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## Obama's Edifice Complex

By [Ed Lasky](#)

Barack Obama [proclaimed](#) on the eve of his primary triumph in 2008 that future generations would look back and remember:

"this was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal...this was the time we came together to remake this great nation."

With echoes of Genesis, the world was on the verge of becoming not only his stage but also his dominion. Little did we realize that his grandiosity was not just a celebratory outburst but the articulation in sound-bite form of his plan to truly remake our country. Those words may also be his political epitaph, as his plans run aground on the rock shore of reality.

His election was given a boost by the precipitous slide in the stock market and the economy before the election in 2008. He truly did not let this "crisis go to waste." Congress was swamped with Democrats and they gave Barack Obama a platinum American Express card to go wild. We have yet to see a President -- with the possible exception of FDR -- who was as determined to create as many monuments to his own presidency as the man who now holds the reins of power in the Oval Office.

Barack Obama has an edifice complex, not of buildings but of government programs, and after he has finished leaving his mark, we will be paying the price for decades to come.

Barack Obama was determined to remake health care and be the one president to bring universal health care to all Americans -- a feat that his primary opponent and her husband failed in accomplishing. He never minded the term ObamaCare when it became the nickname for the unwieldy and Orwellian Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (only when its popularity plummeted did his Democratic allies object to the use of "ObamaCare").

This was to be his signature achievement -- come hell or high water and through any means, fair and foul. Hence the sorry spectacle that Americans witnessed as politicians twisted and pulled, bribed and threatened to pass a monstrosity that the majority of Americans did not want. But a legacy was at stake and Obama twisted arms (disgracing his office when he [threatened](#) one wavering Democrat with the taunt, "Don't think we're not keeping score, brother"), disregarded public polls, trashed Congressional procedures, and all but ignored that piece of parchment that has served for hundreds of years as the foundation of our nation. One-sixth of the economy is now in the hands of bureaucrats and ideologues with barely any real world experience. Reality-based worlds must be for little people. Who cares about the costs? Barack Obama wants bragging rights as large as his healthy ego.

All Hail ObamaCare.

Health-care bragging rights: check.

How else to create a legend? How else to follow the adage ascribed to a fellow Chicagoan, architect Daniel Burnham to "Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood".

Obama's blood us stirred alright, with an admixture of adrenalin.

What was next on the horizon as Obama looked across America from the Olympian Heights of the District of Columbia?

Perhaps, those power lines stretching across America may have given him an idea (or maybe it was his guru, David Axelrod, who did major league astroturfing for one of the largest electric utilities in the nation, Exelon). Thomas Edison and George

Westinghouse are icons of the America energy industry. Has our President a fatal case of icon-envy? Weren't those Obama posters wallpapering America and his ubiquitous presence on television enough? Does narcissism ever end?

Obama is insatiable when it comes to leaving monuments to his own reign behind. We were warned that he had a bit of the megalomaniac about him years ago.

Barack Obama's zeal to remake the energy industry is akin to a perpetual motion machine. His latest gambit is to impose a [clean energy standard](#) throughout America . But his agenda has been clear for years.

He wants to create a green and clean energy industry -- a dream filled with shimmering images of solar farms, windmills, ethanol plants (for now), fleets of electric cars, and bullet rains zipping their ways across America. The problem with dreams is they are often just fantasies with little prospect of coming to fruition.

During an interview with the San Francisco Chronicle in 2008, he [said](#), "under my plan of a cap and trade system, electricity rates would necessarily skyrocket" and would probably make the coal industry less viable. He may have an aversion to fighting wars but he certainly is committed to a [war on coal](#).

But while Edison relied on free enterprise to bring about a revolution, Obama seeks to kill off free enterprise (and the element carbon while he is at it) and rely on government fiat and loads of taxpayer money.

His obsession was manifest very early in his Presidency: the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Program received \$1.7 billion in 2008 and \$16.8 billion in 2009-a 1,014 % increase and a sign of big things to come as our modern-day Edison seeks to bring forth an energy revolution. The spendthrift ways are still in full flower: his 2011 budget proposes billions more for clean energy "investments" (while [slashing spending for fossil fuel research](#)).

Bu they are expensive, inefficient and wasteful (no wonder Democrats love them -- they sound like government).

Unable to stand on their own, Obama has used every means at his disposal (this is the man who said he would bring a gun to a knife fight) to force his green energy schemes down our collective throats.

President Obama also saw an opportunity to shut down Gulf of Mexico oil drilling in the wake of the BP oil spill ("never let a crisis go to waste") by issuing an executive order banning further drilling. The moratorium was accompanied by a series of safety regulations given to the White House by a panel of experts that would have made a resumption of drilling more difficult. That panel later accused the White House of misleading the public by [misrepresenting their views](#) and their report as an endorsement of the moratorium. A federal judge ordered the moratorium lifted. When the Interior Department tried to evade the judge's order by reissuing a moratorium -- albeit one drafted a bit differently -- and imposing other constraints on Gulf drilling, the same judge held the administration in contempt.

