

**Mark L. Melcher** Publisher  
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

**Stephen R. Soukup** Editor  
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

## THEY SAID IT

Next year we are to bring all the soldiers home  
For lack of money, and it is all right.  
Places they guarded, or kept orderly,  
We want the money for ourselves at home  
Instead of working. And this is all right.

It's hard to say who wanted it to happen,  
But now it's been decided nobody minds.  
The places are a long way off, not here,  
Which is all right, and from what we hear  
The soldiers there only made trouble happen.  
Next year we shall be easier in our minds.

Next year we shall be living in a country  
That brought its soldiers home for lack of money.  
The statues will be standing in the same  
Tree-muffled squares, and look nearly the same.  
Our children will not know it's a different country.  
All we can hope to leave them now is money.

Philip Larkin, "Homage to a Government," 1969.

## A RELATIVISTIC WORLD.

One of the many important questions being raised in Washington today is what the newly anointed Nobel Peace Prize winner and his intrepid team of peacemakers are going to do in Afghanistan. Our advice to those who care about such things is to forget about it, to look beyond this parochial issue and begin to consider what is going to happen when America loses the war over there. Because it will. No matter what "the chosen one" chooses to do, he's eventually going to throw in the towel. Count on it.

You see, Barack has three choices. He can do what he's doing now, which isn't working and won't work. He can take some half measures as Joe "Clausewitz" Biden would have him do, which won't work either. Or he can go "all in," to borrow a phrase from the Texas hold em crowd, and add 40,000 new troops as General McChrystal wishes. This latter plan might work militarily. But politically, it doesn't stand a chance.

A tough-minded, eloquently patriotic president with a good track record on foreign affairs and the trust of a substantial portion of the American public on both sides of the aisle *might* be able to convince the American public to hang in there for a long and costly war to teach the gun-toting, poppy-growing tribal chieftains in Afghanistan about the glories of the ballot box. But Barack is not the man for this job. For one thing, his

### In this Issue

A Relativistic World.

Look Back in Anger.

Subscriptions are available by contacting:

The Political Forum LLC 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842  
Phone 540.477.9762 Fax 540.477.3359 melcher@thepoliticalforum.com www.thepoliticalforum.com

heart isn't in it. Hell, he and more than half of his party have already gone wobbly on McChrystal and the good general hasn't even had time to get his boots muddy yet.

The bottom line on Afghanistan is that America's inevitable retreat from that benighted land will mark the formal opening of the long awaited new world order, the most distinguishing characteristic of which will be the slow relinquishing by America of its 60-plus years role as the world's nanny.

Some observers argue that the deliberate abandonment of American "exceptionalism" burst forth from Barack's forehead fully armed and ready for combat, like Athena did from Zeus. Charles Krauthammer put it this way in the October 19 issue of *The Weekly Standard* in an article entitled "Decline Is A Choice." To wit:

Facing the choice of whether to maintain our dominance or to gradually, deliberately, willingly, and indeed relievedly give it up, we are currently on a course towards the latter. The current liberal ascendancy in the United States--controlling the executive and both houses of Congress, dominating the media and elite culture--has set us on a course for decline. And this is true for both foreign and domestic policies. Indeed, they work synergistically to ensure that outcome.

The current foreign policy of the United States is an exercise in contraction. It begins with the demolition of the moral foundation of American dominance. In Strasbourg, President Obama was asked about American exceptionalism. His answer? "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." Interesting response. Because if everyone is exceptional, no one is.

Indeed, as he made his hajj from Strasbourg to Prague to Ankara to Istanbul to Cairo and finally to the U.N. General Assembly,

Obama drew the picture of an America quite exceptional--exceptional in moral culpability and heavy-handedness, exceptional in guilt for its treatment of other nations and peoples. With varying degrees of directness or obliqueness, Obama indicted his own country for arrogance, for dismissiveness and derisiveness (toward Europe), for maltreatment of natives, for torture, for Hiroshima, for Guantánamo, for unilateralism, and for insufficient respect for the Muslim world.

Quite an indictment, the fundamental consequence of which is to effectively undermine any moral claim that America might have to world leadership, as well as the moral confidence that any nation needs to have in order to justify to itself and to others its position of leadership. According to the new dispensation, having forfeited the mandate of heaven--if it ever had one--a newly humbled America now seeks a more modest place among the nations, not above them.

