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THEY SAID IT

Democratic eras are periods of experiment, innovation, and adventure. There is always a multitude of men engaged in difficult or novel undertakings, which they follow by themselves without shackling themselves to their fellows. Such persons will admit, as a general principle that the public authority ought not to interfere in private concerns; but, by an exception to that rule, each of them craves its assistance in the particular concern on which he is engaged and seeks to draw upon the influence of the government for his own benefit, although he would restrict it on all other occasions. If a large number of men applies this particular exception to a great variety of different purposes, the sphere of the central power extends itself imperceptibly in all directions, although everyone wishes it to be circumscribed.

Thus a democratic government increases its power simply by the fact of its permanence. Time is on its side; every incident befriends it; the passions of individuals unconsciously promote it; and it may be asserted that the older a democratic community is, the more centralized will its government become.”

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1840.

STUPID IS AS STUPID DOES, REDUX.

Just over four months ago, the Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and her first lieutenant, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, took to the pages of *USA Today* to call those of you who oppose what they call “health care reform” nasty names. Specifically, they called you (and us) “un-American” for having the gall to oppose their plans to take over the American health care system.

If for no other reason, this tantrum by two of the Democratic Party’s most prominent and visible leaders was interesting for its word usage. “Un-American” is a rather loaded term in Washington and has been for nearly half a century. Generally speaking, the political left considers it “outrageous” to call a political actor “un-American,” insisting that to do so is odious at best and, more often than not, dangerous and “chilling.”

Of course, such rules tend to apply only when the left is the object of such insults and are notably less stringent when they are the slur’s source.

In any case, this time around, the Speaker and her henchman insisted that they didn’t mean to question anyone’s patriotism, but merely to note that their opponents were behaving badly and, more to the point, were violating fundamental principles of American political behavior, dating back to the nation’s founding.

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What's ironic in all of this, is that even this lame afterthought of an excuse has the dynamics of American politics precisely backward. The Republicans, conservatives, Tea Partiers, and health care protestors were not and are not the political participants violating the historic norms of American political discourse. Pelosi and Hoyer, their Senate counterparts Harry Reid and Dick Durbin, and the folks in the Obama administration are, in truth, the players using the faulty rule book. That they are on the wrong side of the issues is a matter of opinion. That they are on the wrong side of historical American political practice is a matter of fact. And it is all but certain that they will pay a price for this historical ignorance.

Whether they know it or not, the Democrats who currently control all the levers of the federal government have a problem, one that dwarfs just about any other political concern in Washington these days. It stems from the Democrats' arrogance and their own misperception of themselves.

In their own eyes, the Democrats fancy themselves the protectors of the downtrodden, the saviors of the powerless, the angels in America, trying desperately to keep the "fat cats" from laying waste to the middle and working classes. They are, they believe, knights in shining armor, who wage battle on behalf of those who cannot wage it themselves.

This is not, however, how most voters see them, at least not right now. It's tough, you see, for the gracious and generous Democrats to make the stupid and rowdy rabble understand. When a party's entire platform is built on the premise that the hoi polloi is simply incapable of governing itself, it's hard to hide the contempt. And, given that, it is only a matter of time before someone figures it out and then, in due course, grows unhappy about it.

Funnily enough, on the very same day that Mizz Pelosi and Mr. Hoyer published their essay calling you'ens un-American, we published our own piece calling you stupid – errr . . . well . . . something like that. To wit:

We hate to say this, but in case you hadn't noticed, some very important people in this country think that you are stupid. Yes, you. Right there in the white shirt. Stupid. In fact, nearly the entire political-media class believes this to be true, including the President of the United States and his allies in the U.S. Congress and in the press corps. There really is no way to be gentle about this. Like it or not, that's what they think of you.

They believe that this stupidity manifests itself first and foremost in irrationality. They believe that your concern that the government is trying to take over roughly 1/6th of the national economy is over-the-top, koo-koo-banana . . . The belief is widespread that you are crackpots and kooks, not rational, sentient beings. Indeed, your actions of late prompted the alleged comedian and leftist pop-hero Bill Maher to note just last week that this is an amazingly "stupid country." To drive home his point, Maher noted that "last election, a full one-third of voters forgot why they were in the booth, handed out their pants, and asked 'do you have these in a relaxed-fit?'" Wow. Comedy gold. As the noted political philosopher Homer Simpson might say, "it's funny 'cuz it's true."

