

## OBAMA, THE COMEBACK KID? ..... LET'S ADD UP THE SCORE!

Stephen L. Bakke – December 24, 2010

For the last several days the loyal, adoring press has been radiating the “good news” that faux “messiah” Obama has come back from the brink of political ruin in the final days before Christmas. I’m sure no one has missed the “glowing” enthusiasm of these reporters. I contend that he looks good because he has done so badly during most of the first two years that the “bar of expectations” has been lowered dramatically. But whatever the circumstances, the mainstream media is returning to full campaign mode!

And, unfortunately Obama did gain big PR points. These last few weeks did help him, but for the reasons stated in the prior paragraph – more emotion than substance – but that helps too. Before we become too enamored (libs) or distressed (conservatives), let’s really take a look at what’s been going on. **(Yes – your C-Span warrior has been on the job.)** As we look at these developments, I will assign points – from **minus 5** for a big defeat to **plus 5** for a major victory.

***Immigration/Dream Legislation*** – This bill died last week. There had been a huge push by Obama and his base. While it had elements (re: pathway to citizenship for children of illegal aliens) that many conservatives would agree to, the reluctance by the administration to produce real border security killed the bill. Nothing will ever move ahead without border security. **An embarrassing defeat for Obama – one that could have been avoided! (minus 4 points)**

***Continuation of Current Income Tax Rates*** – The democrats didn’t want this to happen – big time! They pledged that they would increase the income tax rates on the wealthiest Americans – families over \$250,000 income. They said it, shouted it, and screamed it! The republicans simply wanted the current rates to stay as is for all – and they will, for now. Republicans are accused of just wanting tax cuts to the wealthy – ignoring the positive economic effect of lower taxes for all, including the wealthy. This was all about aggressive class warfare – not about the economic effects of tax rates. The Senate couldn’t do Obama’s bidding so the President reeled himself back in, rejected his base, and agreed to compromise with the republicans by leaving things as is – for two full years. He even agreed that leaving tax rates in place would be good for the economy. During the next two years the House will be controlled by republicans, and they will also gain power in the Senate. The final decision on the tax rates will come when the Republicans have much more influence. Obama was praised for bringing bipartisan agreement to the issue. **NO! He compromised! He came reasonably close to what the republicans were hoping for all along. A defeat for Obama! (only minus 1 point because, unfortunately, he did get the two year limit and extension of unemployment benefits)**

***Repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell*** – I’m fine with this. The time has come for this change. DADT was a “fall-back” measure employed by Clinton because no other agreement could be reached. It was a “punt.” It is now time to put the old compromise policy to bed and accept the inevitable and start learning how to deal with “open enrollment” for the military. There will be implementation problems, but everything will be fine. I welcome new patriots to the military! This is a routine measure – let’s move on. **Obama really had to have something for which he could “beg for applause.” Nothing stunning here! (0 points for both sides – ho hum!)**

***New START Treaty*** – This was all about timing. Remember that it is the Senate’s obligation to critically examine and ratify all treaties proposed by the President before they become official. As I wrote in recent weeks about this process: *“I have noted ..... the reluctance of conservative Senator Kyl to address this measure too quickly. I believe he is leaning toward agreeing with the treaty if he can obtain assurances, which are enforceable and deliverable by the administration, of a commitment to fund future nuclear arms modernization ..... other concerns as well – like making sure he and all the Senate understand what is proposed, what the consequences are, and what could be the “unintended consequences” ..... if (Kyle and others) obtain what they are after, I believe the Senate should, and will, ratify this treaty with at least the required 67 bipartisan votes in the affirmative. In fact, I predict an overwhelming vote to affirm ...”*

Senator Kyle didn’t vote for ratification, along with a few others, but for the most part, it all came to be – discussion, debate, amendments, written assurances. It worked as I predicted and as it should have. This would be a “push” for scorekeeping purposes, except that the “pure politics” portion goes to Obama. Due to the bipartisanship exhibited by the republicans, after they had their say and obtained assurances and clarifications, they supported cloture and completed the vote in the current congressional session. They could have delayed it until the new congress. **Obama prevails on pure politics alone – nothing to brag about! (plus 1 point)**

