

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

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

## THEY SAID IT

Entitlement reform has become a leading issue in this year's Republican primaries. I don't mean the kind of entitlement reform associated with Medicare or Social Security. I'm referring to the Republican Party's establishment figures and their exaggerated sense of political entitlement....

In a different season, such petulance might have strategic significance. But not in 2010. These various "moderates" and party operatives will be swept away by the coming storm - next and last to be seen as post-storm debris hanging undecorously next to old tires and broken awnings. As a party, broadly, the GOP will embrace its new voters and its old principles and thereby profit from the energized grass-roots activists whose efforts surely would flow to a third party next time if thwarted by the Republican establishment this time.

Despite their years of expertise, some Beltway insiders of all varieties - press, pundits, politicians and strategists - some friends of mine - only dimly understand the Tea Party phenomenon. Spontaneous in its formation and wide-ranging in its composition, the Tea Party upwelling is the first genuine grass-roots movement in American politics in decades.

Tony Blankley, "Sore Losers' Epitaph," *The Washington Times*, September 21, 2010.

## THE CLUELESS CLASS.

For all practical purposes, the Obama administration will be two years old in roughly five weeks, when voters go to the polls to elect the next Congress, a handful of new governors, and countless other state and local officials. Now, we're well aware that Congressional elections, not to mention state and municipal contests, are supposed to hinge on "regional" issues, concerns, and personalities. National-level issues are, at least according to the political scientists and seasoned elections analysts, only marginally and only occasionally determinative. As the late Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill famously put it, "All politics is local."

But you don't believe that, do you? No? Well, we don't either. In fact, we haven't seen a shred of evidence that local issues are playing a significant role in determining the shape of the on-going campaign or are likely to play one in the outcome. Truth be told, we'd argue that there hasn't been much support for the conventional wisdom about the local nature of Congressional elections for at least the last three election cycles and probably four of the last five. It strikes us that national forces have, more or less, been increasingly important since the first post-9/11 election in 2002, with the presidential contest of 2004 being the only possible exception.

### In this Issue

The Clueless Class.

Hedging.

There is, of course, no mystery behind any of this. As anyone who has been paying attention can see, it's all about anger, tension, and frustration, all three of which have been at work on the psyches of the American population for more than a year now.

Which is why we find it so shockingly stupefying that those individuals who are supposed to understand this stuff the best – the purported “experts” and professionals – are the only ones in the country who seem not to have figured out what is going on.

Last week, for example, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a piece by one of its regular contributors, a guy named Karl Rove. For those of you who spent the last decade or so in a cave, Rove was President Bush's chief political strategist and senior White House advisor. As such, he was, according to anyone and everyone on the left, the man solely responsible for all evil that occurred in the world between 1999 and 2009 – and a great deal of that which has taken place since as well.

Rove, the consummate political analyst, goes waaaaaay out on a limb in this piece, arguing not only that the Obama-Pelosi-Reid agenda is unpopular among conservative voters, but is also disliked by a great many moderates and liberals. Rove further notes that Democratic candidates – and Democratic incumbents in particular – are running away as fast as they can from the leaders of their party. Nobody, it seems, wants to be associated with the “accomplishments” of the current Democratically controlled Congress, and nobody wants the names Pelosi, Reid, or Obama attached to their campaigns. Noting the dissatisfaction with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi in particular, Rove writes:

It's hard to imagine Mrs. Pelosi likes the ads run by at least seven Democratic House incumbents distancing themselves from her agenda, such as the stimulus, cap and trade, and ObamaCare. Or the comments in recent weeks by Reps. Chet Edwards (a trusted Texas lieutenant), Heath Shuler (North Carolina) and Zack

Space (Ohio), all of whom declined to support her re-election, saying they don't even know who will run for speaker. Does she appreciate Alabama Rep. Bobby Bright, who said late last month, “Heck, she might even get sick and die”?

This is all well and good, we guess. And we certainly don't dispute Rove's contention that the leaders of the Democratic establishment are extremely unpopular among voters these days. There's no question about that.

But doesn't Rove know that he's telling only half the story? Is it really possible that this guy – this evil genius – is so clueless? Is there really a chance that he doesn't have any inkling, even as he's typing the lines about how unpopular Democratic establishment figures like Pelosi and Reid are, that Republicans establishment figures – *himself included* – are at least equally unpopular in the minds of many voters? Does he really think that this is about “them” and not about him?

