

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

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

## THEY SAID IT

And as the care of the common weal is committed to those who are in authority, it is their business to watch over the common weal of the city, kingdom or province subject to them. And just as it is lawful for them to have recourse to the sword in defending that common weal against internal disturbances, when they punish evil-doers, according to the words of the Apostle: "He beareth not the sword in vain: for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil"; so too, it is their business to have recourse to the sword of war in defending the common weal against external enemies. Hence it is said to those who are in authority: "Rescue the poor: and deliver the needy out of the hand of the sinner"; and for this reason Augustine says: "The natural order conducive to peace among mortals demands that the power to declare and counsel war should be in the hands of those who hold the supreme authority."

Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Part II, Question 40.

## In this Issue

Tolerance Be Damned.

Tax Cuts -- Or Obama's  
Obsession, Redux.

## TOLERANCE BE DAMNED.

Once in a great while, we read something that is so wonderful, so absolutely spectacular in its capacity to crystallize an idea or an ideology, that we just have to share it. This past week that "something" was an op-ed piece in *USA Today* written by somebody called Tom Krattenmaker, who is a resident of Portland, Oregon, is "a writer specializing in religion and public life," and is a member of *USA Today's* editorial board of contributors. Krattenmaker's piece was an attempt to make sense of the recent attempted terrorist attack on his home city by a 19-year-old Muslim student at Oregon State University. To wit:

For several good reasons, many of us Portlanders are having a hard time wrapping our minds around the horrific thought of a 19-year-old from the local suburbs wanting to kill and destroy. Why would Portland, of all places, be the site of a terror attack?

The "People's Republic of Portland" — so dubbed for its liberal ways — seems so utterly different from New York, Mumbai, London, or the other places that one associates with terrorist attacks. Portland is so much smaller, light years from the figurative front lines. This is a laid-back city where the red-hot rhetoric around terrorism, Islam, the "ground zero mosque," and the like runs cooler. It's a place where a live-and-let-live spirit extends ample latitude to anyone who might otherwise stand out — whether it's for wearing a Santa hat and pedaling around on a

unicycle playing bagpipes (which my wife actually witnessed last year), covering every inch of your arm with tattoos, or wearing a head scarf and praying at a mosque rather than a church or synagogue.

This is, to put it lightly, awesome. We're not sure that ol' Tommy Krattenmaker meant to give voice to the left's confusion about terrorism, to its grand expanse of the moral sphere, or to its incredible, almost unfathomable self-absorption, but he did all of that, and more. And we are grateful to him for it. Such clear and concise distillation of ideology is, as we said, rare. But when it appears, it is ever so beneficial.

Now, those of you who think you have seen these sentiments expressed before, you are correct. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the filmmaker and propagandist Michael Moore made a similar argument, writing on his web site:

If someone did this to get back at Bush, then they did so by killing thousands of people who DID NOT VOTE for him! Boston, New York, D.C., and the planes' destination of California – these were places that voted AGAINST Bush!

In fairness, we should note that Krattenmaker probably isn't a flabby, unkempt boor. And he doesn't gratuitously and slanderously attack the (former) president of the United States. And he doesn't appear to wish that harm would come to those who have the unmitigated gall to think and (GASP!) vote differently from him. All of which distinguishes him from the loathsome Moore.

But at the same time, he does appear to share Moore's delusion that Islamic terrorism is about the victim, rather than the perpetrator. He also appears to share Moore's moral confusion and his ability to misconstrue – completely and utterly – the nature of the threat that faces the nation. All of which makes him a perfect spokesman for the left on the subject of terrorism.

Let's start with this notion that terrorists shouldn't, logically, attack a peaceful “light-years from the front lines” town that hasn't bothered anybody. This is, to put it delicately, absurd. It is a corollary to – and tantamount to – the declarations that terrorists can or should attack only those who, well, have asked for it. And who ever asks for it? And how do they do so?

Krattenmaker thinks that Portland should be off limits because it is “liberal” and “laid-back.” It's a place “where a live-and-let-live spirit extends ample latitude to anyone who might otherwise stand out — whether it's for wearing a Santa hat and pedaling around on a unicycle playing bagpipes (which my wife actually witnessed last year), covering every inch of your arm with tattoos, or wearing a head scarf and praying at a mosque rather than a church or synagogue.”

