The dreams from his father; Why I believe Obama is an anti-colonialist

BYLINE: Dinesh D'Souza

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If you want to understand what is going on in the White House today, you have to begin with Barack Obama. No, not that Barack Obama. I mean Barack Obama Sr., the president's father. Obama gets his identity and his ideology from his father. Ironically, the man who was absent for virtually all of Obama's life is precisely the one shaping his values and actions.

How do I know this? Because Obama tells us himself. His autobiography is titled "Dreams From My Father." Notice that the title is not "Dreams of My Father." Obama isn't writing about his father's dreams. He is writing about the dreams that he got from his father.

In his book, Obama writes, "It was into my father's image, the black man, son of Africa, that I'd packed all the attributes I sought in myself." Those who know Obama well say the same thing. His grandmother Sarah Obama told Newsweek, "I look at him and I see all the same things -- he has taken everything from his father... this son is realizing everything the father wanted."

But who was Barack Obama Sr., and what did he want? Do the views of the senior Obama help clarify what the junior Obama is doing in the Oval Office? Let's begin with President Obama, who routinely castigates investment banks and large corporations, accusing them of greed and exploitation. Obama's policies have established the heavy hand of government control over Wall Street and the health-care, auto and energy industries.

President Obama also regularly flays the rich, whom he accuses of not paying their "fair share." This seems odd, given that the top 10 percent of earners pay about 70 percent of all income taxes. Yet the president would like this group to pay more.

Some have described the president as being a conventional liberal or even a socialist. But liberals and socialists are typically focused on poverty and social equality; Obama rarely addresses these issues, and when he does so, it is without passion. Pretty much the only time Obama raises his voice is when he is expressing antagonism toward the big, bad corporations and toward those earning more than $250,000 a year. I believe the most compelling explanation of Obama's actions is that he is, just like his father, an anti-colonialist. Anti-colonialism is the idea that the rich countries got rich by looting the poor countries, and that within the rich countries, plutocratic and corporate elites continue to exploit ordinary citizens.

I know about anti-colonialism because I grew up in India in the decades after that country gained its independence from Britain. And Barack Obama Sr. became an anti-colonialist as a consequence of growing up in Kenya during that country's struggle for independence from European rule. Obama Sr. also became an economist and embraced a form of socialism that fit in well with his anti-colonialism. All of this is relevant and helpful in understanding his son's policies.

Consider the article "Problems Facing Our Socialism" that Obama Sr. published in 1965 in the East Africa Journal. Writing in the aftermath of colonialism, the senior Obama advocated socialism as necessary to ensure national
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autonomy for his country. "The question," he wrote, "is how are we going to remove the disparities in our country, such as the concentration of economic power in Asian and European hands . . .?"

Obama Sr.'s solutions are clear. "We need to eliminate power structures that have been built through excessive accumulation so that not only a few individuals shall control a vast magnitude of resources as is the case now." He proposed that the state seize private land and turn it over to collective cooperatives. He also demanded that the state raise taxes with no upper limit.

Just in case the point is unclear, Obama Sr. insisted that "theoretically there is nothing that can stop the government from taxing 100 percent of income so long as the people get benefits from the government commensurate with their income which is taxed." Absurd as it seems, the idea of 100 percent taxation has its peculiar logic. It is based on the anti-colonial assumption that the rich have become rich by exploiting and plundering the poor; therefore, whatever the rich have is undeserved and may be legitimately seized.

Remarkably, President Obama, who knows his father's history very well, has never mentioned this article. Even more remarkably, there has been virtually no media coverage of a document that seems directly relevant to the current policies of the junior Obama.

Yet when the senior Obama's article is placed side by side with the junior Obama's policies, it seems evident that the father's hatred of those on top, and his determination to confiscate their wealth, is largely replicated in the son.

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GRAPHIC: IMAGE; Photos By Associated Press (left) And Via Newscom; Barack Obama, at a rally in Aurora, Colo., in 2006, and his father, Barack Obama Sr., in a 1964 photo.

IMAGE

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THE NOMINATING process this year produced two unusually talented and qualified presidential candidates. There are few public figures we have respected more over the years than Sen. John McCain. Yet it is without ambivalence that we endorse Sen. Barack Obama for president.

The choice is made easy in part by Mr. McCain's disappointing campaign, above all his irresponsible selection of a running mate who is not ready to be president. It is made easy in larger part, though, because of our admiration for Mr. Obama and the impressive qualities he has shown during this long race. Yes, we have reservations and concerns, almost inevitably, given Mr. Obama's relatively brief experience in national politics. But we also have enormous hopes.

Mr. Obama is a man of supple intelligence, with a nuanced grasp of complex issues and evident skill at conciliation and consensus-building. At home, we believe, he would respond to the economic crisis with a healthy respect for markets tempered by justified dismay over rising inequality and an understanding of the need for focused regulation. Abroad, the best evidence suggests that he would seek to maintain U.S. leadership and engagement, continue the fight against terrorists, and wage vigorous diplomacy on behalf of U.S. values and interests. Mr. Obama has the potential to become a great president. Given the enormous problems he would confront from his first day in office, and the damage wrought over the past eight years, we would settle for very good.

The first question, in fact, might be why either man wants the job. Start with two ongoing wars, both far from being won; an unstable, nuclear-armed Pakistan; a resurgent Russia menacing its neighbors; a terrorist-supporting Iran racing toward nuclear status; a roiling Middle East; a rising China seeking its place in the world. Stir in the threat of nuclear or biological terrorism, the burdens of global poverty and disease, and accelerating climate change. Domestically, wages have stagnated while public education is failing a generation of urban, mostly minority children. Now add the possibility of the deepest economic trough since the Great Depression.

Not even his fiercest critics would blame President Bush for all of these problems, and we are far from being his fiercest critic. But for the past eight years, his administration, while pursuing some worthy policies (accountability in education, homeland security, the promotion of freedom abroad), has also championed some stunningly wrongheaded ones (fiscal recklessness, torture, utter disregard for the planet's ecological health) and has acted too often with incompetence, arrogance or both. A McCain presidency would not equal four more years, but outside of his inner circle, Mr. McCain would draw on many of the same policymakers who have brought us to our current state. We believe they have richly earned, and might even benefit from, some years in the political wilderness.

OF COURSE, Mr. Obama offers a great deal more than being not a Republican. There are two sets of issues that matter most in judging these candidacies. The first has to do with restoring and promoting prosperity and sharing its fruits more evenly in a globalizing era that has suppressed wages and heightened inequality. Here the choice is not a close call. Mr. McCain has little interest in economics and no apparent feel for the topic. His principal proposal, doubling down on the Bush tax cuts, would exacerbate the fiscal wreckage and the inequality simultaneously. Mr. Obama's economic plan contains its share of unaffordable promises, but it pushes more in the direction of fairness and fiscal health. Both men have pledged to tackle climate change.
Mr. Obama also understands that the most important single counter to inequality, and the best way to maintain American competitiveness, is improved education, another subject of only modest interest to Mr. McCain. Mr. Obama would focus attention on early education and on helping families so that another generation of poor children doesn’t lose out. His budgets would be less likely to squeeze out important programs such as Head Start and Pell grants. Though he has been less definitive than we would like, he supports accountability measures for public schools and providing parents choices by means of charter schools.

A better health-care system also is crucial to bolstering U.S. competitiveness and relieving worker insecurity. Mr. McCain is right to advocate an end to the tax favoritism showed to employer plans. This system works against lower-income people, and Mr. Obama has disparaged the McCain proposal in deceptive ways. But Mr. McCain’s health plan doesn’t do enough to protect those who cannot afford health insurance. Mr. Obama hopes to steer the country toward universal coverage by charting a course between government mandates and individual choice, though we question whether his plan is affordable or does enough to contain costs.

The next president is apt to have the chance to nominate one or more Supreme Court justices. Given the court’s current precarious balance, we think Obama appointees could have a positive impact on issues from detention policy and executive power to privacy protections and civil rights.

Overshadowing all of these policy choices may be the financial crisis and the recession it is likely to spawn. It is almost impossible to predict what policies will be called for by January, but certainly the country will want in its president a combination of nimbleness and steadfastness -- precisely the qualities Mr. Obama has displayed during the past few weeks. When he might have been scoring political points against the incumbent, he instead responsibly urged fellow Democrats in Congress to back Mr. Bush’s financial rescue plan. He has surrounded himself with top-notch, experienced, centrist economic advisers -- perhaps the best warranty that, unlike some past presidents of modest experience, Mr. Obama will not ride into town determined to reinvent every policy wheel. Some have disparaged Mr. Obama as too cool, but his unflappability over the past few weeks -- indeed, over two years of campaigning -- strikes us as exactly what Americans might want in their president at a time of great uncertainty.

ON THE SECOND set of issues, having to do with keeping America safe in a dangerous world, it is a closer call. Mr. McCain has deep knowledge and a longstanding commitment to promoting U.S. leadership and values.

But Mr. Obama, as anyone who reads his books can tell, also has a sophisticated understanding of the world and America’s place in it. He, too, is committed to maintaining U.S. leadership and standing up for democratic values, as his recent defense of tiny Georgia makes clear. We hope he would navigate between the amoral realism of some in his party and the counterproductive coarseness of the current administration, especially in its first term. On most policies, such as the need to go after al-Qaeda, check Iran’s nuclear ambitions and fight HIV/AIDS abroad, he differs little from Mr. Bush or Mr. McCain. But he promises defter diplomacy and greater commitment to allies. His team overstates the likelihood that either of those can produce dramatically better results, but both are certainly worth trying.

Mr. Obama’s greatest deviation from current policy is also our biggest worry: his insistence on withdrawing U.S. combat troops from Iraq on a fixed timeline. Thanks to the surge that Mr. Obama opposed, it may be feasible to withdraw many troops during his first two years in office. But if it isn’t -- and U.S. generals have warned that the hard-won gains of the past 18 months could be lost by a precipitous withdrawal -- we can only hope and assume that Mr. Obama would recognize the strategic importance of success in Iraq and adjust his plans.

We also can only hope that the alarming anti-trade rhetoric we have heard from Mr. Obama during the campaign would give way to the understanding of the benefits of trade reflected in his writings. A silver lining of the financial crisis may be the flexibility it gives Mr. Obama to override some of the interest groups and members of Congress in his own party who oppose open trade, as well as to pursue the entitlement reform that he surely understands is needed.

IT GIVES US no pleasure to oppose Mr. McCain. Over the years, he has been a force for principle and bipartisanship. He fought to recognize Vietnam, though some of his fellow ex-POWs vilified him for it. He stood up for humane immigration reform, though he knew Republican primary voters would punish him for it. He opposed torture and promoted campaign finance reform, a cause that Mr. Obama injured when he broke his promise to accept public financing in the general election campaign. Mr. McCain staked his career on finding a strategy for success in Iraq when just about everyone else in Washington was ready to give up. We think that he, too, might make a pretty good president.

But the stress of a campaign can reveal some essential truths, and the picture of Mr. McCain that emerged this year is far from reassuring. To pass his party’s tax-cut litmus test, he jettisoned his commitment to balanced budgets. He hasn’t come up with a coherent agenda, and at times he has seemed rash and impulsive. And we find no way to square his
professed passion for America's national security with his choice of a running mate who, no matter what her other strengths, is not prepared to be commander in chief.

ANY PRESIDENTIAL vote is a gamble, and Mr. Obama's résumé is undoubtedly thin. We had hoped, throughout this long campaign, to see more evidence that Mr. Obama might stand up to Democratic orthodoxy and end, as he said in his announcement speech, "our chronic avoidance of tough decisions."

But Mr. Obama's temperament is unlike anything we've seen on the national stage in many years. He is deliberate but not indecisive; eloquent but a master of substance and detail; preternaturally confident but eager to hear opposing points of view. He has inspired millions of voters of diverse ages and races, no small thing in our often divided and cynical country. We think he is the right man for a perilous moment.
Obama's Iraq Mission

BYLINE: E. J. Dionne Jr.

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To win the presidency, Barack Obama needs only to battle John McCain to a tie on foreign policy and national security. That means Obama has no need for a great triumph during his trip this week to the Middle East and Europe. His goal is to look safe, sound and competent, and that's how he's playing things.

More and more, 2008 is taking on the contours of 1980. Then, the country, desperate for change after the battering it felt during Jimmy Carter's term, was eager to vote for a new direction and a charismatic leader.