Really?

If the *New York Times* can be believed – and we're not saying that it can be – then yes, Karl Rove is really that clueless. The guy who masterminded the Bush presidency, who exploited the social conflict of the last decade to advance his party, and who promised to bring the country a “permanent Republican majority” has no idea that he is as much the “enemy” of the mass uprising spearheaded by the Tea Party movement as are Pelosi or Reid or even Obama. In fact, according to the Saturday's *Times* article, Rove not only doesn't have any flipping idea what's going on, but he's actually planning his triumphant return to Washington. To wit:

In 2004, the Republican master strategist Karl Rove led weekly sessions at his Washington residence where, over big plates of his butter-smothered “eggies” and bacon slabs, he planned the re-election of President George

W. Bush – and what he hoped would be lasting Republican dominion over Democrats.

In April, Mr. Rove summoned several of the important players behind Mr. Bush’s ascendance to his home once again, this time to draw up plans to push a Republican resurgence.

Over takeout chicken pot pies, the group – the Republican fund-raiser Fred Malek, the onetime lobbyist and Bush White House counselor Ed Gillespie, and former Vice President Dick Cheney’s daughter Mary Cheney, among others – agreed on plans for an ambitious new political machine that would marshal the resources of disparate business, nonprofit and interest groups to bring Republicans back to power this fall.

When Mr. Rove left the White House in 2007, Democrats rejoiced at what they believed would be the end of his political career and the brand of Republicanism he espoused. This election season is proving that he is back – if he ever really left at all.

The *Times* notes, of course, that “Mr. Rove” has “at times” clashed with the Tea Party movement and that he has “at times warned against insurgent candidates who in his view would reduce Republican chances of winning a seat.” And therein lies the heart of the conflict between Rove and, for lack of a more specific term, “the people.” To them, this election is about change – *real* change, not political sloganeering, but change. For them, it’s about throwing the bums out – ALL the bums. For them, it’s about restoring some sort of sanity to federal governance by rejecting the established political class – ALL the established political class. For Rove, by contrast, it’s about seats. And power. And Republican majorities. In short, Karl Rove is Barack Obama is Nancy Pelosi is Mike Castle is Lisa Murkowski is Charlie Crist. They are *the*

*establishment*; whether they have a big capital “R” or a big capital “D” following their names is, by and large, secondary.

The *Times* glosses over the fact that Rove sacrificed any and all standing he still had left with the electorate at large when he spent primary night railing against the new GOP Senate nominee in Delaware, Christine O’Donnell, whom Rove labeled (and perhaps libeled) “nutty.” We can’t speak for everyone, of course, but prior to that Tuesday evening two weeks ago, we actually hoped Mike Castle would win the nomination, turning Joe Biden’s seat over to the GOP. But after listening to the likes of Rove unload on this woman simply because she happens not to be his preferred candidate and because she is from outside the establishment, we changed our minds. After all, we figured, someone equally hated by Harry Reid and Karl Rove can’t be all bad. And we doubt seriously that we were alone.

All of this is not, we should note here, simply to pick on Karl Rove. Rove may be completely clueless, but he is hardly alone. Also last week, Peggy Noonan, the self-styled doyenne of conservative women pundits, wrote a piece praising the Tea Party movement, calling it, essentially, a breath of fresh air, and pointing out the decidedly feminine nature of many of the movement’s most “livid” and indefatigable activists.

Again, this is all well and good. And certainly it is true that the Tea Party movement is, in many ways, being propelled by women, who, according to some estimates, comprise some 60% of the movement’s supporters. But what does Peggy Noonan know about any of that? You may recall that Noonan, who would like for us to remember her as the author of the “thousand points of light” bit, may be better known as the woman who, into an open mic at the Republican National Convention, called John McCain’s selection of Sarah Palin as his running mate, “bullshit.”

Noonan has spent much of the last two years attacking, belittling, and distancing herself from the variety of conservatism practiced and preached by Palin. Now, we have no brief to make for Palin, but

it's hard to take seriously Noonan's celebration of the Tea Party and its women, even as she continues to dismiss Mrs. Palin.

