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THE FOUNDATION

“[A] good moral character is the first essential in a man.”
--George Washington

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Massa Pile of Corruption

Former Rep. Eric Massa (D-NY) is currently the star of an ongoing ethics scandal that presents quite the dilemma for political analysts. The question is: What are Democrats up to while Massa tries to convince us to believe his story?

The congressman resigned Monday in the wake of an investigation by the House Ethics Committee for inappropriate comments he made to a male staffer on New Year's Eve, along with allegations of similar misconduct over the last year. Given that he's been in Congress for only a year, that's not a great report card. For his part, Massa claims he's merely the victim of political warfare by Democrat leaders who wanted him ousted before he could register the “deciding vote” on health care reform.

If Massa's claim is even partially true, it signals a redoubling of “Chicago-style” political assassination efforts by the Obama administration to ensure passage of their holy grail, health care legislation. Massa claimed that Rahm Emanuel, the Anointed One's Chief of Staff and left-hand arm-twister, accosted him in the showers of the congressional gym last November. “I'm sitting there showering, naked as a jaybird,” he recounted, “and here comes Rahm Emanuel, not even with a towel wrapped around his tush, poking his finger in my chest, yelling at me because I wasn't gonna vote for the president's budget.” While we wouldn't put such an act past Emanuel, we also note that, mercifully, there were no witnesses to the alleged encounter. Predictably, the White House denied the allegation.

Massa asked, “Do you know how awkward it is to have a political argument with a naked man?” No, we honestly don't know. Then again, we also don't know about tickle fights among (supposedly) grown men.

Our take is that Massa is both a liar and a creep, notwithstanding the administration's goals, which are even creepier. Certainly, one less “no” vote on ObamaCare doesn't hurt, as far as the executive branch is concerned. No doubt

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Frutopia) is also pleased. However, such potential skullduggery does lead us to wonder what other sorts of dirt Obamanites have on other “undecided” Democrats should they fail to cooperate.

The downside of this strategy, however, is that the Democrats really can't afford many more high-vis scandals. Over the course of just the last two weeks, for example, three prominent Democrats have managed to rain considerable shame upon their party. In addition to Massa's disgrace, New York Gov. David Paterson, under scrutiny for interfering in a domestic violence investigation, announced that he would end his re-election campaign, and veteran Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY) was forced to resign as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee because of numerous ethics violations. Add these to the stack of sleaze amassed by the Demos just since the Chosen One assumed office, and it amounts to a dismal track record for a party that claimed it would “clean up corruption” and stop “business as usual” in Washington.

Democrats won the House from Republicans in 2006 in large part by highlighting GOP scandals. Evidently, what went around appears to be coming back around ... and how!

From the ‘Non Compos Mentis’ File

“[W]e have to pass the bill so that you can find out what is in it, away from the fog of the controversy.” --House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), confirming that too much Botox can kill brain cells

The BIG Lie

On Monday, Barack Obama declared, “Our cost-cutting measures mirror most of the proposals in the current Senate bill, which reduces most people's premiums.”

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) disagreed, albeit indirectly: “Anyone who would stand before you and say, ‘Well, if you pass health care reform next year's health care premiums are going down,’ I don't think is telling the truth.”

Regulatory Commissars: Pulling the Corker Out of the Bottle

Sen. Bob Corker (R-TN) stunned his Republican colleagues by working with Senate Banking Committee Chairman Christopher Dodd (D-CT) this week to breathe new

life into Democrats' financial "reform" package. Feeling pressure from his right, however, Corker has since pulled out of the deal, which Dodd is now pushing without him.

The House version of the bill, crafted by Massachusetts liberal Barney Frank, was recently considered dead in the Senate, and for good reason. It included a \$4 trillion bailout provision for rickety financial institutions that would make TARP the official policy of the federal government. No more bankruptcies, no more survival of the fittest -- both characteristics of a free market. Instead, the government would be allowed to manipulate the markets on the backs of taxpayers. This bill would also create the Consumer Financial Protection Agency (CFPA), a massive new federal bureaucracy that would have the power to oversee and ultimately regulate not only financial institutions, but also virtually any organization that deals with consumers.

