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THEY SAID IT

Abiding in the midst of ignorance, thinking themselves wise and learned, fools go aimlessly hither and thither, like blind led by the blind.

The *Katha Upanishad*, 5th century B.C.

THE SPEAKER'S DISCONNECT FROM REALITY.

For many years, we and countless others have argued that the politics of race in this country is manipulated by the powers that be to facilitate the election of Democrats to Congress and to keep black Americans politically alienated. These may not have been the initial intentions of those who carved up the political map in the post-Civil Rights era. But they most certainly are the effects, and far too many seem pleased with this condition to do anything about it.

Specifically, we have argued that the gerrymandering of “black” districts – whatever its initial noble intentions – has, in practice, resulted in the misrepresentation of black Americans. Too many politicians believe that they can address issues from some fantastical “black” perspective and ignore other perspectives and, for the most part, other issues, producing a stilted political dialogue that serves the interests of neither the nation nor the black community. We put it this way in a 2006 piece entitled “The Poor Have Us Always With Them.”

One of the critical reasons that black politicians remain at the fringes of political discourse is because the artificially created “black districts” allow them to do so without fear of electoral consequences. And this, in turn keeps black voters on the political fringes, as well as denying them the representation they should, by rights, receive. If politicians are assured of reelection simply by spouting tired, racially fraught, old liberal platitudes, what in the world would motivate them to do otherwise?

We should note that this essential phenomenon has little to do with race specifically and far more to do with the lack of awareness that comes from political isolation. For example, Charlie Rangel, the recently deposed chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, never understood that he was in serious political trouble

over his ethical failings, because his constituents back home in Harlem continued to support him, in spite of the fact that he is as crooked as a snake. He had always done his best for his constituents, narrowly defined, and they appreciated it and him for the effort. But at the same time, he was killing his fellow Democratic House members, who were being tarred with his corruption.

Though not as dramatic and not as nearly perceptible or as gripping, given the lack of the racial component, the very same principle regarding the political insulation of gerrymandered districts applies across the political spectrum. Anywhere that there is a large, homogenous population of voters, those elected to represent those voters tend to see the world very narrowly, ignoring broader political realities. This is, in part, an explanation for what is taking place these days in the health care debate and specifically in the House of Representatives as it prepares to vote on “reform.”

Consider, for example, the case of the Speaker of the House, the woman who is one of the faces of the national Democratic Party regarding health care, but who actually represents a very small and very politically uniform Congressional district, maybe even the most politically uniform Congressional district in the country. Keep in mind the fact that Pelosi’s only serious (though not terribly credible) challenger in the last several political cycles was Cindy Sheehan, the hard-left activist who lost her son in Iraq. Only in San Francisco could a challenger get to the left of Pelosi and not immediately be laughed out of town.

Pelosi talks about how “the American people” want reform and how she was elected to enact the “will of the people.” But she doesn’t represent the American people, she represents a small, homogenous population in San Francisco, a population that does, in fact, want “reform,” but which is as far out of step with the political mainstream as Pelosi is – which only makes sense.

The unfortunate thing for Democrats, especially those living in the real world, is that Pelosi is hardly alone. California has been chief among the states

in the political gerrymandering of districts and of the carving out of “safe” seats for members of both parties, but for Democrats in particular. These safe districts have given rise to many of the most radical leftists in American politics, many of whom have joined Pelosi in directing the Congressional agenda over the past year. Consider, if you will, the following penned by Billy House for *National Journal’s* “Congress Daily”:

Further complicating her efforts, say several House members, is a rising animosity within the Caucus toward a perceived lack of sympathy from Pelosi and other House members from relatively safe districts in California – and who hold so many key chairmanships and others leadership posts – to the election fears of their colleagues from other states.

“Across the Caucus, there is growing dissatisfaction and resentment – not so much directed at Pelosi – but with her cadre of California liberals seen as continually driving her House agenda, regardless of the hits the rest of us will have to take,” said one House Democrat.

