



The End of the American Moment?



A New Generation of Conservative Thought

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The conservative movement is in crisis. Modern conservatism was born in 1955 with the founding of *National Review*. Its editor, William F. Buckley Jr., said the publication's mission was to "stand athwart history, yelling stop!" But history has kept rolling along, smashing every traditional institution in its path. Family, faith, capitalism, our constitutional republic—they have all been shattered by modern liberalism. In the face of this ideological juggernaut, conservatives have offered sporadic and weak resistance. Their ideas have become stale. Too many prefer power to principles. The movement has become corrupt, lazy and ineffective. Having come to Washington to confront the political rot and moral decay, conservatives have become part of the establishment. In other words, they have become part of the problem.

The mission of *Reflections Magazine* is to launch a conservative moral and intellectual revival. We will bring together the finest minds and writers to defend the eternal principles of God, country and family. We seek to forge a reinvigorated conservative movement for the 21st century—one that champions a new nationalism, rooted in a culture of life, small government, a restoration of federalism and victory over Islamist terrorism. Capitol Building

The time has come for a one-nation conservatism that reaches out to minorities and women, the unborn and the poor, workers and students. The movement must go beyond its traditional base or else suffer a slow, agonizing death. Our goal is unabashedly counter-revolutionary: to roll back the forces of progressivism. Since the 1960s, a destructive liberal revolution has swept across our land. Characterized by radical secular humanism, sexual permissiveness and milk-toast socialism, it is transforming America into something our Founding Fathers would not only find unrecognizable but repugnant. We stand for the real America, the historic America, the eternal America—an America based on moral traditionalism, an America of limited government, self-reliance and entrepreneurship, an America that won its independence from imperial British rule, triumphed over Nazi Germany and Communist Russia, and has shed precious blood and treasure to liberate hundreds of millions of people around the world, and an America that champions human rights and freedom, in which every individual—regardless of race, color, gender or religion—possesses innate dignity and equal value in the eyes of our creator. We ask like-minded Americans to join us in this struggle for the heart and soul of America.

Edmund Burke, the great philosopher and godfather of Western conservatism, once said: "All that's necessary for the forces of evil to win in the world is for enough good men to do nothing." We refuse to do nothing. We will fight for what is right, true and good. This is the rock upon which we take our stand.



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The end of the American moment?

By Jeffrey Kuhner

Barack Obama's presidency marks the decline and fall of America as the world's last superpower; it is the end of the American moment, the period from 1945 in which the United States walked on the world stage like a military and economic colossus. Like ancient Rome, America has lost its civilizational will to maintain its great-power status. The country has become stripped from its Judeo-Christian moorings and founding principles. Our liberal ruling elites no longer believe in American exceptionalism or its historic mission as the defender of democracy and liberty.

This was evident during Mr. Obama's recent trip to the Summit of the Americas, the gathering of all the heads of state in the Western Hemisphere. Instead of championing American national interests and values, the celebrity-in-chief rushed to cozy up with Latin America's two worst dictators: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Cuban strongman Raul Castro (the younger brother of the ailing Fidel). Mr. Obama engaged in several high-profile photo-ops with Chavez, publicly shaking his hand and calling the Bolivarian despot his "amigo." Mr. Obama's actions disgraced the United States, undermined human rights and emboldened the region's leading anti-American demagogue to further export his brand of revolutionary socialism.

Mr. Chavez has dismantled Venezuela's democracy. His regime routinely murders and imprisons political dissidents, cracks down on media freedoms and systematically harasses opponents—including leading members of the Catholic Church. He has centralized power,



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the G-20 Preparatory Summit in Berlin.

using class warfare to decimate the country's middle class and erect an authoritarian socialist state. He is following the Marxist model of Castro's Cuba.

Moreover, Chavez has emerged as the region's most dangerous threat to U.S. security interests. He is using Venezuela's vast oil wealth to prop up anti-American, socialist autocracies—like Bolivia and Cuba. His regime funds the leftist FARC terrorists in neighboring Columbia. He actively supports drug traf-

ficking—especially, into the United States, poisoning our nation’s youth. He has fostered close ties with Iran’s mullahs, backing their drive for a nuclear bomb.

Yet, Mr. Obama refused to stand up to this tin pot dictator. He didn’t defend Chavez’s countless victims, who are rotting in the jails of Caracas. Instead, the leader of the free world sent a powerful signal: Washington prefers being liked by odious regimes than champion human rights and democracy. Mr. Obama’s cowardly actions betrayed not only the suffering people of Venezuela, but fundamental American principles.

On Cuba, Mr. Obama is slowly tilting toward a policy of engagement and appeasement. He has relaxed prior policies on remittances and travel to the island dictatorship. Telecommunications companies are lining up to do business with Castro’s apparatchiks. But Castro is not interested in opening up Cuba’s political system and economy: any such moves would result in the same thing that happened in the former Soviet bloc—the collapse of communism.

Mr. Obama’s embrace of Chavez and Castro should come as no surprise. Like them, our celebrity-in-chief is a transnational socialist, who believes America is to blame for much of the globe’s problems. He shares many aspects of their worldview—state control over the economy, soak-the-rich redistributionist policies, massive public spending, a neutered U.S. foreign policy, direct diplomatic negotiations and closer ties with Iran, China and Russia, and the end of an American unipolar international system. Mr. Obama, of course, is a democrat; they are tyrants—and that is a fundamental and all-important difference. He can be replaced at the ballot box; they can’t.

But Mr. Obama is a revolutionary leftist, who is slowly transforming America into a post-modern, post-national, nanny state. In foreign affairs, he has gone to Europe and apologized for the United States’ past “arrogance—despite the fact that, at tremendous cost in blood and treasure, it was America that liberated the continent from Nazi occupation and the menace of Soviet totalitarianism (During the 1990s, while genocide was taking place on their doorstep in the Balkans, the Europeans did nothing until—you guessed it—Uncle Sam intervened). Mr. Obama seeks a rapprochement with Iran’s apocalyptic Islamist mullahs. He has called for unilateral nuclear disarmament. He has failed to punish North Korea for its illegal missile launch. He is back-pedaling on Washington’s pledge to install missile-defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic in order to pacify Russia’s revanchists. And he has publicly demanded that Red China be treated on an equal footing with the United States, elevating the status of a belligerent, militaristic and ultra-nationalist regime to the level of a co-equal hyperpower. In short, he is systematically undermining America’s international prestige and standing, attempting to erect a multi-polar world order—where America is only one of many great powers.