You may also recall that Noonan was one of the most prominent and certainly the most widely read of the "Obamacons," the erstwhile conservatives who supported Obama over McCain during the 2008 campaign. Noonan praised Obama's temperament and gushed over his competence and cool, all of which is to say that she thought he was precisely the type of person who should "rule" over the tired and tiresome Americans. And while it is true that Noonan has since turned on Obama and knocked him mercilessly, saying, among other things, that "he was supposed to be competent" but isn't, she has never, to the best of our knowledge, apologized to the American people for helping push Obama on them or for her role in building the myth of his competence.

All of this is to say that Noonan, like Rove, simply doesn't understand the forces that are animating the voter rebellion that is attempting to overthrow the existing political order, of which, she is an integral part.

We chuckle to ourselves sometimes, when we see stories about how Bill and Hillary Clinton and their enduring popularity represent a political threat to the suddenly unpopular Barack Obama. We have very little faith in the Republican establishment, obviously, but we think that, at the very least, some in the GOP have decided to make a clean break from the past in order to meet the wants and desires of an unhappy electorate. This puts that party several steps ahead of the Democrats, who, apparently, are simply hoping for a Clinton restoration.

What makes people like Karl Rove and Peggy Noonan so pathetic and so completely clueless isn't just that they have only recently discovered the electorate's dissatisfaction with its ruling class, but that all they are promising as an alternative to the current Democratic regime is a restoration of the previous Bush restoration. They are, in other words, one step more clueless than even Bill and Hill.

Again, we should note that our point here is not just to pick on the likes of Rove and Noonan, although that is clearly what we've done. Our point, rather, is to note that the Republican establishment appears just as oblivious to the real sources of voter anger this year as is the Democratic establishment – and the media establishment for that matter. Yes, it's true that the voters don't like Barack Obama very much. And they don't like Nancy Pelosi or Harry Reid very much. But they don't like anyone in the GOP establishment very much either.

In fact, even the people whom the electorate is, quite possibly, about to make the leaders of the new majority party in Congress aren't very popular. As Politico reported just over a week ago:

Fifty-seven percent of Republican voters would get rid of Republican leaders if the GOP wins back Congress, including House Minority Leader John Boehner and Mitch McConnell, according to a Public Policy Polling survey.

The poll reflects the ongoing dissatisfaction that Republican voters have with the establishment GOP in Washington -- a trend also reflected in a series of upsets of Republican incumbents throughout the country.

According to the PPP poll, 21 percent are not sure about whether to keep the current GOP congressional leaders, and the same percentage wants to keep the leadership intact.

Of the 419 national Republican primary voters polled in mid September, just 33 percent want Boehner to become speaker, 34 percent want someone else and 33 percent aren't sure.

Twenty-seven percent want McConnell as the majority leader, should Republicans regain the Senate – 33 percent want someone else and 40 percent aren't sure.

It's the second poll that shows Boehner is both unknown and perhaps unpopular among Republican voters – a survey released earlier this month showed that just 28 percent of his fellow Ohioans want him to become House speaker.

We know, without question, that the voter rebellion in this country was inspired by the politics and policies associated with the Obama administration. And we know, without question, that the purge of the Washington establishment will be directed most aggressively at the Democratic Party. But that is not a function of the electorate's happiness with the Republicans. It's a function of the fact that the purge of the Republicans took place two and four years ago.

Whether or not the Republican leaders understand this, the Tea Party movement has no burning desire to restore the GOP to power. It has, rather, as we noted above, a desire to restore common sense to the governance of this country, regardless of party affiliation or, more accurately, we suppose, in spite of party affiliation.

If we were to summarize the spirit of the Tea Party and the mood of the electorate in one, short anecdote, it would be this one, published earlier today by our old friend Rich Galen, the author of the web-column "Mullings" who was back home in Ohio this past weekend:

The principal reason Ohio's unemployment rate is so relatively low is because people have been moving out at about the same rate as the jobs have disappeared. Current estimates are that Ohio will likely lose two of its 18 Congressional seats when those seats are re-apportioned next year. While the national population appears to have increased by about ten percent over the past decade, Ohio's population has been about stable and Washington County has lost three percent.

Not that the folks here appear to be much interested in that. During a commercial break in the race I asked the dozen or so folks sitting at the bar if they knew who was running for Congress from this district . . . .