The Interior Department has also drastically slowed the issuing of leases of federal land for exploration and the issuing of permits to drill for oil and gas-a de facto moratorium. Recently, the EPA has [started looking into](#) the practice of "fracking" a technique used to liberate vast amounts of gas and oil from huge shale formations that underlay much of America. While President Obama sets aside a vast swath of federal lands as a critical habit and thus forecloses energy development, and while the Interior Department slows to a crawl oil drilling permits, the administration speeds [wind farm permits](#).

Obama owes Iowa. Those fine citizens gave his fledgling primary campaign a big boost in 2008. So the ruinous ethanol subsidies continue, despite mounting evidence that these boondoggles are wasteful, based on bad science, harmful to the environment, and damaging to the food supply of the world (40% of the corn crop is fed into the ethanol maw). Even [Al Gore admits](#) ethanol programs are a failure and admits he supported them as a way to garner political points.

Solar and wind power are woefully inefficient and pose a myriad of problems (distance from consumers triggering the Not-in-My Backyard syndrome among landowners whose views might be marred by power lines; vast areas needed for solar farms; vast subsidies needed to justify projects; endangerment of animals; possible health effects from proximity to windmills; unreliability of power).

But Obama is determined to remake our landscape. Given that there is no space on Mount Rushmore, why not try for something even more ambitious: planting vast solar farms and Quixote-like giant windmills across our land, all stamped with the "Made by Obama" label. Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" needs to be modernized with the name Obama slipped into the lyrics-so determined is he to outdo FDR's Depression-era post offices (themselves on the way out).

Obama's justifies his plans by touting "green jobs". This is a fiction.

Any green jobs generated come at [great cost](#) and are often [temporary](#). A fringe benefit for Obama is that these federally-funded projects often go to union members and are subject to the Davis-Bacon act that requires high wages be paid on federally-funded projects, a subtle method of replenishing the union coffers for the next election cycle (and unions, to no one's surprise, give the vast bulk of their campaign cash to Democrats; they have even boasted of the amounts they spent to elect Barack Obama and other Democrats. Maybe there is one way that recycling works: taxpayer dollars are recycled as political contributions).

As [Byron York](#) points out, there has been a lot of flim-flammy regarding how the Obama administration plays fast and loose when it comes to defining "green jobs" (echoes of the elastic definition of "jobs created and saved"). They often kill jobs (see [Green Smoke Screen](#) by Bjorn Lomborg) and when they don't kill jobs they often just send them [overseas](#).

But these image projects all too often play the starring role in Democratic Party's Friends and Family Program -- the boondoggles gild the lilly and line the pockets of donors and relatives of the Democratic powers-that-be, including those of Barack Obama. (See [this](#) about windmills and the influential Democratic Carnahan family of Missouri; and [this](#) about solar panels and former Democratic Congressman Kanjorski; and [this](#) about a disastrous 535 million dollar loan guarantee given to Solyndra, whose very viability is being questioned by its auditors but which has a big investor in George Kaiser, a big bundler of campaign cash for Barack Obama; and then there is the sugar granddaddy of the Democratic Party, George Soros, who plans to invest [a billion dollars](#) in "green energy"; Al Gore who has a big investment in an electric car company, Fisker Automotive, that has benefited to the tune of [\\$529 million and change of taxpayer dollars](#); there is a brewing fraternity of journalists who ferret out these clear conflicts of interest -- a growth industry in the era of Obama.

Why stop with the remake of the energy industry? Why not eclipse Henry Ford and remake the car industry? Hence, the federal takeover of two of the once-great American auto companies. Even bankruptcy laws are bent and broken to benefit auto unions at the expense of creditor rights and the law.

Why not use the unprecedented power in the hands of the President to promote electric cars -- let's call them ObamaCars (or at least Democratic allies of Barack Obama cry "unfair").

But again, reality has reared its ugly head. A [New York Post editorial](#) was succinct:

One of President Obama's pet projects is the clean-green wonder called the electric car.

Obama burned through \$2.4 billion in stimulus money on grants and tax breaks to boost its production, and pledged in January to get "a million electric vehicles on the road by 2015."

That's aiming high. At the rate they're selling today, Obama should hit that benchmark in about *900 years*.

GM managed to sell just 281 units of its electric Chevy Volt in February, while [Nissan](#) sold a meager 67 Leafs.

No wonder. Their batteries die so quickly -- the Leaf has a 100-mile range -- they're about as reliable and cost-efficient as running a car on AAA batteries.