At home, Mr. Obama is implementing the most ambitious leftist agenda in our history. He has passed a nearly \$1 trillion stimulus package. His administration is nationalizing the big banks and the insurance companies. They are bailing out key sectors of the economy—including the automakers, to the point where Washington is picking who runs General Motors. He supports government-run health care, federally subsidized day care, pouring billions into public works projects, expanding funding to unemployment insurance and Medicaid, granting amnesty to 12-

20 million illegal immigrants, creating a new “green economy,” mandating draconian cap-and-trade environmental regulations and imposing a nearly \$1 trillion tax increase. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office states the Obama administration will add \$9.3 trillion to the national debt over the next ten years—accumulating more red ink than all the previous 43 administrations *combined*. The Federal Reserve is printing money to underwrite these massive levels of deficit spending and government commitments. Bailout Nation is leading to Bankrupt Nation. No country can sustain this kind of fiscal irresponsibility and social engineering—not even the land of milk and honey.

America is not immune to the laws of economics or history. Civilizations rise and fall. Our Founding Fathers understood this; in fact, they were deeply learned students of history. Their entire mission was to erect a republic—an experiment in individual freedom and self-government—that would endure the test of time. Upon leaving the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was asked, “What kind of government have you given us?” Franklin’s response: “A Republic if you can keep it.” We are, however, in the process of losing our republic. We are going the way of ancient Rome.

Rome collapsed because of internal decay and the abandonment of its animating principles. It was the great superpower of its age, spreading peace, order, commerce, art, literature, culture, roads, prosperity and the rule of law. Yet, over time, its civilizational will to lead and survive was sapped. It no longer could protect its borders. Its politics was slowly undermined by factionalism, vicious infighting and the relentless centralization of power. It no longer could stand up to its external enemies.

Patriotism and civic virtue were gradually extinguished. Its economy was strangled by crushing taxation and a burdensome, bloated bureaucracy. Sexual permissiveness, obsession with fame and entertainment, homosexuality and hedonism became rampant. The Romans lost more than their self-respect. They lost their sense of historical patrimony: What it meant to be a citizen, and the sacred rights and responsibilities that came with it. Their civilization slowly crumbled and died—going out not with a bang, but a pathetic whimper.

The Obama presidency represents an historic watershed: The time in history where the United States repeated the tragic pattern of Rome. We now have a commander-in-chief, who no longer believes in the American mission or in the foundational values that propelled the United States to global preeminence—limited government, free-market capitalism, traditional morality, national sovereignty, a distinct cultural identity and the unrivalled champion of freedom, democracy and human rights. His socialist internationalism not only emboldens our enemies, such as Chavez and Castro, but signals the loss of American power, American will and American self-confidence. Obama’s America is characterized by national confusion, moral self-loathing and civilizational paralysis. Once those qualities enter the bloodstream of a body politic, they are almost impossible to cure. And they lead to only one end: decay, decline and eventual ruin. It happened to Rome. And it is happening to us.

-Jeffrey T. Kuhner is president of the Edmund Burke Institute and a columnist at The Washington Times.

Are Republicans the stupid party?

By Steve Malzberg

I am privileged to spend three hours a day, five days a week behind a microphone. I love what I do, and I do it quite well. At times I laugh, but these days, more often than not, I get angry, very angry. I get angry because I take pride in informing and educating my lis-

teners, but unfortunately, the same cannot be said for elected representatives in Washington whose charge it is to get the conservative message out. Ever since I can remember, the GOP and those on the right have been just plain lousy at communicating. They get run over by their counterparts on the left and let the mainstream media set the agenda. If the GOP and conservatism is to survive, this problem must be remedied.

is happening under the Obama administration and the Democrat leadership in Congress. We need to stop assuming that the public knows. They don't. From behind my microphone, I went on an extended rant over the accusations made by our Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. She claimed that we, the United States, bear a "co-responsibility" for the drug war in Mexico. On her way south of the border, Mrs. Clinton blamed America's "insatiable demand for illegal drugs" and its "inability to prevent weapons from being smuggled across the boarder" for the deaths of Mexican police, soldiers and civilians. It's our fault! So the Republican leadership took to the steps of the Capitol and expressed their collective outrage over these vulgar remarks, right? Wrong.



Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Do you think Americans are aware of the fact that Rep. Greg Harper (R-MI), who sits on the budget committee, proposed that nearly half of the \$900 million slated in aid for Hamas and the Palestinians be given instead as a raise to our brave men and women in the armed services? Do they know that not one Democrat voted in the affirmative for this proposal? My listeners know this, but the leadership was AWOL on this.

So it turns out that Chris Dodd's (D-CT) wife served as an "outside" director of IPC Holdings Ltd., a Bermuda-based company controlled by AIG! What did the great communicators who run the GOP have to say at

The public needs to be made aware of what

their massive press conference on this? There was, of course, no such presser.

The three issues discussed above all became news on the very same day, Wednesday March 25, 2009. For those at the helm of the GOP and the conservative movement, it should have been a day at the beach. Instead, they were all missing in action. The problem is this is the norm, and it is nothing less than an abdication of responsibility, as well as dangerously poor politics.

Also on March 25, our new Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano testified to Sen. Joe Lieberman's (I-CT) committee and refused to use the term "illegal immigrant" during testimony on Mexican illegal aliens. This comes on the heels of the elimination of terms like "Global War on Terror" (replaced by "overseas contingency operation") and "terrorism" (replaced by "man caused disaster"). The public would be outraged to learn this. It's a winning point for our side. But of course, we let it slide.

One day earlier at his press conference, President Barack Obama exhibited unprecedented arrogance in claiming that anyone who contributes to charity in whole or in part for tax deductions, which he now wants to limit, is not in keeping with the spirit of charitable giving. This is extremely pompous and condescending. Yet I didn't hear one word from

our fearless leaders in response to this. If the GOP is to move forward, our message must be made clear not only by folks like me, but by the people running the real show. In addition, as we edge ever closer to the midterm elections, the Republican National Committee must do what it failed to do in the 2006 elections. They must nationalize them.

In 2006, I launched daily pleas which fell on deaf ears. The party needed to run national TV and radio spots featuring the remarks made by the likes of Sens. John Kerry (D-MA), Richard Durbin (D-IL), Harry Reid (D-NV), and Rep. John Murtha (D-PA), who trashed our men and women in uniform.

Since Mr. Obama's swearing in, he has been a gift for the GOP that keeps on giving. The library of video and sound bites that exist on the president, Mr. Biden, Mrs. Pelosi, Mr. Reid, Mrs. Clinton, et al, can provide the GOP with more than enough ammunition with which to put together multiple winning spots for November 2010. But based on past and current performance, or should I say the lack thereof, I have serious doubts that they are up to the task. Sometimes, I just think they don't want to win.

-Steve Malzberg is a nationally syndicated talk show host on the WOR Radio Network and a frequent guest on many of the television cable shows. He can be reached through www.worradionet.com

Swinging right

By Kerry W. McCarthy

To win elections, conservatives need to attract swing voters. Otherwise, conservatives will stand by, powerless to preserve the American system of government, free enterprise, and individual liberty. But winning without maintaining our conservative values creates no mandate.

