anticlimactic moment to choose for opening a book. But in his fine and engrossing "The Return of George Washington," Edward J. Larson makes the case that Washington never really did step down at all.

The Return of George Washington

By Edward J. Larson

Morrow, 366 pages, \$29.99

If never considered exactly wilderness years, the span between the end of the war and Washington's presidency is often seen as a hiatus in which the Virginia planter put his estate in order and then shed legitimacy on the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia solely by his taciturn presence. But Mr. Larson, a history professor at Pepperdine University, engagingly argues that the stretch between 1783 and 1789 was as important to Washington—and to America—as all that preceded and followed it.

It is not that Washington wasn't quite sincere in his wish to recede from public life and, as he wrote, "become a private citizen of America, on the banks of the Potowmac; where under my own Vine and my own fig tree—free from the bustle of a camp & intrigues of a Court, I shall view the busy world, 'in the calm lights of mild philosophy.' "

But once he got under his fig tree he was vexed with worries about his fledgling nation. At first these took the form simply of wanting his former troops to be paid, and not in the increasingly debased paper money that the new states were spewing out. He had fought for his country from New England to the Carolinas, and his travails had given him a truly national vision. He wrote to Congress, then trying to wield the feeble powers established by the Articles of Confederation, that "it is indispensable to the happiness of the individual States, that there should be lodged somewhere, a Supreme Power to regulate and govern the general concerns of the Confederated Republic."

Washington's worries were almost immediately exacerbated as he took stock of his holdings, which included frontier tracts in Pennsylvania and western Virginia. The further he got from Mount Vernon, the more worried he became. He found the inhabitants increasingly fractious and only sketchily loyal to their new nation. "The Western settlers . . . stand as it were upon a pivot; the touch of a feather, would turn them any way." Into the arms of Spain, for instance, which controlled the mouth of the Mississippi and the western lands beyond it. "The ties of consanguinity which are weakening every day will soon be no bond," Washington warned.

Washington believed that only a common interest supported by a vigorous central government and nourished by commercial ties could prevent the fragmentation of his bafflingly large country. The best way to work this, he said, was through building canals, which would benefit both private investors and the nation as a whole. "That was how he had seen the American Revolution," writes

Mr. Larson, “and that would be how he would see the Constitution: viable and worthwhile because they served common and individual interests.”

He found his unifying vision everywhere threatened. The failure of state-issued money was leading to open insurrection by citizens burdened with the worthless paper; they attacked courthouses throughout the country. To his old lieutenant Henry Knox he wrote: “Good God! there are combustibles in every state, which a spark may set fire to!”

In 1786, he wrote John Jay, then secretary of foreign affairs: “What a triumph for the advocates of despotism to find that we are incapable of governing ourselves, and that systems founded on the basis of equal liberty are merely ideal & fallacious! Would to God that wise measures may be taken in time to avert the consequences we have but too much reason to apprehend.”

Mr. Larson’s splendid account illumines those wise measures and how they were taken—or rather, how George Washington took them. When Congress called the Constitutional Convention in 1787, it needed Washington to give stature to the proceedings. He shrank from seeming to promote himself, but he also knew that there was only one figure who stood tall enough to command the allegiance of the whole nation. As the sour, funny, hectoring John Adams grouched, all anybody was likely to remember about the Revolution was “that Dr. Franklin’s electric rod smote the earth and out sprang George Washington. That Franklin electrified him . . . and thence forward those two conducted all the Policy, Negotiations, Legislations and War.” Franklin, however, was in his 80s. It is startling to remember that when Washington said farewell to the Continental Army he had been only 51 years old, with plenty of vigor left in his big frame.

Washington was coy about going to the Convention until he was reasonably confident that the deliberations would bring about some valid result. After all, he had his dignity to consider. But he also knew very well that he would be more than a dignified presence. He was determined not to be seen as backing any of the factions that were already beginning to emerge, but he led one nonetheless: He was a federalist who wanted a strong national government and was opposed to the anti-federalists, who worried that such an institution would douse the liberties won over eight mortal years.

Washington proved a subtle (had it been in a lesser cause, he might be called “sly”) proponent of his beliefs, and Mr. Larson brings an invigorating immediacy to the wranglings that went on among the delegates charged with inventing a wholly new form of government—one in which the rulers were obedient to the ruled rather than the other way around—with no previous experience to draw upon save old democracies dimly glimpsed through the mists of antiquity and the tepid example of Swiss cantons.