The Californians cited most frequently -- and angrily -- are Energy and Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman and Education and Labor Chairman George Miller, both with key roles in healthcare legislation. But also mentioned are Ethics Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren, Rep. Anna Eshoo, Foreign Affairs Chairman Howard Berman, and Democratic Caucus Vice Chairman Xavier Becerra.

“She seems to only be listening to this small cadre, and the rank and file are expected to simply fall in line,” complained a senior Democrat; he said this is contributing to Caucus animosity

over the prospect of being asked once again to walk the plank on a healthcare bill, after already passing a bill last year, on top of climate legislation establishing a cap-and-trade emissions program.

You wanna know how political majorities are destroyed? Well, here you have a case study. Pelosi is clueless. And when she needs help, she turns to the even-more-clueless. She has no sense of what actual Americans want and she has no idea how damaging all of this is and will continue to be to her colleagues who will have to face these actual Americans at the polls this November. She's a radical. Her constituents are radicals. Her confidants are radicals. Most Americans are not. This has "disaster" written all over it.

In this morning's *Wall Street Journal*, our old friend, the pollster Kellyanne Conway, has a piece co-authored with Heather Higgins of the Independent Women's Voice that details precisely how damaging all of this may be to Democrats whose districts are far less uniform and thus far less likely to support unbridled partisanship:

Voters in key congressional districts are clear in their opposition to what they have seen, read and heard on health-care reform. That's one of the findings of a survey that will be released today by the Polling Company on behalf of Independent Women's Voice. The survey consisted of 1,200 registered voters in 35 districts represented by members who could determine the outcome of the health-care debate. Twenty of those members voted for the House bill in November but now may be reconsidering. Fifteen voted against the bill but are under tremendous pressure to change their vote.

The survey shows astonishing intensity and sharp opposition to reform, far more than national polls reflect. For 82% of those surveyed, the health-care bill is

either the top or one of the top three issues for deciding whom to support for Congress next November. (That number goes to 88% among independent women.) Sixty percent want Congress to start from scratch on a bipartisan health-care reform proposal or stop working on it this year. Majorities say the legislation will make them and their loved ones (53%), the economy (54%) and the U.S. health-care system (55%) worse off—quite the trifecta.

Seven in 10 would vote against a House member who votes for the Senate health-care bill with its special interest provisions. That includes 45% of self-identified Democrats, 72% of independents and 88% of Republicans. Three in four disagree that the federal government should mandate that everyone buy a government-approved insurance plan (64% strongly so), and 81% say any reform should focus first on reducing costs. Three quarters agree that Americans have the right to choose not to participate in any health-care system or plan without a penalty or fine.

Yikes.

Some analysts and commentators have suggested that the Democrats are pursuing health care reform legislation with such abandon because they know that it is far more important, in the long run, than some piddling old Congressional majority. Once the government controls health care, it controls everything. Control of health care changes forever the relationship between the government and the governed. And for this – to enjoy in perpetuity the benefits of expanded state control – some members and perhaps even the majority can and will be sacrificed.

We ourselves have made similar arguments from time to time. And there is no doubt a great deal of truth to

them. The leaders of the Democratic Party do, in fact, see health care as the key to expanding irrevocably the reach of state. There's no denying that.

But at the same time, it is quite possible that many of those pushing hardest for reform – people like the Speaker of the House herself – are completely unaware of just how angry voters are about this nonsense and just how severe the short-term political damage might be. This is unsurprising, to say the very least. Pelosi, for all her blather about the poor and the downtrodden, has led an exceptionally sheltered life, far away from the problems and concerns of “the people.” She is the daughter of a political dynasty and the wife of a multimillionaire. She has never had to work a day in her life – and that includes her political life, in which she is able to float along, from election to election, unconcerned about the possibility of defeat. She is, in short, insulated from reality on a host of levels.

