

Promises, Promises

by Alfred S. Regnery

I FIND IT ENLIGHTENING to review the many promises made by incoming presidents over the years, and to then compare those promises with what they actually accomplished.

The country is fixated on what Mr. Obama has promised and his big plans. With Washington now owned by the left, there is no little bit of damage that he and his cohorts in Congress might do. But a look at history will reveal that things never turn out as even the wisest among us expect. Presidents usually end up remembered not for what they promised, but for persistent and nasty little problems they did not foresee. Just ask LBJ, Nixon, Carter, Clinton, or George W. Bush.

Take economics. The Democrats' so-called stimulus is designed to fundamentally restructure our economy and set the country on a new course. We may be in the minority, but we happen to think that any change will be negative and likely result in unhappy times we have unfortunately seen before. The U.S. economy has enjoyed steady economic growth since its earliest days, with the exception of two protracted periods of stasis and decline: the 1930s and the 1970s. We asked economist Steve Moore to take a look at the more recent decade. Growth fell during those 10 years by 45 percent from the postwar pace, and Jimmy Carter's "misery index," which combines inflation and unemployment, jumped from its postwar average of 7 percent to a truly miserable 21 percent. A new term was coined—stagflation—and it's about to make a comeback.

Mr. Obama's economic policies, Moore warns, coming in the wake of the imploding Bush presidency's bailouts of the past several months, could return us to interest rates, unemployment, and inflation not seen since that dreaded Carter era. If the unanticipated recession is what we will remember George W. Bush by, then unanticipated stagflation could be Mr. Obama's legacy—unanticipated by Mr. Obama, that is.

What about events abroad? Mr. Obama has promised to withdraw from Iraq and to send more troops instead into Afghanistan. He will also, he tells

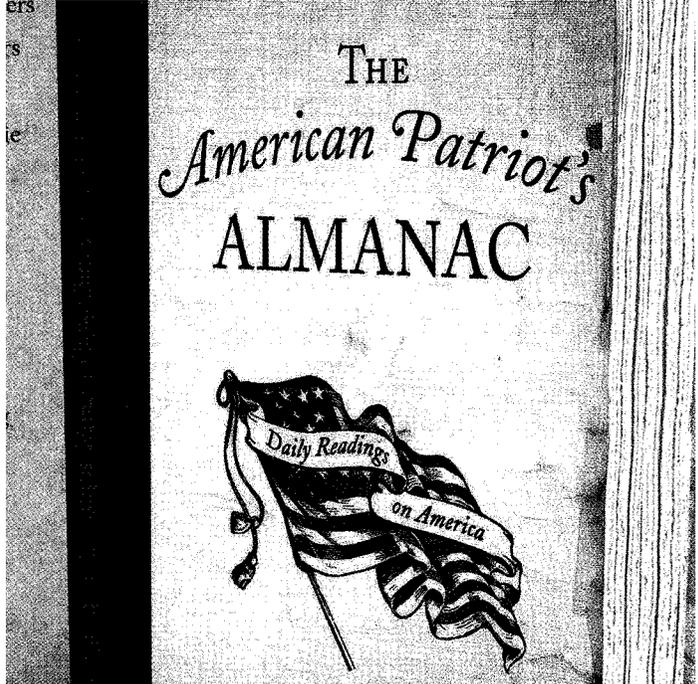
us, finally locate the elusive Mr. Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice (presumably in an air-conditioned courtroom, subject to the federal rules of evidence and all the other constitutional niceties accorded to American miscreants). But where, oh where, you might wonder, is this Osama, and what is it that we are actually trying to achieve in Afghanistan?

In a pair of pieces we examine these questions. Historian and analyst Angelo Codevilla, in our cover story, contends it's more likely we'll find Mr. Elvis Presley among the living than the permanently missing Mr. bin Laden. Meanwhile, foreign policy hand Stefan Halper explains why our chance of accomplishing whatever it is we are trying to accomplish in Afghanistan—a good question by itself—is not much better than that experienced by the British in the 1840s or the Russians in the 1980s. To give our previous comparison a different twist: if George W. Bush will be remembered for an Iraq war he did not, in the early days of his presidency, anticipate, will Mr. Obama—a president promising to reshape the world—end up remembered for a debacle in Afghanistan?

