

PUBLIC NUISANCES

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.



Missing Bill

WASHINGTON

OUR NATION'S CAPITAL IS filling with *nouveau* New Dealers, social engineers, men and women with a glint in the eye. All are anticipating the orgies. There is a stimulus bill of \$787 billion, an appropriation bill of \$410 billion, a housing bailout bill of \$275 billion, and the Prophet Obama's colossal budget, promising \$3.55 trillion of expenditures (including a \$634 billion "down payment" on health care reform). My heart goes out to the American taxpayer, of course, but, somewhat to my surprise, I reserve a special sadness for former president Bill Clinton. In his party he is a dinosaur. Today, as the Obamaists swarm through Washington, the centrist from the 1990s must feel forlorn.

For years it has been his boast that he balanced the federal budget and maintained vigorous economic growth. He expanded free trade and, working bipartisanly with Republicans, reformed welfare. People left the welfare rolls and took remunerative employment. Usually federal spending hovers around 20 percent of GDP. In the Clinton administration it dropped to 18.4 percent—the lowest level since 1966. Bill said "the era of big government is over," and he meant it.

Today his party has passed him by. Bill, can we now be friends? I apologize for all my past rudeness, even the jokes. It is a matter of public record that you have made friends with Dick Scaife. Allow me to be next. Let us convene a conference. We could explore market solutions to public problems and together we could promulgate a manifesto on free trade. I shall bring some friends from the Heritage Foundation and the Hoover Institution—PhDs. Perhaps we can plot how to re-reform welfare after the Obama administration shanghai's the poor back into the welfare trap.

Under the Prophet, federal expenditures will soar to 27.7 percent of GDP. That is the highest rate of expenditure since 1945. The deficit will hit \$1.7 trillion this year and after a brief decline rise above \$700 billion. His budget contemplates a recovery,

but in 2010 spending will still be in the range of 24.1 percent of GDP. Moreover, he will raise taxes and cut the military.

Though we are mired in a recession whose recovery is still in doubt, the Obama administration is going to move on all fronts. As his White House chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, has said, "Never let a serious crisis go to waste." If you are suffering from the recession you might find Emanuel's line callous, but that is just the way Democrats talk nowadays. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton put it this way: "Never waste a good crisis."

Both of these crisisists apparently believe there is something systemic in the United States that needs to be radically changed. Perhaps they think that the past 25 years of growth that began with the Reagan administration and continued through the administration of Emanuel's former boss, Bill Clinton, was a failure. So working simultaneously the Obama administration is going to fix the banking crisis, the housing crisis, and the economic slowdown. That is not all. It promises to usher in nationalized health care, nationalized education, and a nationalized energy policy abundant with green energy funded and regulated by the government.

With all of this hurly-burly going on I hope my new friend is not going to suffer the blues. In less than four years his presidency is going to be looked back on fondly by Democrats and even by me. I think it is increasingly evident that Bill's Democratic successor is the most ill-prepared man to serve as president in a long time. My mind goes back to President Abraham Lincoln's abrupt successor, Andrew Johnson. Mr. Obama's problems in staffing his government suggest as much, as does the low quality of many of his nominees, at least the nominees who were not dropped for tax irregularities or for being under grand jury investigation. Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner looks and sounds like an undergraduate. His colleague Peter Orszag is hardly better. In the months ahead we shall see what other duds the president has brought aboard.

So cheer up, Bill. Your legacy is going to look fine, save for that unmentionable run-in with what was

her name again? Already things are turning against the Prophet. Just the other day Howard Fineman, writing on the *Newsweek* website, noted that “the American establishment is taking his [the president’s] measure and, with surprising swiftness, they are finding him lacking.” Bill, let’s have a beer.

Progress Thwarted

WASHINGTON

VINDICATION IS SWEET! During last summer’s Olympics, I wrote in this space that the high-tech swimming suits worn by competitive swimmers in the events and manufactured by Speedo with the assistance of NASA scientists were irrelevant to sport and destined for further controversy. In fact, I argued that the suits, known as the Speedo LZR Racer, were as inappropriate for competitive swimming as wearing swim fins in the pool. Now a rising chorus of swimming coaches and competitors seems to agree.

The LZR’s are made of high-tech material. They cover a competitor’s body from shoulders to ankles. The material allows the body to float higher in the water. It also offers less resistance to the water than human skin, allowing those who encase themselves in it to glide through the water faster. Consequently, in championships everyone wants to wear an LZR. Those who do obviously have an unfair advantage over those who, for whatever reason, do not. Not surprisingly, since the arrival of the LZR the incidence of world records has increased—though this does not mean that today’s champions in their high-tech suits are really faster than pre-high-tech swimmers.

In fact, the use of the high-tech suits by Michael Phelps last summer casts doubt on the claim that his performance was greater than that of Mark Spitz in 1972. Phelps won eight golds, one more than Spitz. But Spitz, wearing a pre-tech suit best described as a brief, set world records in every event he won. Phelps equaled Spitz’s seven world records, but the records he beat were set in olden times, before the advent of the LZR. It is estimated that the LZR improves a swimmer’s time by at least 3 percent. Did Phelps best each world record by at least 3 percent? He did not. Spitz’s Olympic performance is arguably history’s best.