Similarly, Michael Moore wonders why New York, Boston, California, and the like were not off limits, given that they didn't vote for Bush – which is to say that they are “liberal” and “laid back,” and, presumably, places “where a live-and-let-live spirit extends ample latitude to anyone who might otherwise stand out.” A Santa Claus on a unicycle playing bagpipes? Stand out? In New York? HA! Are you joking? New York and California are so laid back and liberal that nuts DON'T stand out; they blend in. Why didn't this prevent them from being attacked?

The answers to this question are, we think, obvious – but apparently not to everyone. So let us help.

First, let us clarify one minor point: terrorists attack because they are terrorists, not because of anything that anyone anywhere has done. To presume otherwise is to presume that terrorism can be avoided simply by anticipating what it is that will make terrorists unhappy and then avoiding it. Needless to say, this is a recipe for both abject self-censorship and utter disappointment. In this particular case – the case of radical Islam -- this is the precursor to self-imposed sharia law, among other things, an imposition that will yield no results – as “peaceful” Portland's unfortunate example illustrates.

Additionally, this view presumes – wittingly or unwittingly – that those who have been victimized by terrorists somehow deserved it. The Israelis, for example? Damned Jews should know better than to live in the Middle East. The sailors on the USS Cole? HA! That’s what you get for joining the military-industrial complex. The countless innocents slaughtered in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi? Walking too close to American embassies is just plain stooooopid – not to mention profane.

In Krattenmaker’s case, this is a less overt but equally caustic version of the far left’s insistence that 9/11 was the United States’ fault, that somehow Americans “had it coming,” or, as President Obama’s preacher and spiritual guide put it, that the attacks of that day were simply America’s “chickens coming home to roost.” This is a moral abomination. Portland and the left in general don’t wish to be seen as passing judgment, except that in this case they’ll pass judgment on the United States; they will, in short, blame the victim. And happily so.

What this amounts to, in practice, is the justification for and legitimization of terrorism as a means to achieve political, religious, or social ends. Got a problem with somebody? Blow him up. Why not, after all, he had it coming.

The moral obscenities contained in this rationalization are both manifold and extraordinarily demented. We’d like to believe that no sentient human being could honestly believe this garbage. But then, we’d be wrong.

Of course, all of this is just an antecedent of the real absurdity in the left’s approach to and understanding of terrorism, namely its presumption that the values that it finds so terribly appealing are universally so and will be treated as such by radical Islamists as well, thereby providing some sort of fortification against Islamist terrorism.

Over the years, we have discussed no issue more often and more thoroughly perhaps than we have the notion of the clash of moral systems. The right operates based on one set of presumptions about what

constitutes moral behavior, while the left operates based on another. That much we’ve said countless times.

What we have not discussed; indeed, what we really haven’t contemplated in any great detail is the fact that many on the left are completely and utterly ignorant of this clash and, more to the point, that the values they hold nearest and dearest actually represent a break from and a rebellion against traditional morality and the very concept of moral absolutes. It never seems to have occurred to our pal Krattenmaker, for example – or to Moore, or any of the others from Europe down through the ranks of the Democratic Party – that anyone should want to attack Portland. Or New York. Or California. After all, Portland is laid back and tolerant. It’s “open” and accepting. And what’s not to dig about that?

People like Krattenmaker tend to believe that their fundamental and eternal value – tolerance – is the ultimate universal good and that its embrace safeguards them from the ravages of the savages. If they just agree to say that the savages are just as good as anyone else, everything will be OK, right? Right.

Now, never mind the fact that universals are not supposed to exist in the post-modern moral structure; that is the least of the cognitive dissonance here. The idea that tolerance of intolerance can somehow make all things better is just bizarre – both morally and practically.

Those on the left pride themselves on what they insist is their better, more sophisticated understanding of cultures other than their own. They travel abroad. They study other languages. They encourage and even participate in the celebration of rites and festivals associated with other cultures. They are sensitive to the feelings and sensibilities of “the other” in the Western world and feel his pain more acutely than do the unthinking, know-nothing types on the political right and especially on the religious right.

Yet somehow, despite all this caring, sharing, and understanding, the left still doesn’t grasp the fact that “tolerance” is not a universal value that is held in as

high esteem by other cultures as it is by the post-modern West, but is, in fact despised by the culture in question here, namely radical Islam. “Laid-back” and “accepting” are two adjectives that not only do not describe the Islamists’ moral code but which are anathema to them.

