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Memo to Republican Voters: Don't Succumb to Your Inner Democrat

By Charlotte Hays

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We are witnessing the left turning on an increasingly bewildered Barack Obama, who without his usual balm of praise, now seems lost in the cosmos, with the kind of bitterness that can spring only from one cause: love gone sour. Much to my horror, my fellow Republicans, I am seeing in you something alarmingly similar to what got the 2008 Democrats in such trouble: you, too, want to fall in love. It is your inner Democrat speaking to you.

Your inner Democrat is what is lurking behind your oft-stated unhappiness over the current crop of Republican presidential hopefuls. You recognize that Mitt will never make you swoon. Voters seemed frustrated that no one ever needed to pack smelling salts for a Tim Pawlenty rally, a major reason his campaign couldn't last through the summer. You are waiting for somebody to sweep you off your feet and dance you around the ballroom until dawn. You want—in short—to love like a Democrat. But you're better than that.

We are Americans and we not supposed to fall in love with our politicians. This isn't the way our flinty Founders, steeped in the classics of Greece and Rome, designed the republic. Yet the last election was such a love fest that I felt I'd moved to the Third World. What kind of moron believes it when a candidate says he'll make waters of the seas subside (even God contented Himself with parting the Red Sea)? As Gene Healy, the Cato Institute scholar and author of *The Cult of the Presidency: America's Dangerous Devotion to Executive Power*, has noted, our concept of the presidency has changed:

"The chief executive of the United States is no longer a mere constitutional officer charged with faithful execution of the laws. He is a soul nourisher, a hope giver, a living American talisman against hurricanes, terrorism, economic downturns, and spiritual malaise. He—or she—is the one who answers the phone at 3 a.m. to

keep our children safe from harm. The modern president is America's shrink, a social worker, our very own national talk show host. He's also the Supreme Warlord of the Earth.

This messianic campaign rhetoric merely reflects what the office has evolved into after decades of public clamoring. The vision of the president as national guardian and spiritual redeemer is so ubiquitous it goes virtually unnoticed. Americans, left, right, and other, think of the "commander in chief" as a superhero, responsible for swooping to the rescue when danger strikes. And with great responsibility comes great power."

Healy calls it the cult of the presidency. I call it the euphoric presidency, deriving this from the atmosphere in Washington after the election of Obama. The photos of the new president that sprouted in my favorite Adams Morgan eateries reminded me of pictures of messianic strongmen plastered everywhere in the Middle East. They are signs not of patriotism but of a strangely un-American devotion to a politician.

The cult of the presidency could not have existed with the "minimum leader" established by the Founders in the Constitution—George Washington was a hero to rank with the ancients, but nobody swooned over him. The powers of the presidency had to expand before the president could become a cult figure. To our everlasting discredit, my fellow Republicans, the first celebrity president was one of our own—Teddy Roosevelt—but it was his Democratic cousin Franklin who really got the love flowing like a river.

As Republicans, proponents of limited government, we should focus on policy rather than swooning. We can perform a valuable service if we do this, showing that the president should be a figure of reasonable probity with attractive ideas rather than a cult figure. I hear a lot of pro-lifers say they don't trust Mitt Romney, who has flip flopped on the issue. I think what they are really saying is that they don't feel Romney is one of their own, that they don't know what is in his heart. Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn what is in Mitt's heart.

I am more intrigued to learn that Romney had the gumption to veto bills passed by a Democratic legislature in Massachusetts. But then I feel no need to fall in love with the guy. It bothers me that a lot of you have fallen in love with Michele Bachmann.

Don't let the belle of the ball avoid hard questions. What would have happened if the U.S. had defaulted on our national debt? She'll probably point to the stock market fall after the deal was signed. That is a cop out. Make her answer. When asked why he had the most-hard left voting record in the U.S. Senate, Barack Obama said he was voting against George Bush. Yeah, but that wasn't an answer.

We probably won't have as euphoric a convention as the Democrats had in 2008, but if we do a good job in selecting a candidate, we won't need to love him (or her). We'll not be blinded by love and we will have a shot at selecting somebody who can grow, rather than shrink, in office. And, while we're at it, let's talk about shrinking the office back to what it was when George Washington took it on. Can you imagine George Washington caring if we ate our peas?