For example, Newt Gingrich, in a speech to the Michigan legislature, proposed to pay children to read. This was a misguided and condescending attempt to appeal to an electorate that he does not understand. Such ideas reveal that Mr. Gingrich misjudges independent voters and the nature of potential swing states. Pay children to read?!

Karl Rove was much more astute. He studied where people live and their buying patterns to try to ascertain how they might vote. He then tailored messages in response to issues at hand in the hopes of binding persuadable swing voters to Republicans. This worked in 2004 when there were two major issues: the importance of continuity of leadership during wartime and anti-gay marriage initiatives.

In 2006, however, Republicans suffered at the ballot box because President George W. Bush was demeaned as a leader. Incessant Democrat and media attacks portrayed him as weak and wrong, and he did little to dispel that notion. The public, with help from his opponents, began to see his unchanging policies as a sign of inflexibility and stubbornness. Mr. Rove's demographic analysis was not a viable technique once the party lost control of the debate and the issue became Bush's perceived failures in the war and in spending, which

undermined Republicans' reputation as the "small government" party. After GOP losses in 2006, Mr. Bush said, "We got our voters out; they just didn't vote for us."

In the 2008 campaign, Senator John McCain, Arizona Republican, seemed to many to be the best candidate to attract swing voters. His compelling life story and heroism appealed to Republicans and his willingness to "cross the aisle" made him popular with Democrats (he was so acceptable to liberals that a high number of them switched over to vote for Mr. McCain in Republican primaries). But in the end, Republicans' attempt to offer a candidate who might appeal to swing voters failed. Mr. McCain couldn't even fill two minutes provided to him during the last debate to say why he should be president.

Swing or independent voters believe that ordinary citizens shouldn't have to spend much time thinking about politics. Independents hope to be relieved of the burden of closely following politics, as was the intent of our founders, who expected a combination of virtuous leaders, checks and balances, and limited government to allow citizens to focus on their own lives between elections.

Many independent voters look for representatives who agree with them on issues of importance. A panderer, however, cannot be counted on. He can be persuaded by powerful forces and interests once he is elected, and a voter cannot be sure his or her opinion will be one of those forces.

Those independent voters who "vote for the

person, not the party” seek the best leaders. Attempts to pander to these voters repel rather than attract their votes, because conservatives who water down their leadership qualities offer little to follow, and these people see through and resent the dishonesty involved in pandering.

Cynical independent voters believe that very few good politicians exist. Demonstrating desperation for votes at the expense of core values only confirms these voters’ belief that all politicians are dishonest

Our hope is to explain to each of these groups why conservative ideas will work, not to try to figure out how to appeal to their possible liberal proclivities. Conservatives need to be strong leaders voters can believe in, even if they don’t agree on all issues.

Some Republicans are tired of hearing about Ronald Reagan, but Mr. Reagan was consistent. Through the course of his campaigns he convinced people of the validity of his ideas. If this no longer works, then conservatives don’t have a mandate. They’ll be voted out. But at least they’ll be voted out honestly, and will provide an alternative for voters after liberal policies fail.

Conservatives may gain ground with voters

by addressing the problem of lost manufacturing jobs, which Democrats have successfully blamed on Republican policies. The Border Tax Equity Act of 2007 authorizes the U.S. to charge a tax on imported goods commensurate with the tax charged on our exported goods. This bill would help other countries—not only the United States—because it encourages the development of the middle class that so strengthens an economy, not just a manufacturing class. Staunch advocates of free trade should be cautious of knee-jerk reactions to commonsense adjustments that could be beneficial to the American people and the countries we trade with, which, after all, is the goal of free trade in the first place.

Another commonsense goal that may attract swing voters is to make people aware that the consumer actually pays corporate income taxes, because manufacturers apply the cost directly to prices. America has the second highest corporate income tax rate in the industrialized world, and these taxes actually provide an incentive for manufacturers to move overseas.

If the GOP wants to win swing voters in 2012, it will have to enact these recommendations. Time is of the essence.

-Kerry W. McCarthy is a writer living in Indiana.

Defeating America from within

By Nancy Morgan

As the media obsesses about President Barack Obama on the Jay Leno show and his wife, Michelle’s new White House garden, the real story has gone virtually unnoticed. Namely, the Fed’s announcement that it will

be pumping another trillion dollars into the economy. That’s one trillion dollars it will manufacture out of thin air.

Consider this: What would happen if you

maxed out your credit cards, borrowed to pay your mortgage, spent all your savings and then went out and got a new loan, which you had no hope of repaying?

Ronald Reagan knew. He had the rare ability to recognize the obvious, being the sole voice predicting that the former Soviet Union could not possibly sustain its level of spending and would eventually collapse. It did. And all “experts” were surprised.

It doesn't take an expert to predict what will happen when individuals, businesses, or countries spend beyond their means. Joe six-pack in flyover country knows better than most politicians that there are no free lunches, that actions have consequences.

Our elected officials remain blissfully unaware of these basic tenets. Whether through economic ignorance or a political lock-step mentality, both Republicans and Democrats not only continue the massive raid on our present and future tax dollars, they continue to enact policies that make an economic recovery virtually impossible.

While the media focuses the nation's attention on the faux brouhaha of the AIG bonuses, our elected officials lay plans to implement a [costly cap and trade system](#) to address the new “crisis” of global warming. The Heritage Foundation estimates this [will add approximately \\$1,800](#) in energy costs to every American household.

Meanwhile, the popular “soak the rich” class warfare has resulted in a massive tax increase on those making over \$250,000. Mr. Obama blithely states that “the rich shouldn't mind paying their fair share.” Notice: It is now the government that defines what is “fair” and

who is “rich.”

Noticeable only by its absence, is the historical fact that raising taxes in a recession is economic suicide. Not one of our elected officials has pointed out the obvious (which is also a proven fact) that lowering taxes fuels the economy while, at the same time, replenishes government coffers. Instead, most of our elected officials have opted to continue promoting class warfare as both an explanation and a solution to the current economic mess.

Between 70 percent and 90 percent of our economy is fueled by and dependent on small businesses, who routinely file taxes as “sole proprietors.” This means all their receipts are figured into their gross income, automatically placing them in the ranks of the “rich.” These are the people who are paying for the government's largess. These entrepreneurs are the very ones who are being demonized, taxed to death and run out of business. These guys are our neighbors. And we are now all complicit in denying them the legitimate fruits of their labor. We are killing the golden goose.

One of the rare political hold outs against the prevailing tsunami, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford was twice rejected by the White House when he humbly asked to use the “stimulus” money to pay down his state's debt.

