

Time for president to stop slide to left on health care



DAVID BROOKS says it would be suicidal for Obama and the Democrats to ram through reform with tool to reduce the need for GOP or moderate votes.

TWO tides swept over American politics last winter. The first was the Obama tide. Barack Obama came into office with an impressive 70 percent approval rating. The second was the independent tide. Over the first months of this year, the number of people who called themselves either Democrats or Republicans declined, while the number who called themselves independents surged ahead.

Obama's challenge was to push his agenda through a Democratic-controlled government while retaining the affection of the 39 percent of Americans in the middle.

The administration hasn't been able to pull it off. From the stimulus to health care, it has joined itself at the hip to the liberal leadership in Congress. The White House has failed to veto measures, like the pork-laden omnibus spending bill, that would have demonstrated fiscal restraint. By force of circumstances and by design, the president has promoted one policy after another that increases spending and centralizes power in Washington.

The result is the Obama slide, the most important feature of the current moment. The number of Americans who trust Obama to make the right decisions has fallen by roughly 17 percentage points. Obama's job approval is down to about 50 percent. All presidents fall from their honeymoon highs, but in the history of polling, no newly elected American president has fallen this far this fast.

Anxiety is now pervasive. Trust in government rose when Obama took office. It has fallen back to historic lows. Fifty-nine percent of Americans now think the country is headed in the wrong direction.

The public's view of Congress, which ticked upward for a time, has plummeted. Charlie Cook, who knows as much about congressional elections as anyone in the country, wrote recently that Democratic fortunes have "slipped completely out of control." He and the experts he surveyed believe there is just as much chance that the Democrats could lose more than 20 House seats in the next elections as less than 20.

There are also warning signs in the Senate. A recent poll shows Harry Reid, the majority leader, trailing the Republican Danny Tarkanian, a possible 2010 opponent, by 49 percent to 38 percent. When your majority leader is down to a 38 percent base in his home state, that's not good.

The public has soured on Obama's policy proposals. Voters often have only a fuzzy sense of what each individual proposal actually does, but more and more have a growing conviction that if the president is proposing it, it must involve big spending, big government and a fundamental departure from the traditional American approach.

Driven by this general anxiety, and by specific concerns, public opposition to health care reform is now steady and stable. Independents once solidly supported reform. Now they have swung against it. As the veteran pollster Bill McInturff has pointed out, public attitudes toward Obamacare exactly match public attitudes toward Clintoncare when that reform effort collapsed in 1994.

Amazingly, some liberals are now lashing out at Obama because the entire country doesn't agree with The Huffington Post. Some now argue that the administration should just ignore the ignorant masses and ram health care through using reconciliation, the legislative maneuver that would reduce the need for moderate votes.

This would be suicidal. You can't pass the most important reform in a generation when the majority of voters think you are on the wrong path. To do so would be a sign of unmitigated arrogance. If Obama agrees to use reconciliation, he will permanently affix himself to the liberal wing of his party and permanently alienate independents. He will be president of 35 percent of the country — and good luck getting anything done after that.