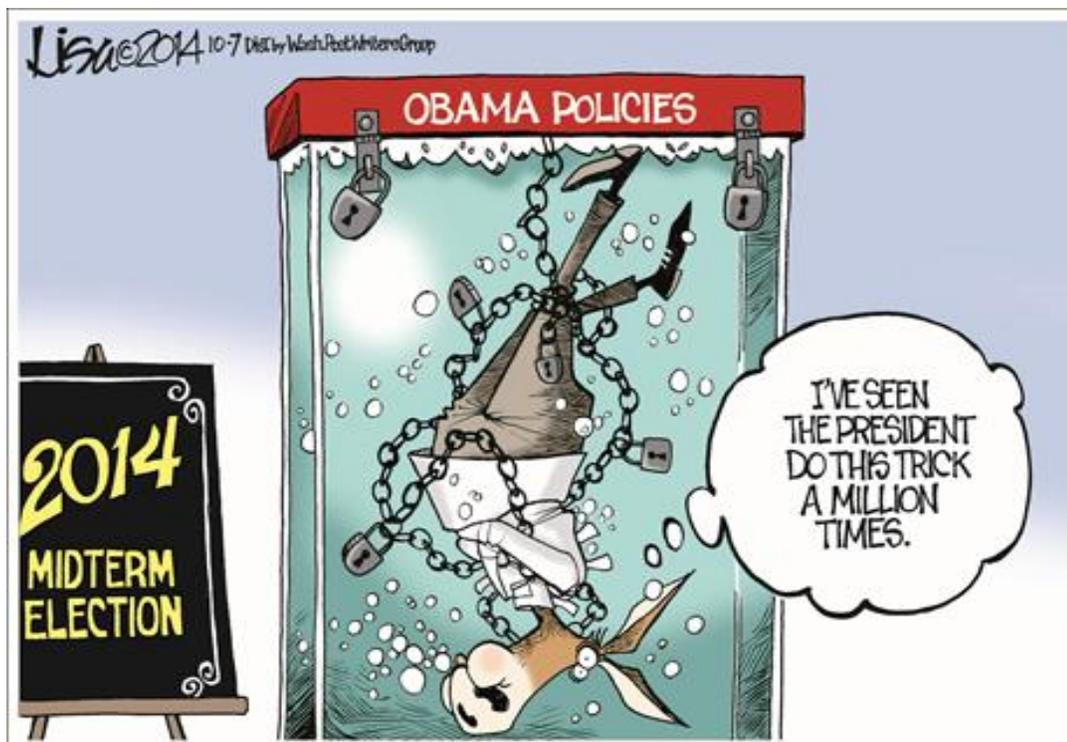
Should there even be a president? Edmund Randolph, Washington’s fellow Virginian, vividly said that giving such power to an individual would be “the fetus of monarchy.” Well then, what about three presidents? Anyone who has gone on a vacation with two other people knows how well that would have worked. Quietly, discreetly, Washington, as Mr. Larson puts it, “hijacked” the convention.