Conundrum! What should Obama do to get more electric cars on the road?

Maybe he should pass a law mandating citizens to buy electric cars.

For the most part, they have become playthings for the rich who indulge in conspicuous consumption -- helped by our tax dollars and subsidies for purchasing electric cars. But for the rest of us living in the real world (where cold weather kills the batteries that "power" these cars) they are just souped-up Edsels. He is driving the car and the rest of us are in the back seat paying for the ride; and it is a ride that will not end well, probably (to mix Obama's own oft-used metaphor) in the ditch.

The Washington Post's [Charles Lane](#) calls Obama's passion for electric cars "Obama's Electric Car Cult," for very good reasons: cultists live in a fantasy world of their own making. Young children live in fantasy worlds; not most adults.

Barack Obama's [Inaugural Address](#) included the call that "the time has come to set aside childish things." Perhaps when he replays that speech to himself he may take those words to heart.

What might be the next big thing on Obama's radar (we know that a Russian bear on the prowl and Islamic extremism are certainly not)? How else could Barack Obama's edifice complex manifest itself?

A trivia question might give us a clue. What do most Americans come across every day that is the legacy of one President? One more clue: think Dwight Eisenhower. Bingo! The highway system was created and promoted by Eisenhower and has outlasted his mortal self. Does Obama want to create a monument to his own Presidency, miles wide and sprawling across the nation for all of us to behold?

Could Obama leave a similar edifice behind -- say a high speed rail network costing taxpayers tens of billions of dollars? He has been forcefully trying to get this past Congress and past recalcitrant Governors worried about the real-world viability of high-speed rail networks across America

These high speed rail projects would be a disaster. [Robert Samuelson](#) of the Washington post writes:

High-speed rail would definitely be big. [Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood has estimated](#) the administration's ultimate goal - bringing high-speed rail to 80 percent of the population - could cost \$500 billion over 25 years. For this stupendous sum, there would be scant public benefits. Precisely the opposite. Rail subsidies would threaten funding for more pressing public needs: schools, police, defense.

How can we know this? History, for starters.

Passenger rail service inspires wishful thinking. In 1970, when Congress created Amtrak to preserve intercity passenger trains, the idea was that the system would become profitable and self-sustaining after an initial infusion of federal money. This never happened. [Amtrak has swallowed \\$35 billion in subsidies](#), and they're increasing by more than \$1 billion annually.

Despite the subsidies, Amtrak does not provide low-cost transportation. Longtime critic [Randal O'Toole of the Cato Institute](#) recently planned a trip from Washington to New York. Noting that fares on Amtrak's high-speed Acela start at \$139 one-way, he decided to take a private bus service. The roundtrip fare: \$21.50. Nor does Amtrak do much to relieve congestion, cut oil use, reduce pollution or eliminate greenhouse gases. Its traffic volumes are simply too small to matter....

The reasons passenger rail service doesn't work in America are well-known: Interstate highways shorten many trip times; suburbanization has fragmented destination points; air travel is quicker and more flexible for long distances (if fewer people fly from Denver to Los Angeles and more go to Houston, flight schedules simply adjust). Against history and logic is the imagery of high-speed rail as "green" and a cutting-edge technology.

What's disheartening about the Obama administration's embrace of high-speed rail is that it ignores history, evidence and logic. The case against it is overwhelming. The case in favor rests on fashionable platitudes. High-speed rail is not an "investment in the future"; it's mostly a waste of money.

Even Ray LaHood, Obama's Transportation Secretary, tips the hand of Obama and shows the megalomaniac agenda at work, the edifice complex in its full budget-busting glory.

The [Washington Examiner](#) reminds us:

In an October 2010 interview, LaHood denigrated the "traditional people in Congress who like the idea that we continue to build roads and bridges and things like that," as opposed to the "big things" he and Obama support, including enormously expensive high-speed rail, unprofitable low-speed Amtrak, and other forms of government-subsidized mass transit.

In other words, Americans are bitter clingers who grasp onto their wallets for dear life as their pocketbooks are ransacked to build monuments to Obama's own ego. These inflated and ruinously expensive dreams of reengineering America are wreaking havoc on people's views of him.

Why persist in these fantastical exercises of egoism objectified? Where will it all end as Obama's Edifice Complex runs wild? The plans are redolent of other "visionary" agendas -- "Great Leaps Forward" and "Five Year Plans", and such -- produced by command and control leaders of the past; the same plans that produced very little but mass misery and failure.

With our nation mired in debt for decades to come and Obama's reputation in tatters. A poem, Ozymandias, written by Percy Bysshe Shelley regarding another ruler with a desire to monumentalize himself and his reign may be prophetic:

I met a traveler from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

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