We can thank the inventors of this idiotic aquatic contraption for this idiotic debate. Also we must

thank NCAA officials who last September decided to allow its use in intercollegiate swimming. Why did they not allow the use of swim fins too?

Now coaches are grumbling that the high-tech suits have introduced a variable into the sport that detracts from the essence of competitive swimming: stroke mechanics, rigorous training, and competitive drive. Dennis Dale, the swimming coach at the University of Minnesota, told the *Wall Street Journal*, “I’m very disappointed that our sport has come to a point where I have to be as concerned with swimsuits as I am with the swimmers.” Said Phil Whitten, executive director of the College Swim Coaches Association: “It’s like having one pole-vaulter using a fiberglass pole and another using a wooden pole. It’s an absolute mess.”

Moreover, the introduction of high-tech suits not only gives an advantage to those who wear them. The LZR gives a special advantage to fat swimmers—yes, I said fat swimmers. The suits compress competitors’ flesh, making their bodies more buoyant and allowing them to float higher in the water. Yet when the fat of corpulent swimmers is compressed their bodies become more buoyant than the body of a lean, dense-muscle swimmer. Thus the fatties, according to the *Journal*, “float higher in the water and swim faster.”

Another problem is that the LZR suits are tremendously expensive. Whereas the ordinary brief that most swimmers still wear costs around \$25, the LZR costs \$550. Equally appalling, it is good for only a few races before it is worn out and falls apart. This adds thousands of dollars more to cost of athletic programs that might better use their money on scholarships. The LZR redirects competitive swimming from sport to technological experimentation. It causes athletic programs to place a swimmer’s swimsuit above an athlete’s education.

At the heart of the matter we see a clever swimsuit manufacturer expanding its profits hugely by bringing out a hitherto unimagined product. What allowed Speedo to get away with this? Doubtless the officials at the NCAA assume that they are part of history’s march to progress. Well, if it is progress when swimmers wearing a high-tech swimsuit break world records, it would be even more progressive if the swimmers took up my suggestion and wore swim fins. With them the swimmers would swim even faster and at much less cost. A standard pair of fins goes for about \$30, and they last for years. ❁



American Prospect

An apparently humorless AmPro intellectualoid catalogues specimens of what very well might qualify as the magazine's ideal mums:

A mother tells her child that Haagen Dazs is a special medicine for mommies because she doesn't want to share. Another purposely ruins her daughter's favorite T-shirt with red nail polish. One joins Weight Watchers so she has a place to go by herself once a week. Another mom admits, "I can't wait to wean my daughter so I can get stoned again."

(April 2009)

The Progressive

Interviewed by another glassy-eyed scrivener from imbecility's Old Faithful, one Miss Arundhati Roy, described by the New York Times as "India's most impassioned critic of globalization and American influence," plays the role of the late historian Edward Gibbon bending over the corpse not of Rome but of Washington, D.C.:

Q: What was your response to Obama's election?

Roy: The fact that the American people wanted a change, that they wanted something else, meant a lot, because the last time they wanted the same guy back, which was devastating. So this makes me feel better about the American people.

Obama is going to be presiding over perhaps the debacle, the undoing, of the American empire. And that doesn't need to worry the American people, because the Romans are still around and the Brits are still around, and the Americans will still be around and

might be slightly more relaxed. It might be easier to be an American when there isn't an American empire.

(March 2009)

Marie Claire

On the occasion of Earth Month, a shapely editrix serves up eight libidinous items for Marie Claire's slutty readership. We pass on but four, out of concern for our readers' sexual hygiene:

Eco-Sex

In honor of Earth Day, some green playthings to spruce up your sex life:

1) Love Yourself, Love Your Planet. *Take landfill-clogging batteries out of the equation with Sola, a small bullet-shaped vibrator powered by the sun. (\$69.95; shop.libida.com)*

4) Wet and Wild. *Lube up with Hathor Aphrodisia's Lubricant Pure, an organic formula made from seven plant-based ingredients and fortified with libido-boosting Chinese herbs, like horny goat weed. (\$18.50; smittenkitten online.com)*

5) S&M with a Conscience. *Earth Erotics' Standard Recycled Rubber Whip is a hand-crafted spanker made from recycled car and truck tire parts. (\$40; eartherotics.com)*

8) Give Some, Get Some. *Trade in your broken Rabbit and worn-out handcuffs for a \$10 coupon and free shipping on your next sex toy through the mail-in Sex Toy Recycling Program (recycle*

mysextoy.com). Sorry, curbside pickup not available.

(April 2009)

New York Times Book Review

More evidence of intellectual torpor at the moribund Times as filed by Philip W. Bennett, whistleblower?

To the Editor:

With reference to the musical talents of the Wittgensteins, your reviewer did not mention the prodigious whistling talents of Ludwig, the philosopher. It is reported that Ludwig could whistle the entire parts of string quartets along with those playing instruments. When he visited the United States in 1949 as a guest of Norman Malcolm of Cornell, Malcolm reports, Wittgenstein whistled whole symphonies on the drive from New York City to Ithaca.

Philip W. Bennett
Hamden, Conn.

(March 22, 2009)

The New Republic

Another sad effort at humor from one of the New Republic's legendary teacher's pets laboriously improvising under the fanciful title "The Lesser-Known Think Tanks of Washington":

Heritage Foundation RAW

The new home for policy recommendations too crazy conservative for the

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