Like Mr. Reagan, Mr. Sanford has been predicting for years what will happen if the United States continues its present course. In virtually every public speech he makes, he includes this timeline of nations, learned from 200 years of history:

1. From bondage to spiritual faith
2. From spiritual faith to great courage

3. From courage to liberty
4. From liberty to abundance
5. From abundance to complacency
6. From complacency to apathy
7. From apathy to dependence
8. From dependence back into bondage

Mr. Sanford's voice is being ignored—as are the voices of an awaking populace, only now realizing that the new Obama Messiah does not have the ability to wave a magic wand and replace reality with a blissful utopian paradise.

Our enemies have realized this all along.

Obama's bogus economics

By Joseph Beaudoin

President Barack Obama continues to insist that his stimulus plan will create or save 3.5 million jobs but he has not explained how he arrived at this number. In fact, nobody has done that in a convincing manner because it cannot be done. Mr. Obama's stimulus plan is a pipe dream based on economic assumptions known theoretically and empirically to be false.

The 3.5 million jobs stem from an economic model built by Christina Romer, chair of the White House Economic Advisory Board, and Jared Bernstein, economic advisor to the vice president elect. The [Romer-Bernstein](#) model goes a long way to revealing why Mr. Obama would rather talk about the 3.5 million jobs than about how these jobs came into projected

And now that the America is in appeasement mode, [cutting military spending](#) and believing that the war on terror can be ignored by redefining it, it is only a matter of time before some Islamic fanatics take advantage of our weakened economic status and our new pacifism.

Alas, they may be too late. The Obama administration, with the help of Republicans, has already inflicted more economic damage on this country than the terrorists ever did. And the media has done more to destroy America's will to fight than legions of suicide bombers ever could. Our enemies may now rejoice that America appears to have been defeated from within.

-Nancy Morgan is a columnist and news editor for [RightBias.com](#). She lives in South Carolina.

existence.

Romer-Bernstein is a Keynesian macroeconomic model based on the following critical assumptions:

1. A multiplier averaging 0.82 for to tax cuts;
2. A multiplier averaging 1.5 for government spending;
3. Interest rates to be zero for four years;
4. Government spending causes no crowding out.

Multiplier

The “multiplier” is a Keynesian concept used to quantify the effect of government policies on the GDP. For instance, should it have a 1.5 multiplier, government spending equivalent to 1 percent of GDP would create a 1.5 percent increase in GDP. Needless to say, socialist economists love the multiplier.

Oddly, Romer-Bernstein’s multiplier assumptions are not borne out by Mrs. Romer’s previous work. In a paper published in March 2007, Mrs. Romer and her husband, David H. Romer, found that tax cuts have a multiplier of three in normal economic times but they are ineffective when used to offset a business cycle. In other words, [Romer-Romer](#) found that tax cuts do not work during recessions – ostensibly, because consumers choose to increase their savings.

The Romer-Romer paper constitutes a major blow to Keynesian economics because its findings can be applied to government spending as well. Hence, Romer-Romer provides the best argument against Romer-Bernstein’s 3.5 million jobs, namely, that fiscal policies do not work during recessions.

In a recent paper, economists John F. Cogan, Tobias Cwik, John B. Taylor and Volker Wieland ([Cogan-Taylor](#)) assessed Romer-Bernstein with a Keynesian model that incorporates the major economics findings of the past 30 years, including rational expectations. They found that the multipliers for government spending was only one third of the multipliers Romer-Bernstein assumed and, most significantly, multipliers become negative in 2013 for several years thereafter. The inescapable conclusion is that government spending will eventually impoverish the country. This

explains why countries that relied on government spending for growth became poorer.

It seems that Mrs. Romer and Mr. Bernstein disregarded reality and simply set their multipliers at levels that would ensure a predetermined outcome, namely, Mr. Obama’s 3.5 million jobs. Government spending multipliers of 1.5 are to economics what unicorns are to zoology: they are mythical.

Zero interest rates

Romer-Bernstein makes another outrageous assumption, i.e. that interest rates will be zero for four years. In theory and in practice, interest rates can only be at zero during a period of no or of very slow growth. As Romer-Bernstein projects strong GDP growth, it is inconceivable that interest rates would remain at zero for four years.

That assumption is even more problematic when one factors in the Federal Reserve’s inflationary activities of the past year. The combination of strong growth and the Fed easy-money will make it impossible for interest rates to remain at zero.

Romer-Bernstein’s interest rate assumption is, therefore, indefensible within the parameters of their model. It also contradicts basic interest rate theory.

No crowding out effect

Mr. Obama, while embarking on the largest peacetime government spending programs, pays lip service to the private sector and assures Americans that he wants a strong private sector. Accordingly, Romer-Bernstein projects that the private sector will create 90 percent of Mr. Obama’s 3.5 million jobs. Eco-

conomic history, however, does not bear that assumption out.

It is an empirical fact that government spending reduces—crowds out—private private sector economic activity. It is, therefore, hard to imagine how a government spending program that will crowd out private sector economic activity by hundreds of billion of dollars will, at the same time, get the same private sector to create 90 percent of the 3.5 million new jobs.

In contrast, the Cogan-Taylor model suggests that Mr. Obama's stimulus plan will only create 600,000 jobs and that the private sector contribution will be minimal. In other words, Mr. Obama will spend almost \$800 billion to create 600,000 mostly-government jobs. That means each Obama job will cost American taxpayers over \$1.3 million and will disappear soon after the spending is done.

In order to create the promised 3.5 million jobs, Mr. Obama would have to increase the stimulus plan to \$4.2 trillion. That would be 33 percent of the U.S. economy.

Models versus reality

Ultimately, models are as good as their assumptions. That is why Mr. Obama's 3.5 million jobs will never materialize. The model upon which these jobs are based is so seriously flawed as to have zero credibility. Government spending will prove just as ineffective in this recession as it did in other recessions, in the United States and elsewhere. There is no empirical evidence that demonstrates that government spending creates prosperity. The opposite is true.

Plenty of countries, from Argentina to Zimbabwe, have repeatedly and over several de-

acades tried to spend their way to prosperity. The results have been consistent. Government spending increases debt, shrinks the private sector and impoverishes the nation.

While the experiences of bankrupted states like North Korea and the former U.S.S.R. come to mind, one does not have to go far to observe failures similar to those in which Mr. Obama's policies will result. Some of our European allies were, for decades, ardent proponents of government spending. They moved away from such policies because they were going broke. Italy's experience ought to be a lesson for Congress, the White House and the brand of economic theory they have embraced.

By pursuing discredited economic policies, Mr. Obama is putting the United States on the road to economic irrelevance. His upcoming budget, building on the stimulus plan, will bring America closer to destitution. Perhaps Congress will stop this madness before it is too late.

