

The Ship of State is Sinking

by Bill O'Connell on January 26, 2011
2012 Election, Economy, Education, Fiscal Crisis, Health Care, Liberty, Obama, Politics, Taxes

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On the surface, President Obama's State of the Union address was like many others, long on platitudes, short on substance. I had the opportunity to witness it at the studio of WNYC in New York. We were a handful of Tea Party members in a sea of progressives.

Education

The president talked of many things that were, constitutionally, not his nor the federal government's responsibility. He spoke of having to strengthen education. Before my progressive friends leap out of their chairs let me point out that being against the federal government's involvement in education, is not to be opposed to education. We have had a Department of Education since the Carter administration, spent over one trillion dollars, and our educational performance has declined. The stock progressive answer to such failures is that the program either wasn't big enough, or that we should imagine how bad things would be without the effort, neither of which is provable.

We should eliminate the Department of Education. During the speech, folks in the studio tweeted their thoughts and they were projected on a large screen. One of my favorites was, "Mixed msg for teachers: will recruit you & celebrate you as nation-builders while making it easier to fire you." Who would want to fire a competent teacher? Anyone? At the same time, who would not want to fire an incompetent teacher? How does retaining an incompetent teacher improve our education? We should eliminate teachers' unions. I know of no professional that does not stand on his own merits and make the case for their value to the organization and their compensation. Teachers tell us repeatedly that they are professionals, but they need the protection of an unskilled laborer pushing boxes in a warehouse, or they won't be treated fairly. I'm all for paying good teachers as much as the market will bear. I am against paying teachers because they carry a union card and will disrupt the education of our children if they are not bought off.

High Speed Rail

The president wants 80% of Americans to have access to high speed rail. Why? Why, even if we could, would we pay for this? Think about it. A car can travel in any direction you point it. A plane can travel in any direction you point it. A train can only go where some very expensive tracks are laid and if conditions change you can't re-route it without tremendous expense. Yes, high speed trains are much faster than cars, but when you add in the time to get from your home to the train and from the termination point to your ultimate destination, the speed advantage falters. Add to that the inflexibility of adhering to a train schedule, and the advantage is lost to all but the most densely populated areas of

the country, like the Northeast corridor. This will be the white elephant of white elephants.

ObamaCare

Obama cracked his Cheshire Cat grin and joked about some folks not being satisfied with ObamaCare. He said he was open to suggestions on how to improve it. Why wasn't he open to ideas when it was crafted? Congress passes this two thousand page abomination and now he invites us to tinker with it. A tweak here, a twist there, and it will be terrific. Throw it out wholesale, and implement some simple market based solutions: Tort reform, buying policies across state lines, eliminate third party payer, high deductible plans with Health Savings Accounts, employees owning policies rather than companies. Let's find common ground on how to deal with pre-existing conditions and the issue of dropping coverage for people who get sick. That will not take two thousand pages to do so.

Spending Cuts

After a spending binge under both Bush and Obama, capping spending is negligence. As Senator Jim DeMint said, "When a car speeds toward a cliff, you hit the brake, not cruise control." We have about four hundred thousand federal employees that make over \$100,000 per year. We need to cut, cut, cut.

Taxes

Watching the speech in the bastion of liberalism, it still baffles me how they view taxes. This was not a crowd of homeless people. When Obama talked about taxing the wealthiest, the room exploded in cheers and applause. Consider two things. One, New York is heavily dependent on those very wealthy people who work on Wall Street to pick up most of the tax burden, and they do. They are also very mobile and do not have to choose to remain in New York, if New York becomes hostile, taxwise. Two, compared to the rest of the country, we are rich. Which means we pay a greater share of the federal burden of taxes and yet our heavily Democratic Congressional delegation keeps voting for a bigger and bigger federal government and we get the bill but a small portion of the benefit. The light bulb recently illuminated over the head of Congressman Steve Israel, when he wondered why we don't get back as much money from the federal government as we send to it. As comedian Ron White likes to say, "You can't fix stupid."

Cato Takes it Apart

The Cato Institute produced this excellent video taking apart the State of the Union, piece by piece. It's worth a watch.

That's my opinion; I'd like to know yours. Please comment below.