

## THE SUMMIT AT BLAIR HOUSE

Stephen L. Bakke – February 26, 2010

*My Irritation accelerates as this article progresses. So go ahead and skip ahead if you prefer.*

### Philosophies On Display

Over the last months I've given you all my arguments regarding the reform of health care (over 30 articles, a few with fairly wide distribution). I don't have anything new to add to those arguments. So, this is an opportunity to highlight some basic philosophical differences between conservative and liberal approaches to all that life presents. Nothing exemplifies these differences better than how we look at health care, the politics involved, and the arguments presented. And for the first time we saw these conflicting approaches in the raw light of day during the "Health Care Summit" held February 25<sup>th</sup> at Blair House. Yes, I watched most of it. **And it's a little scary how much I enjoyed it!**

These two philosophies represent two vastly different "world views." Those holding these views are usually sincere and credible. Often these philosophies become tainted and distorted by pure politics, but we have to deal with it – most of what gets done in our world involves politics.

The liberal philosophies that came through from the Democrats:

- A very expansive view of the federal government's role in all aspects of life.
- A view that citizens need government's guidance in all aspects of "health care."
- Come from a reference point of compassion being one of their most important principles.
- Fully seeking to control (or guide and protect using their words) beyond what is necessary or desirable – after all they very bold in proclaiming "we know best."
- An assumption that the government should be limited only by what it can't deliver.

The conservative philosophies that were evident in the Republican's arguments:

- A belief that government's role is defined/limited by the U.S. Constitution.
- A sense that citizens are generally capable of accepting a level of independence and self reliance.
- Come from a reference point of a high regard for historical principle – compassion can't just be discussed, there must be results – and the conservative approach brings the right conclusion.
- Strong intuitive feelings that even with the best and most compassionate intentions, the result is an unacceptable level of control.
- The government's role should continue to be what is constitutionally provided for.

The above are from a report I did over a year ago on liberal and conservative thought. I believe they help describe the two philosophies on display at Blair House. I would agree that their statements and these attributes are not a perfect match, but directionally they do correlate well.

## **Getting to Know You, Getting to Know All About You** (*Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein*)

We didn't know much about our president when he emerged prominently on the national scene just about four years ago. **As Time Goes By** (*Lyrics by Herman Hupfeld*), we learn more and more about whom he is.

The thing I found most irritating was Obama's flagrantly patronizing and dismissive arrogance toward all in attendance – even (poor) Joe Biden. I don't think he needed to "scold" his opposition the way he did. That's one of his least endearing characteristics – an ego beyond anything I have ever seen. His view of himself is most certainly of being elite and regal, in ways he is not. A great president will always be confident but also will bring a genuine humility to his leadership. Obama's inexperience came through because he tended to "proclaim concepts", ignoring and even "pooh poohing" details, while the opposition brought facts and excellent counterpoints to his, and the Democrats' statements.

Some of the action:

- Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA) the number-two house Republican brought a copy of the 2,400 page Senate bill, quoted from it and commented, along with other Republicans. Obama in his dismissive style, scolded Cantor for using **"props (that) prevent us from having a conversation."**
- Again, as Cantor began to speak, Obama chimed in: **"(The) truth of the matter is, health care is a very complicated subject."** He doesn't want simple objections to easily understood problems with his favored legislation. Doesn't he think the American people can actually understand such complicated concepts as health care reform? Or is he afraid they just might understand!
- Once more, in an attempt to avoid the details about how the Democrats' proposals have failed to control costs, Obama told a brilliant young Republican congressman, Paul Ryan, that he'd rather not **"get bogged down in numbers."** He's obviously not a "numbers guy" and is uncomfortable dealing with any numbers or statistics that don't roll down his teleprompter! Please give me a break "Mr. Concept and Generalist Guy!" The devil really is in the details!
- When challenged by Republican leadership that the Republican's were not allotted the same time as the Democrats (Republicans spoke about 30% of the time), Obama once again was dismissive, neither smiling nor showing any intended humor: **"I don't count my time because I'm the president."**
- Senator John McCain made some comments about promises not kept by Obama and the Democrats and also about it being wrong to treat some Americans better than others. Our president interrupted the comments and scolded: **"Uh, let me just make this point. We're not campaigning anymore. Uh, John, the elections over."** Whatever you think of McCain's candidacy and record, he is a gentleman and would **never** have pulled that!
- At one point in the afternoon, as a deflection of the discussion about the possibility of "reconciliation" (procedural move to get the legislation passed with only 51 Senate votes), our president stated (once more dismissively): **"The American people are not all**

**that interested in procedures inside the Senate.”** B as in B, S as in S!! And pat the ignorant citizenry on the head! He’s a master at that!

Obama was ingenious in accomplishing his now all too familiar goal of keeping the accomplishments “all about him” and the failures “all about others” – mostly Republicans but also some on his side. I wonder if some of “his own” are sometimes upset by the way he sets himself up for claiming most of the success with most downside reserved for others – especially his own party. That’s another discussion. But he’s good at pulling off this annoying style!

### **Brief Rant**

Here I will briefly go “off subject.” Do you notice the disregard this administration has for the American people? – e.g. The government knows best; You can’t decide that on your own; You probably don’t care about the details; The details and process are too complicated for you to understand. This liberal/democrat opinion was stated very clearly by Jacob Weisberg in Newsweek – **“These are large factors to be sure, but that list neglects what may be the biggest culprit of all: the childishness, ignorance, and growing incoherence of the public at large.”** Is that what elitists like President Obama think of us? I think it is!

### **Evaluation/Observations:**

*OK, SB ..... you worked up quite a lather writing this – just calm down and give an objective evaluation of the “summit”!*

*OK, I will! .....*

The “summit” was more a good thing than a bad thing – for both sides of the discussion. I think it is a good precedent to set and a process we can seek to improve on next time. The tone was mostly OK, and the discussion bold but usually civil. The Democrats (Democrat delegation and the President) dominated the time by approximately two to one, but much of the Democrats’ time was taken up (wasted) by sad stories and proclamations of their compassion (policy by anecdote – note the false teeth comment).

The Republicans were very well organized and “on point.” I was very pleased that the Republicans came so well prepared to an event that, at best, they could only hope to “break even.” I am very pleased by the performances of many Republicans, particularly Representative Paul Ryan, and Senators Lamar Alexander, John Kyl, and Tom Coburn – there were others as well! As stated by commentator Jonah Goldberg, the Republicans “succeeded in undermining the central talking point of the Democrats – that the Republican Party has no ideas on health care.”

This gathering was what Obama had to do, and something Republicans couldn’t avoid. It turned out to be all it could be.

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Next, a look at the question “Is Health Care a Constitutional Right?”