Tolerance, you see, implies sanction for everyone and everything – from Islamist imams to trans-gendered welders, and everyone in between. Yet strangely the imams in question find that offensive. The left’s inexcusable validation of Islamism’s prejudices – against women, against gays, against secularists, against everyone who isn’t an Islamist – is self-defeating and grotesque in general. But in this case, it’s dangerous as well. To tolerate intolerance is one thing, but to proclaim and even to advertise one’s tolerance for intolerance is something else altogether. It is almost to invite a terrorist attack, precisely the opposite of what said advertisers appear to believe. In this sense, Krattenmaker, Moore, and the rest demonstrate their conclusive ignorance of other cultures and put themselves at risk by doing so.

The left thinks that the Islamists hate America for the same reasons they do. But they couldn’t be more wrong. The Islamists hate America because of the tolerance, indulgence, and moral conditionalism that the left itself over-emphasizes and proclaims as a defense against hate. Never have ends and means been so completely and utterly disconnected.

Of course, all of this would amount to little more than the silly ramblings of a few silly men if these sentiments were confined to the silly men like Krattenmaker and Moore. But they aren’t. And that is both pathetic and ultimately dangerous.

In the case of Portland, immediately after the attempted terrorist attack last month, the *Oregonian* reported that the city’s Mayor, Sam Adams, had been unaware of the plot until he learned about it the same way the rest of us did, in the news. And the reason that he was in the dark is because his predecessor Tom Potter had opted out of participation in the federal government’s Joint Terrorism Task Force. Apparently,

the mayor was unhappy that he wouldn’t be granted adequate clearance and that privacy might be violated and that there might be profiling and the like. And heck, you just can’t have that in an open, laid-back kinda town now can you?

Mayor Adams is fortunate that his predecessor’s show of “principle” didn’t cost him his life.

More importantly, though – to the country, if not to Mayor and Mrs. Adams – the entire foreign policy of the Obama administration and of the Democratic Party as a whole appears premised on the same basic notion, that tolerance and accommodation can solve any problem and mend any rift. Obama bragged, in fact, that his superior negotiating skills, his compliant nature, and his familiarity with Islamic culture – including his Islamic middle name – would be of tremendous advantage in dealing with the world and with the Islamists in particular.

But it hasn’t really worked out that way. War continues to rage in Afghanistan and Iraq. Islamists continue to try to kill Americans in mass terrorist attacks. And the Islamists appear, if anything, more intransigent than they were when Bush was president.

As we and countless others have noted countless times, anyone actually familiar with Islamic culture would know that there is, in fact, one characteristic that is prized above all others. And it is NOT “tolerance.” It is, in fact, strength, as bin Laden’s infamous “strong horse” assertion confirms. To a great many in the Islamic world, tolerance is weakness. And the only hedge against confrontation is unquestioned strength.

So why did a Somali-born Islamist nut try to attack laid-back, tolerant Portland last month? Mostly, he did so because he is an Islamist nut. But he did so as well because he could – or at least because he thought he could. Tolerance be damned. Strength, power, and good old-fashioned anti-terrorist investigation foiled the would-be Portland attacker.

Mayor Adams should hope he’ll be as lucky next time.

Actually, we should all hope to be as lucky next time.

## TAX CUTS – OR OBAMA’S OBSESSION, REDUX.

Hip, hip, hooray! Barack Obama has demonstrated that he can, in fact, move to the center! He has done what they – and we, for that matter – said he couldn’t do. He has compromised; given in, triangulated! A tax compromise has been reached and will save the taxpayer and the country. Ideologue shmideologue. This guy plays to win. He got the message loud and clear. Happy times are here again, baby.

Or so we’ve been told.

Of course, the problem with what we’ve been told is that it’s not true. Not one little bit.

Barack Obama did, in fact, cut a deal with the Republicans last week. But let’s be honest about what he did and why he did it.

First, what Obama did, in truth, was take advantage of the longest, most active, and lamest lame duck Congressional sessions in recent memory. The President and his party got their butts kicked six weeks ago. And in three weeks, the effects of that backside kicking will become part of the landscape in the form of a new Republican House majority and a new, stronger Republican Senate minority. And before the new Congress is seated, the President and his party will do everything in their power to squeeze blood from the turnip that is this poor, over-leveraged nation.