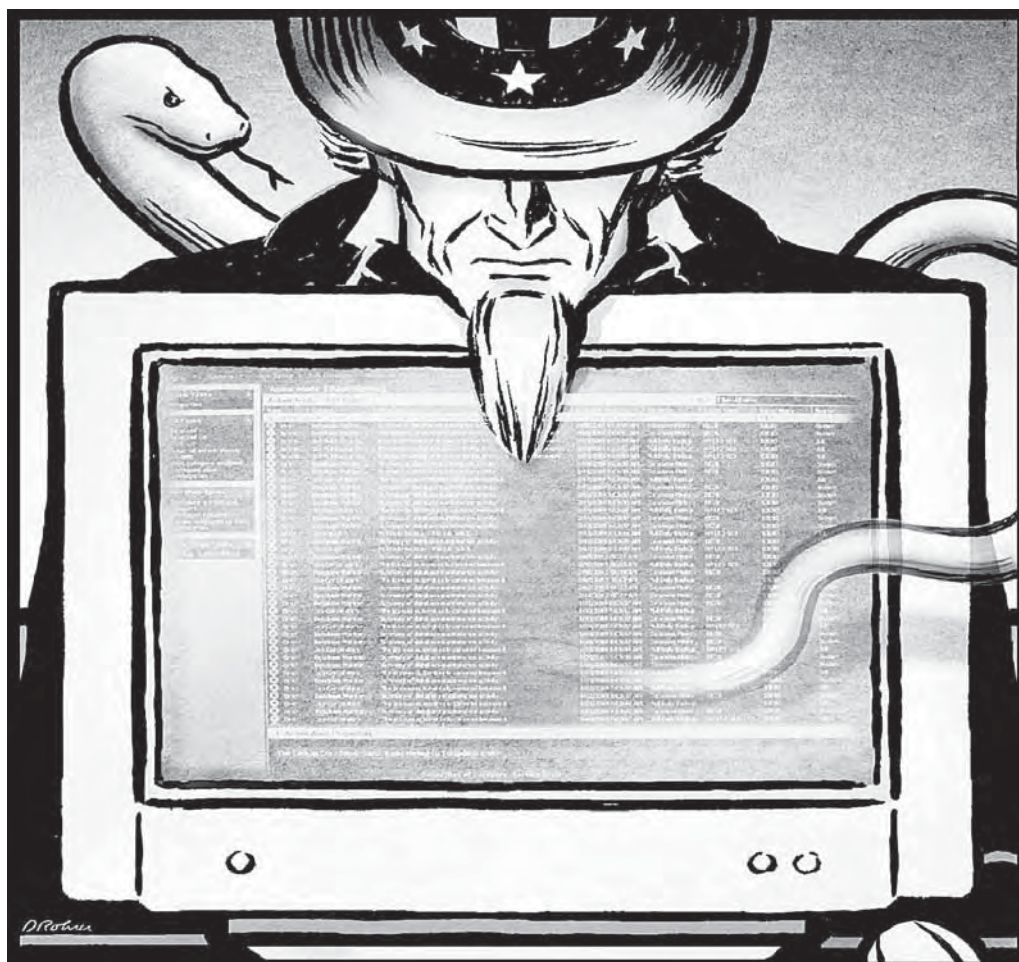
The second liberal response has been to attack the budget director, Peter Orszag. It was a mistake to put cost control at the center of the health reform sales job, many now argue. The president shouldn't worry about the deficit. Just pass the spending parts.

But fiscal restraint is now the animating issue for moderate Americans. To take the looming \$9 trillion in debt and balloon it further would be to enrage a giant part of the electorate.

The president's challenge now is to halt the slide. That doesn't mean giving up his goals. It means he has to align his proposals to the values of the political center: fiscal responsibility, individual choice and decentralized authority.

Events have pushed Barack Obama off to the left. Time to rebalance.

Brooks is a columnist for The New York Times.



Air Force unit designed to operate in cyberspace

■ Collaboration is the key to success of organization

By CHRIS BRONK

THIS month, the U.S. Air Force established its new cyber-focused organization: the 24th Air Force at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. The new unit expands the Air Force into missions outside the cockpit and onto the world's digital data grid. In doing so, the Pentagon expresses its seriousness in addressing its digital vulnerabilities and developing a cyber-arsenal.

The men and women of the 24th, which will eventually number some 8,000 individuals, will work to accomplish two missions: securing the networks of the Air Force and other components of the Department of Defense and, when called upon, waging offensive operations in cyberspace.

A news release states, "The 24th AF will provide combat-ready forces trained and equipped to conduct sustained cyber operations, fully integrated within air and space operations." This will begin the many-year process of developing skills, operating plans and an overarching strategy for protecting the computer networks used by the Air Force and often shared among the services as they deploy around the world.

Critics of the Air Force's move into cyberspace call the move a land grab in the ongoing Pentagon turf battles between the services. Additionally, Cyber Command, the umbrella organization that will manage the 24th and the Defense Department's other cyber-echelons, has an unclear mandate, and its playbook is still very much a work in progress.