This is, as one would expect from the highly talented Charles Krauthammer, a well formulated argument. But a case can also be made that Barack didn't originate the idea of letting the world stew in its own juices for a while, but just happened to show up at the right time and the right place to get out in front of a parade that was already underway; that years before most of the American people had ever heard of Barack Obama, they had already grown exceedingly tired of being the police department for the entire world, plus its welfare agency, its emergency relief response team, its bank, its self-appointed confessor, its moral scold, and its sympathetic ear, while at the same being the whipping boy for every grievance, large or small, of every little pissant nation on the face of the globe.

Indeed, one could argue that the logical result of George and Condi's multi-trillion-dollar, decades long and extremely bloody adventure in democracy building in Iraq was bound to be a growing skepticism among

average Americans about the benefits to them of pouring their hard earned and hard borrowed money into numerous bottomless pits in foreign lands based on the pipedreams of some half-wit politician who fancies him or herself the current day's counterpart to Caesar Augustus.

It is, of course, painful for Americans to realize that their generosity is not appreciated globally. And it's even more painful for them to hear that their own president not only doesn't appreciate the sacrifices of blood and treasure their country has made over the years on behalf of other nations and other peoples, but actually believes that America has done more harm than good in the world.

So it should come as no surprise to anyone who knows anything about Americans that many of them decided a long time ago that, unlike Krauthammer, they don't give a tinker's damn what the rest of the world thinks about America, that indeed, those folks from foreign nations who don't like America and those who agree with America's president that America doesn't have the "moral confidence" to assume a leadership role in the world can go suck eggs.

After all, if there are no apparent, tangible benefits to the average American of America's "exceptionalism," either in the form of greater security or even a smidgeon of gratitude now and then, then the average American is unlikely to join Krauthammer in lamenting the sacrifice of the nation's "leadership" role in the world. And this is especially true at this period in American history, when the nation's debt is at historic highs and the largest generation in the nation's history is about to discover that the Social Security and Medicare "trust funds" that were going to take care of them in their retirement are as empty as Joe Biden's head.

So, as we said earlier, it's time to begin thinking about what will happen when Obama gives up the ghost in Afghanistan, moves the nation's defensive perimeters closer to home, assumes the relativistic position that no nation or no form of government is morally better or worse than any other, and forswears the importance

of the alliances and friendships the United States has formed over the ages with nations that share America's traditional values and love for democracy and freedom.

Obviously, this subject cannot be adequately covered in a short essay such as this. But we can offer a few observations that might get the imagination working and set the stage for future articles on the subject.

For starters, it would seem that any nation or group of nations that has relied in the past on the United States to rescue it from aggression had better begin to think about either defending itself or forming alliances with other friends or its potential enemies. This includes not only scores of small countries in the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the rest of the world, but numerous larger and globally more important ones, including but not limited to Israel, Taiwan, Japan. And yes, Europe, whose armies couldn't fight their way out of a wet paper sack.

Israel obviously faces the most immediate threat from the Obama's administration's indifference to friendships based on past ties and shared values. Indeed, Israel could be forgiven for believing that Barack's enthusiasm for sacrificing old friends on the altar of moral relativism might be directly related to his obvious ambivalence to the presence of the Jewish state in the heart of the Muslim world.

Our guess is, and has been ever since it became obvious that George W. Bush wasn't going to prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon, that Israel will eventually have to take matters into its own hands by attacking Iran militarily. You see, if the United States accepts a nuclear Iran, which seems increasingly likely, Israel will have no friends left in the entire world – that's zero, nada, zip, zilch – that are capable of or willing to come to its assistance in the case of a nuclear attack by Iran. Moreover, it does not have the option of surrendering, even if it wished to do so, which it wouldn't.

It is possible that Obama is hoping that Israel will solve the Iranian problem for him. And if he doesn't approve the attack in advance, he could then publicly

condemn Israel for acting so hastily and sell it out by withdrawing all support – moral, military, economic and otherwise – unless it makes extensive and suicidal concessions to its neighbors. Of course, we don't know if this possibility has ever crossed Barack's mind, but as the Shadow used to ask in the radio days, "who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?"

Theoretically, the United States could fare quite well in a morally relativistic world in which might makes right. It is, after all, militarily the most powerful nation the world has ever known, which means that it could bomb any nation that attacks or even threatens it back into the Stone Age. By the same token, it should be able to adequately protect its economic assets and its citizens any place on the globe that it chooses to do business.

But no one can possibly know what bloody pitfalls lurk in the prospects of a globalized, high tech world in which no moral authority is either claimed or recognized by any nation and in which no nation is able or willing to provide a modicum of secular order by protecting the weak from the strong and the good from the evil. In his great classic history of the world from the 1920s to the 1990s, *Modern Times*, Paul Johnson notes that the last time that moral relativism swept the globe, it created a spawning ground for two of the greatest mass killers in history, Stalin and Hitler. We guess that we will eventually see what happens this time.