Think, for just a minute about what Obama won in the compromise. He got another extension of long-term unemployment benefits. He got a non-stimulating raid on the illusionary Social-Security trust fund via a temporary cut in the employee portion of FICA. He got a two year fix on the Alternative Minimum Tax, which helps Blue state residents overwhelmingly. He got an extension of the expanded earned income tax credit (EITC), ensuring that even more people have nothing invested in the country in which they live. He got a jump in the estate tax to 35% from zero. And he got the Republican leadership to embarrass itself with regard to spending, even before the new Congress

is sworn in. Indeed, Obama “got” so much that Moody’s yesterday signaled its uneasiness openly. As per *Reuters*:

Moody’s warned Monday that it could move a step closer to cutting the U.S. Aaa rating if President Obama’s tax and unemployment benefit package becomes law.

The plan agreed to by President Obama and Republican leaders last week could push up debt levels, increasing the likelihood of a negative outlook on the United States rating in the coming two years, the ratings agency said.

A negative outlook, if adopted, would make a rating cut more likely over the following 12-to-18 months.

Now, all of this is not to say that this is a bad deal, or that Republicans should reject the good in pursuit of the perfect, or that anyone wants to see taxes go up on January 1. It is simply to say that the notion that Obama gave in and moved to the center is a stretch, to put it mildly.

Had Obama not cut the deal, it is likely that the new House would have made a point, on January 3, to pass HR 1 “The Sticking it to the Obama Administration Act,” which would have extended (3 days retroactive) the Bush tax cuts, possibly permanently, and without any of the “gifts” contained in the compromise. At that point, Obama and the still-Harry-Reid-led Senate would have been in the position of either truly capitulating or taking responsibility for any economic damage that might result from the largest tax hike in the nation’s history.

All things considered, Obama took what he could. And his base should be grateful that he did.

In spite of the compromise reached last week, we continue to believe that Barack is simply not suited – politically or personally – to adopt a Clintonesque

move to the political center. He is a lefty. He has always been a lefty. And, perhaps most importantly, the people whose admiration he seeks – academics and historians – are lefties and are unlikely to be impressed with triangulation.

Evidence of this abounds. And most of it comes from the President himself. For political theater, it would be hard to imagine anything more outlandish and cringe-inducing than last week's press conference, at which Obama announced the compromise. After declaring that an agreement had been reached, Obama proceeded to shriek hysterically about everyone else in government, including those with whom he had just brokered said agreement, i.e., the "hostage-takers."

Apparently sensing that his admirers would find his "sell-out" less than admirable, Obama decided that it would be best to pre-empt their charges and declare that he had no choice but to fold. Never mind that this admission of impotence diminished him more than the notion that he was capable of compromise. About the only thing that could, even in theory, have made him look weaker and more pathetic would have been some sort of modern-day political paraphrasing of Augustine's response to his Sainted mother Monica's prayers for his conversion: namely a declaration that he was eager to prove his worth and his righteousness by fighting the nasty, dirty, rotten, stinking Republicans; *but not yet*. Which brings us to the following, published yesterday by *USA Today* under the headline: "Obama Vows to Fight Republicans – Next year":

As fellow Democrats accuse him of caving in to Republicans on the tax cut deal, President Obama is repeatedly promising them that he will fight the GOP aggressively when it takes over the U.S. House and adds senators next month.

"I will be happy to see the Republicans test whether or not I'm itching for a fight on a whole range of issues," Obama said last week. "I suspect they will find I am.

And I think the American people will be on my side on a whole bunch of these fights."

Obama has echoed this pledge repeatedly as House and Senate Democrats wrestle with the package that also includes items sought by Obama, including a 13-month extension of unemployment benefits and an array of middle class tax cuts. In a conference call with political supporters, Obama said: "We are going to go right back at Republicans in showing why the things that they wanted in this compromise don't make sense."

Oh dear.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but this is just silly. We'd be more inclined to take Obama seriously, either as a partisan fighter or as a potential political compromiser, if we had any reason to believe that he had any enthusiasm at all for the job or felt even remotely compelled to do anything of any merit over the next two years. But we doubt that he does.

Recall that just two weeks ago, we wrote the following about our President and his seeming detachment from his job:

Well, it seems clear to us – and to others, we might add – that Obama's biggest problem isn't that he is inexperienced, but that he doesn't really care to gain any experience. The whole process of governing and becoming better at it is trivial to him. Or, more accurately, it's trivial by comparison to that which matters most to him, which, as far as we can tell, is ego gratification....

Obama's closest and most trusted confidants openly admit that nothing interests him anywhere near as much or anywhere near as thoroughly as writing about himself. That makes sense.