After a stunned silence (I had previously established my bona fides as having been a member of the Ohio Army National Guard in the unit which used to be housed here, so I was in no physical danger) a lively conversation started about whether we should have a Congress much less why anyone would run for it, much, MUCH less why anyone would vote for one of them.

The "people," you see have real, critical, potentially life-altering concerns. The ruling class, by contrast, merely has political concerns. That the members of the ruling class don't see the difference is not, exactly, a surprise – to us at least. We suspect, however, that it will be a surprise to the members of the ruling class, who will wake up on Wednesday, November 3 to find that the world has changed, but not quite as they were expecting.

Moreover, it could come as a big surprise to many of the happy warriors on Wall Street who are betting that if the Republicans regain leadership in Congress this fall everything will be hunky dory. Don't get us wrong. We hope the Republicans win big. But our guess would be that if they do, it will spark a new fight, this one between "the people" and the Republican leadership, which could be every bit as hot as the on-going one.

## HEDGING.

As you may have noticed, we do not yet have peace in the Middle East, despite Barack Obama's apparent determination to end the conflict once and for all. As it turns out, some of the parties involved in the discussion are being, well, intransigent, insisting on pre-conditions that the other side can't meet. Some refuse to give up new settlements in disputed territories, water rights, and reliable defense positions, while others refuse to give up their decades-old desire to slaughter every Jew in Israel. Negotiations can be tough, you know?

More to the point, both sides are being asked to give up something truly important to their home constituencies and, in return, have received Obama's personal assurance that everything will be okay. And strangely, that doesn't seem to be enough. So they play along, without actually playing along. This is called, "hedging," which essentially means that the Israelis and the Palestinians are protecting themselves against the probability that Obama won't stick around for very long after the headline-generating photo-ops. They are betting, in short, that he can't be trusted.

Of course, this is not new. In fact, the Israelis and the Palestinians have been hedging like this for more than half-a-century, recognizing instinctively that those who push most desperately to see a solution implemented – Clinton, Carter, and now Obama – are the least likely to deal with the damage that might result if things don't go exactly as planned. The survivors of the first and the second Intifadas, for example, could tell you a great deal about how well the abandonment of the "hedging" strategy works and how unseriously certain American presidents will take their obligations to the parties whom they forced to reach an agreement.

On the other hand, the hedging involved in this round of "peace" talks appears rather transparent, as if both parties fully understand that there is really no point in pursuing serious discussions of any sort, given that this particular American president has already demonstrated that he has no desire whatsoever to get too involved in any foreign entanglements, which he

views as distractions from his true mission, whatever the hell that is.

And why should they believe otherwise? Is there any evidence to the contrary? If so, we haven't seen it. Indeed, if there is one thing that we learned from last week's release of excerpts from Bob Woodward's new book, *Obama's Wars*, it is that Barack Obama seeks nothing in foreign affairs more desperately than an "exit strategy." As the *Washington Post* put it:

Frustrated with his military commanders for consistently offering only options that required significantly more troops, Obama finally crafted his own strategy, dictating a classified six-page "terms sheet" that sought to limit U.S. involvement, Woodward reports in "Obama's Wars," to be released on Monday . . . .

According to Woodward's meeting-by-meeting, memo-by-memo account of the 2009 Afghan strategy review, the president avoided talk of victory as he described his objectives.

"This needs to be a plan about how we're going to hand it off and get out of Afghanistan," Obama is quoted as telling White House aides as he laid out his reasons for adding 30,000 troops in a short-term escalation. "Everything we're doing has to be focused on how we're going to get to the point where we can reduce our footprint. It's in our national security interest. There cannot be any wiggle room."

Obama rejected the military's request for 40,000 troops as part of an expansive mission that had no foreseeable end. "I'm not doing 10 years," he told Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at a meeting on Oct. 26, 2009.

Is it any wonder, given this, that the factions fighting in Afghanistan – both those fighting with us and those fighting against us – have been busy discussing, with each other in some cases, their plans for the post-American era? Is it any wonder that local warlords and tribal leaders are unwilling to cross the Taliban, unwilling to back the Americans, unwilling, in short, to imitate the Sunnis in Iraq who adjusted to President Bush's surge and decided to switch to the American side in anticipation of American victory and American commitment?