But Ronald Reagan was inexperienced in foreign policy. Some of his previous statements made swing voters worry that he might blow up the world -- or so Carter's strategists tried to get voters to think. The election stayed close until the final days.

The key moment came in the campaign's single one-on-one debate. Carter may have prevailed on debating points, but Reagan was the real winner because he came off as cool, calm and likable, and that was sufficient. In the week that followed, the bottom fell out on Carter.

Obama is in an analogous situation. The country is at least as fed up with Bush as it was with Carter. Polls suggest that if Bush were on the ballot this year, Obama would sweep the country. The race is closer against McCain, who does not inspire the same rage and hatred that Bush does. So Republicans hope that voters might yet find their way to voting their doubts about Obama.

But another parallel with 1980, also helpful to Obama, is emerging: Just as Carter effectively strengthened Reagan's arguments by adjusting to the country's more hawkish mood as the election approached -- he boosted defense spending, had the United States boycott the Moscow Olympics and took a much harder line on the Soviet Union -- so are Republicans now adjusting to the reaction against Bush's foreign policy and to new realities.

The Obama camp has gleefully noted that over the last week, the administration and McCain have moved closer to Obama's foreign policy positions on issue after issue. Obama called for diplomacy with Iran, and Bush has taken the first steps in that direction, with McCain's support. Obama has long said that more American troops were needed in Afghanistan. McCain made a statement to the same effect last week.

Bush also endorsed a "general time horizon" for pulling American troops out of Iraq, although the administration was at great pains to distinguish between its "time horizon" and the 16-month "timeline" that Obama has proposed.

And then over the weekend, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki appeared to give support to Obama's withdrawal plan during an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel.

Under pressure from the administration, Maliki tried to back off. A spokesman said that Maliki's words had been "mistranslated," but a separate New York Times translation of the interview revealed that Maliki had said Obama's withdrawal proposal "could be suitable" if tweaked. After the Democrat met with Maliki on Monday, an Iraqi
spokesman suggested a withdrawal date eight months later than Obama's. This was still closer to Obama's view than to either Bush's or McCain's.

The upshot in all these cases: Obama's positions have come to look safe and reasonable, undercutting McCain's core argument about Obama's inexperience. And if the Bush administration is seen as moving his way, Republicans can hardly dismiss Obama's ideas as dangerous or impractical.

The Obama campaign is under no illusions about McCain's advantage in the polls as a would-be commander in chief. In the Washington Post-ABC News poll released last week, 72 percent said McCain knew enough about world affairs to be a good president, compared with only 56 percent for Obama. Head to head, McCain was judged by more than 2 to 1 as the candidate with greater knowledge of the world.

Yet even with this foreign policy deficit, Obama led McCain overall, 50 percent to 42 percent. Narrowing the foreign policy gap could allow Obama to open an even larger lead.

As Obama made the rounds in Iraq on Monday, his lieutenants were careful to say nothing for attribution that would detract from Obama's statements or the pictures of his visits with American troops and foreign leaders.

Their calculation is obvious and almost certainly right: Obama is playing it safe because he needs to make Americans feel that they would be safe under his leadership. If he achieves this, he will vastly strengthen his odds of becoming commander in chief.

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America's foremost black intellectual has published a slender book about the most interesting presidential candidacy since 1980. Shelby Steele's characteristically subtle argument is ultimately unconvincing because he fundamentally misreads Barack Obama. Nevertheless, so fecund is Steele's mind, he illuminates the racial landscape that Obama might transform.

Ronald Reagan's 1980 candidacy fascinated because, as a conviction politician, he sharpened partisanship as a prelude to implementing discontinuities in domestic and foreign policies. Obama's candidacy fascinates because he represents radical autonomy: He has chosen his racial identity but chosen not to make it matter much.

In "A Bound Man: Why We Are Excited About Obama and Why He Can't Win," Steele, of Stanford's Hoover Institution, argues that Obama "embodies" -- an apposite word -- the idea that race can be "a negligible human difference." His candidacy asks America to complete its maturation as a society free from all "collective chauvinisms" about race. And his flair for the presentational side of politics makes him, Steele concludes, immune to affirmative action's stigma -- the suspicion that he is a mediocrity lifted up by lowered standards.

Steele, like Obama, is a child of racially mixed parentage. But Steele, 61, unlike Obama, 46, grew up when "race was a hard determinism." For Obama, his race and how closely he will be tethered to it have been, Steele surmises, choices that have made him a "bound man."

Son of an absent black father, Obama lived overseas and in Hawaii, remote from any large black community, and received an elite education -- all this, Steele believes, created an "identity vacuum" that caused Obama to want to "resolve the ambiguity he was born into."

Since the 1960s, the prevailing dogma of black identity has, Steele believes, required blacks to adopt a morally stunting stance of accusation against white society. Whites eagerly embraced a transaction: Blacks insist that their progress depends on whites acknowledging through uplifting actions their obligations of guilt to blacks; in exchange, whites get absolution as their guilt is expunged.

Obama, however, is a product of America's mainstream, in which he enjoys unlimited opportunities. He is a model of blacks' possibilities when they are emancipated from ideologies of blackness, particularly those that, Steele says, "focus on self-respect apart from achievement."

In his autobiography, Obama recounts how, when he was living in Indonesia, his mother rose at 4:30 a.m. to work with him on a curriculum more rigorous than the one at his local school so that he would keep pace with American children. To Steele, Obama's upbringing illustrates the primacy of parenting and self-reliance in black progress. Obama's success refutes the theory of social determinism popular with many black leaders. It is the idea that blacks are comprehensively and systematically held back by an oppression that is prevalent even -- perhaps especially -- when not apparent.
Since the 1960s, to "be black" has, Steele says, required blacks to embrace "a deterministic explanation of black difficulty," a determinism that "automatically blames and obligates white power for black problems." It is, Steele charges, condescending of Obama not to use himself, and especially "his exposure from infancy on to mainstream culture," as "a measure of black possibility."

This, says Steele, could be Obama's "Promethean fire, his special gift to his times." But "thus far, Obama is the very opposite of a Reaganlike conviction politician." This is because Obama has chosen to resolve his ambiguous racial identity by embracing the social determinism and identity politics of post-'60s black dogmas. Hence he is a "bound man." He is "bound against himself" because he "has fit himself into the world by often taking his experience out of account."

Steele has brilliantly dissected the intellectual perversities that present blacks as dependent victims, reduced to trading on their moral blackmail of whites who are eager to be blackmailed in exchange for absolution. But Steele radically misreads Obama, missing his emancipation from those perversities. Obama seems to understand America's race fatigue, the unbearable boredom occasioned by today's stale politics generally and by the perfunctory theatrics of race especially.

So far, Obama is the Fred Astaire of politics -- graceful and elegant, with a surface so pleasing to the eye that it seems mistaken, even greedy, to demand depth. No one, however, would have given Astaire control of nuclear weapons, so attention must be paid to Obama's political as well as aesthetic qualities.

Steele notes that Obama "seems to have little talent for anger." But that is because Obama has opted out of the transaction Steele vigorously deplores. The political implications of this transcendence of confining categories are many, profound and encouraging.

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The trial of Barack Obama's wheeler-dealer friend, Antoin "Tony" Rezko, was back in the news last week because of a disagreement over whether Obama did or didn't attend a party at Rezko's house for an Iraqi-born billionaire named Nadhmi Auchi.

A prosecution witness testified that Obama and his wife were guests at the April 3, 2004, gathering in the Chicago suburb of Wilmette. The Obama campaign responded that neither of the Obamas recalled attending such an event. Auchi similarly has "no recollection of meeting Senator Obama at any party in 2004 or at any other time," according to his lawyer, Alasdair Pepper.

The testimony was a reminder of the vortex of business and politics swirling around Rezko -- and of Obama's curious 17-year friendship with the indicted Chicago businessman. The Clintons rightly have gotten hammered over the years for their friendships with political fixers. And although Obama complained in Wednesday night's debate about "distractions" in the campaign, his long association with Rezko is worth a careful look.

The mystery about the Rezko matter, for me, is why Obama stood by the Syrian-born businessman as his legal troubles mounted. The answer, near as I can tell, is the same one that emerged in the debate over inflammatory statements made by the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Obama's former pastor. Obama remains doggedly loyal to his friends, especially those who embraced him when he first came to Chicago as a young man struggling to find his place in the world.

Obama met Rezko in the early 1990s as he was finishing up at Harvard Law School. Rezko was well connected in Chicago's African American community, in part because he had worked with Jabir Herbert Muhammad, the son of Nation of Islam founder Elijah Muhammad, when he was managing the career of boxer Muhammad Ali, according to a May 2005 profile in the Chicago Tribune.

Rezko moved into real estate and political fundraising, often a combustible combination in Chicago. Rezko offered Obama a job with his real estate company soon after they met, but Obama declined. When Obama decided to run for the state Senate in 1995, Rezko was his "first substantial contributor," according to the Tribune. That money relationship continued, with Rezko raising as much as $250,000 over the course of Obama's five Illinois races, reported the Chicago Sun-Times.

The friendship may have reflected the fact that both men were outsiders, trying to establish themselves in the rough-and-tumble world of Chicago. Obama told the Sun-Times last month: "My assessment of Tony Rezko was that he was an immigrant who had sort of pulled himself up by his bootstraps. . . . I think he saw me as somebody who had talent, but he was probably also intrigued by my international background."

Part of what Obama says he liked about Rezko was his graciousness: "He never asked me for anything."
The relationship became controversial because of the now-famous home-purchase deal: When Obama and his wife bought a $1.65 million house in Chicago in June 2005, Rezko's wife simultaneously bought the adjoining lot and later sold part of it to the Obamas so that they could have a bigger yard.

Obama conceded in an interview with the Chicago Tribune last month that in the real estate deal, "I made a mistake in not seeing the potential conflicts of interest or appearances of impropriety." He said of Rezko's motivation in the purchase of the adjoining lot, "He perhaps thought that this would strengthen our relationship. He could have even thought he was doing me a favor."

What's troubling about this story is that at the time Obama bought the house in June 2005, allegations had already surfaced about Rezko's alleged influence-peddling. In 2005, a Feb. 13 story in the Chicago Tribune criticized Rezko's receipt of lucrative state contracts to operate restaurants on Illinois toll roads; an April 8 story said he was "under fire from Chicago's city hall" because his restaurant chain had taken two spots at O'Hare International Airport designated for minority firms; and a May 17 article reported that Rezko had been subpoenaed in a corruption probe.

When asked by the Tribune why he didn't break off the relationship, Obama said Rezko "gave me assurances that he was not doing anything wrong" and "my instinct was to believe him." Given the range of information that was available at that time about Rezko's activities, it must be said that Obama was loyal to a fault.

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The Post provided a lot of good campaign coverage, but readers have been consistently critical of the lack of probing issues coverage and what they saw as a tilt toward Democrat Barack Obama. My surveys, which ended on Election Day, show that they are right on both counts.

My assistant, Jean Hwang, and I have been examining Post coverage since Nov. 11 of last year on issues, voters, fundraising, the candidates' backgrounds and horse-race stories on tactics, strategy and consultants. We also have looked at photos and Page 1 stories since Obama captured the nomination June 4.

The count was lopsided, with 1,295 horse-race stories and 594 issues stories. The Post was deficient in stories that reported more than the two candidates trading jabs; readers needed articles, going back to the primaries, comparing their positions with outside experts' views. There were no broad stories on energy or science policy, and there were few on religion issues.

Bill Hamilton, assistant managing editor for politics, said, "There are a lot of things I wish we'd been able to do in covering this campaign, but we had to make choices about what we felt we were uniquely able to provide our audiences both in Washington and on the Web. I don't at all discount the importance of issues, but we had a larger purpose, to convey and explain a campaign that our own David Broder described as the most exciting he has ever covered, a narrative that unfolded until the very end. I think our staff rose to the occasion."

The op-ed page ran far more laudatory opinion pieces on Obama, 32, than on John McCain, 13. There were far more negative pieces about McCain, 58, than there were about Obama, 32, and Obama got the editorial board's endorsement. The Post has several conservative columnists, but not all were gung-ho about McCain.

Stories and photos about Obama in the news pages outnumbered those devoted to McCain. Reporters, photographers and editors found the candidacy of Obama, the first African American major-party nominee, more newsworthy and historic. Journalists love the new; McCain, 25 years older than Obama, was already well known and had more scars from his longer career in politics.