Corker, a freshman senator with an American Conservative Union rating of 83, should have joined his colleagues in the first place and let the bill die in negotiations. Instead, he worked with Dodd to keep the CFPA alive. His office stated that he doesn't support the bailout provision, but he did in fact vote for the TARP-bank bailout in 2008. Wall Street likes the bailout provision, because it coats big firms with Teflon to keep them from failing under almost any circumstances. It's a good thing that Corker, who has received \$3 million in campaign funds from the finance industry since taking office in 2007, reconsidered when he did. Still, he shouldn't have put himself in that position in the first place.

Health Care and Student Loans?

Senate Democrats want to attach a provision to the health care reconciliation bill that would allow the government essentially to take over all student loan lending in the country. Democrats are having enough problems passing health care on its own, and this latest parliamentary trick could shake up the delicate vote balance. The student-lending bill would federalize all higher education lending and would thus cause the loss of tens of thousands of private sector jobs. Senators representing states where those jobs stand to be lost are now wavering on whether they can support health care with this completely unrelated provision attached to it. What a shame.

The student-lending bill doesn't stand much chance of passage on its own. The \$67 billion that the White House claims will be saved by the legislation is more than offset by \$77 billion in new costs. That figure is a *lowball* estimate as it doesn't take into account the rate of student loan

defaults or accurately figure new spending increases over time. Worst of all, virtually no one in the Senate has seen this bill, and the public isn't aware of the details, let alone the fact that it may become law without much debate.

In related news, according to Roll Call, "The Senate Parliamentarian has ruled that President Barack Obama must sign Congress' original health care reform bill before the Senate can act on a companion reconciliation package." We'll soon see how Democrats plan to work around this legal obstacle.

New & Notable Legislation

Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ) announced a measure that would cut Congress's salary by 5 percent in 2011. It has 21 cosponsors so far, and, if passed, it would save taxpayers \$4.7 million. Granted, that's a drop in the bucket considering the deficits we're facing these days, but it would be an important symbolic step for Congress to recognize the economic woes being felt in the private sector. The House voted against an automatic pay raise in 2009 and 2010, but it hasn't taken an actual cut in pay since 1933.

The Senate voted 62-36 Wednesday to extend jobless benefits and temporary business tax breaks. Six Republicans and all but Democrat Ben Nelson of Nebraska voted for the bill, which will add about \$130 billion to the deficit over the next 18 months. The GOP "yes" votes were mostly the usual suspects, Christopher Bond (MO), Susan Collins (ME), Lisa Murkowski (AK), Olympia Snowe (ME), David Vitter (LA) and George Voinovich (OH).

Sen. Jim DeMint (R-SC) proposed an amendment last week to block the White House's arbitrary seizure of over 10 million acres of land in nine Western states. The land was designated as "monuments" under a questionable application of the Antiquities Act of 1906, in order to prevent resources development. DeMint pointed out that during times of economic stress, the government should be freeing up resources for development, not locking them up. Unfortunately, most of his colleagues disagreed. His amendment was defeated 58-38.

Sens. John McCain (R-AZ) and Joe Lieberman (I-CT) introduced the "Enemy Belligerent, Interrogation, Detention, and Prosecution Act of 2010," which would provide for military, rather than civilian, detention of terrorism suspects. The bill is ostensibly a response to the Christmas Day undi-bomber incident, in which the perpetrator was read his Miranda rights. It permits detentions based on "the potential intelligence value of the individual," or

“such other matters as the President considers appropriate.” That’s a lot of uncomfortable leeway. Furthermore, the military would have the power to detain high-value detainees indefinitely “without criminal charges and without trial for the duration of hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners in which the individual has engaged, or which the individual has purposely and materially supported.” Given that Obama’s Homeland Security team views right-wingers as threats, one wonders just where this could lead. With “friends” like McCain...

