

# HUFFPOST POLITICS

## Extremism: How Democrats Blew It



Jeff Schweitzer: 11/04/2014

Politicians of all stripes since the dawn of time have perfected the art of feigned regret and false outrage in the face of opposition, while embracing blind indifference to their own failures. Standard fare for the left and right. But the depth, intensity, and institutionalized hypocrisy of the political right has taken our country on a new course; conservatives are writing a new chapter if not a new book on cynicism, deceit and delusion. As we contemplate our world dominated by Republicans controlling the House and Senate, we must therefore consider life in the face of deep hypocrisy.

Mitch McConnell, with a straight face and no apparent appreciation for irony, said that voters should install a Republican majority in the Senate because his party would "be able to bring the current legislative gridlock to a merciful end." This really reaches new heights of absurdity. The Filibuster King, the Guru of Gridlock himself, says that in order to end gridlock we need to elect the people who are responsible for bringing us Olympian records of obstruction. McConnell's Republican army in the Senate has led more filibusters than any previous Congress in our nation's history, attempting to thwart any progress on a gleeful spree of "no." This is the McConnell who made obstruction his publicly announced number one goal when Obama was elected to his first term. But now McConnell wants to say yes, to have you vote for him because he is the one to rid us of the scourge of the gridlock he created. Give him a majority and voila he will make sure gridlock is a distant memory. This means of course that he expects the newly-made minority to simply go along with his agenda; you know, like he went along with the Democrats when they had the majority. Sigh. It is enough to make one's head explode.

### No Show

This story highlights the major failure of the left. Democrats have not defined the agenda or narrated the story. This capitulation creates a void of reason such that absurdities like McConnell's claim can take hold without everybody doubling over in laughter. Like frightened children Democrats run from Obama's record, as defined by the right, rather than championing

his amazing successes as defined by fact. Much to the credit of the Republican political machine, and with equal same to the Democrats, the far right has been able to convince the public that everything bad is Obama's fault, but that Obama is responsible for nothing that is good. When that does not work, they create the illusion that what is good is bad; health care comes to mind.

Democrats have ceded the territory of reality to Republican fantasy. Need a specific example? The media of late have been touting the story of "Obama's dropping approval ratings" noting that his "approval ratings have plunged to record lows" and have "plummeted" and are "sinking to historic lows." Only one problem with this narrative: it is factually and demonstrably false. Here is the verifiable truth: from January 1, 2014 to October 30, 2014, Obama's approval rating fell from 42.6 percent to 42 percent. The year's peak was 44 percent, and the low of the year was 41 percent. A drop of about one-half of one percent does not constitute numbers that are "plummeting" or "sinking" or even "dropping." Yet the Democrats sit by and let this nonsense flow forth with no fight.

We can do the same analysis for past GOP claims about unemployment, the war in Iraq, saving the auto industry, bailing out Wall Street and the banks, instituting meaningful health care reform... just about anything major issue that has improved significantly over the past 7 or 8 years. You remember when unemployment exceeded 10 percent; that was Obama's fault. There was a daily drumbeat denouncing the president. But with unemployment now under 6 percent, Obama gets no credit, or the positive statistic is dismissed as unimportant (the same statistics with the same numerators and denominators that were critical when the numbers looked bad for Obama). Obama is responsible for all of our ills and deserves credit for none of our successes. This is a childish, bogus outlook, yet remains central to everything conservative. This lack of depth and nuance, and the absence of the art of compromise (actually praising Obama for something), is precisely what led to the extremism of shutting down our government and threatening default on our debt. This lopsided, one-sided, one-dimensional world view is morally and intellectually bankrupt. Hating Obama should not be an effective political organizing strategy, but is indeed in the absence of any effective Democratic backbone to counter right-wing absurdities. Democrats deserve their losses; they ceded the battle before it began. Hoping for failure has become the right's most effective political platform; creating the appearance of failure in the face of Democratic success is now a Republican sport played to victory by default because the opposing team never showed.

### What Goes Up...

I was driving along the other day in the face of the mid-term elections, considering how Democrats who ran from Obama's record deserved to lose. Then I passed by a service station and noted the price of gas was in the mid-range of two dollars. And the thought immediately struck; Republicans have done it again -- somehow, expensive gas was Obama's fault, but low prices deserve no mention, and certainly no credit. The absence of debate during the elections is all the more astonishing given that the price of gas today is the same as what we were paying nearly 10 years ago, and far from historic highs.

So... gas prices, so easily quantified, offer us the ideal case study to demonstrate that hypocrisy is truly the core foundation of right-wing thought and the basis for Republican politics. I challenge anybody to provide the equivalent of what you see below for the Democrats.

Below we will see in black and white that the GOP vocally, loudly and undeniably blamed Obama for expensive gas as prices climbed toward \$4 per gallon. The right openly blamed the president

not only for pursuing a bad energy policy but for actively seeking higher prices. Here are just a few examples:

#### Mitt Romney: Obama to Blame for High Gas Prices

Romney said on Fox News (where else?) that he believes "absolutely" that Obama is responsible for high gas prices. To bolster his point, Romney noted that Obama does not allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve (ANWR), and his refusal to build the Keystone pipeline from Canada to Texas. Romney said of Obama, "His policies are responsible for not having America using the energy that we have in this country."