## **LOOK BACK IN ANGER.**

Barack Obama wants a health care bill passed. And he wants it passed now.

Nancy Pelosi wants a health care bill passed. And she wants it passed now.

Harry Reid wants a health care bill passed. And he wants it passed now.

Why the hurry?

For much of the last several months, the collective commentariat, ourselves included, has pondered this question over and over again. The first deadline

was before the August recess. When that date passed without a bill, the deadline became the end of September. Now it's the end of the year. The deadline keeps slipping, but the appearance of urgency never fades.

At first, we suspected that the President and his fellow Democrats wanted the bill passed quickly because they wanted to avoid precisely the type of backlash that eventually developed. They wanted the thing done and over with before people found out what was in it and what effects it would have. They wanted to "move on" before Main Street Americans decided that they didn't like the idea of government-rationed health care; that they didn't like the idea of Medicare cuts; that they didn't want government bureaucrats making decisions about their health; that they didn't want government "competition" to demolish the current private insurance system; in short, that they didn't favor "reform." The Democrats wanted to pass their bill before a genuine populist movement developed and made it a priority to attend town hall meetings, to question legislators, and to show their displeasure with the reform initiatives.

They didn't get what they wanted. Instead, they came under intense fire from an "angry mob." Yet the haste continues.

This time, we suspect that the Democrats want the bill passed and out of the way because they have come to see it as burden, as the proverbial anchor around their collective necks. The protests are giving them gas. And the protestors are making them uncomfortable.

Obama, Pelosi, and Reid may be many things, but they are not complete idiots (STOP LAUGHING!). They know that the health care debate has driven Obama's polls steadily downward, faster than those of any other modern first-year president. They may have driven Congressional Democrats' polls down as well, though it might be kind of hard to tell. After all, the statistical significance between .005% approval and .0025% is kind of hard to measure. In any case, Republicans are raising money, closing the gap in the generic ballot question, recruiting excellent candidates, and threatening to retake one or both houses of Congress

next year – all without actually doing anything particularly noteworthy. This is sheer self-destruction on the part of the Democrats. And it has been tied directly to the health care reform debacle.

So now Barack, Nancy, Harry, and the rest think that they can staunch the bleeding by finishing this job and getting on with the rest of their lives. If they can just get to the point where they don't have to talk about this stuff anymore – and certainly not everyday – then things can get back to normal and they can go on about the business of being the happy majority party and of transforming the country into their image.

Or so they seem to think.

But they're wrong, you know. Dead wrong. If they think that this mess, this anger, this political upheaval will just go away once they pass a bill, they're in for a shock. Because it won't. Not by a long shot. In fact, we'd argue that when they finally pass a bill, that's when their heartaches begin, to borrow a phrase from an old Elvis song.

For starters, fearing a domestic and, indeed, a global backlash against his prodigious spending, President Obama has declared that he will not sign a bill that comes in at more than \$900 billion over the course of ten years. That's all well and good, we guess. But no one who has any sense is likely to care that he kept the tab "down" to a mere \$900 billion. In fact, in so doing, he has accomplished little, except to ensure that his plan will offer a great deal of pain for precious little gain, particularly in the opening years.

The current legislative focus is on the so-called "Baucus Bill" constructed by Senate Finance Committee chairman Max Baucus, which appears to be the plan that Senate Democrats as a whole will support. The plan begins inauspiciously by cutting benefits to Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans and by hiking all sorts of taxes. Of course, Baucus and his Democratic colleagues insist that any cut in Medicare and Medicare Advantage payments will NOT reduce benefits, but that is deceitful at best, which even the Congressional Budget Office confirms.

Moreover, the excise taxes on "premium" employer sponsored health plans and on such things as medical devices will top more than \$500 billion, a staggering number. The Senate Democrats, naturally, can and do refer to these tax hikes as "fees" and "fines," but the American people are not quite as stupid as they would presume. Anything that increases what they have to pay to the government is a tax hike, no matter what the men and women in Washington choose to call it.

In return for all of this short-term pain, the public will receive, in return, nothing, at least not for a while. Under the Baucus plan, benefits will not begin until 2013, three years after the taxes and cuts take effect and after the next presidential election. As the Associated Press recently noted:

Sixty years is how long Democrats say they've been pushing for legislation that provides health care access for all Americans. They'll have to wait another three if President Barack Obama gets a bill to sign this year.

Under the Democratic bills, federal tax credits to help make health insurance affordable for millions of low- and middle-income households won't start flowing until 2013 — after the next presidential election. But Medicare cuts and a sizable chunk of the tax increases to pay for the overhaul kick in immediately.