It is, we think, instructive here to contrast Pelosi's circumstances with those of her predecessor as Speaker of the House, Republican Dennis Hastert. Though Hastert himself was never in any jeopardy of losing his seat, his seat was hardly the homogenous “safe” seat that Pelosi's is. Indeed, Hastert's successor as the representative of Illinois' 14th Congressional district is a man named Bill Foster, a Democrat. Hastert may not have been the greatest Speaker ever, but at the very least, he had contact with those whose views differed from his own, something which Pelosi backers would be hard-pressed to claim.

We understand why Congressional Democrats might be apprehensive about making someone from a competitive district their leader. It was incredibly embarrassing when, in 1994, Tom Foley became the first sitting Speaker to lose his reelection bid since the Civil War. It was likewise embarrassing when, in 2004, Tom Daschle became the first Senate party leader to lose reelection since 1952. And it will be equally embarrassing this fall when Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is dumped by Nevadans. A leader from a safe district, like Pelosi, saves considerable embarrassment.

But it also opens the party up to charges of disconnection from reality. Pelosi's seat was gerrymandered to be safe. That is most definitely to her advantage. But it's poison to her Party.

OBAMA AND THE MILLENNIALS.

Twelve years ago in a three-part article entitled “Millennium Kids, Teachers, and Bill,” which we wrote for Prudential's *Strategy Weekly* publication, we noted that recent Census Bureau figures had revealed that the “Millennium generation” (loosely defined as those under 18 then, and between ages 12 and 30 today) would soon eclipse the Baby Boomers as the largest generational cohort in the nation's history. The number of Americans 18 years old or younger, we said, had just topped 70 million, “larger than at any preceding time in the nation's history, surpassing by 300,000 the previous high water mark set in 1966, two years after the last Boomer was born.”

Ultimately, we argued, this nation's social, commercial, and political power base would be compelled to acknowledge the crushing size and influence of the Millennium generation, just as it had done with the Boomers. No one ignores the largest demographic cohort in American history for long. Or at least no one does so in the expectation of remaining a viable entity, much less a successful one. Indeed, catering to this generation and to its perceived preferences had already become an integral part of the political order when we wrote that piece in July 1998. As *The Washington Post* put it:

Politics has become more child-focused, as evidenced in the tobacco debate, the saliency of education reform as a campaign issue, the recent expansion of child health insurance and a White House erupting with executive orders, speeches and photo opportunities related to children.

In the last presidential election, Barack Obama staked his entire campaign on the Millennials, hoping that, against all odds, the “youth vote” would, at long last,

turn up in solid numbers and would provide him with the support necessary for victory. They did (though to what degree is debatable), and he won. Obama made “youth” one of the themes of his campaign, along with “hope” and “change,” which is to say that he intended not only to ride the young voters to the White House, but to make them the centerpiece of his political base and of the permanent Democratic majority he believed he would inaugurate.

He had excellent cause to do so. Although younger voters, as a rule, tend to be flakier than their elders, they also tend to be receptive to political overtures, especially when these overtures address their specific insecurities. And this is particularly true if the generation happens to come of age during a grave political or economic crisis. Think, if you will, of the examples set by two previous generations, both of which came of age during times of trouble and discord, both of which were the target of political opportunists, and both of which became the foundation of the political establishment’s behavior for decades.

The aforementioned Baby Boomers, of course, are one such generation, the generation that came of age in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassinations and the Civil Rights movement, and which fomented its own turmoil and friction, challenging the social and political establishment directly and remaking the Democratic Party in its image. Though it’s true that many of the young, idealist Boomers eventually abandoned the unruliness of their youth, along with the party of their youth, those who remained nevertheless took control of that party and directed its energies for the better part of four decades. Still today, the Democratic Party is, by and large, the party of the Boomers and of their youthful vision for the future of the country.

A second, better example can be found in the generation that came of age between the World Wars, the generation that felt the full force of the Great Depression. As Ross Douhat, the resident conservative columnist at *The New York Times*, wrote, this generation “has cleaved to the Democratic Party like no population before or since.”