The number of Obama stories since Nov. 11 was 946, compared with

McCain's 786. Both had hard-fought primary campaigns, but Obama's battle with Hillary Rodham Clinton was longer, and the numbers reflect that.

McCain clinched the GOP nomination on March 4, three months before Obama won his. From June 4 to Election Day, the tally was Obama, 626 stories, and McCain, 584. Obama was on the front page 176 times, McCain, 144 times; 41 stories featured both.

Our survey results are comparable to figures for the national news media from a study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism. It found that from June 9, when Clinton dropped out of the race, until Nov. 2, 66 percent of the campaign
stories were about Obama compared with 53 percent for McCain; some stories featured both. The project also calculated that in that time, 57 percent of the stories were about the horse race and 13 percent were about issues.

Counting from June 4, Obama was in 311 Post photos and McCain in 282. Obama led in most categories. Obama led 133 to 121 in pictures more than three columns wide, 178 to 161 in smaller pictures, and 164 to 133 in color photos. In black and white photos, the nominees were about even, with McCain at 149 and Obama at 147. On Page 1, they were even at 26 each. Post photo and news editors were surprised by my first count Aug. 3, which showed a much wider disparity, and made a more conscious effort at balance afterward.

Some readers complain that coverage is too poll-driven. They're right, but it's not going to change. The Post's polling was on the mark, and in some cases ahead of the curve, in focusing on independent voters, racial attitudes, low-wage voters, the shift of African Americans' support from Clinton to Obama and the rising importance of economic issues. The Post and its polling partner ABC News include 50 to 60 issues questions in every survey instead of just horse-race questions, so public attitudes were plumbed as well.

The Post had a hard-working team on the campaign. Special praise goes to Dan Balz, the best, most level-headed, incisive political reporter and analyst in newspapers. His stories and "Dan Balz's Take" on washingtonpost.com were fair, penetrating and on the mark. His mentor, David S. Broder, was as sharp as ever.

Michael Dobbs, the Fact Checker, also deserves praise for parsing campaign rhetoric for the overblown or just flat wrong. Howard Kurtz's Ad Watch was a sharp reality check.

The Post's biographical pieces, especially the first ones -- McCain by Michael Leahy and Obama by David Maraniss -- were compelling. Maraniss demystified Obama's growing-up years; the piece on his mother and grandparents was a great read. Leahy's first piece on McCain's father and grandfather, both admirals, told me where McCain got his maverick ways as a kid -- right from the two old men.

But Obama deserved tougher scrutiny than he got, especially of his undergraduate years, his start in Chicago and his relationship with Antoin "Tony" Rezko, who was convicted this year of influence-peddling in Chicago. The Post did nothing on Obama's acknowledged drug use as a teenager.

The Post had good coverage of voters, mainly by Krissah Williams Thompson and Kevin Merida. Anne Hull's stories from Florida, Michigan and Liberty University, and Wil Haygood's story from central Montana brought readers into voters' lives. Jose Antonio Vargas's pieces about campaigns and the Internet were standouts.

One gaping hole in coverage involved Joe Biden, Obama's running mate. When Gov. Sarah Palin was nominated for vice president, reporters were booking the next flight to Alaska. Some readers thought The Post went over Palin with a fine-tooth comb and neglected Biden. They are right; it was a serious omission. However, I do not agree with those readers who thought The Post did only hatchet jobs on her. There were several good stories on her, the best on page 1 by Sally Jenkins on how Palin grew up in Alaska.

In early coverage, I wasn't a big fan of the long-running series called "The Gurus" on consultants and important people in the campaigns. The Post has always prided itself on its political coverage, and profiles of the top dogs were probably well read by political junkies. But I thought the series was of no practical use to readers. While there were some interesting pieces in The Frontrunners series, none of them told me anything about where the candidates stood on any issue.

A longer column is online. Deborah Howell can be reached at 202-334-7582 or ombudsman@washpost.com

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President Obama Won What?

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"Mom!" my 12-year-old yelled from the kitchen. "President Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize!"

I told her she had to be mistaken.

This is ridiculous -- embarrassing, even. I admire President Obama. I like President Obama. I voted for President Obama. But the peace prize? This is supposed to be for doing, not being -- and it's no disrespect to the president to suggest he hasn't done much yet. Certainly not enough to justify this prize.

"Extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples?" "Captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future?" Please. This turns the award into something like pee-wee soccer: Everybody wins for trying.

Scroll down the list of peace prize winners. Jimmy Carter won in 2002 "for his decades [emphasis added] of untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts." Last year's winner, Martti Ahtisaari, was cited "for his important efforts, on several continents and over more than three decades [emphasis added], to resolve international conflicts."

Obama gets the award for, what, a good nine months? Or maybe a good two weeks -- the nominations were due Feb. 1. The other two sitting U.S. presidents who won the prize -- Woodrow Wilson in 1919 for his role in founding the League of Nations, Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 for negotiating an end to the Russo-Japanese War -- were in their second terms.

I imagine that Obama, when they woke him up this morning to deliver the news, grasped the bizarreness of it all. In 2006, when he was only a star senator, he mocked his instant celebrity at the Gridiron Club dinner.

"I've been very blessed," he said. "Keynote speaker at the Democratic convention. The cover of Newsweek. My book made the bestseller list. I just won a Grammy for reading it on tape. And I've had the chance to speak not once but twice before the Gridiron Club. Really, what else is there to do? Well, I guess, I could pass a law or something."

If the Nobel Committee ran out of worthy candidates, it might have engaged in a bit of recycling. Nothing wrong with a second prize to Aung San Suu Kyi (1991).

And I suspect it did not do the president any favors. Obama's cheerleaders don't need encouragement -- and his critics will only seize on the prize to further lampoon the Obama-as-messiah storyline.

Now what does he do for an encore?

-- Ruth Marcus

At least the Nobel committee came clean this time. In awarding the peace prize to President Obama, its chairman acknowledged that it did so because it agrees with and wants to promote his politics.
"We are hoping this may contribute a little bit for what he is trying to do," Thorbjorn Jagland, the chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, said on Friday. The prize "is a clear signal to the world that we want to advocate the same as he has done to promote international diplomacy."

The confession of political motive should be no surprise following the Nobel Committee's behavior during the Bush administration, when the peace prize was regularly handed to fierce opponents of the president -- from Jimmy Carter to Al Gore to Mohamed ElBaradei of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In those cases, though, the committee denied that its intentions were political. Now Jagland doesn't mince words. "We have to get the world on the right track again," the New York Times quoted him as saying. "Look at the level of confrontation we had just a few years ago. Now we get a man who is not only willing but probably able to open dialogue and strengthen international institutions." Obama may get a boost from the Nobel Prize; in time he may prove the committee's declaration right. But I suspect even he might shrink from some of its rhetoric. "His diplomacy," the citation declared, "is founded in the concept that those who are to lead the world must do so on the basis of values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world's population."

Really?
--Jackson Diehl

In a stunning development, Millard Fillmore Senior High School announced today that it had chosen Shawn Rabinowitz, an incoming junior, as next year's valedictorian. The award was made, the valedictorian committee announced from Norway of all places, on the basis of "Mr. Rabinowitz's intention to ace every course and graduate number one in his class." In a prepared statement, young Shawn called the unprecedented award "[expletive]ing awesome."

At the same time, and amazingly enough, the Pulitzer Prize for literature went to Sarah Palin for her stated intention "to read a book someday." The former Alaska governor was described as "floored" by the award, announced in Stockholm by nude Swedes beating themselves with birch branches, and insisted that while she was very busy right now, someday she would make good on her vow. "You'll see," she said from her winter home in San Diego.

And in an astonishing coincidence, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced the Oscar for best picture will be given this year to the Vince Vaughn vehicle "Guys Weekend to Burp," which is being story-boarded at the moment but looks very good indeed. Mr. Vaughn, speaking through his publicist, said he was "touched and moved" by the award and would do everything in his power to see that the picture lives up to expectation and opens big next March.

At the same news conferences, the Academy announced that the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award would go this year to Britney Spears for her intention to "spend whatever it takes to save the whales." The Academy recognized that Spears had not yet saved a single whale, but it felt strongly that it was the intention that counted most. Spears, who was leaving a club at the time, told People magazine that she would not want to live in "a world without whales." People put it on the cover.

The sudden spate of awards based on intentions or plans or aspirations was attributed to the decision by the Nobel Committee to award the peace prize to Barack Obama for his efforts in nuclear disarmament and his outreach to the Muslim world. (The committee said next year it will honor a Muslim who reaches out to the non-Muslim world.) Some cynics suggested that Obama's award was a bit premature since, among other things, a Middle East peace was as far away as ever and the world had yet to fully disarm. Nonetheless, the president seemed humbled by the news and the Norwegian committee packed for its trip to the United States, where it will appear on "Dancing With the Stars."

--Richard Cohen

The Nobel Peace Prize award to Barack Obama seems goofy -- even if you're a fan, you have to admit that he hasn't really done much yet as a peacemaker. But there's an aspect of this prize that is real and important -- and that validates Obama's strategy from the day he took office.
The Obama team came to the White House convinced that one of America's biggest problems in the world was "reflexive anti-Americanism," as Obama put it in his speech to the U.N. General Assembly two weeks ago. They saw America's unpopularity as a big national security problem, and they were right.

So they set about winning hearts and minds (the Nobel judges among them) from Day One. Obama gave a series of speeches calculated to position him as the Un-Bush. He listed his achievements in that U.N. speech -- halting torture, ordering the closure of the prison at Guantanamo Bay, withdrawing from Iraq, backing negotiations on climate change and paying America's debts at the United Nations itself.

Europeans liked it, too, when the president picked a fight with Israel over settlements and when he showed himself so determined to negotiate with Iran that he overlooked the fact that its government had stolen an election.

That's what he's being honored for, really: reconnecting America to the world and making us popular again. If you want to understand the sentiments behind the prize, look at the numbers in the Transatlantic Trends report released last month by the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Obama's approval rating in Germany: 92 percent compared with 12 percent for George Bush. In the Netherlands, 90 percent to 18 percent for Bush. His favorability rating in Europe overall (77 percent) was much higher than in the United States (57 percent).

Obama's achievements are in the "good intentions" category, but that doesn't mean they are insignificant. America was too unpopular under Bush. The Nobel Committee is expressing a collective sigh of relief that this country has rejoined the global consensus. They're right. It's a good thing. It's just a little weird that they gave him a prize for it.

--David Ignatius

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Many commentators have wondered how President Obama could have won the Nobel Peace Prize less than a year into his first term. Has he made peace between anyone, anywhere in the world?

But anyone paying attention to the White House's news releases a few days ago knows the real reason: Obama proclaimed Oct. 9 Leif Erikson Day, in honor of the Nordic explorer who landed in America a millennium ago, founding Vinland, a small settlement in what would later become Newfoundland. Can this mean anything but that Obama is in the tank for the Scandinavian lobby? And what malicious timing: a few days before Americans honor the explorer who really discovered the Americas. Now the Norwegian parliament has given Obama his ill-gotten reward.

-- Stephen Stromberg
Should Obama make up with the left?

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LENGTH: 1511 words

The Post asked political strategists and commentators if President Obama should make up with his base and, if so, how? Below are responses from Mike Lux, Tony Fratto, Douglas E. Schoen, Matthew Dowd and Martin Frost.

TONY FRATTO
Deputy assistant to the president and deputy press secretary from September 2006 to January 2009

This isn't junior high school. Any overt effort by President Obama to "make up" with the left will be seen for what it is: a transparent and cynical - even weak - contrivance. The president's base supporters will eventually come around and realize they can't possibly do better for their agenda. How would he make up, anyway? Apologize? Send flowers? Invite them to sit at his lunch table?

Maybe everyone needs to grow up a little, but it would help if the president would lead the way - as he promised to do. Those of us who, despite policy differences, were nonetheless hopeful Obama would act as the grown-up in the room have instead been subjected to an endless stream of angst-ridden whining - about the "24/7 echo chamber," "politics in Washington," the "mess he inherited," "Republican obstructionism" and the ungrateful "professional left." Not to mention name-calling - "enemies," "hostage-takers," "fat cats." Does anyone remember that inaugural call to "set aside childish things"?