- Joseph Beaudoin holds degrees in economics and finance, and worked in the banking and investment industries for 20 years. He is a regular contributor to Reflections.

The growing cracks in Putin's regime

By *Andrei Piontkovsky*

The second trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky began last month in Moscow. It is a significant event, though not unique in the history of Russian political trials. The sadistic desire to kick a victim when he is lying down has inflamed Kremlin rulers more than once. The second trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev, the second trial of Rokotov and Faibishenko, the fifth trial of Marchenko—these are only the most famous examples of this kind of brutality.

Nevertheless, I think a different historical analogy, not connected with the fact of a second trial, is more appropriate here. There is only one other political trial where the stakes in the battle inside the Kremlin were so high: the doctors' trial that did not take place. It was also supposed to be held in March in the Hall of Columns in the House of Unions.

In March 1953, in place of the trial the unplanned ceremonial farewell to Comrade Stalin, who had initiated and inspired it, was held in this hall. Another party won—the party of Comrade Beria, whose 100 days of rule showed that for those times he was potentially a more effective reformer than those in Dmitry Medvedev's circle today.

For all of Stalin's hostile attitude to the unfortunate accused, as he lapsed into zoological anti-Semitism in his old age, they were only pawns in the enormous game where the stakes were the power, life and death of the leaders of the country.

The fate of Mr. Khodorkovsky today is also only an excuse for a showdown between the “party of blood” and the “party of cash” in the Kremlin. Open confrontation between the two has been avoided so far. We can only guess at why the “party of blood” has raised the stakes so high and decided to hold this trial.

There can be no outcome to the trial that would please both parties. If Mr. Khodorkovsky is acquitted at a public open trial advertised by the regime, it will be a shameful defeat for the “party of blood,” a sign of its increasing weakness, the political death of Putinism and its leader. Quite soon after this two classic phrases will reappear. The first is what Count Pahlen said to Emperor Alexander I, “Go, sire, and rule!” The second (from the Alexander Galich song) will be on all the Russian TV channels, “Our father turned out to be a bitch, not a father.”

If, on the other hand, Mr. Khodorkovsky is sentenced for a second time, the formal president (the political hope of the “party of cash”) will be publicly humiliated. It will demonstrate convincingly to the president that he occupies the same position as Mr. Kalinin did in the Kremlin pecking order. There will be a severe purge of party members in the structures of government and presidential administration, as well as in the media.

The trial of the “doctor murderers” in March 1953 was intended to have a similarly explosive role in the developing crisis of power.

Those times were far from easy and political death automatically also meant physical death. The execution of Jewish doctors would have been followed by the execution of what the poet Osip Mandelstam called the “thin-necked leaders.” But in 1953, the trial ended several days before it began with the opposite outcome—the death of Stalin.

It is hard to predict how the trial of March 2009 will end. The “party of blood” has chosen to escalate the situation. It seems to me that they have chosen the right moment for a clash, but made a mistake in choosing the field of battle. Some foreign policy escapade would have been much more promising.

The crisis is rapidly destroying the Putin myth, turning it on its head. In spite of their patriotic garb, the ugly Chekist-bandit capitalism of the Sechins and Chemezovs, the Timchenkos and Yakunins has been revealed. The increasing inadequacy of their leader is already obvious from official television reports.

The party of cash—the party of the Abramovichs and Voloshins, Deripaskas and Potanins—bears just as much responsibility for the economic catastrophe that has overtaken the country. It now has the chance to blame the crisis exclusively on its rivals and purge them during a “Medvedev thaw.”

For the “party of blood,” delay could be fatal if they want to stop the process of de-Putinisation which is gathering speed, though it is unlikely that a repeat trial of Mr. Khodorkovsky is the proper arena for this. Their choking hatred for Mr. Khodorkovsky has betrayed them. The charges made against him are absurd. His courageous behavior in prison has gained him increasing sympathy in society. Many see him as one of the anti-crisis managers who will be

able to save the country from the difficult situation. Everyone remembers that his imprisonment began with his public dispute on matters of principle with the “national leader”—“Your officials are stealing, Mr. President!”

By putting Mr. Khodorkovsky in prison the officials and close friends of the eternal president/prime minister are continuing to rip off the country on an incredible scale.

Everyone who has read on the Internet Mr. Abramovich’s testimony at the Royal Courts of Justice in London has heard about the \$13 million that he was paid for the company Sibneft. They will also have read about the fantastic financial success of the Gunvor Company and will be familiar with the report “Putin and Gazprom.” No one could have the slightest doubt that the leaders of the “party of blood,” starting at the very top, are the “oligarchs who robbed the country.” This is not a comfortable topic—either for the party of blood or for the powerful elite as a whole.

- Andrei Piontkovsky is the executive director of the Strategic Studies Center in Moscow and a well-known political analyst in Russia.

Mexico's American lifeline

By Octavio A. Hinojosa Mier

While the headlines continued to warn Americans about the dangers of travel to Mexico, 300 undergraduate and graduate students gathered at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to discuss the vested interest in the economic and political progress of their neighbor to the south.

San Antonio, Texas, only 150 miles from the U.S./Mexico border, was an important location for the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute (CHLI) to hold its conference focused on "The Emerging Role of Hispanic Future Leaders in U.S./Mexico Relations." The CHLI Future Leaders Conference was conceived as an opportunity to bring together student leaders and young professionals of diverse backgrounds to learn more about the increasingly important role the U.S. Hispanic community is playing in American society.

Although the conference theme was not new to the community, the combination of expert facilitators including the former President of Mexico Vicente Fox, U.S. Congressman Henry Cuellar, Mexican diplomats, professors from the University of San Antonio, and 13 other speakers made for a vibrant, relevant and powerful day of learning and calls to action at a time when both citizens of Mexico and the United States need it the most.

Like any good solution-based discussion, the conference included speakers from Mexico who hold current or former positions in government. Hearing from Mexican officials, including the current Mexican Consul General in San Antonio, Chief Operating Officer from the North American Development Bank, Mex-

ican Foreign Ministry Deputy Director for the United States and the former President of Mexico Vicente Fox. These speakers gave participants a unique insight into Mexico's position on bilateral relations and economic development. Whether the discussion was centered around promoting economic development or the effects of bilateral public policy on education, environment, security and immigration, the Mexican perspective was consistent. They are aware and concerned about their country's economic situation which breeds organized crime, drug cartel wars and illegal immigration to the United States. However, they have also extensively studied the issues and the most effective solutions. All admit that the implementation of those solutions have been slow to gather momentum and that significant outcomes may not be apparent to the United States. Despite this, they all agree that at the root of all the problems spilling across the border is economic development and trade.

These advocates also believe it is important to that we impart our American values of democracy and adherence to the rule of law to Mexico. Doing so will help create economic prosperity, and will, at the very least, elevate the standard of living for Mexican citizens. America needs to be a role model to Mexico. But more than that, it actually needs to extend a hand and provide training and technical assistance at the private, individual, academic and political levels.