This eat-your-vegetables-first approach is causing heartburn for some Democrats.

More heartburn is likely to come in the form of 25 million uninsured Americans. We've been hearing for years that the principle incentive motivating health care reformers is the desire to end this country's divide between the "haves" and the "have nots" -- between those who have health insurance and those who do not. How, we have been asked unremittingly, can a

nation so rich and so powerful continue to leave so many of its citizens and residents uninsured? Under the Baucus bill, those questions will continue.

Through subsidies and by threat of fine and/or jail time, the Baucus bill will decrease the number of Americans without health insurance. But it won't eliminate them, not by a long shot. By 2019, some 25 million Americans will remain uninsured, which is to say that the oft-stated goal of universal coverage will be nowhere near met, which is to say that the principal excuse for "reform" will remain and will continue to motivate the reformers.

Democratic leaders point to the Baucus plan, which contains no public option, and offer assurances that such a plan will never, ever, ever lead to a single-payer system, the likes of which Americans have repeatedly rejected. That's great, we guess. But it nonetheless leaves the principal problem unsolved and invites future tinkering, the result of which may well bring single payer closer to reality.

As if that's not enough, the "cost savings" that allows the Baucus bill to come in at under \$900 billion includes a 25% cut in Medicare reimbursement rates to physicians to take effect in 2011. Anyone who has paid any attention to Washington over the last 40 years can tell you pretty definitively that these cuts will not actually be made. And, to tell the truth, we can't imagine why Baucus or any other Democrat would hope that they are. Such cuts would be a disaster for Medicare and its Baby Boomer subscribers (or soon-to-be subscribers).

Physicians are already being screwed over by Medicare, which covers far less than said physicians' actual costs, which is why doctors and hospitals and other providers are dropping Medicare and thereby dropping Medicare patients. One of the Mayo Clinic's two units in Arizona announced just last week that it will not, for at least the next two years, be accepting Medicare as coverage for its patients. Dr. R. Scott Gorman, vice chairman of the executive-operations team at Mayo Clinic of Arizona, noted that "Medicare now only covers about half our costs." And the hospital

estimated that the deficit left them every year by Medicare reimbursement shortages was more than three-quarters of a billion dollars (\$765 million, to be exact.)

What all of this means, then, is that the Baucus plan will do one of two things. Either it will cut Medicare reimbursement rates dramatically, thereby destroying seniors' access to quality care – just as the Baby Boomers are getting to the age at which they will want to use that care. Or it will violate its own budgetary framework before anyone ever sees any benefits. If the reimbursement rate cut is subsequently impeded – as seems likely – the cost "savings" on which the Baucus bill's CBO number relies will be sacrificed, which is to say that the smoke and mirrors will fall away and the costs of the program will skyrocket – a full two years before anyone, anywhere begins to see any benefit.

Just call it a hunch, but we doubt that this will make many cost-conscious debt holders and constituents particularly happy.

So here's the roundup of bad news for Democrats. If they pass the Baucus Bill – or something like it – they face the voters in 2010: having spent nearly a trillion dollars; having begun to raise \$500 billion in taxes; having delivered nothing by way of benefits; having planned to leave some 25 million people uninsured; and having planned a system which will either break its promises on costs immediately or drive doctors out of the Medicare game, leaving Baby Boomers and other retirees with little or no access to high-quality care.

Of course, the *really* bad news for Democrats is that this bad news is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. It's just the stuff that they are willing to admit to. It doesn't even begin to address the stuff they won't admit to and about which they desperately want not to talk.

For example, there is the fact that the Baucus bill, as written, will almost certainly push employers to quit providing coverage, forcing perhaps as many as 100 million Americans out of their current plans and

into the newly “reformed” private/individual market. President Obama has declared repeatedly that those who like their coverage will be able to keep it. But that seems incredibly unlikely, to put it mildly. The government may not technically take away anyone’s insurance, but under the Baucus plan, it will create incentives for businesses to do so. And much to the Democrat’s chagrin, we doubt that anyone who loses his employer-sponsored plan is likely to see the distinction.

Additionally, the cost of individual plans is all but certain to increase. Health insurers had hoped to be able to keep costs down by expanding their coverage pool – i.e. taking in some 50 million new, previously uninsured customers – but, given the non-universal nature of the Baucus reform, that now seems highly unlikely. What insurers will be compelled to do therefore is to offer coverage to everyone, even those who will increase costs dramatically (those with pre-existing conditions), to offer only plans that meet the government’s coverage mandates, and to do so without the offset of the new customers they had been expecting. All of this will mean dramatically increased costs to individuals buying their own insurance – which, as noted above, may include a great many more Americans in short order.