The president could also do with a better sense of timing. He could have sent a strong message had he chosen to pick his fight with Democrats early in his term, not after they've been bloodied in electoral defeat. Instead, from the earliest days, with the design of the stimulus package and later with health-care reform, Obama allowed congressional Democrats to set the tone of his presidency. They would respect him more now had he called the tune himself back then.

DOUGLAS E. SCHOEN
Democratic pollster and author

President Obama has to do what President Bill Clinton did with the left in 1996. He must make it very clear that while he is happy to listen to them and can probably do a better job communicating with them, for the Democratic Party to thrive and, indeed, to survive, it must fundamentally move to the center. The recent deal made between House Republicans and the White House, for example, offers an extension of all of the Bush tax cuts, but it also addresses important Democratic goals such as extending unemployment insurance for 13 months and providing tuition tax credits.

Obama's first goal must be to expand the economy and create jobs. Without jobs, we will not get out of the current economic crisis. If our economic situation does not improve, the president will not be reelected and congressional Democrats will undeniably suffer more losses in the 2012 election.

Obama must also do what Clinton did more generally, which is to offer a vision of the kind of America he wants. This vision should be based on a social safety net and compassion, but also on fiscal discipline. He must acknowledge that,
Should Obama make up with the left? Should Obama make peace with the left? The Washington Post December 12, 2010 Sunday

unless we balance the budget and reduce the deficit, the country will be weaker and the Democratic Party will be weaker still.

MATTHEW DOWD
Political analyst for ABC News; columnist for National Journal; chief strategist for George W. Bush's 2004 presidential campaign

Looking at President Obama's political standing, he remains less popular but not yet vulnerable to a primary challenge. His numbers among his liberal and Democratic base remain very strong, with approval ratings in that group in the high 80s. Like former president George W. Bush, he is very well-liked by his base and immensely disliked by the opposite party. Obama's approval numbers would have to drop 10 more points before he realistically became vulnerable to a challenge from his base.

In the end, for his political standing and prospects for reelection, Obama needs to ensure that independents, who have left him over the past year, are represented in his agenda and their concerns met. And the biggest concern right now for independents is the economy and the United States being a place of optimism and confidence. During the 2008 campaign, Obama demonstrated that he has the capacity to speak in these terms, though he has lost his way recently.

If independents move back to Obama over the next 18 months and the economy improves, it doesn't matter what the Republicans say, whom they nominate or how upset liberals remain. Obama will win. My advice on dealing with his base today is for the president to address his administration to the hopes and beliefs of the mainstream of the country and give his base a forum for conversation and input along the way. In any relationship, one of the worst things you can do is be dismissive of someone who has stood by you through thick and thin. You don't have to do everything your partner wants, but you sure need to listen and be empathetic.

MARTIN FROST
Chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee from 1995 to 1998; representative from Texas from 1979 to 2005

President Obama and the left in Congress can and will work together next year after the current controversy over tax policy is resolved. Obama should concentrate on repairing relationships with key liberal legislators and not get preoccupied with liberal talking heads in the media. It's the members of the House and Senate who will influence the success or failure of his presidency in the next two years.

Let's not forget that Obama and congressional liberals worked together to pass sweeping health-care reform and financial regulatory reform in the current Congress. They still have much in common - and certainly much more so than the new crew that will be running the House.

Obama must reach out to personally involve key liberal legislators in policy decision making. He can and should do this on a regular basis, even if the end result is still compromise with Republicans. If he doesn't at least involve his base, he's in for big trouble as he loses critical allies who could otherwise have helped him advance his agenda.

There are lots of little symbolic things he can also do, such as standing in line for photo sessions with congressional and key political guests at White House receptions - something he is doing now but shunned for much of his first two years. Little things make a difference.

DONNA BRAZILE
Manager of Al Gore's 2000 presidential campaign; author and political commentator

Although he cannot just focus on Democratic priorities such as protecting the middle class and investing in education and green energy, President Obama must not abandon - nor should he attempt to take for granted - the base of supporters who propelled him to victory in 2008. These lawmakers and the voters who support them are just as crucial to his governing in 2011 as they have been to his winning support for so many controversial issues.

For two years, Democrats had the town to themselves - time Congress and the president wisely spent tackling an array of difficult issues such as the economic stimulus, health-care reform, the foreclosure crisis and banking reform.

But with Republicans having won back control of the House, things have changed. The president must reach out and form meaningful relationships with the party whose members have berated him daily and belittled his accomplishments.
Yet while the president must find ways to work with the GOP, the administration also cannot be out there bashing House and Senate Democrats or others in the party.

That will not do anyone, including Obama, any good. This president should remember the adage of the Congressional Black Caucus: We have no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, just permanent interests.

MIKE LUX
Democratic political strategist; special assistant to the president for public liaison from 1993 to 1995; author of "The Progressive Revolution: How America Came to Be"

Contrary to Washington conventional wisdom, President Obama doesn't have to choose between a "centrist" strategy designed to appeal to swing voters and a progressive strategy designed to appeal to the Democratic base. The facts from exit and post-election polling are clear as a bell: On the major economic issues of the day, swing voters and base voters overwhelmingly agree. Both groups want no benefit cuts to Social Security and Medicare and no increase in the retirement age. Both want government focused on creating more jobs, especially manufacturing jobs and green jobs. Both want trade negotiators to be far more concerned about sticking up for American workers and not just corporate profits. And both see the big banks on Wall Street as the No. 1 culprit of our economic problems and want to see government fight for homeowners and Main Street business instead of the big banks.

So how does the president rebuild his relationship with progressives? Show some backbone in siding strongly with the middle class. Make clear that he is fighting - really fighting - on the side of regular people, not the big-money lobbyists in Washington. By doing that, he will not only rally progressives back to his side but will win back the middle-class swing voters he needs as well.
What topics should be in Obama's State of the Union address? What topics should be in Obama's State of the Union address? The Washington Post January 23, 2011 Sunday

**What topics should be in Obama's State of the Union address?**

**SECTION:** EDITORIAL COPY; Pg. A17

**LENGTH:** 2880 words

The Post asked business leaders, policy experts and others to name an issue that President Obama should include in his Jan. 25 State of the Union address. Below are responses from Maya MacGuineas, Drew Altman, Howard Dean, Frances Beinecke, Robert L. Reynolds, Douglas Holtz-Eakin, Frank Sharry, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Jamie Radtke, Ed Rogers, Bob Lehrman and Matthew Dowd.

**MAYA MACGUINEAS**
President of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget

President Obama should make controlling the national debt the central theme of his speech. He should go big, not small, and lay the foundation for viable compromises.

The president's fiscal commission offered a plan to reduce the debt by $4 trillion. Obama should build on that momentum - not just talk about pay freezes or incremental tax reforms - by calling for passage of a comprehensive plan this year (to be phased in gradually) with everything on the table. His plans need to reflect political balance, not just be an opening bid for Republicans to react to, which would turn budget reform into even more of a political punching bag. On Social Security, for instance, he shouldn't stick to stale talk of raising taxes on the rich alone but should include a balanced proposal with a moderate means test, retirement age increase, cost-of-living fixes and new revenue. Yup, that is something for everyone to hate, but that's what it's going to take.

Obama is certain to emphasize that cutting the deficit too quickly would harm the economy. True. But so, too, would failing to put a plan in place, leaving uncertainty to hinder the economic recovery and increasing the risk of an outright fiscal crisis. He needs to emphasize debt reduction as part of his economic recovery strategy, not use the economy as an excuse to delay.

**DREW ALTMAN**
President and chief executive of the Kaiser Family Foundation

The president's overarching challenge is how to rise above the Washington politics the public is so frustrated with and still fight hard for his policies. On health reform the fireworks will be in Washington, but much of the work of implementing last year's law will be done by the states. Focusing on working with states, while sticking strongly to the core goals and protections of the law, would build allies and give the president an opportunity to align himself with the pragmatism more typical of the states.

Another opportunity is to become consumers' defender in chief against giant hikes in health premiums. This problem can be blamed unfairly on health reform, or the administration can use its platform to lead the offensive in scrutinizing unpopular premium increases.

The president needs to get behind deficit reduction, but proposals to cap spending growth could have profoundly negative effects on the people served by Medicare and Medicaid, depending on how it is done. Almost half of all
seniors and disabled people on Medicare have incomes of less than $21,000 per year. The president has an opportunity to be for deficit reduction and speak for people on these programs at the same time. It is both good policy and good politics to tell seniors that while spending reductions may be necessary he has their back.

HOWARD DEAN
Former chairman of the Democratic National Committee; governor of Vermont from 1991 to 2003

The president has a wonderful opportunity to reset the focus on jobs in the State of the Union address. The new majority in the House has helped immensely by making the same mistake Democrats did - not focusing on what Americans are worried about most. In this case, they have focused on abortion and reopening the health-care debate. The speech should be focused entirely on jobs and the economy. The president should avoid the temptation to have a laundry list of key phrases and sentences designed to satisfy every interest group under the sun.

Instead, do the whole thing on jobs, America's competitiveness and improving the economic prospects of the average American. In particular, focus on young people who are starting to fear that the American dream may not be there for them. Start with short-term help such as a tax code overhaul and job programs; then discuss items that are part of a moderate, four-to-10-year horizon and name new American industries to support. Finish with longer-term fixes such as investments that will make our education system more responsive to a changing economy. Address no other topics.

JAMIE RADTKE
Former president of the Richmond Tea Party; candidate for the U.S. Senate in Virginia

The goal is to create jobs. The problem is deficit spending. The solution is to release the stranglehold government spending has on our businesses. The federal government is spending $300 billion every month but collecting only $200 billion. Nearly three years of stimulus spending has not created jobs. It is time to cut our spending, reduce the tax burden on our businesses and unleash the job-creating potential of the free market. In the State of the Union address and the official Republican response, I want to learn this from the president and both parties: How much are you willing to propose in dramatic cuts in spending, beginning with the current budget, in order to reduce deficit spending and create jobs?

FRANCES BEINECKE
President of the Natural Resources Defense Council and a member of the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling

President Obama must rally a divided nation around the kind of common purpose and collective vision that has the potential to unite us all. A good place to start is by challenging us to do what presidents since Richard Nixon have asked - to break our costly and dangerous dependence on oil.

Doing so will create millions of jobs, as we develop renewable fuels, sustainable communities, and the next generation of energy-efficient cars, workplaces and homes. It will make our companies more competitive and position our workers for success in the fast-growing global market for clean-energy solutions. It will stem oil imports that drain our economy of $1 billion each day. It will make us more secure and less dependent on those foreign oil suppliers that don't share our values or goals. It will safeguard the health of our children.

This won't be accomplished overnight; great achievements seldom are. But the BP oil disaster was a shocking glimpse into the destruction we invite unless we change course now in a way that strengthens the foundational protections that defend our water, wildlife, lands and air.

KATHLEEN KENNEDY TOWNSEND
Lieutenant governor of Maryland from 1995 to 2003

Twenty months after he was inaugurated, President John F. Kennedy had the audacity to proclaim that we could put a man on the moon within a decade. He knew that a great enterprise can unite a country as its citizens work together to succeed and be proud of the outcome. The day that Americans walked on the moon thrilled us as to what science, ingenuity and determination can accomplish. The spinoffs from the Apollo program have benefited American industry and technology for 50 years, and those government workers, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, remain our heroes today.

Some argue that our best days are past, that we should devote our energy to shrinking our government and privatizing our dreams. I don't believe that. I would like to see President Obama challenge Americans to shoot for the sun, to
discover and harness new forms of clean, renewable energy and achieve complete energy independence by 2021. Just as we did 50 years ago, let's engage the best minds and wills of our generation in a bold venture for the good of the planet.

ROBERT L. REYNOLDS

Chief executive of Putnam Investments

There is one initiative that could simultaneously move America toward fiscal sanity, dramatically boost national confidence and help restore our government's own credibility: ensuring the long-term solvency of Social Security.

As November's election results suggest, Americans are deeply concerned about the multitrillion-dollar surge in federal deficits and deeply weary of politicians' refusal to come to grips with them. That makes action to ensure Social Security's solvency more politically feasible than ever.