Well, you're welcome. Thanks to us, you've finally noticed that this is what the ruling class (and the ruling party in particular) thinks of you. And it's not just you. Rasmussen Reports noted over the weekend that President Obama's approval ratings have fallen to new lows, with strongly disapproving respondents outnumbering strong approvers by 19-percentage points. And lest you think that Rasmussen – a conservative favorite – is alone or biased in his reporting, Gallup, Quinnipiac and others tell much the same story. Here, for example, is what Quinnipiac had to say:

At 46%, President Obama's latest job approval rating is the lowest ever in Quinnipiac polls, and he has an upside down rating for his handling of health care. The new survey (Dec. 1-6, 2313 RV, MoE +/- 2%), released this morning, finds 44% disapproving of the job Obama's doing. More than half (51%) of independents now disapprove of Obama's job performance, while 37% approve . . . On health care, 56% approve of giving people a government-run insurance option. However, voters disapprove by a 52%-38% margin of the overall reform package currently being debated in the Senate, and disapprove of Obama's handling of health care 56%-38%.

You will notice that the above poll – like all polls these days – measures Obama's approval with regard to health care and also approval of health care reform in general. This only makes sense, given the emphasis that Obama, Pelosi, and Reid have placed on health care. And it also demonstrates the danger for Democrats extant in the policy process.

In general, voters favor "health care reform," broadly defined. They even favor some sort of public option or government intrusion into the health insurance market. But they also hate the ideas being forwarded by the Democrats in Washington – even when the Democrats in Washington are promising voters just what they say they want in the abstract. What this suggests is that voters don't necessarily disapprove of government, just *this* government. They don't hate Washington, just its current residents. They don't mind being talked to by their president and other elected officials; but they hate being talked *down* to by them.

Do you want to know just how unhappy voters are with the current crop of "leaders" in Washington? OK. Remember President Bush? Remember the guy who left office after eight years of war, in the face of a massive recession, and with approval ratings that were downright Truman-esque, even Nixon-esque?

Bush may not have been reviled by voters, as his Democratic opponents insisted, but he had most definitely worn out his welcome. By January of this year (has it really been less than a year?) even Republicans – ourselves included – had tired of the guy and were ready to move on.

Absence, however, appears to make the heart grow fonder, at least when the alternative is the current pant-load in the White House. As of last week, voters preferred their lord and savior Barack Obama by only six points over George W. Bush, according to Public Policy Polling. Think about that for a second. Bush left with approval ratings stuck firmly in the 20s. And now he's almost as popular as The One – or, conversely The One is now almost as UNpopular as Bush. That's quite a year.

Add to that the fact that the President's current approval numbers are only marginally higher (1 point) than those of Sarah Palin, whom the media would have you believe is the dumbest human ever born, and you get a sense of the general unhappiness developing among the voters.

The troubling thing for Democrats is that they are, as far as we can tell, nowhere near the bottom yet. As we have noted countless times before, Democrats believe that passage of health care legislation will mark the end of their public approval problems on the issue, when, in truth, it will actually mark the beginning. A plan that increases taxes immediately but offers no benefits for several years is bound to be a loser, even if the public strongly supports it – which it does not in this case.

Moreover, health care is possibly the least of the Democrats' problems.

Last week, while President Obama was receiving the Peace Prize that only one in four Americans think he deserves and hobnobbing with the global warming alarmists in Copenhagen, his Environmental Protection Agency was sowing the seeds of his administration's ultimate destruction. Unhappy that the Senate, fearing reprisal from the electorate, has refused to endorse obscene and absurd new taxes on

energy (also known as Cap-and-Trade), Obama's EPA decided simply to bypass this uncooperative branch of government and take matters into its own hands. Last week, when the EPA issued its "endangerment finding" on carbon dioxide, it essentially took full control of the issue of CO2 emissions and thus of the matters of global warming and energy production. The element that humans create as the byproduct of respiration is now, according to EPA Director Lisa Jackson, hazardous to their health and fair game for government regulation.

The peerless Dr. Charles Krauthammer wrote last week that the White House/EPA's end run on the matter of carbon dioxide is proof of the political left's continued obsession with power and with rule by bureaucrats. "The cultural elites went straight from the memorial service for socialism to the altar of the environment," Krauthammer wrote. "The objective is the same: highly centralized power given to the best and the brightest, the new class of experts, managers and technocrats."

This, of course, is our rant against "the administrative state" in a nutshell. "You – you poor, stupid sap – are simply not smart enough to understand the world's problems, which is why we've decided to cut you out of the process. Just shut up and do what you're told. We and our army of experts have it all under control. Get used to it."

The only quibble we would have with Krauthammer is his implication that the political left is alone in this usurpation of power. It's not. Certainly the left's administrative power-grab is more offensive and more aggressive than grab undertaken by what passes for the political right these days. But it is, in the long run, no more dangerous. Over the past two decades, politicians of both parties have demonstrated an undeniable disdain for the will of the electorate and the performance of broad, public-opinion-based mechanisms, including, broadly, markets. The left is the most immediate and most antagonistic threat in this regard, but it is hardly the only one.