Finally, in a bid to put their big-spending past behind them (or at least make a good campaign statement), the House GOP adopted a unilateral one-year ban on earmarks Thursday. To paraphrase Ben Franklin, that’s a good promise ... if you can keep it.

NATIONAL SECURITY

On the Warfront With Jihadistan

As the Long War continues, both expected and unexpected targets were picked off by various American and allied forces this week. In Pakistan, Interior Minister Rehman Malik said that Maulana Faqir Mohammed, a top Pakistani Taliban commander, was probably killed last weekend after helicopters hit a building in Pakistan’s Mohmand region, killing at least 16 Taliban militants. Although Malik could not confirm Mohammed’s death, he was quoted as saying, “We had real-time intelligence that Faqir Mohammad was in a meeting with another commander, Qari Zia-ur-Rehman, in the hideout at the time of the attack.” If true, we got two jihadis for the price of one. Meanwhile, the good hunting continued on Wednesday as U.S. missile strikes killed at least 12 militants near Pakistan’s Afghan border.

Also this week, Pakistani officials claimed that an American, Adam Gadahn, a 31-year-old who has appeared in al-Qa’ida videos urging jihad against the West, had been captured. U.S. defense officials said they had received no indication of any such arrest, and by Friday, Pakistani officials were backing away from the story. Gadahn, who grew up in Riverside County, California, before converting to Islam at a nearby Orange County mosque is the first American charged with treason since 1952, and the U.S. government is offering \$1 million for information leading to his capture.

Finally, on Monday, a Pennsylvania woman named Colleen LaRose, but known to authorities as “Jihad Jane” (not to be confused with Hanoi Jane), was charged in federal court with using the Internet to recruit jihadis to carry out murders and other violent attacks overseas. One

of her targets was Lars Vilks, an artist who had exercised his free speech rights by drawing a cartoon of the prophet Muhammad. The indictment alleges that LaRose received orders to murder someone in Sweden, and to do so in such a way that it would frighten “the whole Kufar [non-believer] world.” It also states that LaRose agreed to commit the murder, and that her appearance and American citizenship would help her blend in and carry it out.

Maj. Gen. Harding: Obama’s Backup TSA Pick

Nearly 14 months in, the Obama administration still lacks a leader at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). After months of dithering, back in September Obama first selected Errol Southers to head the agency, but Southers withdrew in January after Republicans threatened to continue a hold on his nomination. Republicans’ biggest issues with Southers were his lying to Congress about having unlawfully accessed FBI records to spy on his ex-wife’s boyfriend and his unyielding stance on unionizing TSA employees, a move that could have impeded flexibility in a time of national crisis. Southers also drew fire for his categorization of “Christian identity oriented” groups as the largest threat to our national security.

On Monday, however, Obama nominated retired Army Maj. Gen. Robert A. Harding for the post. Harding, a former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, brings a 33-year military career to the table. The president was “confident that Bob’s talent and expertise will make him a tremendous asset” to the TSA. So far Republicans are receptive, which makes us wonder why Obama didn’t pick Harding in the first place.

Profiles of Valor:

U.S. Marine Corps 1st Lt. Elliot Ackerman

On November 10, 2004, then-2nd Lt. Elliot Ackerman of the United States Marine Corps led a platoon into Fallujah -- at that time, still a hotbed of insurgent activity. The platoon’s mission was to establish a foothold from which the battalion would then clear the city. As the Marines pushed into the city, enemy fighters attacked from all sides.

Twice in the early fighting, Ackerman risked himself to pull wounded Marines to safety, and then organized their evacuation. As the battle raged, however, the vehicle sent to evacuate the wounded couldn’t find their position, so Ackerman again headed into the open and risked what his citation called a “gauntlet of deadly enemy fire” to direct the vehicle to the Marines.