Economic development professionals also believe that great opportunities exist for Americans to create innovative products with the freedom of trading with individuals in Mex-

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ico and vice versa. The exchange of products and trade as a significant economic solution to the problems of Mexico led to what became the recurring sub-theme of the CHLI Future Leaders Conference. Leaders from both countries agree that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), now in its 15th year, is the vehicle for promoting economic opportunities with greater competition and larger markets which can transform the economy of all three participants, America, Canada and Mexico.

Specifically, all agreed that NAFTA works as a formula for increasing freedoms of individuals in Mexico by reducing government interference in their opportunity to rise to any level of prosperity through hard work and free trade. Former President of Mexico Vicente Fox admitted that overcoming 70 years of political leadership not focused on democratic standards has slowed down the outcomes of NAFTA. However, over the last 15 years, NAFTA helped build the manufacturing infrastructure in Mexico; created a multi-billion dollar import and export business with the United States; and has begun to close the

income gap between socio-economic groups. Giving NAFTA time to work is important to the future of bilateral relations. Renegotiating the agreement or spending less time on building the capacity of a market economy, freedom and democracy in Mexico will not advance the U.S. economy.

Based on the day's events, discussions and reflections, students and young professionals in attendance were given a consistent call to action: Get involved; learn all you can about economic issues in Mexico (not just the social and cultural aspects); support NAFTA as a tool of change; reach out to Mexico with all your knowledge and expertise; promote and protect the free market economy you enjoy in the United States; and consider a career in the foreign service to further export the values of freedom, democracy and economic development. Let's hope this call does not fall on deaf ears. The future of Mexico depends on it.

- Octavio A. Hinojosa Mier is the Executive Director of the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute, a non-profit organization, based in Washington, DC. www.chli.org

YouTube's Christian Double Standard

By Amy Polasky

Google's YouTube, the Internet video file sharing site, is the medium of choice for rock stars, wannabes, crazy uncles and proud mommies everywhere. But anyone who has ever been to a happy hour on karaoke night at a bar or club will tell you that sooner or later someone steps up to the microphone who probably shouldn't have.

Such is the case with YouTube. Despite terms of service expressly prohibiting the uploading of material likely to be deemed hate speech, vitriol inevitably finds its way there.

Hatemongers are cautioned upfront that YouTube "encourage(s) free speech and defend(s) everyone's right to express unpopular points of view. But we don't permit hate speech (speech which attacks or demeans a group based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status, and sexual orientation/gender identity)."

With more than 50 million videos hosted on any given day, it seems understandable that YouTube may have trouble policing subjective content. They rely on viewers, who are able to flag offensive files, as the first line of defense for enforcement of their hate speech policies.

YouTube defends any lack of front-end screening by stating, "We have strict rules on what's allowed, and a system that enables anyone who sees inappropriate content to report it to our 24/7 review team and have it dealt with promptly. ... Given the volume of content up-

loaded on our site, we think this is by far the most effective way to make sure that the tiny minority of videos that break the rules come down quickly."

Atheist author Nick Ginsburne joined this tiny minority when he uploaded a video viewers flagged as critical of Islam. The content, reportedly consisted primarily of Ginsburne reading verses from the Koran. Given that his intent may have been to mock Islam, I am happy to report that it was promptly removed from YouTube along with every other entry Mr. Ginsburne had posted.

A video uploaded by Christian pastor David Williams from Bethesda, MD met the same fate. What was his crime? He parodied an atheist-sponsored "blasphemy challenge," which encouraged YouTube viewers to record themselves engaged in blasphemous acts. Atheists were outraged and Mr. Williams' video was yanked after a mere six hours.

At the very least, Mr. Williams' case seems to support the "24/7 review team's" rapid response to viewer flags. A great system, as long as it is not selectively enforced.

Unfortunately for Christians, further investigation doesn't seem to even the score.

"Jesus Juice...Praise the Lord" is a case in point. In this video, a man combines in a juicer, fresh fruit (organic, of course) with what he implies to be a consecrated Eucharistic host.

For those unfamiliar with the Catholic faith, this is the most sacred element of their faith. They believe it to be the actual body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. To see it thrown in a juicer with fruit is positively horrific.

Adding insult to injury, the man (identified as TJ) encourages those watching that if they think hard enough about where he got the “secret ingredient,” they too can figure out a way to make their very own “Jesus Juice.” If viewers still haven’t connected the dots, TJ continues, “Jesus, we thank you for this juice. May it nourish my body. And thank you for giving me the idea as I sat in church...”

So here is an example of a video which is clearly intended to demean the Catholic faith. It blatantly encourages others to defame what Catholics believe to be the most sacred aspect of their religion. Both items fit very well into YouTube’s own definition of hate speech. So why is it still on YouTube four months after being posted?

Perhaps the video has not yet been reported as hate speech? Unlikely, given that Catholic talk-radio powerhouse Drew Mariani railed against the video on his show, encouraging listeners to flag it and hold YouTube account-

able. If that wasn’t enough, Catholic blogs everywhere are encouraging readers to visit YouTube and report TJ’s offensive entry. Personally, I’ve flagged the video as hate speech, and sent e-mails to YouTube leadership asking them to remove the video based on its own hate speech policy.

No response yet.

It is possible that YouTube doesn’t see what Catholics see when they watch TJ’s video. To do so requires more than a cursory examination of the content—it requires an understanding of the Catholic faith. So that is why YouTube would be waiting, 24/7, for their viewers who do understand the Catholic faith to flag TJ’s entry as hate speech.

Any Christian can tell you that faith, by definition, requires belief in things unseen. So despite mounting evidence to the contrary, I have faith that YouTube will do the right thing and equally enforce its hate speech policy.

-Amy Polasky is a Roman Catholic writer and blogger. She is a former employee of the United States House of Representatives and is an alumnus of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Making superheroes bad

By Loredana Vuoto

Hollywood never misses an opportunity to defame America and denigrate the values for which it stands. *Watchmen*, the recently released blockbuster directed by Zack Snyder, is no exception.

Based on the comic book by [Alan Moore](#) and Dave Gibbons of the same name, *Watchmen* follows a group of former superheroes who investigate a potential conspiracy against them. The story takes place in an alternate timeline in 1985 during mounting tensions between the [United States](#) and the [Soviet Union](#).

Mr. Moore portrays a nihilistic world where presidential term limits are abolished and Richard Nixon has become a de facto fascist dictator. Democracy is in tatters. Anarchy reigns. The only way to have achieved victory in Vietnam was for the United States to send Dr. Manhattan, who is symbolic of the nuclear bomb, to massacre countless Vietnamese. This great blue mammoth larger-than-life figure has the power to bring the Vietnamese to their knees. He is not their hero, but a monster that puts an end to life as they know it, wreaking death and destruction on their land. From the outset, Mr. Moore's *Watchmen* makes clear with Dr. Manhattan that these superheroes are different than most others.

