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THOMAS: President hides a lot of spending in his speech

In his State of the Union address, President Barack Obama at times sounded like he was channeling Ronald Reagan: cutting the deficit, hailing private enterprise and individual initiative, talking about the future. But for all his eloquence, the president wrapped his liberal ideology in conservative sheep's clothing.

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On the surface, the president said many things with which conservatives might agree, but words can mean something, or they can mask true intentions.

There was no indication the president plans to retreat on his far-left agenda of the last two years. Why should he? That would require denying who he is. <

Absent the glamorous rhetoric, let's examine the major subjects on which the president touched.

EDUCATION: Anyone who has seen the film "Waiting for Superman" knows the public education system in this country is a mess and that if all the money now being spent on education isn't improving the product, especially for the poor, whom Democrats are supposed to be championing, more money will not help. Competition through school choice would improve education. The speech was another sop to teachers' unions that care more about their members than students' futures.

INNOVATION: Government doesn't innovate. It regulates. It taxes. According to The Cato Institute (www.cato.org), the average combined federal and state corporate tax rate in the U.S. is 40 percent, first among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Japan comes in second with a combined rate of 35.7 percent. In his speech, the president said he supports reducing the corporate tax rate for the first time in 25 years, but then came the caveat: "without adding to our deficit." Cutting taxes without reducing spending will add to the deficit and so the president can eschew responsibility when Democrats refuse to vote for business tax reductions.

DEFICIT REDUCTION: Where to begin? A president and until recently an all-Democratic Congress has put our financial house in jeopardy by running up a \$14 trillion debt. In March 2006, when he was a senator, Obama called the \$8.27 trillion debt ceiling "a sign of leadership failure." If the debt ceiling during the George W. Bush presidency was a sign of failed leadership, who's failing in his leadership when the debt has climbed to \$14 trillion? Deficit reduction will come when the government cuts, not caps, spending.

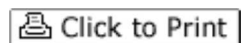
REFORMING GOVERNMENT: The best way to "reform" government is to reduce unneeded and unnecessary programs and agencies. Congress should establish a commission similar to the successful Base Realignment and Closing Commission, which shuttered outmoded military bases. Every government agency and program should be required to justify its existence consistent with its cost and benefit to the greatest number of Americans. If they can't, they should be eliminated.

INFRASTRUCTURE: From better roads to high-speed inter- and intra-city trains, the U.S. lags behind many European and Asian countries in providing low-cost, efficient and fast transportation for its people. It is one of the few areas where Americans would be willing to pay more in fares or even taxes to improve the way we move around.

Included in infrastructure ought to be the mining of America's considerable natural gas supply and a "to the moon" emphasis on nuclear power and drilling for more oil in America's backyard to

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