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EDITORIAL

Obama joins the right-wing attack machine

BY RICH LOWRY

In the early 1990s, few right-wing bugaboos loomed as large as Hillary Clinton's secret health-care task force. Conservatives who still routinely invoke the task force can seem obsessed with rehashing the greatest anti-Clinton hits of yore. But look who's talking about the task force now.

"They took all their people and all their experts into a room, and then they closed the door, and they tried to design the plan in isolation from the American people," said, no, not Rush Limbaugh or Newt Gingrich or Rudy Giuliani, but the nation's foremost liberal tribune of hopefulness, Barack Obama.

The latest turn in the Democratic primary race is the best thing to happen to Republicans since the 2006 elections. Two high-profile Democrats, Obama and John Edwards, are validating a core part of the anti-Hillary case that Republicans have made for years -- that she's a slippery cynic who cares only about power.

In the initial phase of the Democratic primary fight, her opponents attacked Hillary for voting for the Iraq War and refusing to apologize for it. This was an ideological

attack that Hillary cleverly defused, while remaining more hawkish -- and therefore better positioned for a general election -- than her opponents. To the extent such attacks from the left make her seem more centrist, they help her.

The latest round of criticisms is more insidious. They aren't so much ideological -- though they still come from the left -- as character-ological. Hillary is a calculating and poll-driven double-talker. This line of attack amounts to millions of dollars' worth of free advertising for the eventual Republican nominee and for conservative groups that will attack Hillary on these grounds next fall.

The character attacks box Hillary in. Her primary strategy so far has been to placate the left of her party while not saying anything that will hurt her in the general election. The strategy involves careful positioning that necessarily opens her to the charges that she's calculating and evasive. Hillary has a bitter choice: either to hew to her (otherwise sensible) primary strategy and get tagged as a shrewish triangulator, or to swing left and risk alienating general-election voters.

How can Hillary escape the trap? She probably can never convince people that she's a straightforward politician of courage, but she certainly can convince them that John Edwards is a fraud and that Barack Obama has no experience, no accomplishments and no defining issues, beyond his vaporous abstractions.

The hit against Hillary as a triangulator wouldn't have as much punch if her husband hadn't lived off poll-driven, situational politics for eight years. In a general election, a key point of thematic contention will be whether a Hillary presidency will represent change or -- as Republicans will argue -- an unwelcome return to the 1990s. Here, too, Obama is making the Republicans' case, saying that we shouldn't spend "the next four years refighting the same fights we had in the 1990s."

Hillary now faces the potential of a more drawn-out, and much more damaging, nomination fight. If Obama needs more material, surely Rush Limbaugh will be eager to provide. ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the *National Review*.

GUEST OPINION

Stop manatee downlisting plans

BY PATRICK ROSE

Executive Director,
 Save the Manatee Club

On Sept. 12, the IUCN World Conservation Union officially declared the Florida manatee endangered using exactly the same criteria state officials are attempting to use to justify downgrading the manatee's status from Endangered to Threatened. After a scientific status review at the international level, the Florida manatee was declared Endangered on the Red List, which is recognized as the most reliable evaluation of the world's species. The manatee's status evaluation was conducted and also reviewed by some of the world's most qualified sirenian scientists who based their recommendation for listing as Endangered on the most recent scientific data.

Incongruously, that was the day the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission was scheduled to vote on whether to reclassify the manatee to a lesser state imperiled status -- a vote that marine industry representatives and go-fast boating interests have supported for many years. But just two days before this monumental vote, Gov. Charlie Crist came to the rescue and asked the Commission for a reprieve for manatees, wisely urging them to postpone the vote, while also questioning the accuracy of the method used to estimate the size of the manatee population.

Ultimately, the Commission listened to the governor and unanimously voted to postpone the manatee's reclassification,

but under pressure from boating and development interests they will revisit this issue at their December 5th meeting.

How could the FWC, claiming to be using IUCN's widely supported listing/delisting criteria, conclude that manatees are no longer endangered and move to downlist them? The answer is simple. While the FWC adopted IUCN's criteria for Endangered species, they opted to call species that met those criteria Threatened, instead of Endangered. Ironically, the Commission openly declares that manatees, with less than 2,500 adults, face a "very high risk of extinction" but want to wait until a species' risk of extinction is "imminent" before declaring it Endangered. A sure recipe for future extinctions.

The FWC continues to nonsensically argue that protections won't change if manatees are downlisted. In light of the hundreds of manatees killed since the unjustifiable reclassification process began, this argument seems disingenuous at best. At worst, a change in status at this time could have serious consequences like cuts in funding for research, rescue, and enforcement programs. Already numerous law enforcement positions are proposed to be cut to meet state budget shortfalls.

Furthermore, it is widely recognized that the natural springs and power plant discharges that most manatees depend upon to survive the coldest winter days are likely to be lost in the not to distant future. Unless Florida's springs are protected and alternatives to the power

plants are found and implemented, there is also consensus that manatees could suffer catastrophic winter losses leading to more than a 50 percent decline in the current manatee population.

With mortality continuing at a brisk pace this year, with threats from both human and natural causes escalating, and with the manatee's international biological status confirmed as endangered, it is time for the FWC to kill the unwarranted downlisting effort. Looking beyond manatees to Florida's other imperiled species, it is time for the Commission to fix their imperiled species classification system by adopting one where all of Florida's most at-risk species can be fairly reviewed, classified properly, and managed accordingly to sustain and recover their numbers in the wild.

As someone who has worked a lifetime to see manatees and other imperiled species recovered and ultimately taken off the Endangered Species list for biologically sound reasons, I will do all I can to resist this politically driven subversion of Florida's imperiled species listing rule. I simply cannot celebrate such a tragic and irreversible mistake that will further endanger manatees and all the other imperiled species we steward by continuing to employ an inappropriate and widely criticized classification system. Please join the over 20 million Americans who have already made known their objections to this politically driven subversion of imperiled species protections in Florida. ■

MOMENTS IN TIME

◆ On Nov. 30, 1959, production begins on Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller "Psycho," starring Anthony Perkins as murderous hotelier Norman Bates. The film is considered one of Hitchcock's most frightening, and the terrifying shower scene is still referenced today.

◆ On Dec. 1, 1934, jazz clarinet pioneer Benny Goodman debuts as a regular on radio variety show "Let's Dance." In 1935, the band gave a famous performance at the Palomar Theater in Los Angeles that drew an enormous audience and is frequently

credited as the kickoff of the Swing Era.

◆ On Dec. 2, 1932, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope appear together for the first time onstage in a show at the Paramount Theater, where "The Mask of Fu Manchu" opens. The duo would become two of Hollywood's best-paid actors thanks to their comic rapport.

◆ On Dec. 3, 1979, nearly a dozen young people are killed at concert by the rock band The Who in Cincinnati. Eleven victims were trampled to death during a stampede for seats at the Riverfront Coliseum.

The band was not told of the deaths until after the show.

◆ On Dec. 4, 1921, the manslaughter trial for actor and director Fatty Arbuckle ends in a hung jury. Arbuckle -- nicknamed "Fatty" for his generous physique -- was accused of manslaughter in the death of Virginia Rappe. The starlet died of a ruptured bladder several days after an alleged sexual assault by the 350-pound Arbuckle at a wild drinking party in San Francisco. After two hung juries, he was acquitted in 1922. ■