Later in the battle, Ackerman and his team were working to clear a building when he saw some of his Marines ex-

posed on a rooftop. He ordered them down, but took their place to mark targets for American tanks. Under a barrage of enemy fire, he suffered shrapnel wounds in his leg but continued to direct both the attack and four medical evacuations. For his bravery and leadership, Ackerman was awarded the Silver Star. Semper Fi!

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Income Redistribution: You Paid for It

Executive salaries reach \$500,000, hourly fees top \$600, and millions of your dollars are propping it all up. Welcome to the underworld of the environmental industry. According to Richard Pollock of Pajamas Media, “environmental activist groups have surreptitiously received at least \$37 million from the federal government for questionable ‘attorney fees’” related to lawsuits that “had nothing to do with environmental protection or improvement.”

Since 2000, nine national environmental groups have filed the astounding number of 3,300 lawsuits, most based on “alleged procedural failings of federal agencies” rather than “substance or science.” Not only has Uncle Sam doled out the millions, but Washington has “neither tracked nor accounted for” any of the outgo. Wyoming attorney Karen Budd-Falen, who helped uncover the fraud, says the \$37 million is just the “tip of the iceberg,” estimating the actual number is in the hundreds of millions.

Interestingly, according to the Washington Examiner, compensation for the top 10 paid environmental executives ranges from \$308,000 to \$496,000. Pajamas Media notes that of the \$3.4 million that environmental PACs have given in federal campaign contributions since 2000, approximately 87 percent was to Democrats. Coincidence? We think not.

Eco-activists aren't the only ones greening themselves with your money. It seems Wake Forest University is using a \$71,623 federal “we must rescue the economy now” stimu-less grant to study the effects of cocaine on a specific neurotransmitter in addicted monkeys. The economic benefit? Apparently a job “saved.” For the record, we believe taxpayer dollars already fund too much monkey business in Washington; there's certainly no need to fund it anywhere else.

CBO Contradicts White House on Budget (Again)

As monkeys and tree-huggers eat at the government trough, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) predicts that Barack Obama's proposed budget will hike the

national debt by more than the mind-numbing sum of \$9.7 trillion over the next 10 years -- far more than the already astounding \$8.5 trillion the White House predicts. Naturally, the Democrat-led CBO blames the ballooning deficit on the Bush tax cuts while simultaneously claiming the proposed health care takeover will be deficit-neutral.

Let's get this straight: passing a trillion-dollar government-run and taxpayer-funded health care plan won't add to the deficit, but restoring to Americans trillions of dollars in saving, investing and spending power somehow did? Whose money is it, anyway?

Federal Pay vs. Private Sector Pay

USA Today recently conducted a survey comparing average salaries of private sector employees to those of federal employees. Guess who did better? If you said the public sector worker, go to the front of the class.

First of all, many federal workers are covered by civil service rules, making them nearly impossible to fire and difficult to layoff. On top of that, based on 2008 data, the typical federal worker is paid 20 percent more than one in the private sector in the same occupation. The median salary for a federal employee is \$66,591, while that of a private sector employee is \$55,500, a difference of \$11,091 -- before adding benefits such as medical insurance, sick days and holidays, pensions and the like. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, benefits averaged \$40,785 per federal employee versus \$9,882 per private worker. Add these to the USA Today figures and the average in total compensation for each is \$107,376 versus \$65,382, a whopping 64 percent difference of \$41,994.

The difference in salaries is greatest in the public relations occupations. The widest spread, \$44,169, was for public relations managers, with the federal employee receiving \$132,410, compared to \$88,241 for his private sector counterpart. The next largest difference was \$41,045 for broadcast technicians.

So if you want a job that pays well, has great benefits and offers little chance of being laid off, the federal government is the employer for you -- that is, until it runs out of other people's money.

