

May 21, 2010

Voters Stop Buying the Obama Spin

By Jonah Goldberg

Falling Down (1993) was one of the worst political films of the last 20 years, but it had one memorable line. A stunned Michael Douglas asks, "I'm the bad guy? . . . How did that happen?"

Barack Obama should be asking himself something similar these days. He came into office promising rainbows and puppies for everyone and has, like Pizza Hut during a blizzard, failed to deliver.

Now, before some intern at a left-wing media watchdog outfit spits Diet Snapple out his nose in outrage over my "fabrications" and "distortions," and fires off some canned protest e-mail, I do not literally mean to suggest that Obama promised voters rainbows and puppies. Rather, I mean it figuratively. He did literally promise to change the way Washington works, unify the country, govern from the center, work with Republicans, and operate the government in a fiscally responsible way. That hasn't happened. You could look it up.

I was on Fox News recently and was asked to debate the proposition that Obama's candidate endorsements are the "kiss of death." My response: No, they aren't the kiss of death, but they certainly aren't the kiss of life either. They're more like a kiss from your sister. They add little to no excitement while inviting many unwanted questions.

Some of those questions might include: Do you agree with the president's health-care plan? His stimulus package? His spending record? Cap-and-trade? The bailouts? Terror trials in New York? Etc.

Over the past year, President Obama hasn't been much help to anyone trying to get elected. He endorsed and campaigned for Massachusetts attorney general Martha Coakley, and she lost in her bid to keep "Ted Kennedy's seat" in the hands of Democrats. In political terms, it was a bit like holding a papal election and having the pontiff's seat (or cathedra, for you sticklers) go to the head counselor of the Unitarian Church (or whatever they call their Pope-equivalent).

Obama endorsed then-New Jersey governor Jon Corzine, only to see him beaten by Republican Chris Christie. He endorsed Creigh Deeds in Virginia, only to see Republican Bob McDonnell win that governorship handily. He hugged Florida governor Charlie Crist so hard he squeezed him right out of the Republican party.

The elections this week continued the trend. Obama endorsed Arkansas senator Blanche Lincoln in the Democratic primary, but it wasn't enough for her to avoid a runoff. He endorsed snarlin' Arlen Specter in the Democratic primary for the Pennsylvania Senate race, only to see Specter's opponent, Rep. Joe Sestak, use that endorsement against Specter as proof of Specter's inside-the-Beltway phoniness.

The much-ballyhooed silver lining for Obama came from the Pennsylvania special election to replace the recently deceased Rep. Jack Murtha. Democrats not only outnumber Republicans two-to-one in the 12th district, but Murtha remains a hero for getting the entire district strung-out on high-grade pork (not the oink-oink kind).

Obama's preferred candidate won there. How did former Murtha aide Mark Critz do it? By promising to be Obama's point man on Capitol Hill? Nope. He ran as a pro-life, pro-gun, anti-Obamacare right-wing Democrat who (dishonestly) denounced his GOP opponent as a tax hiker.

The White House desperately wants the story to be "Voters Mad at Washington," not "Voters Mad at Democrats" or, heaven forbid, "Voters Mad at Obama." But the simple truth is that all three things are true, and Obama deserves much of the blame.

Jay Cost, an indispensable election analyst at RealClearPolitics.com, has it exactly right: "'Change that you can believe in' has gone from an over-worked campaign slogan to an unfalsifiable hypothesis. Vote for a Dem, you support the President's agenda for change. Vote for a GOPer, you support the President's agenda for change."

This spin has been a long time in coming. After the Scott Brown victory, the White House claimed that the Republican's win was a manifestation of the same political forces that brought Obama to power, even though Brown opposed Obama's agenda, and despite the fact that Obama lustily endorsed Brown's opponent, Martha Coakley. Who, by the way, wasn't an incumbent. She promised to advance Obama's "change" agenda, and she lost. But Obama's just so awesome that what would be political losses for lesser mortals must be more winning proof of his supercalifragilisticexpialidociousness. Because as far as this White House is concerned, nothing is ever Obama's fault and everything is proof of how much we need him.

It's an odd position given how the people who need him least are candidates from his own party.

© 2010 Tribune Media Services, Inc.