As the historian and classicist Victor Davis Hanson noted recently, “regional powers are designing their own spheres of control” in Afghanistan in anticipation of Barack Obama's bug out. Additionally, as Hanson notes, “Lebanon is unwinding, Iran is daring the world to stop its proliferation, and . . . In all these cases – and others as well – there is a general sense that the U.S. will not come strongly to the side of an ally, nor come out strongly against the side of an enemy.”

The Pakistanis are inching closer and closer to the Chinese, announcing last week plans to build two nuclear reactors with Chinese help. And even the Afghans are working with the Chinese, who as Robert Kaplan noted last week, are “building transport and pipeline networks throughout Central Asia that will ultimately reach Kabul and the trillion dollars' worth of minerals lying underground.”

Everyone in the Muslim world, it would seem, is hedging; figuring out how they will deal with their precarious neighborhood once Obama finally cuts and runs.

Not that anyone should be surprised by any of this. As we put it last February:

“Hedging,” you see, is the theme of global relations under the Obama regime. The Indians don't know if they can trust Obama, and they're making contingency plans. The Japanese don't know if they can trust Obama, and they're making contingency plans. The Australians

don't know if they can trust Obama, and they're making contingency plans. *Etc., etc., ad infinitum.*

This, sadly, is the way the world works when the world's lone superpower abdicates its role in the world and seeks desperately to occupy itself exclusively with the home front. And the hedging we've seen so far is only the beginning.

The *Telegraph* of London reported late last week that there are some people in the world who are either very concerned that the Korean Peninsula will soon erupt in war or are trying to convince the rest of the world that the Korean peninsula will soon erupt in war in order to provide justification for their own provocative actions in the region. To wit:

In Moscow's bleakest assessment of the situation on the Korean peninsula yet, Russian deputy foreign minister Alexei Borodavkin said tensions between the two countries were running at their highest and most dangerous level in a decade.

“Tensions on the Korean Peninsula could not be any higher. The only next step is a conflict,” he told foreign policy experts at a round table on the subject in Moscow.

His prediction came two months after North Korea vowed to wage “a sacred war” against South Korea and its biggest backer, the United States.

Meanwhile, Kim Jong Il, the bizarre little man who runs North Korea, is installing his son as a four-star general in expectation of a transfer of power. The Japanese and the Chinese nearly came to blows during the last week when Japan detained a Chinese “fishing boat” near disputed islands and the Chinese responded by severing diplomatic ties with Japan. China and India are engaged in a nuclear arms race along their

common border. India and Pakistan are, once again, escalating the war of words over Kashmir. And on and on it goes.

And where, you ask, is the President of the United States? Who knows? Maybe he's still in Martha's Vineyard. Maybe he's at backyard barbecues raising money for Democratic candidates. Maybe he's interviewing hundreds of applicants for the dozens of jobs either currently or soon to be open in his White House. We really can't say. But what we can say is that no one else in the world appears to be giving it much thought. They're carrying on as if this is the way things will generally be henceforth, which is probably a pretty accurate assessment.

Unfortunately for us and for everyone else in the world, it's likely only downhill from here. Again, to borrow from Victor Davis Hanson:

In an analogous sense, we have now completed our own version of 1977–78, with updated Carteresque damnations of past policies, loud lectures on past American sins, estrangement from Europe and Israel, and self-righteousness about

our evolution beyond simplistic views of good and evil. All that is left now is the denouement: another 1979–80, when the world sized us up and concluded that there would be few repercussions from regional “adjustments,” and wars by the Soviet Union, China, and Communists in Central America, hostage-taking, embassy-storming, and all the rest paralyzed a sanctimonious president.

It is only a matter of time, we suppose, before we see such things as a push to amend the Japanese constitution to allow for a larger standing army; a Japanese nuclear program; a Saudi nuclear program; provocative Russian actions in central Asia; stronger ties between Russia and China; a more aggressive North Korea and Iran; greater intransigence from anti-Israel and Islamist forces throughout the Middle East; and any of a host of other potentially incendiary acts on the part of governments planning for the continued erosion of American global leadership.

Hedging. Almost everyone is hedging, you see. And those who aren't are causing the others to hedge. And who can blame any of them?

Copyright 2010. 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.