In the estimation of this generation, Roosevelt saved the country. He ended the Depression and put people to work. It doesn’t matter that, in truth, many of the components of Roosevelt’s recovery plans were disastrous and actually extended the Depression. It doesn’t matter that the interventionist government he initiated actually hurt the nation’s economy and retarded recovery. To those who experienced the Depression in its full force, Roosevelt and the Democrats were saviors. They took over a disaster loosed on the country by callous and foolish Republicans, and they set things right.

There is no question, given these examples, that Obama and his fellow travelers had just cause to believe that their efforts at youth outreach would be rewarded. Not only is the Millennium generation larger than the Baby Boom generation, it too is coming of age during a time of economic upheaval and uncertainty about the economic future. And this latter point is one that could, at least in theory, tie the Millennials to the Democrats for life. Again, Ross Douhat explains:

In a recent paper, “Growing Up in a Recession,” Paola Giuliano, an assistant professor of economics at U.C.L.A., and Antonio Spilimbergo, an economist at the International Monetary Fund, offer statistics to back this intuition up. Looking at over 40 years of survey data, the authors report that Americans who experienced “macroeconomic shocks” between the ages of 18 and 25 were more worried about poverty and inequality across their voting lives, and more skeptical about the wisdom of the market.

These findings track with the results of the 2008 election, when a cratering economy helped Barack Obama win an extraordinary landslide among young and first-time voters. And they provide grist for the liberal hope that the rising generation will prove as enduringly

Democratic as that of their Depression-era grandparents, with George W. Bush playing Herbert Hoover to Obama's F.D.R.

It would seem, from this, that the Democrats are sitting pretty, and that we should all prepare to be permanently European-ized, i.e. turned into the clients of a comfortable welfare state rather than the free-born citizens of an occasionally cold and cruel but liberty-loving, dynamic, and emancipated nation. The left would appear, at long at last, to have the opportunity to consolidate power and cement its dreams.

Fortunately, things are not always as they seem.

For starters, the Democrats have a problem or two related to their consolidation of support deriving from the "macroeconomic shocks." As it turns out, winning the love and devotion of a generation scarred by recession is not as easy as it sounds. Not only must the party in charge foster government intervention, but it must do so effectively, which is a difficult proposition, even for capable statist politicians. And this administration is, as we have documented countless times, anything but capable.

Last week, we edited the ending of our piece on immigration just before publication. It initially read, "In the meantime, just to cheer you up a little, gentle reader, we would simply note that things could be a whole lot worse. You don't think so? Well, just consider how bad things would if Barack were competent." This was a fortuitous edit, as it appears that this thought fits much better with this piece than with that one. Competence matters. Or, to refer back to Douthat again:

The authors find that growing up in a recession can encourage conservative instincts as well. Downturns make young voters distrustful of unfettered capitalism, yes. But they also make them less confident in the federal government . . .

Recessions, it seems, only benefit liberals when an activist government is perceived to have answers to the crisis. When liberal interventions seem to be effective, a downturn can help midwife an enduring Democratic majority. But if they don't seem to be working — or worse, if they seem to be working for insiders and favored constituencies, rather than for the common man — then suspicion of state power can trump disillusionment with free markets.

All of this is to say that rather than consolidating support amongst the Millennium generation, Obama is likely to dissipate support, demonstrating both the futility of government action in many cases and, more to the point, cementing the idea that the Democratic party exists exclusively to advance the interests of powerful constituencies.

From the bank bailouts to the auto takeovers; from the Cornhusker Kickback to the Louisiana Purchase; from the "stimulus" to the Cap'n trade bill that would reward energy companies, Obama and his administration have served their big-money supporters first and foremost. The auto unions, the teachers' unions, the public employees' unions, pharmaceutical companies, Wall Street donors, trial lawyers, and a host of other players have all benefited greatly from Obama's largesse. And they have done so unashamedly.

