

OBAMA: A LOST AND INEFFECTIVE LEADER

Stephen L. Bakke – August 4, 2011

Obama's Running Commentary

The jury is out on the success or failure of the debt and budget debate. I will address that at a later date. What I am concerned with here is the running commentary Obama gave as the two houses of Congress struggled with this very difficult task.



During the debate, Obama refused to provide leadership by presenting DETAILED guidance of potential solutions to the impasse they were facing. But that isn't what I consider the worst of his leadership transgressions. Rather here is my focus of concern:

- In the middle of this debate he couldn't set aside his natural tendencies to talk down our country and provide divisive negative comments and demagoguery.
- He emphasized and reemphasized how the country is in such bad shape solely because of (guess who?) George W.
- He tried to heighten the crisis by scaring the markets and debt holders by stating inaccurately what would happen if an increase in the debt ceiling were delayed.
- He attempted to scare retired Americans and our military by stating he couldn't guarantee their priority for getting paid.
- He pounded on the "hated" "fat-cats – those greedy millionaires and billionaires."
- He repeatedly, and most unhelpfully, publicly ridiculed congressional leadership – particularly the republicans – but actually the democrats as well.

Scare tactics, class warfare and demagoguery are not the tactics of an effective leader. He lacks something I want my president to possess – a reflexive and obvious pride in the United States. Rather he is reflexively NOT interested in expressing the exceptionalism of the United States.



What Was He Thinking and Why Does He Do That?

What makes Obama that way? As I wrote many months ago, we are all products of our training, education, and life experiences. At that time I went on to research Obama's life experiences and positions he held. One significant activity was spending years involved, in various ways, with community organizing in Chicago. It has been widely reported and acknowledged that he spent time studying, and later training, community organizers in the "Alinsky Method." Saul Alinsky, the "godfather" of community organizing, was a left wing activist and wrote the book "Rules for Radicals." I purchased an old copy, published approximately 40 years ago, and found it incredible. The book is excellent and terribly frightening.

Apparently, one of Obama's early mentors in the "Alinsky Method" was Mike Kruglik who had this to say in an interview with "The New Republic": "He was a natural, the undisputed master of agitation, who could engage a room full of recruiting targets in a rapid-fire Socratic dialogue, nudging them to admit that they were not living up to their own standards ... he could be aggressive and confrontational ... he would pinpoint the source of pain in their lives, tearing down their egos just enough before dangling a carrot of hope that they could make things better."

So, what did Alinsky teach that made sense to the young Obama and which influenced his "style" in dealing with situations and governing? Let me repeat a few items here that I believe provide insight into how Obama deals with others – particularly his constituents and his opposition. Alinsky provided these as some of his rules and principles (see if you recognize any similarities to Obama while reading this):

- Goals must be phrased in general terms like "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," "Of the Common Welfare," "Pursuit of Happiness," or "Bread and Peace."
- If you push a negative hard enough and deep enough it will break through into its counterside.
- **Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.**
- **The opposition is the enemy and they are 100% evil, without any redeeming features. To recognize any good points of/from the opposition is a sign of weakness.**

Here are some parallels I have drawn:

- ***Some contend:*** that Obama and his "disciples" believe in creating chaos or making sure that no crisis is ever wasted. He has been accused of using false hyperbole and misinformation to stir up the emotion about an issue. ***Alinsky taught:*** "The first step in community organization is community disorganization ... No politician can sit on a hot issue if you make it hot enough ... **In the beginning the organizer's first job is to create the issues or problems** ... What the organizer does is convert the plight into a problem."
- ***Some contend:*** Obama's own words imploring his supporters argue and "get in the face" of critics, might just indicate an unsavory characteristic or tactic favored by him. ***Alinsky taught:*** "Change means movement. Movement means friction ... abrasive friction of conflict ... **The organizer's job ... [is] to agitate, introduce ideas, get people pregnant with hope and a desire for change** ... The organizer dedicated to organizing the life of a particular community must first rub raw the resentments of the people ... **fan the latent hostilities ... stir up dissatisfaction** ..."

- *Some contend:* the Obama presidency has caused more polarization than at any other time. The Republicans and the “Tea Party” are definitely “taking it on the chin” for this. Some feel that polarizing the system is Obama’s intention. *Alinsky taught:* “**Before men can act an issue must be polarized.** Men will act when they are convinced that their cause is 100 per cent on the side of the angels and that the opposition are 100 per cent on the side of the devil ... [The organizer] knows that all ideas arise from conflict.”

Does this provide any insight? Did you detect any similarities to Obama’s tactics and style?

What Should a True Leader Say?

Let’s get back to the topic of Obama’s deficiencies during the recent “debt crisis.” What would a true leader have said? A good leader would NOT talk down the U.S. economy and state concern that bills might not be paid. He purposely and unnecessarily scared senior citizens. He stoked the fires of class envy and class warfare. Here is what he should have said:

“I want to speak to U.S. citizens about what’s going on in Congress. And I invite leaders and all people of the world to listen in on this conversation.

What you are witnessing is the painful process of deliberation set out by our founders when matters of this magnitude are to be legislated. Since I became involved in elected office at the state and federal level, I have come to better understand what was referred to as the ‘great experiment’ – that is, our form of government. It is painfully deliberative! Good people on both sides of the debate believe their world view is the correct one.

Our system, by design, makes it difficult to complete controversial and important legislation. Let me assure you all that our economy is stretched but it won’t break and you are witnessing the process we follow to get to the best possible answer – our system demands that! We are coming close to a critical time in this debate, and with important matters like these being considered in a divided congress, some conflict is no surprise.

This debate isn’t really about whether we can fulfill our obligations here and around the world – we won’t disappoint you in that. The debate is about what should be our economic policies and priorities going forward. We will ultimately get to the best answer possible – but it won’t be easy – tough choices never are.

I, as chief executive, have the authority to do what is necessary to set short term spending priorities and to make sure there are no defaults on our national debt. So, while I attend to my job, you all pay attention to this dynamic and exciting place (albeit sometimes frustrating) which I am privileged to serve as President – the United States of America.”

That’s what a true leader would have said – or something to that effect – those are just my words. But the words Obama did speak truly indicate just how lost he is. He repeatedly talks down our country, its leaders, its institutions, its traditions and his legitimate, committed opposition!