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## COLUMNS AND OPEDS

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### Gene Healy: Obama is becoming the omnipresident

By: **GENE HEALY**

Examiner Columnist

October 6, 2009

"No-drama Obama"? The president's flight to Copenhagen last week to make a personal pitch for holding the 2016 Olympics in Chicago was an audacious move -- and a dramatic failure. "Second City Absorbs Its Latest Defeat," read the (rather snotty) headline in the New York Times.

But shed no tears for Chicago. As a 2006 report from Europe's leading tourism trade association concluded, there's "little evidence of any benefit to tourism from hosting an Olympic Games, and considerable evidence of damage." With a projected half-billion-dollar deficit next year, the Second City is better off without the Games.

We can't say the same for Obama's reputation after his in-person appeal failed to get his adopted hometown past the first round of voting. What new project can the president undertake to save face?

How about ... reforming college football? In a post-election "60 Minutes" interview last November, Obama called for selecting the national champion via an eight-team playoff: "I'm going to throw my weight around a little bit. I think it's the right thing to do."

Perhaps those of us who oppose national health care and cap and trade shouldn't complain that the president seems so easily distracted. But you have to wonder: Does Obama think there's anything too frivolous to merit the president's attention?

Obama's failed Olympic gambit was dumb politics. But it's also bad policy for the president to involve himself in nonpresidential issues, reinforcing as it does an infantile and unhealthy view of presidential responsibility.

Obama didn't invent that view of the presidency, he inherited it. Over the course of the 20th century, the public, conditioned by the media's relentless focus on presidential action, came to view the chief executive as a national father-protector, with a purview far broader than the limited role the Constitution sets out for him.

Nor is Obama the first president to involve himself in minutia. In his 2004 State of the Union, for example, President George W. Bush urged major-league baseball and football to "get tough, and get rid of steroids now."

And Bush periodically played the role of national fitness coach, meeting with food company executives to hammer out "a coherent strategy to help folks all throughout our country cope with" childhood obesity.

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He just can't help himself. Six months into his presidency, the Politico reported, Obama had already "uttered more than half a million words in public." In one whirlwind week last month, the president made his third appearance on "60 Minutes," gave a major speech on the financial crisis the next day, and made a record five talk-show appearances the following Sunday. And on the eighth day, he did Letterman.

Obama's incontinent approach to presidential responsibility doesn't seem to be helping him politically, however. August was the toughest month of his young presidency, and it began with the ridiculous "beer summit," in which the president gratuitously injected himself into a disputed arrest by a local cop in Cambridge, Mass.

Given how much bloom has come off the rose since then, Obama's decision to stake some prestige on securing the Olympics is baffling. What was the point of getting himself into an irrelevant fight that he might well lose?

More importantly, why would Obama go out of his way to encourage the public's irrationally broad view of presidential responsibility? Isn't the president's job hard enough?

Obama has become the omnipresent omnipresident. But a man who is everywhere, promising to do everything, may end up accomplishing very little, and he's sure to disappoint.

*Examiner Columnist Gene Healy is a vice president at the Cato Institute and the author of "The Cult of the Presidency."*

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