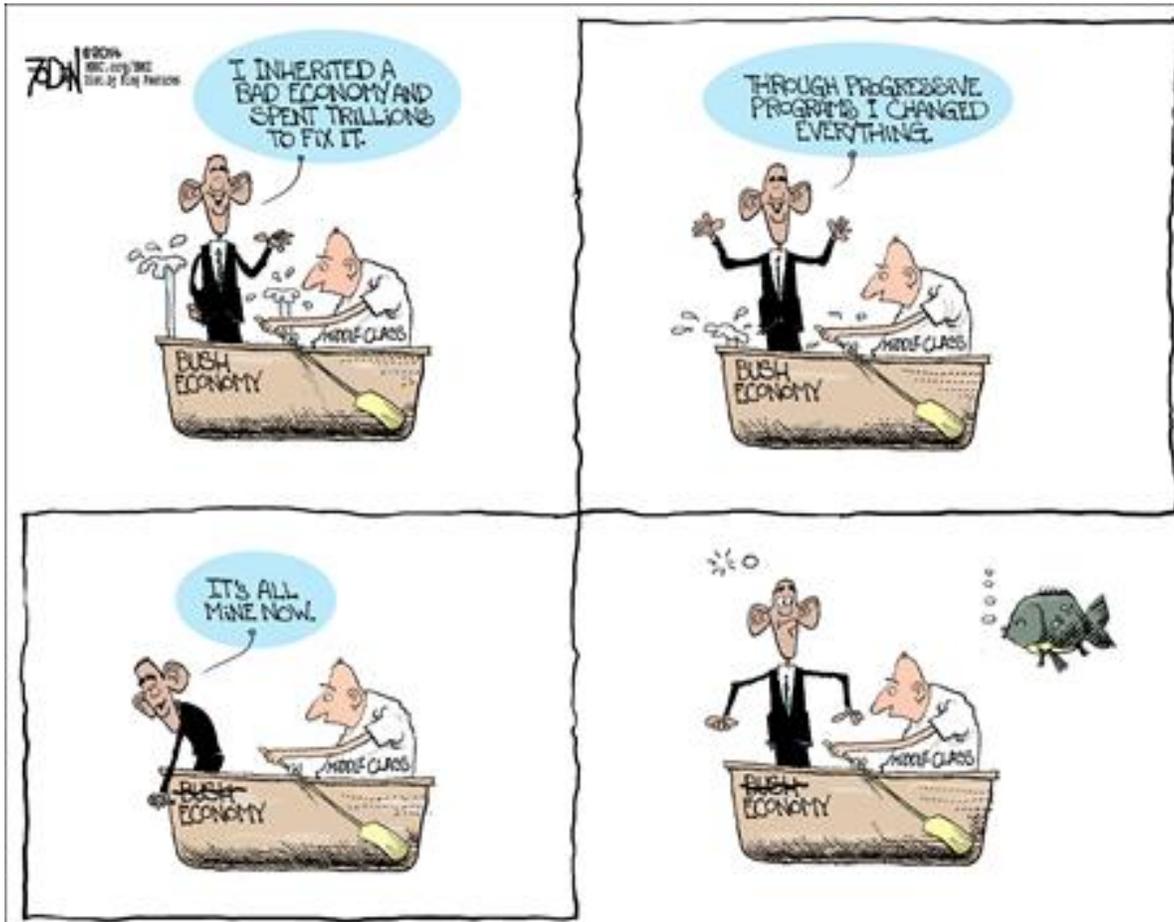
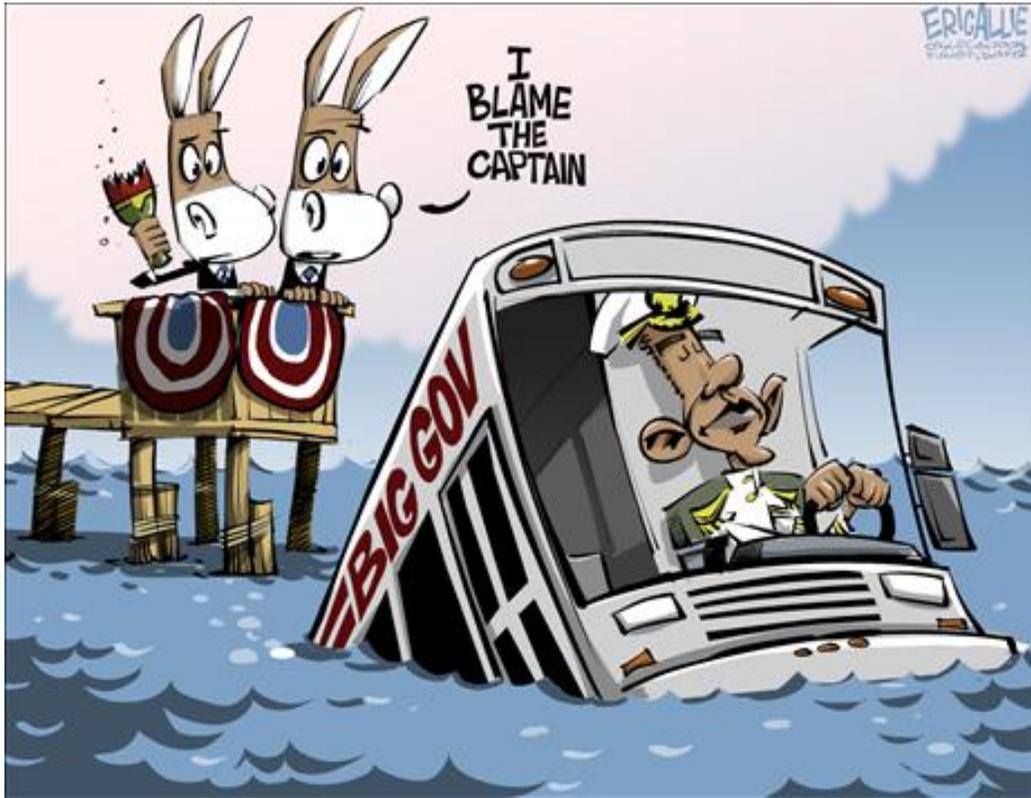
Between the sessions, in taverns and in the houses of the rich, he spoke all the time, making his views known although insisting that they be concealed from the press. In the end, the appealingly named Committee on Style polished up the draft Constitution and sent it out to the states for ratification. “Washington’s signature on the transmittal letter and accompanying resolutions,” writes Mr. Larson, “ensured they would command attention. Indeed, they made it look as if the Constitution came from him.”

It largely had. Small states would enjoy equal representation with large ones in a senate; commercial states would have access to national markets; there would be no more state-issued paper money; and, perhaps most of all, there would be a strong president. Although Washington had many doubts about the particulars that the delegates had finally agreed upon, the newborn polity took the shape he envisioned. "Be assured," wrote the delegate James Monroe, "his influence carried the government."

Many today are unsatisfied with the intricate, loose-jointed machine whose building Washington oversaw during the stifling Philadelphia summer of 1787, but it is hard to finish reading this valuable, lively account without feeling that we were damned lucky to get it.

Mr. Snow is the former editor in chief of American Heritage magazine and the author of "I Invented the Modern Age: The Rise of Henry Ford."





PANETTA WARNED OBAMA ABOUT PULLING TROOPS FROM IRAQ...



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