Absent reform, future benefits from Social Security are projected to drop by nearly one-quarter in 2037. But Social Security is by far the easiest element of America's long-term deficit challenge to put right. It faces a shortfall only about one-tenth of the government's total unfunded liabilities - roughly $5 trillion. We could bring Social Security into balance through surprisingly modest reductions of benefits for more well-off citizens along with a gradual rise in full retirement age (to 69 by 2050, in one version) and a more rapid rise in the total amount of wages subject to FICA tax.

The psychological impact of making Social Security solvent would be immediate and profound. Reform would show Americans that our political system is not dysfunctional. We would have set a precedent for bipartisan action to curb our much larger long-term deficit challenges. Global markets would gain a fresh respect for our economy and the dollar itself. And only you can do it, Mr. President.

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN

President of the American Action Forum; former director of the Congressional Budget Office; senior economic adviser to Sen. John McCain's presidential campaign

President Obama should propose to repeal the Class Act. America's burgeoning debt is a fundamental threat to prosperity - a rot eating at our economic foundations and freedom; the United States will be simply unable to oppose its bankers' wishes. At the heart of the debt threat is spending growth, and what's driving spending growth are entitlement programs. Without a plan to control entitlements, any discussion of fiscal sanity is simply talk.

The Class Act is a dangerous, new open-ended entitlement furnishing in-home care for the disabled that was included in health-care reform strictly because of its virtues as a budget gimmick. While collecting $70 billion in premiums looked good on paper, a fair reading of the full act was provided by Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad, who called it a Ponzi scheme. Its danger was highlighted by the fact that the president's handpicked fiscal reform commission proposed eliminating the Class Act.

The president needs to provide a road map to a solvent future. He needs to propose real cuts to spending. He needs those cuts to rein in entitlement overpromises. The president needs to find common ground with Republicans. The president needs to call for repealing the Class Act.

FRANK SHARRY

Executive director of America's Voice

President Obama should challenge Republicans such as Arizona Sens. John McCain and Jon Kyl to work with him on immigration reform. Immigration has become the defining issue for Latinos, a fast-growing group of voters who are pivotal in swing states such as Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Florida. Action on the Dream Act in late 2010 put Republicans on the defensive and generated a wave of Latino support that helped Democrats hold onto the Senate. Obama, having failed to keep his promise to fight for comprehensive immigration reform early in his presidency, needs more than a drive-by mention near the end of the speech.

Republicans, still in the grip of the party's hard-liners and probably needing 40 percent of the Hispanic vote to retake the White House, are vulnerable on this issue. Obama should call for either: (a) an approach that combines the "border security first" stance of many Republicans, with triggers to a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants that most Democrats support; or (b) enactment of a suitable version of the Dream Act. This will produce a long-overdue bipartisan break-through on immigration or make the issue one that can be used against the GOP in 2012.

JOSEPH A. CALIFANO JR.
What topics should be in Obama's State of the Union address? What topics should be in Obama's State of the Union address? The Washington Post January 23, 2011 Sunday

President Lyndon Johnson's top White House assistant for domestic affairs; secretary of health, education, and welfare in the Carter administration

President Obama should avoid any legislative laundry list and make jobs the government's Job No. 1, by proposing a 21st-century Works Progress Administration to modernize our infrastructure - roads; high-speed rail and commuter lines; and efficient sewer, power and communications systems. He must make clear that this is a capital investment to be amortized over many years, not expensed as single-year spending like the cost of heating buildings or administering Medicare claims.

He should preempt the deficit hawks by announcing that he is directing his chief of staff and director of the Office of Management and Budget to meet with House and Senate leaders to seek agreement on a trillion dollars in savings over the next 10 years. He should direct his secretaries of state and defense to review every military station around the world to make certain that there is no American in harm's way unless it is absolutely essential for our national security.

His speech should have at least three applause lines that will bring lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to their feet; there is no more potent visual to demonstrate that he is taking the lead in trying to get both parties to work together.

ED ROGERS
White House staffer to Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush; chairman of BGR Group

President Obama needs to use the State of the Union address to confirm that he accepts reality about the power-sharing arrangement that now exists in Washington.

Democrats in Congress have shown that they do not respect their defeat. Their reelection of Nancy Pelosi as their leader, confirming her point of view, was harmful to America and disastrous politically. The question is: Has Obama drawn different conclusions? Will he say so in his speech Tuesday?

Obama should be blunt and realistic about spending; he should call for a reduction in corporate tax rates; he should be clear on whether he has a plan for or is even in favor of lower energy prices; and he should acknowledge the obvious about the necessity of Guantanamo and confirm that the United States will be ruthless in its pursuit of terrorists.

The State of the Union address will be the first opportunity for Obama to offer an agenda that confirms a sincere movement to the right. The next and probably more important test will come when he unveils his budget proposal in a few weeks. The budget will tell us if the moderate rhetoric that will no doubt be on display Tuesday is a cynical head-fake or if Obama really wants to try to govern from the center.

BOB LEHRMAN
Clinton White House speech writer, 1993-1995; co-founder of the PunditWire blog; author of "The Political Speechwriter's Companion"

They save lives every day - by fighting a forest fire in California, helping planes avoid collision or interpreting a new law that makes food safe. Who? The federal workforce. The Republican Study Group's recent spending-cut proposal targets those workers - by firing 3,000 food inspectors, for example. Apparently, the way to create jobs is to cut them.

So while the State of the Union address will clearly be about jobs and the economy, President Obama should defend those workers. But he should do it first by conceding - conceding a point to the other side is one of the best ways to make listeners think you're a reasonable guy. Luckily, there's a moderate Republican proposal: the one from House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, who is to give the minority response on Tuesday. Obama should accept Ryan's spending-cut goals, forcing both sides to applaud.

But then the president should point to some heroic federal workers up in the balcony - perhaps including one of Gabrielle Giffords's staff. After the applause, Obama should announce that he will not accept draconian cuts that take a meat axe to the federal workforce. "We're about putting Americans to work," he should say, "not putting these brave workers out to pasture."

MATTHEW DOWD
Political analyst for ABC News; columnist for National Journal; chief strategist for George W. Bush's 2004 presidential campaign
Gallup polling has shown that, on their own, State of the Union addresses hardly ever have a big public impact. It is the cumulative effect of a president's actions and communications that citizens respond to and are moved by; the key audience for the president Tuesday will be the elected leaders sitting in the Capitol. With that in mind, I think the president should continue to focus like a laser on the economy and on improving both the conversation and relationships in Washington so that folks begin to trust in the federal government again. The No. 1 issue today is the economy. The tragedy in Tucson sparked a near universal positive outpouring. The president needs to keep both of those bipartisan conversations moving. President Obama can keep calling for leaders of both parties to come together, behave more decently, talk to each other more, understand their shared American values, and thus work hand in hand to address the damaging effects on people's lives of a stagnant economy. If he commits to lead in this way, and does not get bogged down in the weeds of policy debates and continues to connect the dots of his approach over the past 60 days, this speech could have a profound effect on Washington's culture.
In his Tuesday night acceptance speech, President-elect Barack Obama appropriately offered "thank-yous" to his family, campaign aides and voters who supported the Democratic ticket.

Now he may be dashing off thank-you notes to others who helped bring about his electoral college landslide. Here's hoping his list includes:

- Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine. The allegiance of Obama's Democratic party allies should be measured against the standard: "BATK" (Before or After Tim Kaine.) Kaine endorsed Obama in February 2007, far in advance of most Congressional Black Caucus members and statewide elected officials outside of Illinois.

- Bill and Hillary Clinton. Obama could not have asked more of the Clintons. Despite her bitter defeat in the race for the party's presidential nomination, they went all-out for Obama, urging disappointed supporters to get behind the Democratic ticket. The Clintons should be thanked for that. But there's another reason to thank them.

Obama wouldn't be set to become the nation's 44th president were it not for the toughening-up he got from the Clintons in the primaries. Everything was thrown at Obama: his inexperience and questionable associations, his so-called oratorical skills vs. a lack of substance, his supposed unreadiness to become commander in chief -- charges that were also used by John McCain in the general election race.

By the time Obama locked horns with the GOP attack machine, he was battle-tested. For that, he owes the Clintons a special thank-you.

- The Commission on Presidential Debates. The debate formats -- one devoted exclusively to foreign policy and another to domestic policy, and a third using a town-hall-meeting style -- gave Obama the opportunity to demonstrate his command of the issues and to show that he could coolly and ably defend his positions in a face-off with the more senior McCain. The debates elevated Obama's presidential stature -- and took McCain down a peg or two.

- The Rev. Jeremiah Alvesta Wright. In Liberty Baptist church, my childhood place of worship, I heard it preached: "Sometimes a stumbling block can be a steppingstone in disguise."

Wright, Obama's former pastor, may have fulfilled that wise saying. Without Wright's fiery and controversial sermons, short segments of which were repeatedly aired in the media, Obama would not have delivered his "A More Perfect Union" speech in Philadelphia.

The whole affair allowed Obama to address head-on the elephant in the room -- race. Obama did it with candor and a sensitivity that reflected an insightful understanding of this American dilemma. It was a rare and reassuring performance by a presidential hopeful.
The U.S. Secret Service. The number of threats against Obama is kept confidential, but I'm reliably told it is huge. It's no secret that there are people who would harm him if they could. That Obama is on his way to the White House is a tribute to the men and women who, 24-7, put their lives and limbs between him and harm. They can't be thanked enough.

Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity. As a motivational strategy, coaches often post in locker rooms any nasty pre-game comments made by opposing players. O'Reilly and Hannity gave to Obama supporters plenty of fighting words.

Night after night, Hannity and O'Reilly, courtesy of their prime-time cable broadcasts, found new ways to get the juices of the Obama faithful flowing. The Fox channel was the bulletin board that conveyed the ugly remarks that motivated Obama's supporters to hand out more literature, work the phones, canvass door to door and vote by the millions.

Katie Couric. A thank-you note from Obama might embarrass the CBS News anchor, since her interviews with GOP vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin was strictly a journalistic pursuit and not an effort to boost the Democratic presidential ticket.

The Couric-Palin interviews, though hardly the equivalent of the Wall Street meltdown, were excruciating to watch. They sent McCain's claim to good judgment up in flames.

Perhaps a thank-you note to Couric isn't in order. But a knowing smile the next time Obama sees her might do the trick.

Soul-searching Republicans. They are trying to figure out what went wrong. The emerging consensus: Republican candidates strayed from their core principles of fiscal conservatism and small government. Cramped thinking of that sort ensures the Republican party's minority status.

Roll the tape for a larger picture of the problem -- and a glimpse of what lies ahead: Scan the faces of delegates to the Republican and Democratic conventions, as well as the McCain-Palin and Obama-Biden campaign crowds. Examine the demographic results in Tuesday's election.

Now consider the U.S. Census Bureau's population projections.

If the GOP does not become more inclusive and open to new ideas, it could take on the image (not the ideology) of F.W. De Klerk's now disbanded National Party of South Africa.

If that happens, Obama can thank narrow-minded Republican strategists.

I'm out of space, and the darn list keeps growing.

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Obama channeling Reagan? Hardly; Gipper to O Force: There you go again

BYLINE: THE WASHINGTON TIMES

SECTION: B, EDITORIALS; Pg. 2

LENGTH: 568 words

One of the least credible tales to come out of President Obama's recent ideological makeover is the story that he is modeling his presidency on Ronald Reagan's. Time Magazine asserted this week that "there is no mistaking Obama's increasing reliance on [Mr. Reagan's] career as a helpful template for his own." Just to keep this preposterous public-relations ploy in perspective, we have compiled a handy list to remind people how little these two men have in common:

Reagan: Fostered national pride in the military.
Obama: Fostered gay pride in the military.

Reagan: We begin bombing in five minutes.
Obama: We begin golfing in five minutes.

Reagan: Made big government a bad word.
Obama: Made big government a bad dream.

Reagan: Just say no.
Obama: Yes we can!

Reagan: Stood up to the Soviets.
Obama: Bowed to the Saudis.

Reagan: "Tear down this wall."
Obama: Tearing down this country.

Reagan: "Concentrated power has always been the enemy of liberty."
Obama: Concentrated power has always been the objective.

Reagan: Put labor unions in their place.
Obama: Put labor unions in charge.

Reagan: National health care is socialism.
Obama: National health care is socialism.

Reagan: "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction."
Obama: We are that generation.

Reagan: Morning in America.
Obama: Mourning for America.

Reagan: "Man is not free unless government is limited."