***Government Funding*** – Congress attempted to bring a \$1.3 trillion budget to a vote at the last minute. Keep in mind, the government has been operating under a continuing resolution (temporary) for several months. Fortunately, Harry Reid was soundly defeated in his attempt to jam this through. And there were 6,630 “earmarks” in the proposed budget, totaling over \$8 billion. That type of foolish hurry-up, pork-barrel funding was what voters rejected in the November elections! And Obama supported it! A new budget bill will be brought up early in the new year when there will be adequate time to carefully consider the economics of this country. **This was such a foolhardy attempt I wish I could assign -10 points – but the rules have been set. It was certainly a major slamdown! (minus 5 points)**

---

Now let’s take a look at some other major programs and activities of the Obama administration over the last 2 years. How did these turn out? Since I am focused here mainly on the last few weeks in determining “comeback status,” each of these will only range from -1 to +1 point. These should influence the end result – i.e. they should blunt any measurement of success – but shouldn’t be determinant in evaluating comeback status based on recent events.

***GITMO*** – “I’ll close GITMO in a year.” That was Obama’s campaign promise – more than a promise – an assurance. He made much ado about nothing and looked foolish doing it. And that entire embarrassment spilled over into the issue on how/where/when to conduct trials for these terrorists. Terribly misguided promises and subsequent conduct. **Obama’s inexperience is transparent and his naïveté is shining through. Foolish! (the max of minus 1 point)**

***Bail Outs*** – Unnecessary and expensive. Chrysler and GM had to file bankruptcy anyway. They didn’t need the hands of the government all over the process. Because there was some bipartisan support for some of these measures, I might have given Obama a break. **But because**

**a major part of his motivation was disclosed so clearly – i.e. bailing out the unions at the expense of ALL other stakeholders – I have no choice but to slap his hand. (minus 1 point)**

***Tarp/Stimulus*** – Didn't work! Couldn't work! Made things worse! In fact, all of that nonsense merely delayed the inevitable. And the stimulus cost at least \$1 trillion. Markets will hit bottom. Home prices will hit bottom. Unemployment will seek its level. We should have bitten the bullet and let the chips fall where they may. He learned well from FDR – the Great Depression lasted at least until WW II pulled them out of it – 12 plus years. **I can't give Obama a break on this one because of the certainty with which he employed these failed policies. (minus 1 point)**

***Gulf Oil Spill*** – Obama didn't know what to do, but few did. Most would have accomplished equally little. I'm sure he was frustrated that his progressive declarations couldn't solve the problem. The harm he did was relative to the decisions on a ban on drilling, but that is covered in the next item. Other than that, **not much harm done – thanks to Mother Nature. (0 points)**

***Energy and Environment*** – Carbon tax/cap and trade – virtually dead on arrival! No apparent determination by Obama to do the important things necessary for energy independence: smart drilling, nuclear energy, etc. The administration is blind to any proposal that isn't defined as "green." But, regrettably, those aren't real, practical solutions at all. And there seems to be nothing that reduces jobs more than the energy regulations being created and enforced re: drilling, coal and gas. **Obama really hasn't shown up for this one at all. (minus 1 point)**

***Health Care Reform*** – Individual mandates – maybe unconstitutional. Promises of cheaper health care – already we see that won't happen. With a stroke of the pen, Obama created what could be the most devastatingly negative economic program in U.S. history. And guess what! – it will seriously damage our health care system – particularly innovation in medicine and technology. Health care could have been reformed in a different, more effective way. But this was all about government gaining control over more of the economy, the culture, and our lives. **On a scale of minus 1 to plus 1, this should be minus 5, but there are rules. (minus 1 point)**

---

**In the final analysis**, reflect on the accolades being showered on Obama for becoming more willing to compromise and react to the election. The fact that he supported the huge last minute spending bill is proof that he didn't so that. And the fact that he agreed to support the tax rate compromise is a "cave," nothing less. The real compromise came from the republicans (to the dismay of some). On several measures, most notably the New START Treaty and DADT, they voted in a way that seemed appropriate to them. They could have accomplished much the same thing on "their watch" – after the new congress convenes – but that would have been pure politics. I may disagree with some of their choices, but the final result was OK with me.

**Total points: MINUS 14!!** There's no comeback evident there. Suppose I would have been a little less critical and given Obama 5 points better – still a real failure. He already gets about 5 points to his benefit because of his PR impact (shucks!). I'm sure you will never see more objective scorekeeping than this. **So take heart republicans, and look out democrats!**