In any case, the Democrats currently control Congress and the White House and are thus currently in charge of everything. Which means they can be blamed for everything, which is precisely what voters appear inclined to do.

What the Democrats seem not to understand is that Americans have a long history of resisting condescension from their politicians. American voters will put up with just about anything – up to and including sexual relationships with 23-year-old interns in the Oval Office, if we recall correctly. But they will not tolerate a ruling class that takes them for granted and presumes that it knows best and must therefore impose its will on the nation.

A great many of our political betters presume incorrectly that the American Revolution was a tax revolt, citing the old axiom "no taxation without representation." Sure, the taxes were important. But more important was the second half of the adage, the "without representation" part. As freeborn Englishmen, the colonists believed themselves entitled to the rights of Englishman, including a say in their governance. Taxes they could tolerate. But taxes levied unfairly, onerously and without their consent they could not. As it turns out, when an unaccountable omnipotent force imposes its will on erstwhile free men, plundering their earnings and encumbering their future economic prospects, said free men tend to get a little agitated.

And for the record, this agitation applies equally whether that unaccountable omnipotent force is King George or Barack Obama and his EPA, and whether the plunder is levied on tea or on the burning of carbon-dioxide-producing fossil fuels.

Does this mean that we expect or even advocate "revolution" of any sort? Well, not really. At least not in the traditional sense of the word. What we do expect, though, is the modern democratic equivalent, which is electoral rebellion, up to and possibly including "regime change."

We have been hesitant up to this point to predict a Republican takeover of either house of Congress in next year's midterm elections. And we will remain so, today – for a couple of reasons, one selfish and one practical. First, we don't want to get into the whole business of making prediction right now, for fear of stepping all over our first-of-the-year forecast piece, due out in less than a month. Second, and more to the point, as long as the Democrats have only the Republicans to face in any election, there is a chance that they will emerge victorious, irrespective of their manifest incompetence and conceit. If anyone can snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, it's today's GOP.

All of that said, the behind-the-scenes trends all favor the Republicans at this point, and all portend a significant GOP victory. The Republicans are out-fund-raising the Democrats. They are out-recruiting them. They are better focused and have stayed on message more consistently. And, perhaps most conspicuously, the tell-tale “retirement surge” has begun among Democrats in marginal districts. Historically, one of the surest signs of turnover in the Congressional majority is the pre-election retirement of those members of the majority party who could well lose and who therefore see retirement as a less painful option than standing unsuccessfully for re-election. The Democrats were plagued by retirements in 1993 and 1994, as were the Republicans in 2005 and 2006. Members of Congress more than anyone, it seems, can read the proverbial handwriting on the wall. And this year, a number of Democrats have seen the writing and have decided to call in “retired.”

The biggest problem for the likes of Pelosi, Reid, and ultimately Obama is that this democratic rebellion is threatening and may reach its fulfillment not because the Democrats have failed to enact their agenda but because of the agenda itself – because of the simple fact that most Americans think that agenda is creepy. All the hopechangey blather may have sounded heartening and elevating last year, when it was little more than a feel-good abstraction. But now that it has taken the form of concrete policy proposals and threatens to become the law of the land, it is markedly less appealing.

What the Democrats want, in essence, is to reorder significant chunks of American life, from health care to basic transportation, taking the important decisions about such topics out of the hands of individuals and putting them in the hands of unelected, unaccountable paper-pushers. Needless to say, Americans are a little uneasy about that – as well they should be, and as they always have been.

Nancy Pelosi and Steny Hoyer may think it's un-American to oppose this takeover. But the evidence to this point shows that actual Americans think otherwise.

A LETTER HOME.

For a variety of reasons, none of which are interesting, we only have one piece this week. The following is our attempt to make up for that shortcoming and to provide some much needed context in a world that grows ever more complicated by the day.

We chose it because we think it helps to put things in perspective during these gloomy times of economic troubles at home, terrible wars abroad, and a government in Washington that seems out of touch with reality. Furthermore, it drives home the point that no matter how much criticism we Americans get, not only from foreign sources but from some high ranking members of our own government, we have a great deal of which to proud.

It is a letter home from Europe, written shortly after VE Day, from a young man to his wife. He happened to be well known in the small Midwestern town in which they lived, so she had it published in the local newspaper. One of us found it not long ago in a scrapbook kept by a woman whose husband was overseas at that time serving in the same war. The writer was Lt. H.B. “Hank” Hook, who served in the military government attached to the 82nd airborne division “somewhere in Europe.”