Mr. Moore's chaotic universe is without rhyme or reason—but above all, without heroes. Dr. Manhattan, a former brilliant scientist maimed in a nuclear accident, is obsessed with his work, neglecting his girlfriend and fellow superhero, Laurie Jupiter. He is the only character allowed to maintain his powers after Congress passed the Keene Act in

1944, banning superheroes. But after years of being the government's secret weapon against the Soviet Union, Dr. Manhattan has forgotten who he is or even why he exists. In an existential crisis on Mars, he laments to Laurie that he cannot see the difference between living bodies and dead ones. His powers of manipulating time and space are only used to escape reality.

Ozymandias, who plots to transform the world through a nuclear holocaust, has an Alexander the Great complex. He will stop at nothing to see his utopian vision implemented. The obsessed businessman believes human beings are cogs in a wheel; hapless stepping stones in a plan where killing millions is but an unfortunate circumstance to justify global domination—and eventual world peace and co-existence.

The Comedian, brutally murdered at the beginning of the film, has gone through life abusing women and his powers to satisfy his lust for sex and violence. A rapist, murderer and drunk, the Comedian has lost his punch line. In a gripping scene, the Comedian goes on a rampant killing spree. When Rorschach questions what ever happened to the American Dream, he coldly retorts that it is dead. In short, the Comedian embodies the extinction of the American Dream.

Then there is Dan Dreiberg, formerly Nite Owl, who represents the every man. But instead of pursuing liberty and happiness, he sluggishly slumbers through life without purpose. His impotent powers and potential are reflected in his inability to perform in the bedroom. He is only able to regain his viril-

ity after putting on his Nite Owl uniform for a vigilante nightcap with Laurie. Although the duo help some people in need, their escapade is a far cry from noble selflessness. Their endeavor is more to feel good about themselves and regain some of their glory days than truly helping those in need.

Rorschach, who has a mask with shifting inkblots—symbolic of his quest to discover himself—is fraught with angst, trying to navigate a world of evil. He is the only superhero who still has a sense of fighting for what is right, despite the consequences. He sets out to warn his former vigilantes after the Comedian dies, fearing there is a conspiracy to kill ex-crime fighters. But Rorschach's Achilles' heel is his contempt for society and his lust for bloodshed. He ruthlessly kills those who get in his way, taking pleasure in their agony. In the end, he chooses to be killed by Dr. Manhattan rather than perpetuate a lie to the world that Dr. Manhattan is behind the devastating nuclear attack on America.

In *Watchmen*, long gone are the innocence, joy and inspiration of traditional superheroes. Unlike Robin Hood, who steals from the rich to feed the poor, or Spider-Man and Batman who use their superpowers to fight injustice, these superheroes are defunct of all moral goodness. They do not know what to do with the incredible powers they have been bestowed with. As noted in the first *Spider Man* movie, "With great power comes great responsibility." The heroes of *Watchmen* have lost sight of this responsibility and are but mere shadows of their former selves. And moviegoers have taken note. Box office sales for *Watchmen* are dramatically less than other movies based on comic books. It only grossed \$55 million on opening weekend. *Iron Man* yielded \$102 million and *Spider-Man* \$114 million, with se-

quels two and three netting \$88 million and \$151 million respectively during the same period.

Mr. Moore is one of the best-known comic book writers of our time. But he has also forgotten the responsibility his own craft carries and has misused his power. He has corrupted the comic book, destroying the heart and soul of the classic superhero. The antiheroes he portrays leave little to the imagination and even less to aspire to. Moviegoers have taken notice—and rightly so.

-Loredana Vuoto is president of Eloquence, LLC, a speechwriting and writing services firm in Washington, DC. She is also the Associate Editor of Reflections.

Winning the war on poverty

By Mark Rodgers

When it comes to poverty, actions speak louder than words.

Last month, I helped launch The Poverty Forum (www.thepovertyforum.org) a unique effort to find consensus among a very diverse group of Christians with expertise in poverty initiatives and policy reform. The project's goal was to identify ways to reduce domestic poverty and make concrete policy recommendations to Congress and the new administration.

The initiative began last summer when I started working with Mike Gerson, senior fellow with the Council on Foreign Relations and former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, and Rev. Jim Wallis, president of Sojourners. Our concern was that the poor would be left out of the national discussion during the presidential campaign. We agreed that despite the outcome of the presidential race, we would find a way to present our recommendations on poverty reduction at the White House and on Capitol Hill. Who knew when we started that this effort would be launched during a time when experts predict that an additional nine million Americans will fall into poverty due to the current economic recession?

The project was very successful, with some positive results: Twenty-eight recommendations, ranging from strengthening marriage and fatherhood, expanding individual development accounts, creating lifetime savings accounts, fully funding the Second Chance Act

and eliminating the marriage penalty within the earned income tax credit.

Responses from the Right and the Left about our initiative came as no surprise. The conservative critique fell along two lines: a focus on poverty either “dilutes” attention from fighting abortion, same-sex marriage and pornography or leads to an overarching dependence on government that ultimately stifles individual acts of charity and the work of faith-based organizations. Liberals, on the other hand, lambasted our effort as not going far enough with government assistance, insisting that recommendations made are too “cautious,” while others claimed it was too “deferential toward a regnant conservative ideology” with “emphasis on inculcating and reinforcing traditional values.”

In both cases, I think critics missed the forest for the trees. The Poverty Forum was, by design, meant to be incremental and, by outcome, to propose the allocation of current government spending to strengthen such values-laden concepts as family, savings, work and civil society. It is a positive, albeit humble, step forward.

But evangelical critics missed another aspect of the initiative, that it is also a humble effort to share the Good News by expressing concern for the poor through an effort of Christian unity. At the launch of The Poverty Forum, I read from St. John's account of Jesus' final prayer in the garden. It was about Jesus' conversation

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with his Father, in which he proclaimed what theologian John Stott called the cultural commission: “Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world” (John 17:18).

In his book, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, Stott wrote, “It is sadly still the case that some believe that Christians do not have social responsibility in this world but only a commission to evangelize those who have not heard the gospel. Yet it is evident that in his public ministry Jesus both ‘went about . . . teaching . . . and preaching’ (Matthew 4:23; 9:35) and ‘went about doing good and healing’ (Acts 10:38). In consequence, ‘evangelism and social concern have been intimately related to one another throughout the history of the Church . . . Christian people have often engaged in both activities quite unselfconsciously, without feeling any need to define what they were doing or why.’” Preaching and doing good should not be mutually exclusive. To truly proclaim the Gospel, man is called to do both.