Mortgage Plans

The Obama administration plans to force mortgage lenders to allow homeowners behind on their payments to sell for less than they owe. Known as short sales, these transactions are -- or used to be -- few and far between for one

obvious reason: the lender loses money. In this election year, however, the administration is more concerned with garnering the votes of the five million households at risk of foreclosure.

Under the plan, real estate agents would assess the value of the property, which would not be disclosed to the homeowner. If the homeowner receives an offer equal to or greater than that value, the lender must accept. In addition, the lender will receive \$1,000 and the homeowner will pocket \$1,500 for "relocation assistance." One of the stated benefits of the program is that these woe-is-me homeowners -- people who willingly borrowed well beyond their means (yes, we understand this isn't always the case) -- would suffer a lesser blow to their credit than if they had lived through foreclosure. Of course, that will come at the expense of taxpayers.

Administration Delays Oil Drilling

In 2008, then-Senator Barack Obama risked the ire of his leftist comrades when he championed offshore drilling as an opportunity to free America from dependence on foreign oil; he shrewdly hedged his bets in order to lure centrists and other undecideds into his camp. However, as with so many other issues, Obama's campaign promises are proving worthless.

Despite the fact that Americans favor offshore drilling by a 2 to 1 margin, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has used every tool in his bureaucratic box to hinder it, including extending the public comment period before beginning the drilling program, voiding existing contracts for onshore drilling in Utah and announcing the delay of the offshore program until 2012. This program would have created 1.2 million real jobs per year and not doing it will cost the U.S. \$2.36 trillion over the next 20 years. Surprise! Economic recovery is *not* the real agenda of this administration.

CULTURE & POLICY

Around the Nation: Politicizing the Census

The one thing we can count on from Census 2010 is controversy. What began 220 years ago as a constitutionally mandated count for proportional representation has morphed over time into a method for divvying out federal funds targeted to specific groups based on the information asked as part of our decennial census.

The 10 questions asked on this year's short form certainly do more than just account for the number of citizens. Citizens are asked about age, race, gender, whether we own

or rent our homes, and personal identifying information such as name and telephone number.

Ironically, accounting for race made sense only because the nation once counted certain residents as 3/5 of a person -- a compromise wrought to balance Northern and Southern interests over the question of numbering slaves. While the 14th Amendment ended that practice, the question remains as a vestige of a society not quite colorblind. In response, some plan to answer the race question with "American."

Factor in the advertising campaign which suggests people should reply to get "their fair share" of federal goodies, and the possibility of same-sex couples identifying themselves as married regardless of whether the state they live in allows same-sex marriage, and it's clear that the Census is becoming less about proportion and more about politics.

Judicial Benchmarks: 9th Circuit Approves of Pledge

"A federal appeals court in San Francisco has ruled that the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance is constitutional," reports the Associated Press. Atheist Michael Newdow had filed suit in 2004, claiming his daughter shouldn't be required to say the Pledge at school. However, his daughter and her mother, from whom Newdow is separated, are Christians who don't object to the Pledge, and the U.S. Supreme Court threw out the case saying Newdow didn't have standing. He refiled on behalf of other parents, but, in a 2-1 ruling, a Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel rejected his argument that the phrase "under God" violates the separation of church and state. Yes, the Ninth Circuit. Amazing, isn't it?

Climate Change This Week: China and India Join Agreement

"China and India formally agreed Tuesday to join the international climate change agreement reached in December in Copenhagen, the last two major economies to sign up," The New York Times reports. Though Xie Zhenhua, vice-chairman of the powerful National Development and Reform Commission, admitted that there are disagreements over the cause of warming, he said, "As far as governments around the world are concerned, as the existence and long term development of climate change will cause great damage to mankind, it is better to believe that it is happening than that it isn't." He added, "We should take scientific measures to avoid these problems happening." Shoot first, ask questions later.