This is, and will continue to be, a disaster for the Democrats. If nothing else, the Obama administration's attempts to consolidate power have demonstrated rather conclusively that what matters to today's Democratic Party is just that, power. Obama's efforts have not been made to help the lowly or to protect the downtrodden. They have been made, rather, to reward the powerful and to curry their favor.

A second problem that the Democrats face with regard to the Millennials, is that they don't understand them; they don't really know who they are or what they want. As Boomers or Boomer wannabes

(those who idealize the spirit of the anti-war era and its Democratic powerbrokers), the people in this administration have tended to transfer their own beliefs and hopes onto the younger generation, presuming that it would be something of a carbon copy. They are wrong.

Ironically, only a little homework would have been necessary to understand this. Indeed, they could have, if they wanted to, simply cribbed what we wrote twelve years ago. To wit:

It is important to understand that this generation is totally unlike any other in the history of the nation. It cannot be simply defined as the “baby boomers’ kids.”

Granted, the “baby boom echo” accounts for a significant percentage of the cohort, but not enough to constitute its defining characteristic. This generation includes a huge component of second generation Americans. Indeed, 14% of the Millennium Generation is Latino, and 4% percent is Asian. In 1980, the share of the under-18 population by these two groups was 9% and 2% respectively. And these percentages are growing daily. According to the Census Bureau, children of immigrants will account for 88% of the increase in the under-18 population between 2000 and 2050.

Another significant feature of the Millennium Generation is the number of kids in the cohort growing up in single-parent homes. Russakoff notes that Census data show that roughly one-third of Millennium Generation children will grow up in households in which one or both parents are absent. This is double the number raised in one-parent families in 1980.

Dale Celente, director of Trends Research Institute, suggested in Russakoff’s piece that this means that much of the Millennium Generation will have “no loyalty of any kind – no family loyalty, no corporate loyalty. Party Loyalty? Are you kidding?”

The expectation that anything permanent or even semi-permanent could be built on such an inchoate and unstable foundation is silly, to say the least. The Millennium generation will not be easily pigeonholed. The diversity of the cohort is important, and not for the purposes of political correctness. This diversity actually serves to divide the Millennials into several smaller cohort groups, most of which differ dramatically and in many ways from their contemporaries. Many generational experiences will be shared across sub-cohort lines. But many will not, making the attempt to turn this generation into a partisan bedrock is foolish, at least for the time being.

And this brings us to our final thought about the Millennials. Eventually, they will develop something of a generational ethos, but it will be based on events yet to come, which will impact them as they progress through adulthood. As adults, they will share certain milestones, specific watersheds that may permanently affect their perceptions about politics. And here again, the Democrats will have a fine line to toe.

Above, we noted that the Democrats may be turning off some of the Millennials with their crass capitulation to power and their incompetence with regard to pertinent economic matters. This dissatisfaction with the ruling class is actually likely to grow greater in the next several years and may well extend beyond the current administration to government in general.

The problem, as the Greeks are demonstrating today and as Margaret Thatcher warned some 34 years ago, is that eventually statist “always run out of other people’s money.” And then things get ugly. The comfortable, self-sustaining welfare state is a nice

thought, but it is also a myth, one which the Millennials will have to confront. As the columnist Robert Samuelson recently put it:

As baby boomers retire, higher federal spending on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid may boost millennials' taxes and squeeze other government programs. It will be harder to start and raise families.

Millennials could become the chump generation. They could suffer for their elders' economic sins, particularly the failure to confront the predictable costs of baby boomers' retirement.

Is this the foundation for a permanent Democratic majority? We doubt it rather seriously. If anything, we think that all of this contains the seeds of the current Democratic Party's ultimate undoing. The interventionist dream works for a while, but eventually it butts up against reality. And in reality, the Millennials aren't likely to enjoy being played for chumps.

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