Monday

Obama: Man is not limited unless government is free.
Reagan: "Government programs, once launched, never disappear."
Obama: That's the plan.
Reagan: "The best minds are not in government."
Obama: The best mind is in the Oval Office.
Reagan: "I did not take the oath I have just taken with the intention of presiding over the dissolution of the world's strongest economy."
Obama: It's all Bush's fault.
Reagan: Our adversaries "counted on America to be passive. They counted wrong."
Obama: Who else can I apologize to?
Reagan: "Trust, but verify."
Obama: Let's do whatever Putin wants.
Reagan: "We have a rendezvous with destiny."
Obama: I have a rendezvous with destiny.
Reagan: Abortion is murder.
Obama: Abortion is paid for.
Reagan: Thou shalt not speak ill of any Republican.
Obama: Thou shalt not speak to any Republican.
Reagan: Appointed the wise Justice Scalia.
Obama: Appointed a wise Latina.
Reagan: A citizen-politician.
Obama: A citizen (?) politician.
Reagan: Proposed a missile defense.
Obama: Disposed of missile defense.
Reagan: "Go ahead, make my day."
Obama: Go ahead, tax and spend.
Reagan: The nine most terrifying words in the English language are:
Obama: I'm from the government and I'm here to help.
Reagan: "Let's not go overboard in setting and enforcing tough emission standards from manmade sources."
Obama: Why not?
Reagan: Middle-class values.
Obama: Middle-class tax hikes.
Reagan: "Information is the oxygen of the modern age."
Obama: Invented the Internet kill switch.
Reagan: Supported the death penalty.
Obama: Supports the death panels.
Reagan: "I know that for America there will always be a bright dawn ahead."
Monday

Obama: Let me get back to you on that one. Ronald Reagan was one of this newspaper's earliest and most ardent supporters since its inception in 1982. He read this paper every day during his two terms in office. In 1997, Mr. Reagan said, "The American people know the truth. You, my friends at The Washington Times, have told it to them." We knew Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan was a friend of ours. Mr. Obama, you're no Ronald Reagan.

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President Obama's journey

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Two years ago, a freshman senator with almost no record but much audacity began an improbable campaign to become president. Today that journey ends with his taking the oath as the 44th President of the United States of America, the first African-American and biracial person to hold the office, and the fifth youngest. Barack Hussein Obama has made history and changed American race relations and attitudes in the process. What he has accomplished may seem difficult, but actually it is the easy part compared to what looms after noon today.

Mr. Obama secured his party's nomination, and then the presidency, by running an extraordinarily focused and disciplined, tech-savvy campaign, marked by a confidence and an almost serene demeanor that inspired both hope and change - even if he rarely articulated what that hope and change meant. His main primary opponent Hillary Rodham Clinton and general election opponent John McCain might have reprised the famous 1984 Wendy's ad, "Where's the beef?", but candidate Walter Mondale tried that to no effect then, and it would have made little difference in 2008. Sen. McCain was doomed after his response to the Sept. 15 financial meltdown looked herky-jerky and then-Sen. Obama looked the calm and cool man he seems to be. Americans saw in that, and in his soaring oratory throughout the campaign, that Mr. Obama's voting record as the most liberal in the entire U.S. Senate, and his extreme inexperience (despite writing two self-aggrandizing books already, he has never held executive position or established a track record), were somehow immaterial. Doubts melted away amid the telegenic charm. An astonishing record $745 million in campaign spending (having baldly gone back on his promise to use public funds, unlike Sen. McCain) also helped win the day, with most of the money coming from fat cats and corporations; the 26 percent of donors who gave $200 or less was about the same as President Bush had in 2004, contrary to the populist spin. Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin's inexperience in foreign affairs was a factor, as was Sen. McCain's de-emphasizing Sen. Obama's inexperience and arguing (somewhat ludicrously, in retrospect, as he muted his maverick reputation) that he and not Sen. Obama was the true candidate of change.

Mr. Obama secured 53 percent of the popular vote (just 2 points better than George W. Bush in 2004 and about even with George H.W. Bush in 1988), inspiring a top-bottom coalition of relatively rich and educated white suburbanites and relatively poor and undereducated central-city blacks; his focus on the middle class had lesser impact, and his appeal to youths, while real and certainly enthusiastic among supporters, was barely above the support percentage that George W. Bush enjoyed. His Democratic Party increased its congressional majority, but by far less than earlier expectations; the winners were mainly Republican-sounding moderates and conservatives. There was almost no shift in power at the statehouse level, and while voters pulled the Democrats' levers in national elections, there was almost no change in ideological thinking - conservatives constituted 34 percent of voters, unchanged from the last election; liberals 22 percent, up only one percent; and moderates 44 percent, down just one percent. Mr. Obama should, and probably does, realize that the vote was somewhat visceral - support the minority candidate to make a beneficial historic change; stick it to President Bush (and his perceived surrogate, Mr. McCain); and show disgust with Republican scandals, spending excesses and (too often) incompetence by rejecting the GOP brand. The voters sent a message, not a mandate. But, beyond that, Barack Obama earned, and got, the presidency because he was inspirational, idealistic and most closely identified with American hopes, including hopes for change, whatever that entails.

As indistinct as Mr. Obama's message seemed to us, he did make 510 specific campaign promises, according to the St. Petersburg Times, which has a list of them all (including one to buy a puppy for his daughters) on www.politifact.com. The paper will keep track of the status of each promise throughout the Obama administration. The status of the "Obameter" as Mr. Obama enters office is 2 promises kept, 0 compromises, 0 broken promises, 1 stalled promise, 9 in the works, and 498 with no action yet, which is understandable since he is not yet in office.
The presidency Mr. Obama inherits today is wildly different from what Mr. Obama thought it was when he announced his candidacy with little money and few friends light years ago, on Feb. 10, 2007. His plan to take the left flank in the Democratic primary, most reflected in his pledge to get U.S. forces out of Iraq, has been overtaken by events, courtesy of Mr. Bush, Gen. David Petraeus and the surge. After the primary, Mr. Obama became a centrist for the general election (which is where the battle is usually won for the presidency), and even a center-right president-elect, judging at least from pronouncements and appointments. The economic disintegration has buried almost all other issues in the public mind. On Oct. 31, shortly before the general election, Mr. Obama ticked off to CNN five immediate priorities: stabilizing the financial system, moving toward energy independence, enacting some form of health-care reform, granting middle-class tax cuts, and strengthening the education system. While he made it clear that the country is in an era when there are limits to what can be done due to the poor state of the economy, he advocates an $800 billion stimulus package, on top of the second $350 billion bailout package enacted earlier. That’s $1.15 trillion of spending, and Mr. Obama says that 10 percent of the three to four million jobs he expects to “save or create” will be government employees, or up to 400,000 more functionaries. We’ll keep our powder dry for today, but it’s hard to do so. And don’t get us started on his tax measures, such as keeping some of the “death tax” and raising taxes on some individuals and businesses. Or his “card-check” legislation replacing secret ballots that would pressure workers to join unions. And et cetera.

Mr. Obama enters office with his party in control of the legislative branch, and that may tempt him to push ahead with his agenda as the first postmodern populist, following a 28-year lull from Ronald Reagan through George W. Bush (Bill Clinton notwithstanding). He may be tempted to emulate big-government social activists like populists John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. His cabinet selections and actions to date, however, show a centrist orientation and a cautious approach to issues. Commendably, even liberal Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi acknowledged that “the country must be governed from the middle.” Presidents typically accomplish most in the honeymoon period that occurs in the earliest stages of their administration, when politicians and the public alike - not to mention foreign governments - are most willing to give the new guy a chance. For whatever programs he espouses, Mr. Obama will not hesitate to use his online community of 10 million people; the social network he developed on such sites as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook; his e-mail marketing; and blogs to rally the troops, of which a left-wing fringe is already grumbling. Let ’em.

If Mr. Obama and Republicans reach out to each other in a sincere effort to reach decisions that are best for the country (and the devil is always in the details), good things can happen for the nation, regardless of the ideologues and fanatics of any stripe. One need look no further than President Clinton's early years in the White House to see the dangers of overreaching - and the disaster to the Democratic Party that followed. One caveat is that while Obama lieutenants say he will take a balanced approach to governance, they also say he is committed to activist government.

Mr. Obama becomes president because he won a big majority (60 percent) of the 45 percent of voters who call themselves moderates. More than 60 freshman members of Congress elected in 2006 or 2008 come from GOP-leaning districts. Democrats remember the 1994 shellacking they took when they tried to overreach. These facts should mitigate against Mr. Obama wandering back to the extreme liberal days prior to his Feb. 10, 2007, declaration of candidacy. And, in fact, we believe Mr. Obama has been a good learner along the way, and realizes he must now represent all of the United States, and in doing so practice the art of the possible. As a senator, he has built strong relationships on Capitol Hill (as has the new vice president, Joe Biden), something Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, as former governors and outsiders, could not.

Mr. Obama takes the oath today with a 60 percent favorable rating, up from 53 percent on Election Day, according to a Zogby poll. But he will be the president of us all, and surely he has close to 100 percent support from Americans in moving the country to new heights. Whatever the political disagreements, they can be debated and with good will resolved another day. This day, and every day, all Americans should hope and pray for his success, and with it our country's success. The two are intertwined. Good luck, Mr. President.
Obama's summer of discontent

BYLINE: THE WASHINGTON TIMES

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The latest polls ought to alarm Barack Obama. The Illinois senator desperately needs to change the narrative of the last few months - and this week's Democratic convention is a good opportunity. Since he captured the nomination in June, he has made a string of costly errors which have resulted in squandering his previous lead over John McCain.

The latest Wall Street Journal/NBC poll reveals that the race is now a statistical tie: Mr. Obama has 45 percent support in contrast to Mr. McCain's 42 percent support. Since last month, Mr. McCain has closed Mr. Obama's six-point lead. This trend is confirmed in other national polls that indicate the candidates are tied. John Zogby's latest poll even has Mr. McCain leading Mr. Obama by 46 percent to 41 percent - and Mr. McCain has a nine-point lead as better able to handle the economy, too. Even more striking: According to the George Washington/Battleground 2008 poll, Mr. Obama has lost his lead among independent voters. The Arizona senator is now favored by independents by a 45 to 35 percent margin.

Mr. Obama began to lose support when it became clear that he was not the "new kind of politician" he has been touting. His glaring flip-flops have led voters to question his sincerity and his competence. He has appeared weak and unsure of himself in addressing a number of key issues.

As he positioned himself for the general election, Mr. Obama flip-flopped on the The North American Free Trade Agreement, on public financing of his election campaign, on his willingness to meet rogue leaders, on whether Jerusalem ought to be divided, on the D.C. gun ban, on granting immunity to telecommunications companies for wire-tapping and on offshore drilling. He even stated that his Iraq policy, the centerpiece of his campaign for the Democratic nomination, would be further "refined" according to events on the ground. Rather than strengthening his candidacy, these reversals or evasions, which came in rapid succession, took the bloom off the rose of his candidacy. His "movement" came to a screeching standstill.

Mr. Obama was further weakened by his positions on foreign affairs. During his Mideast/European tour, in an interview with CBS' Katie Couric, he acknowledged that the Iraq surge contributed to declining violence but that he had not been wrong in his previous opposition to it. His response made little sense. His speech in Berlin, before a massive audience, contained so many puzzling references to "world" leadership and so much flowery language that it provided the McCain campaign with a golden opportunity: Mr. Obama could be an object of ridicule. The McCain campaign unleashed an ad in which Mr. Obama is presented as a celebrity - akin to Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. The McCain camp also issued ads in which Mr. Obama is mocked as "The One"; this makes light of his messianic persona. Mr. Obama's eloquence is now being used as a boomerang against him: he is being pegged as a lightweight who makes incomprehensible statements. In response, Mr. Obama has been uncharacteristically flat-footed. He has not yet adequately rebutted these charges, nor has he addressed the fundamental question raised during his world tour: As commander-in-chief, whose interests will come first, America's or the world's? Is he, in the final analysis, a globalist who will be unable to defend America's national interest?

Mr. Obama's image was further battered by his response during the crisis in Georgia - he appeared weak and timid in contrast to Mr. McCain's more robust stand. The latest Wall Street Journal/ NBC poll, taken after the Georgia crisis, reveals that 52 percent of voters say that Mr. McCain would be better than Mr. Obama on "international crises such as Iran or Russia and the nation of Georgia." Only 27 percent say that Mr. Obama is better on these issues.