On this vague standing, Noah Shachtman, a writer for Wired magazine's national security blog "Danger Zone," mused recently, "Is CYBERCOM supposed to be a new fighting force, a glorified IT department, an intelligence agency or what? Mmmmm, unclear, to be determined."

The Gannett News Service referred to the 24th Air Force as the service's "greatly reduced successor to the provisional Air Force Cyber Command," noting the Pentagon brass's decision that all the services share the

unit. This, however, is a sound decision, as the Air Force will need to learn the skills of coalition building on the cyber issue if it is to succeed in working with organizations outside of the Pentagon.

While there may be good reason to question the Defense Department's moves on the cyber issue, the importance of protecting our digital infrastructure makes the job far too important to put off. The U.S. government has been criticized for moving too slowly on cybersecurity and failing to develop the pool of trained professionals to cope with vulnerabilities.

Standing up the 24th meets these critiques head-on. The Air Force will educate a large number of enlisted personnel and officers, some of whom will become career service persons, but the majority will likely serve out their enlistments and then take their skills into the private sector or elsewhere in government.

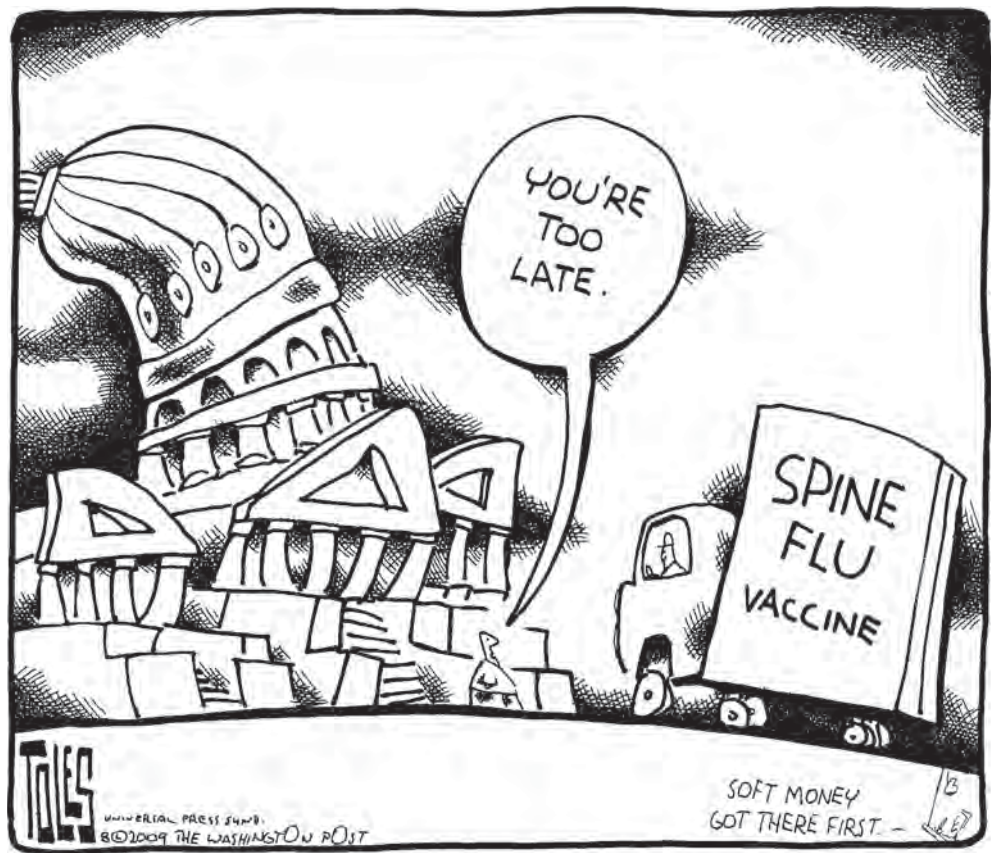
The cyber-elements of the Air Force and the other services can stand as an important schoolhouse for information assurance skill-building that will bolster what remains a woefully inadequate IT security work force. Based on that alone, the Air Force's move should be considered a valid one.

