

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

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APRIL 15, 2009 -- Our trouble is that the agents of change – Obama, Axelrod and Gibbs – have changed to Washington’s conventional wisdom:

-- **On Afghanistan:** The conventional wisdom is to train Afghans to defend Afghanistan from the Taliban so that we can withdraw. We spent ten years trying to train the Vietnamese to defend Vietnam only to learn that more were willing to die for communism than democracy. Losing fifty-eight thousand GIs one would think we had learned the lesson that some work well under governments not committed to freedom and democracy.

I was a bitter-ender on Vietnam and I maintained that we couldn’t withdraw and dishonor those who had already suffered the supreme sacrifice. But now I have been to Hanoi and the people are happy. And I’m afraid that’s the case in Afghanistan.

Sixty-seven years ago, I helped liberate Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia and they have yet to opt for democracy. In the Muslim world, more important than freedom and democracy is tribe and religion. That’s our problem in Iraq. We’ve bribed the Sunnis, calling them the Awakening, and now turning them over to the Shiite government, the violence is resuming. I don’t think we’ll ever teach Afghan warlords to like democracy and grow cotton instead of poppies. In fact, we have become the problem rather than the solution. The Brits tried to teach them monarchy. The Russians tried to teach them communism, and our free elections have never caused a national government.

They’re still tribal and growing more poppies than ever. And it appears that after eight years we have become the enemy. The Russians are taking over Manas, our airfield that we use to supply Afghanistan and Pakistan has established Islamic law in its border area, giving the Taliban sanctuary. We get to them only with a drone that kills ten or twenty but creates two hundred terrorists in Pakistan. I don’t think creating terrorists is worth the life of another GI. Out.

-- **On stimulus:** The conventional wisdom is to stimulate the economy so that we can get the banks back to lending again. After eight years of Bush’s borrowing and deficit spending, we have stimulated the economy \$5 trillion and are still losing jobs like gangbusters.

Last year’s stimulation was exactly \$1 trillion, \$35 billion. Already in this fiscal year, the Secretary of the Treasury reports that we have stimulated \$1 trillion, \$145 billion, and we’re still losing hundreds of thousands of jobs. The last eight year’s household debt of \$7 trillion stimulated the economy more. Now households are saving, which causes businesses not to ask for loans. And we’re losing more jobs to offshoring than the recession.

Rather than stimulating consumption, we ought to be stimulating production by engaging in the trade war and competing in globalization. But it is a “no-no” of conventional wisdom to protect our economy, to protect our standard of living, while the banks and Corporate America want to protect their investments in China and India with free trade. As John F. Kennedy’s *Profile in Courage*, Henry Clay said: “Free trade, free trade ... it

never existed. It never will.”
 Globalization is nothing more than a trade war with production looking for a country cheaper to produce.

We ought to compete in globalization by eliminating the subsidy to offshoring; instituting a VAT tax that’s rebateable to equalize our disadvantage in international trade, and activate the Secretary of Commerce’s list of those items critical to our national security. This will put America back to work. But the conventional wisdom in Washington is that the only way to compete in globalization is to educate. It’s Washington that needs the education. We are producing better BMWs in Spartanburg, South Carolina, than in Munich, Germany.

-- **On a drug czar for the drug war in Mexico:** The conventional wisdom in

Washington is to appoint a drug czar to solve Mexico’s drug war and our immigration problem.

But if we took the money that we are spending on the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Border Patrol, the Immigration Service, the prosecutors, the prisons, the courts, deportation, fences, and gave Mexico \$10 billion a year for five years in a Marshall Plan to clean up the corruption and build a free market with labor rights, we could solve the immigration, drug and trade problem.

We don’t have any drug or immigration problems with Canada, because Canada has a free market. Rather than trying to rebuild Iraq or Afghanistan, we ought to act like a good neighbor and rebuild Mexico with a Marshall Plan. It will be easier to wean Mexico from wanting guns than weaning us from wanting drugs.

Senator Hollings of South Carolina served 38 years in the United States Senate, and for many years was Chairman of the Commerce, Space, Science & Transportation Committee. He is the author of the newly published book, [Making Government Work](#) (University of South Carolina Press, 2008).