Later in that same prayer, Jesus pleaded that we, His followers, may “experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me!” (John 17:23). After 16 years of working on Capitol Hill and being entrenched in the bowels of party politics, I realized how infrequently believers in Washington step out of their ideological and partisan shells to undertake the truly challenging effort of consensus building, and in the process, model the unity that Jesus said would help reveal Him to the world.

Most evangelicals believe professing the Gospel though the written and spoken word takes precedence over less direct methods of “witnessing.” But the witness of Christians united in compassion speaks volumes. As St.

Francis said, “Preach the Gospel always, and when necessary use words.”

The Poverty Forum is a unique opportunity to witness to the world—by word, unity and deed. If some evangelicals cannot in good conscience support the policy recommendations we made, I know they can at least applaud our efforts to help the world know we are Christians by our love.

-Mark Rodgers is principal of The Clapham Group, an organization committed to promoting the good, true and beautiful in the public arenas of politics, policy and pop culture (www.claphamgroup.com).

Lethal science

By Robert Goldberg

There are many in Congress who believe that comparative effectiveness research is a science. Science—in medicine, anyways—is about applying what we know about the biology of disease to the ability to diagnose, treat and prevent illness. That is, research—which links what we do and what we know to address the underlying causes of diseases—will make medicine not only comparatively more effective than what we currently have, but as the essayist and physician Lewis Thomas noted, will lead to preventive technologies that are ultimately cheaper.

Incorporating tools that permit doctors to address illness at this level would be a scientific approach to advancing the goal of comparative effectiveness. The opportunity to integrate genomic information, predictive tests and data analysis that could improve the ability to select the right treatment for individuals right off the bat—thereby reducing costs—exists if we follow this path. But unfortunately, this is not where Congress is heading.

For instance, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) panel that will advise the new Federal Coordinating Council on Comparative Effectiveness Review (FCCER). It is charged with assessing comparative effectiveness research. But unfortunately, the IOM operates under the assumption that summarizing and reviewing old research that ignores individual differences in response to treatments can save money and improve care. To this extent, the research will not be able to guide physician's decisions or adequately inform the FCCER. Under these faulty guidelines, how can it do either?

Rather, the goal of the exercise is to justify saying “no” to new technologies. Advocates want FCCER and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to be like the United Kingdom's comparative effectiveness agency, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). Yet, NICE concluded new drugs (which are available in the United States) for cancer, arthritis and multiple sclerosis aren't cost effective because they are not worth the money for the benefits it provides or the additional life it gives patients. Meanwhile, NICE decided birthing pools and breast reductions for women with self-esteem issues was cost effective.

The IOM panel has only two or three of the committee members, such as former FDA commissioner Mark McClellan, who have looked at how to use predictive markers to improve the evaluation of treatment and outcomes. The remaining members, such as Mr. Harold Sox, the Chair of the IOM committee and head of the American College of Physicians (ACP), regard comparative effectiveness as a tool for extending government's control over medical decisions. ACP's single-payer proposal noted, “Many other countries that have national health insurance programs, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, perform evidence-based evaluations of new drugs and technology...To attain a well-functioning healthcare system, the United States should increase investment in (AHRQ's) technology assessments, comparative effectiveness, and health services research.”¹

Other panelists, many of whom have con-

1. <http://www.annals.org/cgi/content/full/148/1/55?ijkey=cf707430c05cf8c95570152fcd6a77723a4f1af>

sulted for and receive millions from AHRQ feel the same. Mr. Alan M. Garber of Stanford University claims “cost effectiveness. ... simply estimates how much must be spent by using a particular intervention to gain a given health effect, telling us how to achieve the greatest health effect for the dollar.”² Yet Mr. Garber regards orphan drugs that control fatal metabolic diseases in children as an example of treatments not worth the “health effect.” In general, he believes the Orphan Drug Act allows the development of drugs that “do not meet traditional cost-effectiveness criteria.”³

Indeed, the comparative effectiveness tools they have in mind are those that require more evidence for new technologies instead of discovering which advances work best on specific patients. Sean Tunis, another panelist, runs the Center for Medical Technology Policy. Mr. Tunis evaluated medical technologies for Medicare. He then was dismissed and transferred to AHRQ. When he left to set up his Center, AHRQ was his first client, paying him to hold a conference on how government should use evidence to make reimbursement decisions. The key, Mr. Tunis suggests, is to demand reasons for justifying improvements provided by a new technology. But to delay access to a medical advance that saves lives is morally irresponsible.⁴

IOM panelist Kay Dickersin of Johns Hopkins University⁵ runs an AHRQ funded organi-

zation, Consumers United for Evidence Based Care (CUE).

Established to “advocate for local and federal legislative changes,” CUE is an umbrella group of fringe and radical consumer organizations that seek to use comparative effectiveness techniques to advance specific political goals. CUE includes the National Center for Transgender Health; anti-vaccine groups SAFEMINDS and the National Vaccine Information Center; and left-wing organizations such as Center for Science in the Public Interest.

In 2005, Mr. Dickersin joined the transgender groups in pushing Washington State’s Medicaid program to cover sex-change operations. Mr. Dickersin wrote the state that research used to deny coverage was unscientific and “that reports used for funding decisions should be held to the same standards as any other scientific report.”⁶

This is not science. The goal of comparative effectiveness research should be to identify—by developing, testing and using the most advanced scientific methods available—which treatments and clinical practices work best in patients who are critically or chronically ill. To ignore the advances in personalized medicine is to institutionalize ignorance and adversely affect the IOM panel, the decisions of Congress and the conduct of comparative effectiveness. By default, an unscientific approach to comparative effectiveness will make all health care choices political.

-Robert M. Goldberg is vice president of the Center for Medicine in the Public Interest.

2. <http://www.annals.org/cgi/content/full/148/12/>

3. Anthony H. Futerman, Ari Zimran, *Gaucher Disease* CRC Press, 2006, page 496.

4. *Managing Uncertainty in Healthcare*, <http://74.125.47.132/search?q=cache:iu4XLfMLb40J:www.cmtpn.net.org/recent-articles/topic-coverage-with-evidence-development/NICEAHRQWorkshopReportFINAL.pdf>

5. *The Surgical Treatment Outcomes Project for Dysfunctional Uterine Bleeding, a 5-year study designed to assess the effectiveness of hysterectomy compared with endometrial ablation (a conservative surgical procedure) for women with dysfunctional uterine bleeding who have*

failed medical management. Kay Dickersin, Principal Investigator, University of Maryland at Baltimore (Grant No. HS09506).

6. CUE 2007 Annual Meeting <http://apps1.jhsph.edu/cochrane/NSourofficialdocs.htm>

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A New Generation of Conservative Thought