More than 100 countries have signed the accord, which calls for limiting the rise in global temperatures to no more than 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit beyond pre-industrial levels. It sounds so easy -- if we can all just agree that the temperature shouldn't get any higher, we'll save the planet.

Meanwhile, Reuters reports, "Loopholes in the United Nations climate treaties could actually amount to an increase in global climate-warming emissions, and the chance to rein in temperatures may be slipping away, a draft European Union report showed." Bummer.

This Week's 'Alpha Jackass' Award

"I guess what we all underestimated was the degree, the depths of dishonesty, and dirtiness, and cynicism to which the climate change denial movement would be willing to stoop to advance their agenda." --Michael Mann, author of the dirty, dishonest and cynical "hockey stick" graph showing a recent spike in warming

Second Amendment: Guns For Dummies

Federal authorities at the ATF recently intercepted a large shipment of rifles labeled "toys" in Tacoma, Washington, that it claimed "could have had far-reaching and potentially devastating ramifications if they had gotten into the hands of individuals who wanted to do harm in the American population." Could the weapons seizure have prevented a shooting rampage across the nation? Perhaps -- except for one problem. The guns actually were toys.

Apparently, the ATF thought there was no limit to the widespread damage these mostly plastic Airsoft BB guns could have inflicted upon hapless Americans. The lightweight plastic BB ordnance fired by such heavy artillery may actually sting or leave welts on bare skin if fired at close range. Undeterred by such an obvious blunder, the agency *justified* its seizure by declaring the toy BB guns could be converted into real, fully automatic machine guns -- which is true, if virtually all of the toy's parts were replaced with real machine gun parts from a real weapon. The same holds true for any other toy being converted to the real thing from scratch, like toy pickups or spaceships. The old adage never to attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity continues to be true, especially when it comes to bureaucratic bungling. Perhaps in the future, the ATF could refer to Guns for Dummies to help them identify real weaponry.

To Keep and Bear Arms

A burglar had the surprise of his life when he broke into a soon-to-be Marine's home in Delhi Township, Ohio.

In the middle of the night, Kevin Boyle noticed that his door had been opened and quickly confronted the suspect. After warning him not to move, Boyle noticed him pull out what appeared to be a gun and raise it towards him. Fortunately, he had his own .45 caliber handgun ready.

Boyle fired two shots at the suspect and ran to get behind the corner wall for protection. He immediately called the police for help. The suspect took off to escape in the woods. It appears a car was waiting to pick him up. He remains on the run, and there is no evidence that he was struck by the bullets.

"I'm glad no one got hurt, including him. He probably thought he could get in for a quick little burglary and luckily I was ready to keep myself safe," said Boyle, who is two months away from leaving for Marine training camp. We'd call that successful early training.

And Last...

One of the biggest questions on Capitol Hill these days is whether the Democrats have the votes to pass health care legislation. Speaker Nancy Pelosi claims she does, but political analyst Michael Barone, for one, doubts it. One bit of evidence supporting his conclusion is reported by National Journal's Congress Daily: "House Rules Chairwoman Louise Slaughter is prepping to help usher the healthcare overhaul through the House and potentially avoid a direct vote on the Senate overhaul bill, the chairwoman said Tuesday. Slaughter is weighing preparing a rule that would consider the Senate bill passed once the House approves a corrections bill that would make changes to the Senate version." In other words, House members would vote for a rule, not a bill, which, to a party that thinks the American people are behind them, makes perfect sense.

Slaughter is the congresswoman who, two weeks ago, told the sad tale of a woman wearing her dead sister's dentures, which she interpreted as a call for Congress to commit a hostile takeover of one-sixth of the economy. It was a bit of a leap, we know.

As to her current machinations, House Republican Leader John Boehner's office came up with a clever moniker: "The Slaughter Solution." Indeed, not only would this "solution" slaughter the checks and balances provided by the Constitution, but it would almost guarantee that Democrats get slaughtered at the polls in November. And wouldn't that be a shame!