George Friedman, in his perceptive new book *The Next 100 Years*, reminds us that things that appear to be permanent at any given moment can change with the blink of an eye. As we anticipate the Obama-Pelosi-Reid domination of government, we should look back to 1980: we had been defeated in a lengthy war with North Vietnam aided by China, the U.S. was in decline about everywhere you looked, and the USSR was at the peak of its power. A mere 20 years later the Soviet Union was out of business, the economic boom was roaring along, and China was busily turning itself into a capitalist country.

Then came September 11 and the world was turned on its ear. So let us remind Mr. Obama that nobody has a clear view of the future. But you can bet the farm on one thing. It will look vastly different from what this president, or anyone else, may think right now. ❁

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THE CONTINUING CRISIS

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.



January witnessed the inauguration of the 44th president of the United States, and the first of African American origins, though Miss Toni Morrison claimed President Bill Clinton was America's "First Black President" and in the 1920s there were rumors about President Warren Harding that were not meant as compliments. President Barack H. Obama's African American roots are, and on a frigid day in Washington he intoned a somber speech on the steps of the Capitol, fully cognizant of the economic gloom facing the country but apparently utterly unaware that Global Warming is passé. Mr. Obama offered change and hope, and a new tone in Washington—though the weekend before he spoke, as many as 100 private jets had landed at Dulles International, closing the runway but assuring that Washington's new tone would be very tony indeed. By the end of the inaugural revels twice as many private jets had flown into the capital as had flown in for President George W. Bush's 2004 ceremonies—new tone, indeed.

In Illinois Mr. Obama's former supporter, Gov. Rod Blagojevich, was fighting impeachment for attempting to sell Mr. Obama's Senate seat to the highest bidder, and in early January Gov. Bill Richardson of New Mexico had to withdraw his nomination as Mr. Obama's commerce secretary, owing to corruption investigations back home. Then Mr. Obama's nominee for secretary of the treasury, Mr. Timothy Geithner, admitted that he owed \$34,000 in back taxes, and former senator Tom Daschle, Mr. Obama's nominee for secretary of health and human services, admitted to failing to pay more than \$128,000 in taxes and to engaging in energetic lobbying. It was all quite embarrassing, but it did shed light on why Democrats do not mind if the government raises their taxes. They simply do not pay them. By the end of January a new bumper sticker was seen around Washington: "Vote Democratic! Raise Taxes. Don't Pay Them."

In Canada members of a breakaway Mormon group were charged with polygamy, which is not to be confused with the board game Monopoly. Investigators in New York probed the financial chicanery of Mr. Bernard Madoff, who amassed a fortune by paying off early investors with monies he cadged from more recent investors, which is not to be confused with the federal government's Social Security system. Mid-month a blast of freezing weather crossed much of the United States from Canada, bringing some of the coldest weather experienced by Americans—environmentalists included—since the arctic weather of 2004. Even Hollywood, California, suffered the shivers as Los Angeles experienced a rare snowfall. January, in fact, marked the 10th winter in a row that frigid weather befuddled the environmental wackos' computer predictions of Global Inferno, and once again it was gloomy Mr. Al Gore's fate to testify before Congress about the nonexistent inferno on one of Washington's coldest, most inclement days. The Sage appeared at the door of the Capitol wearing a heavy overcoat and stepping cautiously lest he slip on the ice. Glassy-eyed—and frankly looking adipose—he answered questions posed to him by Senator Jean-François Kerry's Foreign Relations Committee. Perhaps inspired by hushed tones of his adulatory questioners, he occasionally lapsed into Oriental rumble-bumble, as when he chanted: "The road to Copenhagen has three steps to it." None of the senators laughed or even asked that the former vice president submit to a urine test. Actually, a Republican senator, the Hon. Bob Corker, chirped that he "very much enjoyed your sense of humor too." Mr. Gore was not joking, you dinkelspiel! That is how the mooncalf talks, even with his manicurist.

American conservatives, alarmed about illegal immigration, could borrow a page from the political playbook of Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. Sr. Berlusconi is supporting a campaign in Italy's