Everything else around him is dull, tedious. Everything else is “work.” But writing about himself is a pleasure, and it’s a pleasure because it’s his favorite thing in the whole wide world, the sun around which his world revolves.

Like all presidents, Obama is facing some tests, some very serious tests that will determine the future of this nation and, indeed, of the world. Yet given his history and his predilection for interest only in that which affects him directly, there is no reason whatsoever to believe that he is even minimally, much less fully, engaged in the events as they are unfolding.

For much of the past two years, people like Matt Drudge have had quite a bit of fun noting how often Obama plays golf or goes on vacation or plays golf while on vacation. They make fun of how he plays basketball all day every day and appears to care more about making Final Four picks than about the business of the country.

And for much of the past two years, the traditional media and Obama’s defenders (as if the two can be distinguished from one another) have insisted that Drudge’s fascination with Obama’s leisure activities reflects more on Drudge than the President; that it is an indication of Drudge’s desire to find flaws in Obama’s behavior, no matter what he does. Taking “breaks,” after all is necessary for presidents. And if Obama takes a few more than some of his predecessors, that’s just because he is dealing with far weightier issues.

We, for two, doubt it. We think, rather, that Obama enjoys his leisure time so much and takes so many breaks not

because he is dealing with weighty issues, but because he is avoiding weighty issues. After all, what do they have to do with him? He has plenty of time for his legacy, the health care bill and the like. But other, less self-centered issues like North Korea, Iranian nuclear weapons, the ongoing jobs recession; what do they mean to him? Nothing. And so he checks out. Goes golfing. Shoots some hoops. Watches ESPN compulsively. Does anything he can to avoid having to deal with “other people’s” problems.

Perhaps we would be open to the charge of editorializing too much about the President and his innermost desires and impulses. And perhaps we would consider copping to such a charge, were it not for the fact that this past Friday, in a discussion about the tax compromise, Obama proved us prescient if not downright prophetic. In the most bizarre presidential press conference in memory, Obama actually abdicated his responsibility for his own policies and cut out to head to one of the White House’s dozens of Christmas parties, leaving Bill Clinton to answer questions, entertain the press, and generally enjoy prattling on endlessly about how thoughtful and busy he is. Let us reiterate that: Barack Obama went to a party; Bill Clinton stayed and did Obama’s job. Could a guy be more detached?

All of this prompted the *Washington Post* to note the following day the ironies that abounded with Obama and Clinton sharing the work load:

If not a transfer of power, the whole show seemed at least a temporary handoff. An embattled president, fresh off an electoral shellacking and struggling to sell a controversial tax deal to members of his own party, turned to a former president who, exactly 16 years ago, was struggling to right his own presidency after a defeat of almost similar magnitude.

Neat, huh? The only difference between the two, as the inimitable Glenn Reynolds (aka Instapundit) pointed out, was how the two men reacted to their respective shellackings: “Clinton said ‘I’m still relevant.’ Faced with a similar situation, Obama said, ‘I’m outta here.’

Now, we don’t know what, if anything, this says about the future of the Obama presidency. It is interesting, though, that now on Intrade – “the prediction market” – you can bet on . . . errr . . . “invest in” the likelihood that Obama will not serve out the remainder of his term. We’d guess that the guy will stick it out. But apparently not everyone feels that way; indeed enough of them to make a market in the speculation.

Whatever the case, all of this suggests to us that no one on any side of any political issue should be too terribly comfortable about the President’s likely future behavior. We continue to believe that he is more and more detached from the job and therefore less and less concerned about the nuances of governance; you know, little things like consistency.

Anyone on the right who is hoping that this tax compromise portends a move to the center should re-examine both the compromise and the conditions

under which it was reached. There is nothing here to suggest that Obama “pulled a Clinton” and even less to suggest that he could or would do so consistently, even if that were to become his goal.

Anyone on the left who is hoping that the tough talk portends future tough action from the President should, well, wake up and smell the proverbial coffee. In order to take tough action, the guy would have to care. And we don’t think he does. Or to be more accurate: we don’t think that he cares enough to do more than just flap his gums. Anything else would require real effort. And he doesn’t seem up to it.

The next two years are all but certain to be bumpy. And about the only thing we can say for certain is that the President’s response to the bumps will depend on how much energy he has at the time, how effectively his allies or opponents have backed him into a corner; and whether or not he has anything better to do that day.

In other words: enjoy the tax cut extension. Heaven only knows what the guy will do next.

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.