And it will only get worse. Once it becomes clear that this “reform” will cost a great deal more than expected and once it becomes clear that the government will be far more heavily involved than it now admits, the real battle for “control” will begin. Anyone and everyone familiar with the broader health care agenda will willingly concede that a critical component of the struggle to control costs is the struggle to control those behaviors that exacerbate costs. In the 1990s, when the states sued the tobacco companies and, eventually, reached a settlement with them, the pretext for much of the litigation was a need to recoup health care expenses paid by the states (through Medicaid) and ostensibly caused by the tobacco companies’ products. This rationale has already been resurrected and will get serious consideration in the post-reform world, as efforts to stifle “unhealthy” behavior become fiscally necessary.

Already, President Obama has admitted that he would not be averse to taxing the consumption of soda and other sugary drinks as a way to control and to defer costs. Last month, he told *Men’s Health* magazine that he thinks that taxing sodas is “an idea that we should be exploring.” He continued:

Every study that’s been done about obesity shows that there is a high correlation between soda consumption and obesity. Obviously it’s not the only factor, but it is a major factor . . .

Look, people’s attitude is that they don’t necessarily want Big Brother telling them what to eat or drink, and I understand that. It is true, though, that if you wanted to make a big impact on people’s health in this country, reducing things like soda consumption would be helpful.

And the soda is just the beginning. Next comes cookies. Then candy. Cheese. Red meat. *Et cetera, et cetera, ad nauseam.*

As we have noted in these pages before, once competition for scarce government resources become reality, then various constituencies will fight to ensure that they get their due, principally by taking it away from others. Smokers, drinkers, the obese are obvious targets. But there will be others. And the competition will get ugly.

Some behaviors, of course, will, get a pass. Don’t expect for government to punish, control, or tax risky sexual behavior, for example, in the name of “better health.” That would be just silly. But then, so is punishing allegedly “risky” dietary behavior, in the name of better health.

Of course, that’s the dirty little secret no one in Washington wants you to know: this isn’t about health; it’s about control. This isn’t about promoting better living or longer lives. It clearly isn’t about ensuring that everyone is insured. It isn’t about controlling costs so as to benefit the consumers of

health care. And it isn't about incentivizing research, development, and implementation of life-saving treatments. It's about control, pure and simple.

We and countless others have noted that once government controls health care, the relationship between that government and its erstwhile free citizen changes dramatically. Everything can be controlled, monitored, and punished in the name of health. And nearly everything will.

The soda taxes are just a glimpse of the future. But they will be an immediate and unhappy glimpse. Unlike smoking, which by the 1990s had been definitively proven harmful and effectively marginalized, consumption of pleasurable foods and beverages is neither marginalized nor has it been proven harmful – regardless of how the President may manipulate the science and bend the truth. And people who drink soda – a group that includes nearly everyone in the country at some point in time – are going to be unhappy with the idea that they should pony up extra to Big Brother just for the pleasure of sipping a Coke. And they are going to be unhappy with those who imposed this onus upon them, namely Washington's Democrats.

We could go on and on, we suppose, with our list of potential problems that health care "reform" could cause for the reformers. And perhaps, in another piece, we will do so.

But what we have presented above is not a list of "potential" problems. It is a list of real, tangible, and inevitable problems. With the exception of the sugary-

beverage sin tax, all of the items detailed above are the nearly inevitable consequences of actual legislation – the legislation that both houses appear poised to pass and that the President seems eager to sign. And as for the sin tax garbage, that too seems nearly inevitable, though it may take some time to materialize.

What this means, then, is that the above expectations are, in many ways, the best case scenario for the Democrats. We didn't include speculation or expectations of inevitable unforeseen consequences. We included merely that which the Democrats themselves have conceded to, more or less.

We have written before that Barack Obama's willingness to tackle the "reform" issue was foolish at best. This is a problem that didn't need solving – at least not by the means he has chosen.

Now, he thinks that he can get this foolishness behind him by signing a bill and getting on with other matters. The press and his advisors have told him repeatedly that he "needs" a victory here, lest health care become the Waterloo of his presidency.

We're not convinced. Sure, losing on health care would be bad for him and for his party. But we suspect that winning will be even worse.

Copyright 2009. The Political Forum. 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842, tel. 540-477-9762, fax 540-477-3359. All rights reserved.

Information contained herein is based on data obtained from recognized services, issuer reports or communications, or other sources believed to be reliable. However, such information has not been verified by us, and we do not make any representations as to its accuracy or completeness, and we are not responsible for typographical errors. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute only current opinions which are subject to change without notice.