Mr. Obama was also not as effective as Mr. McCain during the Aug. 16 debate in Saddleback Church in California, hosted by the Rev. Rick Warren. Mr. Obama's responses were long-winded and overly-nuanced; whereas Mr. McCain
was crisp, concise and decisive. Mr. Obama stumbled in response to the question of when life begins and said that was above his "pay grade." Again, he appeared inept.

Mr. Obama has now chosen Sen. Joseph Biden as his running mate and will conclude the convention with another speech before another mammoth audience. Yet, trouble continues to loom. His vice-presidential pick is a long-time senator who contradicts his anti-Washington, change message. And the convention will highlight the Clintons - who have undermined Mr. Obama at every turn.

The Illinois senator is learning an important political lesson this summer. Momentum, is like youth: once lost, it is very difficult to recover.

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Doubts about Barack Obama's ability to lead persist. The Illinois senator undertook a world tour last week in order to burnish his foreign policy credentials and demonstrate to American voters that he will be an effective world leader. It was an unprecedented journey for a presidential candidate. He travelled to Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Germany, France and the United Kingdom. Yet Mr. Obama gained only a small boost in the polls. According to Rasmussen, he leads John McCain by 48 percent to 45 percent.

Despite Mr. Obama's popularity in Europe, in America he has not yet achieved 50 percent support. Mr. McCain is also closing the gap in such states as Minnesota, Colorado and Michigan. Mr. Obama's Israeli leg of the trip was intended to win support among Jewish voters who have a disproportionate influence in swing states such as Pennsylvania and Florida. According to a Gallup poll conducted from June 5-23, 62 percent of American Jews favor Mr. Obama. This is well below the support garnered by previous Democratic candidates - such as John Kerry who won 75 percent of the Jewish vote in 2004 and Al Gore who won 79 percent of the Jewish vote in 2000.

Mr. Obama's world tour has mixed results. To his credit, Mr. Obama showed that he can engage with world leaders and can attract large crowds (an estimated 200,000 were present for his speech in Berlin). Mr. Obama also gained credibility when Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said he would like American troops to be withdrawn by 2010. This coincides with the time frame the Democratic candidate has been touting. The Bush administration also wants to establish a "time horizon" for troop pull-out.

However, to his discredit, Mr. Obama now has an incomprehensible position on the surge. In an interview with CBS' Katie Couric conducted in Jordan, Mr. Obama stammered as he insisted that he was not wrong in initially opposing the surge in Iraq - even as he acknowledged its success in reducing sectarian violence and stabilizing the nation. He also stated that in the future, if elected, he is indeed willing to adjust his Iraqi policy according to circumstances "on the ground." Translation: If he is president, the troop withdrawal date can be delayed, if necessary.

In the same CBS interview, Mr. Obama also continued to dodge the question of exactly how many residual forces he is willing to leave behind. Former Bush adviser, Karl Rove, demonstrated in the Wall Street Journal that Mr. Obama has changed his position on residual troops four times: In 2006, he opposed leaving residual troops in Iraq; in July 2007 he said residual troops could be left in "the region" such as in Kuwait; in October he acceded to a residual force in Iraq to protect diplomats and for targeted strikes on al Qaeda; now, he states the residual force can be used for three purposes, including training Iraqi forces. According to Obama adviser Colin Kahl, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, Mr. Obama will leave 60,000 - 80,000 troops in Iraq in 2010. If so, how does this really amount to a withdrawal?

Mr. Obama continues to stray further from the dovish policies he touted to win the Democratic nomination. He is now willing to yield both the "carrot and the stick." For example, in Israel, he presented tough talk on Iran's nuclear program. He declared that he will engage in direct-diplomacy but that the regime will not be permitted to enrich uranium. In Europe, Mr. Obama called for more American and European troops in Afghanistan. His "fact-finding" world tour has given him the cover he needs to "evolve" his foreign policy in a pragmatic direction.

Mr. Obama's global tour provided a short-term media blitz but contains long-term pitfalls. By continuously modifying his views, he appears unable to effectively deal with the grave threats that confront America. Among multilateralists, Mr. Obama's high standing in the world is a refreshing change from the Bush administration. But foreign-policy hawks regard Mr. Obama's popularity abroad as a sign that he is a weak defender of America's interests.
Mr. Obama has still not convinced the majority of Americans that he can stand firm for the national interest. This remains an insoluble problem for his candidacy.
Obama's Muslim roots; Cairo pandering didn't convert everyone

BYLINE: THE WASHINGTON TIMES

SECTION: EDITORIALS; A18

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President Obama's speech last week in Cairo was well-received by most of his target Muslim audience, but with some caveats. The general response sums up the nature of the orator - Mr. Obama's promised "new beginning" between Islam and America sounds great but lacks substance.

As in many of Mr. Obama's speeches, symbolism got high marks on Thursday. Pakistani journalist Asif Khan told us, "Muslim sympathy was gained" by the speech, particularly when Mr. Obama discussed his own Muslim roots. Mr. Khan said that greeting the audience with the Arabic "Assalaamu alaykum" "Peace be upon you" ) "made people quite emotional," and Mr. Obama quoted verses from the Koran "quite expertly, I would say. He played his card quite well."

There was fine attention to detail in the speech, such as when Mr. Obama referred to the Middle East as "the region where [Islam] was first revealed," rather than saying it was where the religion was founded or originated. Jamal Abd Al-Jawad of Cairo's Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, appearing on an al-Jazeera roundtable, praised Mr. Obama for giving "an Islamic speech." On the same program, Abd-al-Khaliq Abdallah of United Arab Emirates University said he was "enthusiastic about Obama in person and not about the United States and its policies" because he sees in Mr. Obama "something different than his predecessors."

The president employed his customary rhetorical device when characterizing the central issues facing the region - listing the major complaints of both sides - which was too balanced for those who refuse to recognize that, in fact, there are two sides. But others chose to amplify portions of the speech out of context in ways that cast their camp in the best light. Pro-Palestinian commentators trumpeted that Mr. Obama said the situation facing Palestinians was "intolerable." Pro-Israeli commentators focused on Mr. Obama's call for Palestinians to end incitements and violence. Read in that manner, there was something for everyone.

Most criticism focuses on the lack of specifics - a typical trait of Obama sermons. Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum, appearing on Lebanese television, said Mr. Obama "wanted to decorate the speech with nice phrases here and there. But what is taking place on the ground? The massacre in Afghanistan is still the same. The war on Iraq is still the same. The war on Palestine, Gaza, and Hamas is still the same."

Mr. Khan raised three issues Mr. Obama chose not to address: the final status of Jerusalem, the conflict in Kashmir and the president's inconsistent views on democracy. "While praising democracy as the way forward," Mr. Khan said, "Mr. Obama bitterly criticized Hamas. Why? Was Hamas not elected by the people in January 2006 elections with 74 seats to the Fatah's 45 seats?" Mr. Khan also noted dryly that Mr. Obama "should also have reviewed the state of affairs of the country he was standing in [Egypt] while loudly advocating democracy," as Hosni Mubarak has been Egyptian president for life since 1981.

As we have noted in these pages, much of the policy substance of the speech was similar if not identical to George W. Bush administration policies. The novelty was not the message, but the messenger. The bottom line is that the Muslim world is now willing to listen to proposed solutions to the problems Mr. Obama mentioned, and the onus is on the United States to provide them.

"President Obama's speech is positive to a great extent," Pakistani analyst Mutahir Ahmad said on Karachi television. "However, the Muslim world is waiting to witness what practical steps are taken after it."

So are we.
Obama's failed freshman year; America hasn't been this weak since the Carter years

The Washington Times
January 4, 2010 Monday

Obama's failed freshman year; America hasn't been this weak since the Carter years

BYLINE: THE WASHINGTON TIMES

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President Obama's freshman-year foreign policy was the worst in living memory. At the dawn of 2010, the United States finds itself noticeably weaker in international affairs than it was when Mr. Obama took office, and there are no signs of improvement in the year ahead.

Mr. Obama was elected with almost no national security experience, but he counted on two principle sources of leverage on the world stage: his personal charisma and the fact that he was not George W. Bush. The year began with much swagger and self-assurance, but the result was a foreign policy with the naive enthusiasm of someone who once may have taken a graduate seminar in international relations.

Mr. Obama's first-week pledge to close the detainee facility at Guantanamo Bay within a year set the tone for 2009. It was a victory of symbolism over substance that proved to be more difficult to implement than he expected, and Mr. Obama soon found that it was easier to make lofty promises than to deliver prudent policies.

Other failures followed. Efforts to regionalize a peace process in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India foundered on the rocks of entrenched national interests. The president announced a "stronger and smarter" strategy for Afghanistan in March, and another in November that contained a deadline which is not quite a deadline, for a pullout that is not really a pullout.

Mr. Obama's unprecedented, fawning outreach to the Muslim world has produced no tangible results, no dramatic shifts in public opinion regarding U.S. policies, and certainly no reduction of the terror threat. This was brought home by the attempted Christmas Day bombing that literally almost ended the year with a bang. Al Qaeda views Mr. Obama with outright contempt, offensively declaring him to be a "house Negro" in contrast to purportedly "honorable black Americans" like Malcolm X.

The one solitary success Mr. Obama has enjoyed came from continuing President Bush's policy of using drone aircraft for selective strikes on terror targets. Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, has said that this practice may violate international law, and it has caused some consternation among Mr. Obama's supporters who were under the mistaken impression that he is a man of peace.

Mr. Obama's outreached hand failed to uncurl Tehran's fist; Iran's Islamic regime is pushing ahead on its nuclear and missile programs and unleashing thugs to beat down pro-democracy demonstrators. When Mr. Obama spoke dreamily in September about a world without nuclear weapons, French President Nicolas Sarkozy noted sharply that the only things such proposals have delivered are "more uranium enrichment and declarations by the leaders of Iran to wipe out a U.N. member state off the map."

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process stalled due to a combination of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's grit and a divided, ineffective Palestinian leadership. In May, Israel ignored the administration's demand for a settlement freeze, and the Arab world was shocked when Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton backed off the freeze demand in November. The administration quickly walked back Mrs. Clinton's statement, which only enhanced the sense of American confusion and impotence.

The Obama administration flip-flopped in dealing with the presidential crisis in Honduras, unwisely rushing to side with Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua in calling for return of failed dictator Manuel Zelaya. Then, months later, the United States supported the results of the Honduran elections.
Obama's failed freshman year; America hasn't been this weak since the Carter years

The administration delighted Moscow by abandoning the missile defense system slated for deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic. North Korea continued to pursue its objectives unabated, testing a nuclear weapon and long-range missile, withdrawing from the 1953 armistice agreement with South Korea and declaring it will weaponize its plutonium stocks. In response, the United States unilaterally conceded to long-standing North Korean demands for bilateral talks, and several weeks ago the president sent a personal appeal to dictator Kim Jong-il to which he has not received a response.

The Copenhagen climate conference turned out to be a dismal failure. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao openly snubbed the president, and the final statement which Mr. Obama brokered was not approved by the conference.

Other embarrassing Obama moments on the world stage include: giving England's Queen Elizabeth II an iPod with his own speeches on it; giving British Prime Minister Gordon Brown a collection of DVDs that were not formatted to the European standard (by contrast, Mr. Brown gave Mr. Obama an ornamental desk-pen holder made from the oak timbers of Victorian anti-slaver HMS Gannet, among other historically significant gifts); calling "Austrian" a language; bowing to the Saudi king; bowing to the Japanese emperor; releasing a photo of a conference call with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in which the president was showing the soles of his shoes to the camera (an Arab insult); saying "let me be absolutely clear. Israel is a strong friend of Israel's"; saying the United States was "one of the largest Muslim countries in the world"; suggesting Arabic translators be shifted from Iraq to Afghanistan where Arabic is not a native language; sending a letter to former French President Jacques Chirac when Nicolas Sarkozy was the president of France; holding a town-hall meeting in France and not calling on a single French citizen; referring to "Cinco de Cuatro" in front of the Mexican ambassador when he meant Cinco de Mayo; and failing in a last minute personal appeal to the International Olympic Committee to hold the 2016 Olympics in Chicago. Mr. Obama's Nobel Peace Prize capped the year by drawing attention to his lack of achievement.