Looking forward, involvement of the military is but a piece of a very complex policy puzzle that will require the input and interest of a broader constituency. A hefty share of the Pentagon's communications traffic transits the same networks used by the rest of us.

Those who keep these networks running — Internet Service Providers, telecommunications firms, software and hardware manufacturers, and many others — will need to join with government in crafting a viable public-private partnership to address cyber vulnerabilities.

In the 24th Air Force, the military may have some successes, but without collaboration between industry, academia, civilian agencies and other stakeholders designed to craft policy, deliver more secure technologies and, perhaps most importantly, raise awareness, any victories may be uncertain ones.

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GOP can attract black voters by tackling their issues



KATHLEEN PARKER says a Republican African-American from South Carolina has some advice for the party on how to broaden its support.

COLUMBIA, S.C. — When people think of South Carolina, they think of ... I know, Comedy Central. Really, shouldn't Jon Stewart send South Carolinians a cut of his pay?

What people do not typically think of is black Republicans, a perception that could change soon if a young man named Marvin Rogers has his way. This 33-year-old, Spanish-speaking former aide to South Carolina Rep. Bob Inglis has a plan for the GOP: He wants to change its complexion.

Until 2008 when he ran unsuccessfully for the state House of Representatives, Rogers may have been better known in Latin America, where he was an itinerant preacher for several years, than in North America.

"Unsuccessfully" in this case should be qualified. Rogers won 32 percent of the vote in a blue stronghold, running as a black Republi-

can in the year of Obama.

All things considered, not bad. Rogers' story is, shall we say, unorthodox. Born in the tiny town of Boiling Springs, S.C., he was raised by working-class parents with values rather than ideology. "So I was largely removed from the acrimony between the African-American race and the Republican Party."

Without preconceptions about where his race placed him politically, Rogers began examining issues on paper and recognized that he was philosophically more aligned with Republicans than Democrats. But then a funny thing happened. When he began attending political meetings, he noticed, "Oh, my, I'm the only black guy here. What's up with that?"

That question led Rogers on a quest that has resulted in a book nearing completion, *Silence Is The Loudest Sound*, in which he at-

tempts to explain how the party of Lincoln lost its black soul.

Through five years of study and interviews, Rogers reached the conclusion that the chasm between the black community and the Republican Party is more emotional than philosophical. And, he says, that chasm is more a media template than reflective of reality.

The best explanation for what's gone wrong, he says, was articulated by Jack Kemp, who told him during an interview: "The Republican Party has had a great history with African-Americans, and they turned away from it. The Democratic Party has had a terrible history, but they overcame it."

Part of the turning away followed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and Richard Nixon's "Southern strategy" that tried to harness votes by cultivating white resentment toward blacks. Rogers is no Pollyanna and recognizes this period for what it was — a "bruise" on the GOP.

But he insists that Democrats use the Southern strategy when it suits them.

The biggest problem for today's Republican Party, he says, is tone-deafness, as manifested by conservative talk radio and TV. Rogers says he and most blacks can't listen to Rush Limbaugh because all they hear is anger.

"They might agree with Rush on the issues,

but they can't hear him because he sounds mad. People don't follow fussers. People don't follow angry men. They follow articulators."

Another reason the GOP limits itself among African-Americans, says Rogers, is because Republicans don't talk about issues that have currency in the black community — poverty, the challenges of single-parent homes, social justice, recidivism, black capitalism and crime.

Studying Republican speeches through the decades was how Rogers came up with his book title.

The way for Republicans to attract black voters is pretty simple, says Rogers: Show up and solve problems.

With Rogers on the hustings, Democrats have cause for concern. Among other things, he's telling African-Americans that they have rendered themselves politically impotent by voting monolithically. "If one party can count on our vote, then they can take us for granted. Predictability is suicidal."

Predictability would seem not to be a problem for a Spanish-speaking, black Republican wonk who just might make South Carolina less of a joke.

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