



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #43 — JAN. 3, 2012

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INDEX: Click here.

The Voldemort of American Politics Rules from the Shadows

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 3, 2012)

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The Iowa Caucuses should be pretty interesting. Today, I'm not sure if my predictions from yesterday should be thrown out the window, or not. What's with this Santorum rocket and his Google problem? ^_^

The good news is that at least one of these clowns will probably not be with us past, say, tomorrow. Many more will be fading fast, based on their organizing and financing efforts. Which candidate will we be left with? Mitt Romney, though no one seems to want him very badly? Ron Paul, from way out in Right field? Rick Santorum, a man extremely interested in what you do in your bedroom?

Good luck to all, and may the best "man" win!

Meanwhile, the man who's policies Obama follows as if they were written by God on those famous golden plates of the Mormons, George W. Bush, watches from afar...way, way afar. It seems that no one, no Republican, especially, dares to mention him by name. Surely the mark of an extremely successful Presidency! :-)

"George W. Bush, Voldemort Of American Politics, Rules From The Shadows" by Howard Fineman, Huffington Post

Jan. 2, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/howard-fineman/george-w-bush-election-2012_b_1179655.html?ref=politics)

(DES MOINES, Iowa) The 2012 campaign officially begins on Tuesday with voting in the Iowa caucuses. But here in the Iowa Republican campaign, the most influential political figure of the last decade -- the one whose policies everyone should be talking about -- is invisible.

To Democrats, George W. Bush is the Voldemort of American politics, an evil force. But even to Republicans, he is He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, someone you dare not talk about as you try to win the votes of conservative Iowans.

In events involving five of the six GOP caucus contenders here in recent days, this reporter did not hear the former president's name mentioned once. A survey of other Huffington Post reporters yielded similar results.

The reasons for Bush's invisibility among Iowa Republican/conservatives are obvious. He was unpopular when he left office. With the help of Democrats, he piled up more federal debt than any of his predecessors. He vastly expanded the role and reach of government. He launched but did not "win" in the War on Terror. He and the Fed bailed out the big banks and financial firms on Wall Street and Europe.

Still, it is precisely these and other policies which still frame the outlines of American public life nearly three years after Bush's helicopter that made one last circle over the Capitol on the day Barack Obama was sworn in.

And yet, with the important and perhaps even crucial exception of Ron Paul, Republican candidates do not generally dispute the Bush framework, even though they don't mention his name. They want more tax cuts, not fewer; they advocate for a more aggressive policy toward Jihadists; like Bush, they shy away from specifically stating how they would balance the budget; and except for Paul and asterisk candidate Jon Huntsman, they do not specify, in any meaningful detail, how they would regulate Wall Street and the Fed in fundamentally different ways. The candidates say they are for "smaller government," but do not propose to do away with most of the government functions Bush expanded during his eight years in office.

President Obama -- hemmed in by Republicans and his own amendable nature and desire to win moderate votes in swing states -- has done little to change the basic framework of domestic and foreign policy laid down, brick by brick, in the Bush Years.

As a result, three years after he left office, Bush remains one of the most consequential, though paradoxically invisible, figures in modern American history.

Fiscal policy in the U.S. remains shaped and confined by the massive and successful tax cuts that the former president and his GOP allies put in place in 2001 and 2003. Obama has tried -- ineptly, half-heartedly or both -- to change them, to no avail. He has been unable even to tweak the top rate for millionaires and billionaires. Those tax cuts have and will cost the Treasury as estimated \$2.6 trillion in over a decade.

There will be another fight over tax policy in February. The outcome is at best uncertain.

In the name of fighting recession, Obama has expanded on Bush's own penchant for borrowing money. Bush piled up \$5 trillion in two terms, from 2001 to 2009; the current president has amassed that much in half the time.

The Federal Reserve, meanwhile, has pursued essentially the same easy-money strategy that it pursued in the Bush Years -- and that help lead to the housing bubble that nearly brought down the world economy.

Bush's administration set the essential and still prevalent strategy for fighting global economic catastrophe: shore up the biggest global banks and financial institutions with American loans and credit guarantees. Indeed Bush's Treasury Secretary in 2008, Hank Paulson -- he of the original TARP crusade -- continues to get favorable reviews, even from Hollywood, which portrayed him in a positive light in a recent movie. Timothy Geithner, Paulson's ally and protégè, remains Obama's trusted all-but-indispensable Treasury Secretary.

