

# The Right Fights Back

WHAT HAPPENED to the Age of Obama?

Glancing over the *New York Times Book Review*, one finds three of the top four nonfiction bestsellers were written by conservatives—columnist Michelle Malkin, talk-show host Mark Levin, and Fox News contributor Dick Morris.

At No. 10, in its 40th week on the list, is Bill O'Reilly's memoir. The No. 1 best-seller in paperback: Glenn Beck's *Common Sense*.

Moreover, the altarpiece of the transformational presidency, universal health insurance, is on life support, as huge crowds pour into townhall meetings to denounce it. Responding to the protests, the Obamaites have dumped the end-of-life counselors (aka "death panels") and declared the government option expendable.

But what are we to make of these "evil-mongers" of Harry Reid's depiction, these "mobs" of "thugs" organized by K Street lobbyists and "right-wing extremists"? Surely, all Americans must detest them.

To the contrary. According to a Pew poll, by 61 percent to 34 percent, Americans think the protesters are behaving properly. Gallup found that by 34 percent to 21 percent Americans identify with them. For these folks at the townhall meetings are not overprivileged Ivy League brats seizing campus buildings and holding the dean hostage. They look and talk just like them.

What President Obama is losing is not the far Right but the center of the country. Nor is this the first time liberals have misread America.

During the 1968 Democratic Convention, liberals sided with the antiwar demonstrators in Grant Park. And the country sided with the Chicago cops who went into the park and gave them a good thrashing.

In 1969, the national press was writing that President Nixon must yield to the hundreds of thousands ringing the White House. Nixon went on national TV to call on the Silent Majority to stand by him.

They did, for four years. One recalls Sen. Ed Muskie blurting out, after being crushed in the Florida primary by George Wallace, that he didn't know there were that many racists in Florida. That was the end of Ed. And in the fall, the Floridians flooded to Nixon, who did not insult them.

After Nixon rolled up his 49-state triumph, Pauline Kael, movie critic at the *New Yorker*, is said to have expressed disbelief: "I don't know how Nixon won. No one I know voted for him."

George H.W. Bush never saw the rebellion of 1992 coming and watched Ross Perot waltz off with a third of his 1988 voters.

The anger in Middle America today looks much like what erupted in the NAFTA debate of 1993 and the amnesty debate of 2007.

The difference: Republican leaders stood with Washington then, for NAFTA and amnesty. This time, the party leaders are with the people and should do the people's will.

Seven months into the Age of Obama, the GOP has been given an opportunity to regain the allegiance of the voters John McCain lost with his embrace of NAFTA and amnesty and his dash to Washington to convince Republicans to give Hank Paulson \$700 billion to bail out Wall Street.

For these protesters are not so much being drawn to the GOP as being driven to it. The manic assaults by Democrats and liberal commentators and columnists on the protesters as "un-American," "birthers," "racists," "mobs," and

"evil-mongers" has enraged and united them and cost Obama much of his support in Middle America

Does the Left not realize that, while four in five Republicans say the protesters are behaving appropriately, 64 percent of moderates and 40 percent of Democrats agree with those Republicans?

We are also learning that Republicans have not been hurt by their opposition to the stimulus bill or cap-and-trade. The country has come to agree with the GOP.

Nor was the party hurt when, by four to one, its senators voted against Ms. Affirmative Action, Sonia Sotomayor. Nor was it hurt by standing with Sgt. Crowley when Obama rushed to denounce the Cambridge cop for acting "stupidly" in arresting the Harvard professor who got in his face.

Increasingly, Obama is being perceived as a man of the Left and Republicans as the bulwark against a lurch to the left. Democrats may denounce Republicans as the party of "no"—but the nation seems to be saying "yes" to the party of "no"

In his new memoir, *Encounters*, conservative scholar Dr. Paul Gottfried writes of a 1993 gathering, hosted by this writer, where libertarian legend Murray Rothbard, columnist Sam Francis, and that founding father of postwar conservatism, Dr. Russell Kirk, went at it over the role of the populist Right in the conservative movement.