#### House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH)

"The president holds the key to addressing the pain Ohioans are feeling at the gas pump and moving our nation away from its reliance on foreign energy. My question for the president is: what are you waiting for?" Getting more specific, Boehner claimed that, "The president's own policies to date have made matters worse and driven up gas prices."

#### Senator John Barrasso: Obama Fully Responsible for High Gas Prices

Senator John Barrasso (R-WY) claimed "The president has been a complete obstructionist on that, and his energy policy, if you want to even call it a policy, has in my opinion actually contributed if not caused the pain at the pump, and he should be held fully responsible for what the American public is paying for gasoline."

#### Representative Cory Gardner (R-CO): Obama Policies to Blame for High Gas Prices

Cory Gardner jumped on the bandwagon, complaining that, "The longer we let politicians like President Obama continue to block responsible American energy production, the longer our nation will continue to suffer with high gas prices and limited energy security."

#### National Review: Report Finds Obama Policies to Blame for High Energy Prices

"What President Obama failed to accomplish through the so-called 'cap and trade' program, his administration is attempting to accomplish through regulatory roadblocks, energy tax increases, and other targeted efforts to prohibit development of domestic energy resources."

#### Rush Limbaugh: Obama Wants Higher Gas Prices

Oddly, in his rant against Obama, Rush asks, "Will the media ignoring the rise in gas prices be able to keep that from becoming a major factor in people's minds over the economy and Obama's role in it?" Funny given the torrent of news coverage on higher gas prices, and the GOP's consistent drum beat blaming Obama.

#### High Gas Prices are President Obama's Fault

In this article, the author claims that "The Obama administration's energy plan all along was based upon the rise in energy costs in order to force Americans to be 'greener.'" The piece goes on to say that "President Obama wants Americans to believe that he is powerless to stop the high rise of gasoline prices yet it is his (in)actions that have created the crisis... What the president fails to realize is that there is no one to blame for rising energy costs other than himself."

## Billboard Blames Obama for High Gas Prices

In this case, a conservative businessman by the name of Bret Eulberg posted for all to see the message: "Gas \$1.85. Obama took office. Tight drilling regulations. No Pipeline. Obama = Higher Gas."

Need I go on? Can any reader, of any political persuasion, even those who only watch Fox News, claim that the GOP did not openly, blatantly, consistently blame Obama for high gas prices? Conservatives blamed Obama for high gas prices. Can we be any clearer about that? You simply cannot deny this fact.

### Deficit of Reason

So what happened when the price of gas fell? What now that the price has declined into the \$2 range? Silence. Total, complete, deafening, maddening, huge, gaping, mind-bending silence. Where was Obama's commitment to making prices higher? Where were the impacts of Obama's failed energy policies? Where were the disastrous consequences of delaying the Keystone pipeline? Where were the catastrophic energy shortages due to overzealous EPA regulations? Yet not a single word from the right praising Obama for lower energy prices. He was responsible for them going up, but not coming down. Everything prominent Republicans and wing-nut pundits said about gas prices and Obama's policies proved to be wrong.

What happened when Obama cracked down on oil speculation (an activity much supported by free-market zealots in the GOP), driving down the price of gas by 12 cents at the pump? Not a peep from the right. What happened when gas prices fell to a two-year low, with expectations that the price will continue to decline? Nothing on Fox News about that.

Everything that the GOP claimed caused high gas prices are still in place, as we watch prices decline. There is no Keystone pipeline, drilling levels are virtually the same as when prices were increasing, and EPA regulations are still in place. Those "causes" of high prices are now simply ignored by the right in the face of declining prices at the pump, no longer offered as proof of Obama's incompetence.

And then the Republicans finally broke their silence, with the claim that "Obama deserves no credit for fall in gas prices." This is absolute proof of my thesis; Republicans blatantly admit it. Read this logic and weep for our country: Representative Allen West (R-FL) said, "If you're the chief executive officer of the United States of America, you should take responsibility for anything that's occurring in this country, and you should not want to seek to get praise. This is what the military taught me: Leaders don't take credit, leaders take responsibility." Um, OK. So, you blame Obama for rising gas prices; but then give him no credit for falling prices because it is unseemly for a leader to accept credit for effective policies -- the very policies you were blaming for failure earlier. My head hurts. My heart aches for this great land.

Perhaps one day we will once again we reject the bizarre extremism of the far right and realize the fruits of effective governance through dialogue and compromise. We will know we are on our way when we can give our political opponents credit where credit is due -- and that includes praise for policies we earlier opposed when those policies prove well founded. Extremism and absolutism have no place in America; we can only hope that what we are witnessing today is an aberration much like McCarthyism. Perhaps in 20 or 30 years we'll shake our heads at this folly and wonder how the likes of Ted Cruz and Sarah Palin ever made it to national politics. We can always hope.