The world is a tough neighborhood. Mr. Bush was not loved, but he was feared, which Machiavelli advises is a more durable position. Mr. Obama has sought only to be loved, but in the process has disappointed America's allies and encouraged our adversaries. The world has the measure of the man in the White House, and he doesn't measure up to the task at hand. Unless he shows a stronger hand, Mr. Obama will continue to increasingly follow global events rather than lead them.
The 10th installment in an occasional series leading up to the Iowa caucuses.

Thanks to a combination of high-profile endorsements, stumbles by Sen. Hillary Clinton and a recent decision to adopt more pugnacious rhetoric, Sen. Barack Obama has been able to make a dent into the conventional wisdom that the former first lady will inevitably gain the Democratic presidential nomination.

It also hasn't hurt that by and large the national media has issued fawning reports on the candidate, with the chattering class dubbing him "[John] Kennedy, Santa Claus and the Messiah all rolled into one," as The Washington Post recently put it.

Since his campaign launch in January, however, Mr. Obama has weathered assaults from his opponents who say he lacks the experience needed to command the nation.

Mrs. Clinton recently rapped Mr. Obama when she intoned that our next commander-in-chief should not require "on-the-job training." Bill Clinton has also lashed out, "When was the last time we elected a president based on one year of service in the Senate before he started running?"

Indeed, Mr. Obama is a Washington neophyte, moving here just before taking a seat in the Senate in January 2005. However, it is precisely this outsider persona that Mr. Obama is marketing to voters, vowing that his outside-the-Beltway experience is what America needs to unite a country that is often bitterly divided on a range of issues.

Mr. Obama's appeal has ingratiated himself with a large base of supporters and has enlisted more donors giving him $200 or less than all the other Democratic candidates combined. His poll numbers are steadily on the rise, thanks in part to the star power of Oprah Winfrey.

A native of Honolulu, Mr. Obama, 46, spent four years of his childhood in Indonesia, two years in a Muslim school and another two years in a Catholic school before moving back to Hawaii. His ambition has been apparent since his youth, according to peers and teachers at his elite private island high school. After graduation, Mr. Obama attended Columbia University and later Harvard Law School. He moved to Chicago to work as a community organizer, training religious and ethnic leaders to address problems facing troubled neighborhoods.

He was elected to the Illinois state Senate in 1996, and in 2000 made a failed bid during the Democratic primary to topple four-term incumbent Rep. Bobby Rush. After his House run, he burst onto the national scene when he delivered the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston. He was elected to the Senate by a 70-30 margin, easily defeating his Republican opponent, former Ambassador Alan Keyes.

During his time in Washington, Mr. Obama has been a staunch opponent of the conflict in Iraq, voting in 2002 against sending troops to the region. He wants the United States to withdraw forces as soon as possible. Also on the foreign affairs front, Mr. Obama has said he would engage in direct negotiations with Iran without any pre-conditions.

On Social Security, Mr. Obama says he hopes to uphold the program's solvency by offering benefit and tax changes similar to those recommended by the bipartisan Greenspan Commission in 1983.

Mr. Obama is pro-choice, and he voted to expand federal embryonic stem-cell research. He opposes homosexual "marriage" but says he supports civil unions. He came under fire from a homosexual-rights group in October for inviting singer Donnie McClurkin to sing for his campaign at a gospel event in South Carolina. Mr. McClurkin said he
was a homosexual for 20 years, but said that God "delivered" him from the lifestyle. Mr. Obama rightly refused to disassociate himself with Mr. McClurkin but did take the occasion to express his commitment to homosexual rights.

Mr. Obama has expressed staunch belief in human-induced global warming has said the United States should adopt policies, such as cap-and-trade emissions standards and tighter fuel efficiency standards, to combat this trend. He also voted to ban oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

While he often claims that in the Senate he played a crucial role in passing landmark ethics reforms, critics point out that while Mr. Obama was a cheerleader for the ethics legislation, he spent more time stumping for votes on the presidential campaign trail rather than spending time in the upper chamber muscling this legislation through committee and floor votes.

Mr. Obama has put forth a proposal to create an executive-level branch for using technology to make government more accessible and transparent. He hopes, for example, to name a chief technology officer for the nation and hopes to see live Internet feeds of department and agency meetings.

Mr. Obama seems to have gnawed away at Mrs. Clinton's lead in Iowa. He has raised $78.9 million through the end of September, slightly more than Mrs. Clinton's $78.6 million. He is banking on change - a mantra that resonates with young demographics, independents and other voting blocs. Should he come out on top in Iowa on Jan. 3, it will be his optimism and universal appeal that will have brought him there.
Barack Obama has considerable time to undergo the kind of vetting process he will need to select the best possible running mate. He already has exposed his hand (unlike his chief opponent, Republican John McCain.) The most important factor is putting together a winning ticket now that Democratic primary and caucus voters have proven that theirs is a party deeply divided.

Mr. Obama announced his vice-presidential selection team following his victory over Hillary Clinton on Tuesday. Already, he has come under fire, and rightly so. Mr. Obama is being criticized for naming former Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder as one of three people vetting his vice-presidential selection. Mr. Holder (who had previously served as the top federal prosecutor for the District of Columbia), failed to notify the Justice Department and New York prosecutors during the Clinton administration's consideration of a pardon for Marc Rich - the tax-evading, illegal-trading, racketeer billionaire, who avoided prosecution by fleeing to Switzerland and renouncing his citizenship. Then-President Clinton pardoned Mr. Rich during the closing days of his second term.

Mr. Obama's process has to be unassailable, thorough and deliberative. It should involve extensive background checks and include candidates whose ideology strengthens the Democratic Party's appeal to independents and weakens the pull of Mr. Obama's own ultraliberal positions. Mr. Obama has to be clear about what he wants in a vice president. Geography is a huge consideration. Mr. Obama's troubles with voters in Midwestern majority-white and blue-collar voting blocs are real and will require someone who can deeply connect with those voters. Picking someone who shares Mr. Obama's values and his vision for the future but bring something to the table he lacks is key. The running mate must be in sync with Mr. Obama and appear to be willing to carry out Mr. Obama's policies should he become unable to complete his term. (Consider John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.)

The Obama vetting team is small and includes Kennedy's daughter, Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, and Walter Mondale's 1984 campaign manager, Jim Johnson, who also chaired the vice-presidential selection process for John Kerry in 2004. Mr. Obama said neither he nor his selection committee will be talking to the press about the details until he is ready to announce his choice. That is wise, because making the process an exercise in consensus-building proved costly for Mr. Mondale, who in 1984 selected Geraldine Ferraro after dozens of meetings with party activists. But that squandered time that would have been better used uncovering the questionable real-estate dealings of Mrs. Ferraro's husband. On the other hand, her selection obviously satisfied the overarching goal of pandering to feminists.

Mr. Obama's major weaknesses (in addition to his liberalism) are his limited experience regarding national security and foreign relations, his lack of executive experience and the fact that his campaign has focused on domestic issues. Two names that already have passed the lips of Democrats are New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, a Hispanic and former candidate who also served as U.N. ambassador, and former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who also served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Both would add foreign-affairs and executive status to the Obama campaign. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas - like Hillary Clinton, who suspended her campaign on Saturday and endorsed Mr. Obama - would certainly garner measurable support from women voters. She is a native of Ohio, a state Mr. Obama lost to Mrs. Clinton.

The vice-presidential selection process can easily become an exercise in attributing too much credit to a specific voting bloc. Yet no voting bloc (especially those based on gender, race or class) is monolithic. The makeup of the Obama selection panel speaks volumes about the hand that he and the Democratic Party are playing against the McCain campaign and the Republican Party.
Who is Barack Obama?

BYLINE: By THE WASHINGTON TIMES

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On Tuesday night, Illinois state Sen. Barack Obama, a candidate for U.S. Senate, delivered the keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention in Boston, a spot traditionally reserved for governors and federal lawmakers. Consensus: He hit all the right chords, wowed the audience without resorting to Bush-bashing and fulfilled his promise as a rising star in the Democratic Party.

The Democrats chose wisely when they decided to give the slot to Mr. Obama. Indeed, his biography alone augurs well for an easy win in his Senate race. Born to a Kenyan father and a white Kansan mother, and raised in Indonesia and Hawaii, Mr. Obama combines a lower-class background with Ivy League gentility. After earning a law degree from Harvard, he worked as a civil-rights lawyer and college lecturer in Chicago before being elected a state senator in 1997.

During his keynote address Tuesday night, Mr. Obama, while devoting a great deal of time to his rags-to-riches bio, positioned himself as a moderate and even tickled the crowd with some conservative values, such as calling for personal responsibility, a strong national defense and limited government.

In fact, so enamored have many in the media been over this prodigy that many conveniently have overlooked the rather unsurprising fact that Mr. Obama is just another liberal. Consider the following:

* In October 2002, Mr. Obama said that the buildup to the war against Saddam Hussein was just a political diversion concocted by Bush political adviser Karl Rove. Mr. Obama said that a "rigorous, multilateral inspections regime" would have been sufficient to contain Saddam Hussein.

* Asked if he would support Howard Dean as the Democratic presidential candidate, Mr. Obama replied, "Absolutely."

* Mr. Obama has been endorsed by the anti-defense organization Council for a Livable World, which supports cuts in defense spending and opposes missile defense.

* Mr. Obama supports gun-control laws across the board. As an official at the Illinois State Rifle Association told us, "Mr. Obama is about as liberal as you can get" on the question of gun ownership.

* Mr. Obama opposed President Bush's tax cuts and has said all of them should be repealed. Recently, however, he amended his position and now says that those tax cuts that benefit the middle class should be retained.

* Mr. Obama supports affirmative action, opposes No Child Left Behind and school vouchers and has been endorsed by the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

* Mr. Obama has received a 100 percent rating from the Illinois Planned Parenthood Council.

* Mr. Obama is a critic of NAFTA and has said that the United States should "retool trade agreements to include protections for American workers and the global environment."

As his star continues to rise, we hope Mr. Obama will become the politician he pretended to be in his speech Tuesday night. Old habits die hard, though.
The other Barack Obama

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We don't recall the last time a first-term senator introduced "Monday Night Football" to a national audience; we just hope it doesn't become a trend. But such is Illinois Sen. Barack Obama's celebrity these days that we imagine few who watched Monday's game between the Chicago Bears and St. Louis Rams didn't know that the guy on their screens wearing that awkward Bears cap was a possible future president.

Of course, if you haven't yet fallen prey to Obama-mania, you might just be asking, What has this guy done to deserve all this? The answer is very little but that's also the point. Mr. Obama's two years in the Senate have been relatively quiet, given all the national attention he garners. We'll be analyzing his Senate record so far in a later editorial.

For now, the best way to understand the kind of politician Mr. Obama is and not what team he roots for is to look at his record before becoming a U.S. senator. In 1996, Mr. Obama was elected to the Illinois Senate, representing a South Side district of Chicago. Although he failed in a bid at a congressional seat in 2000, this was Mr. Obama's only legislative experience before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 2004.

* Between 1997 and 1998 and again in 2001, the Illinois Planned Parenthood Council gave Mr. Obama a 100 percent rating on his voting record.

* In 1999, the anti-tax organization National Taxpayers United of Illinois gave Mr. Obama a 0 percent rating on his voting record; in 2001-02, it gave him a 10 percent rating.

* In 2003, the Illinois Environmental Council gave Mr. Obama a 100 percent rating; in 1998, it gave Mr. Obama a 75 percent rating.

* In 2004, based on his lifetime voting record in the Illinois Senate, the National Rifle Association Political Victory Fund gave Mr. Obama a grade of F.

* On labor issues, the Illinois AFL-CIO gave Mr. Obama a 92 percent rating, an 89 percent rating and an 89 percent rating in the years 1999, 2001 and 2003, respectively.

* At an antiwar rally in October 2002, Mr. Obama delivered a fiery speech in which he said, "What I am opposed to is the attempt by political hacks like Karl Rove to distract us from the rise in the uninsured, a rise in the poverty rate, a drop in the median income." However, as Black Commentator magazine noticed, when Mr. Obama began his campaign for the U.S. Senate those remarks mysteriously disappeared from his Web site.

In short, Mr. Obama's record as an Illinois state senator was down-the-line liberal. For someone representing a liberal district in Chicago, that's not very surprising. What is surprising is how Mr. Obama's liberal label has been effectively wiped clean since he entered the U.S. Senate.

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