The president has tweaked but not abandoned -- and in some ways even amplified -- Bush's two biggest domestic policy initiatives: the No Child Left Behind education plan, and the Prescription Drug Benefit.

In foreign policy, President Obama promised a radical departure from the Bush theory of the world and the idea of a "Global War on Terror." But even though Obama delivered on his promise to wind down American military involvement in Iraq, the U.S. commitment to "taking the war to the enemy" has, if anything, grown.

Drones are replacing massive troop commitments, but drones require their own forward infrastructure, which means deeper military involvement throughout the Persian Gulf, Middle East and South Asia.

And though for the first two years of his administration the president and his aides studiously avoiding using the word "war" to describe their effort to defeat al Qaeda and other Jihadists, Obama uses the theory of war -- and the laws of war -- to justify continuing or even expanding Bush's policies of detention, assassination and surveillance.

Last week the president signed a Defense Authorization Bill that allows the U.S. military to capture and detain Al Qaeda or other suspected "terrorists" on American soil, a stark move away from the long American tradition -- born of the excesses of the British colonial era -- or barring domestic military activity.

The president also has approved a doctrine allowing for the killing of American citizens by the government without hearing of trial -- at least in the case of Americans living overseas who have become traitorous "enemy combatants."

Even the style and tactics of the 2012 campaign are defined by Bush and his crowd. His campaign was the first to enjoy the benefits of attack ads aired by anonymously-funded independent groups -- and made "swiftboating" synonymous with campaigning.

Now, in Iowa, there is a whole flotilla of outside groups.

So the Bush presidency may be gone, but Bush still reigns, even if we can't see him in Iowa.

FotM NEWSLETTER #43 (Jan. 3, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

DATE-ID	TIME	FROM	SUBJECT/TITLE
20120103-00		SteveB	The Voldemort of American Politics Rules from the Shadows by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("George W. Bush, Voldemort Of American Politics, Rules From The Shadows")
20120101-01	09:17	SteveG	Video: "'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents"
20120101-02	14:09	Pam	Re: "'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120102-01	13:36	Clark	New Year's Greetings

20120101-01	09:17	SteveG	Video: "'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents"
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Indiana mentally ill kicked out into the street...

Back in the 50's this same location was a TB sanatorium. Then it was used as a facility to provide day services for developmentally disabled, change4d to a nursing home and then to a private facility for the mentally ill contracting with the state. It is located about 6-8 miles east of Rockville in the middle of nowhere.

I find it amazing the government continues to screw over the most vulnerable. I am certain this is just one example and is replicated in some fashion in a multitude of states.

"'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents" by Heather Gillers, *Indianapolis Star*

Dec. 31, 2011, (<http://www.indystar.com/article/20120101/LOCAL/201010339/State-s-clearing-homes-mentally-ill-disaster-vulnerable-residents?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|IndyStar.com>)

(*Star* investigation finds troubling consequences of state's move to clear out more than 200 people from homes for mentally ill.)

20120101-02	14:09	Pam	Re: "'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents" (reply to SteveG, above)
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This is horrible. More and more often I hear troubling things about Indiana's government. The action described here is reprehensible. My niece and her husband and two sons live in Indianapolis. The older son, who must be in his mid- to late-twenties by now, has a form of asperger's and is mildly retarded. He can be violent, and it was

crucial to get him out of the home when he got too big to control. My niece's husband eventually had to quit his job in order to devote full time to trying to find adequate care for his son. It's been a mess. You're right, Steve. We're just beginning to see the effects of all these draconian budget cuts. As my case-manager daughter says, all the progress made in the last 20 years is about to be wiped out in NC, and it's back to square one. I say, let's take stuff from the millionaires until it hurts them as badly as the budget cuts hurt the mentally disabled. What wouldn't be fair about that?

20120102-01	13:36	Clark	New Year's Greetings
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Happy New Year, old Greencastle friends! Please don't overlook the very fine New Year's Greeting and Jingle PDF below, which you can view or download -- suitable for framing or birdcage lining!

For those of you who have never met my family, Catharine is my wife, Grae'l my son, Lia my daughter...where the cats and girlfriends/boyfriends came from, I have no idea, but they're at least somewhat decorative.

Wishing you all the best in the New Year.

—Friends of the Middle,
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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