

The Envelope, Please

In a taped interview to be broadcast on CBS's *60 Minutes* on August 21, Obama repeats for CBS correspondent Anthony Mason his tired excuses for the weak economy and the stock market decline: "I think what the markets were reacting to was the fact that the economy has not grown as quickly as it needs to. There have been a lot of headwinds: the European debt crisis, [the earthquake and tsunami in] Japan, high gas prices from the Arab Spring and what a lot of folks are worried about is that the recovery that we have been on is stalling or not moving as quickly as it needs to."

So, nothing is Obama's fault, but at least he reassures the nation that the economy cannot possibly get any worse: "I don't think we're in danger of another recession but we are in danger of not having a recovery that's fast enough to deal with what is a genuine unemployment crisis for a whole lot of folks out there and that's why we need to be doing more." Obama is worried that we *might* have a recovery that is not fast enough? There can surely not be many Americans who not have *already* concluded the recovery is "not fast enough."

Obama can never forget to blame the Republicans, so he adds, "We should not have had any kind of brinkmanship around the debt ceiling." (Threatening senior citizens with the loss of Social Security benefits in order to get tax increases does not count as brinkmanship in Obama's world view.) "I wish the Speaker [of the House John Boehner] had taken me up on a grand bargain to deal with long term debt and deficit. We still have the opportunity to fix that, it's not too late. I will be putting forward a plan that will be very similar to the plan that I put forward to the Speaker." (The White House has stated that Obama would have a *new* plan in early September. Apparently it will not be so new after all.)

Boehner was reportedly somewhat close to an agreement with Obama—who then insisted on additional tax increases that destroyed the deal. The truth is that Obama never had a plan on paper, other than the 2012 budget he proposed in February—that was defeated 97–0 in the U.S. Senate. The 2012 budget proposed by Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan included far more debt reduction than was eventually agreed to in the debt ceiling agreement, but Obama and the Senate Democrats (and the media) made sure that was not taken seriously. (The Democrat game has been to let the Republicans stick their necks out first so they can get walloped by the media and the voters for daring to propose specific spending cuts and entitlement reform. Obama and the Democrats then ride in to save the day by proposing tax increases to keep grandma and grandpa from getting kicked off Medicare and the grandkids from losing their school lunches. Never mind the fact that even \$100 billion in additional annual taxes would only reduce the deficit from \$1.65 trillion to \$1.55 trillion—while putting even more people out of work.)

But perhaps we don't need much of a grand bargain after all, because Obama makes it sound as though there *are* no significant economic problems facing the nation: "We can

fix these problems. Compared to a lot of countries around the world, the adjustments we have to make are so much more modest and I think that's part of the reason why the Americans are so frustrated. It'd be one thing if we had the kinds of problems like Greece did—where you potentially have to completely restructure your economy and your society.” (A \$1.65 trillion deficit, in Obama's view, can apparently be tackled with only “modest” adjustments.) Obama continues, “That's not the situation here. Here we're talking about closing some loop holes in the tax code, making some modest adjustments [to] entitlements, [and] paring back a little bit on programs that don't work.” (Mason does not ask Obama why “programs that don't work” should only be “pared back” and not eliminated altogether.) “And if we do that—on the back of an envelope I could show you what it would take for us to do it—most folks wouldn't notice.”

Easy peasy! On the back of an envelope! You folks will hardly notice the \$1.65 trillion in tax hikes and spending cuts! Then what was all the debt ceiling fuss about? Senate Democrats have gone more than two years without producing a legally required budget. Why didn't Obama give Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid a few of his envelopes? Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner warned the sky would fall if the debt ceiling issue was not resolved. Couldn't Obama have given Geithner a few envelopes as well, and perhaps even spared one for Standard & Poor's?

Rather than ask those questions, Mason instead asks Obama, “This has been a scary summer for a lot of people—the stock market, economy is struggling. Should Congress be back in Washington? Should you be going on vacation?” Obama responds, “Well no, because I think that if all we're doing is the same posturing that we saw before the debt limit vote that's not going to encourage anybody. That's going to discourage people.” (No one is discouraged now?) “The reason I'm out here is to remind people what the expectations of ordinary Americans are.” (If Americans need Obama to remind them of their own expectations, the nanny state has advanced far more than most people realize.) “In small towns like this [where Obama is campaigning on his bus tour] and in big cities all across America, they are saying to their representatives stop playing games and get something done.” (For the record, they are also saying the same thing to Obama—probably with some four-letter words.)

We should all be happy to hear that Obama finally has a plan—it's just too bad it took him 31 months to find a suitable envelope on which to write it down. Some might ask why, if Obama can solve the nation's economic problems so easily, he must first insist on a 10-day vacation. It's not as though he got tired personally driving that \$1.1 million campaign bus through Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois, or answering softball questions from the mindless myrmidons in his audiences. (One of the tough questions Obama got from the Decorah, Iowa crowd was, “I want to echo the sentiments of those who have spoken before me in praising you and thanking you for all of your efforts and all the things that you tried to do during probably one of the most difficult situations faced by any president in the face of unreasonable obstruction and opposition. So thank you.” For “questions” like that, Obama could have sat down with Barbara Walters or Diane Sawyer for an hour and skipped the three days on the bus.)

Not only did the campaign trip—which the White House pretends was “official business” so that the taxpayers would have to pay for it—not tire Obama, he even had the White House all to himself (and his man-servant Reggie Love) last week while Michelle took her mother and the kids to Oregon to see the First Brother-in-Law. Obama could probably even have gotten one of his six-figure staffers to walk Bo while he finalized his grand deficit reduction plan.

Instead, while 25 million unemployed and underemployed Americans suffer, Obama heads to Martha’s Vineyard for golf, hobnobbing with the wealthy elite, photo ops with his daughters at fudge and ice cream shops, while the svelte Michelle enjoys lobster and audio tapes of Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s sermons. Only *after* Obama is well rested will he pull out an envelope and scribble his dazzling plan.

Would it be too much to ask Obama to pull out that envelope now?

Don Fredrick

August 18, 2011