My heart, my mind, my hands and everything about me are so full . . . and so confused that I hardly know what to say or how to proceed. I'm awfully tired . . . just now sagged back

in my chair half asleep, but I want you to be reassured that the one thing that keeps me going is my unrelenting love for my family and home.

Another week of this, I tell you, and I'll be fit to be tied. I have seen everything . . . I tell you EVERYTHING. What more is there to behold when an entire army has surrendered in front of your eyes . . . when thousands and thousands of persons are clogging every road . . . hungry, lost, cold, afraid . . . when you overrun a concentration camp of 800 with 600 dying, agonized French, Belgians, Russians and Poles lying among more than 200 dead . . . when you see thousands and thousands of women and children sleeping in fields . . . sick . . . having babies in barns . . . when you find, in short, pandemonium supreme.

The war is over, we hear. I don't know whether it's today or tomorrow or yesterday. Nor does it make any difference. It didn't faze me in the least when I heard it this morning. The war was over for me about a week ago when I saw a load of German prisoners going along the road without a guard. I wondered "What the hell?" . . . so I stopped and had them surrender to me and arranged to have them sent to the Prisoner of War cage with guard . . . But a minute later I saw more coming . . . and more and more . . . until there were thousands of them . . . and no guards. A whole army had surrendered to the 82nd Airborne division . . . over a quarter of a million men with their vehicles, imagine, if you please, a division of some 12,000 men having more than 25 times its own strength in P.O.W.s. But that's only half of it . . . mixed with the P.O.W.s were endless streams of civilians . . . French, Belgians, Hollandish, Luxembourgish, Russians, Poles, Germans . . . everything.

I can't begin to describe the situation. I tell you, I'll NEVER be able to tell you. We were about to meet the Russian army somewhere over the Elbe river . . . (You've no doubt heard of the airborne troops with the British) and it seemed that everybody was coming our way . . . having fear of hell for the Russians. I never imagined that such a situation could develop. And only a day after our section had caved in then the whole northwest European front (Denmark) caves in and our manifold troubles are magnified a hundred times.

I want you to know that I have seen EVERYTHING . . . dying, suicides, births, raping, riots . . . and what have you . . . EVERYTHING. It is absolutely unfathomable to anyone who hasn't seen it. We are trying to get food for 100,000 persons, but there doesn't seem to be any food. The French and Belgians, who have suffered for so long in concentration camps, want to go home, but there is no transportation to take them home now. People are dying in our hospital at the rate of 30 per night . . . undernourished and neglected. This IS hell . . . if I have any idea at all of what hell is supposed to be.

We came into a fairly good sized city - some 8,000 normally - on the evening of May 4 - with the Russians just a few hundred yards away. And that night the burgomeister killed himself, his wife and father-in-law. In the neighboring town, a number of Belgians hanged the burgomeister. In short, we had to establish what little law and order we could. But all the Russians and Poles and Belgians and French - who had vengeance in their hearts - had weapons and it wasn't safe to be out that night. There wasn't a food store in this town that wasn't broken into.

Until 2:30 this morning, and up again at 5:30 a.m., I was dogging a bunch of German teamsters and laborers to get 200 bodies here

from the concentration camp so that a decent funeral could be held here for these atrocity victims this morning. People from all stations of life in the city dug the graves and made the crosses yesterday and this morning every one of the 8,000 citizens here were paraded past the bodies ½ hour before the ceremony.

Then the ceremony itself, with our chaplains presiding in the English and German language - and people fainting on all sides. The band played and several thousand of our soldiers stood bareheaded - along with the civilians - as the starved bodies were lowered into 6 foot graves by German civilians and the Star Spangled Banner was played and Old Glory was fluttering over. Joining in our salute were 12 German generals and several hundred German P.O.W.s - standing only a few feet behind our general. How can I ever forget such a day -such impressive moments - and it seems to me they are all impressive.

This is just one incident - but one that will impress you with part of our day's routine. Yesterday morning a GI came into our office,

carrying a new-born baby in an old blanket. He had found the baby in a box on the side of the road with not a sign of a mother anywhere. Simply left behind - in desperation - by a mother who had to move along with the tide. Life is that cheap. I looked at the babe and could hardly control my tears. This is only one of many - most of whom are dead. We told a German nurse in a hospital we had just organized to take care of the baby, and then I thought to myself: What kind of baby is this? French? Belgian? Polish, Luxembourgish? Hollandish? Russian? Slavian? Or German?

Yes, Life is cheap. We have people here with their children . . . many of them babies . . . who had fled ahead of the Russians from on the other side of Berlin. But we can't let them pass over the Elbe. We are, in fact, in territory originally assigned to the Russians for occupation. They should take over eventually. In the next town the Russians exercise military government, and we have met their staff and had snappy salutes and toasts with them. How can I ever forget?

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