Though they vehemently disagreed, each man represented an essential element of a center-right coalition. As for the protesters, surely Thomas Jefferson was more right than Harry Reid when he wrote to James Madison, "A little rebellion now and then is a good thing and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical." ■

# Burn Victims

Toxic exposure torments soldiers long after their tours end.

By Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

RETIRED SGT. Michael Maynard can no longer feel his feet. He began to notice the problem four years ago while working as an air-traffic control specialist in the Army. After a year at Camp Taji in Iraq, Maynard took off his boots one night and found that a hot piece of metal had slipped inside—hot enough to tear away his skin. Somehow he hadn't felt it.

By the time another year had passed, Maynard was back home in Indiana, confined to a wheelchair. Today, at age 49, he needs heavy braces to help him stand.

"With his muscles degenerating ... he keeps falling," his wife Maria says. "He's a mess. I am constantly worried about him."

Department of Veterans Affairs doctors were flummoxed by his condition, finally diagnosing rheumatoid fibromyalgia. But Maynard's own neurologist believes his condition is the result of nerve damage caused by toxic exposure.

He is not alone. Michael Maynard is one among thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—of veterans suffering from what growing anecdotal and scientific evidence indicates is chronic illness due to inhaling poisonous emissions from the massive burn pits at Army installations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Department of Defense is having a hard time managing this story, which echoes the infamous Vietnam-era Agent Orange scandal and Gulf War Syndrome. (There still has been no official admission that symptoms of the latter are service-related.)

The Pentagon insists that burn pits pose no long-term health risks. But this summer, an Army research article surfaced that suggests otherwise, and individual physicians are now saying that the type of heart and lung damage they see among returning soldiers can only be explained by prolonged exposure to toxic emissions. One soldier stationed in Hawaii was told by Army doctors that his cystic lung disease and shrinking abdominal aorta were probably related to his burn-pit exposure at Camp Speicher in Iraq. He is believed to be the first to have the link officially documented.

As of 2008, of the nearly 500,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who had sought healthcare through the Veterans Administration since the war on terror began, 20 percent had respiratory diseases, 36 percent suffered diseases of the nervous system, 17 percent reported circulatory illness, and 42 percent exhibited "symptoms, signs and ill-defined conditions." Outwardly, the Army has been cool in its response; behind the scenes it is struggling to get ahead of these damaging reports, according to sources who spoke to *TAC* on the condition of anonymity.

But you don't have to tell Michael Maynard what to think about the noxious black cloud that used to hover over Taji's airfield. "The smoke got so bad sometimes that we had to reroute traffic or close down traffic," he says. At times, "our lungs and our throats were just burning and it felt like something was crawling all over our skin. ... Frankly, I

don't think anyone had any clue about what they were dumping in there."

As more stories like Maynard's emerge, perhaps the better question is what wasn't thrown into those yawning open-air trash heaps? The massive fires reportedly burned hazardous waste (including, by some accounts, amputated limbs and used hypodermic needles), hardware, Styrofoam, lithium batteries, rubber, dining-hall refuse, petroleum products, pressure-treated wood, plastics, animal carcasses, latrine waste, aluminum cans, and unexploded ordnance. Maynard points out that pre-invasion, Taji was a chemical-weapons plant and munitions and tank-maintenance facility. There was a lot of "cleaning up" when the 1st Cavalry Division took over in April 2004. Everything was "must go."

"I was told the pit was safe, but we all joked we would wind up with cancer," retired U.S. Air Force Sgt. Jon Vance wrote recently in the growing ad hoc registry at the Burn Pits Action Center ([www.BurnPits.org](http://www.BurnPits.org)). In 2005, he was stationed at Balad Air Base, which at its peak was burning up to 250 tons of waste a day.

"I saw furniture, computers, trucks, etc. being burned. I believe they burned some really nasty stuff in that pit," Vance says. He now suffers from "a continuous dry cough along with pain in every joint, headaches, diminished lung capacity, memory loss, and a constant metallic taste in my mouth."

Army Sgt. Michael Moore, 30, tells *TAC* he recently had facial and reconstructive airway surgery to correct sleep