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OPINION

Barack Obama: Steady as she goes

BY RICH LOWRY

Change has rarely looked so much like continuity.

Barack Obama's leftward positioning and achingly idealistic rhetoric in the Democratic primaries harkened back to George McGovern or Robert Kennedy. His personnel choices during the transition instead recall Michael Dukakis, the Massachusetts technocrat who notoriously ran on competence.

Mr. Obama is too savvy a marketer to have tried to make a campaign slogan out of practicality. But who would have guessed that when he lit up the crowd back in 2007 at Iowa's Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner with his signature speech denouncing the ways of Washington and Democrats who accommodated Bush foreign policy, he harbored a secret desire to draw on experienced Republicans to manage his national-security policy?

Mr. Obama has selected a former Marine commandant close to John McCain, Gen. Jim Jones, as his national-security adviser; asked President George W. Bush's defense secretary, Bob Gates, to stay on; and selected Hillary Clinton, a relative centrist who denounced Mr. Obama's naiveté in the primaries, as

secretary of state.

It's as moderate as any Democrat's national-security picks could possibly get. Just when it seemed that the hawkish Scoop Jackson wing of the Democratic Party was dead forever, a jerry-built version of it is making a comeback via the impending administration of a man championed by anti-war zealots. Yes, God does have a sense of humor.

The success of the surge in Iraq made Mr. Obama's pragmatic turn easier. Perhaps never has someone owed so much to a policy he opposed so vehemently. First, the success of the surge diminished the Iraq War as an issue in the general election. Second, it makes it possible to contemplate a responsible drawdown in Iraq.

A kind of continuity is also possible for Mr. Obama because the caricature of Bush foreign policy as dangerously radical never accurately reflected reality.

President Bush wants U.S. troops to "return on success" in Iraq — so does Mr. Obama. Mr. Bush supports a buildup in Afghanistan — so does Mr. Obama. Mr. Bush wants a larger military — so does Mr. Obama. Mr. Bush has launched raids against al-Qaida into the tribal areas of Pakistan — Mr. Obama wants to do the

same. Mr. Bush wants to close Guantanamo Bay, but has been bedeviled by the difficult choices inherent in its shuttering — Mr. Obama will be, too. Mr. Bush has put out diplomatic feelers to Iran, while warning of the unacceptability of its nuclear program — Mr. Obama has done the same, although with more of an accent on diplomacy.

Perhaps Mr. Obama is simply bowing to the exigencies of American foreign policy, defined by a few ineluctable realities: We are the sole superpower in a dangerous world, full of enemies that only we have the military resources to defeat and of rival powers with interests divergent from ours.

The great theorist of realism Hans Morgenthau warned against the illusion that "the final curtain would fall and the game of power politics would never be played." At times during the past two years, Mr. Obama seemed to believe in the curtain fall. His new national-security team holds out hope that he never did, or doesn't anymore. This is change you can respect. ■

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.

GUEST OPINION

One crazy idea can fix Lee's money troubles

BY OSVALDO PADILLA

While Lee County's economy continues to slide faster toward oblivion, it is time for bold thinking and fast action. Both are rarities in public life; nevertheless, here is one outside of the box plan to get the ideas rolling in a new direction.

It's time for Lee County to transition to a truly green economy. The incoming administration in Washington has made it clear that environmental innovation will receive massive funding and support. We need to beat the rest of the country in the race to become the silicon valley of green innovation. Let us become a place for high-paying jobs in research and manufacturing. Lee County can receive press and prestige and eventually revitalize our building and real estate industries by becoming 'the' place for green business.

In order to accomplish this, our infrastructure will have to be revamped in a massive way. The cost will run in the hundreds of millions. But we can do it, practically debt free, by letting green pay for green.

One business that appears to be thriving in Southwest Florida is that of marijuana grow houses. Last year, the sheriff's office confiscated \$8 million worth of the herb. This year, we're approaching \$7 million. Let us generously assume that the sheriff's office is wiping out a quarter of our county's marijuana crop every year. That would give us a \$30 million a year industry that goes untaxed and unexploited by taxpayers. Our high foreclosure rate ensures that entrepreneurs can find plenty of grow houses at bargain-basement rates.

The way the system currently works, money that could be used to fund our economic survival instead ends up in the pockets of second-rate criminals and mobsters in the northeast.

Imagine that marijuana could be taxed at exorbitant rates, 100 percent even, in exchange for granting legalization of the plant. Our hypothetical modest \$30 million could begin to build a comprehensive, world-class transportation system. It could be used to build a municipal, super-high-speed Internet system that makes broadband speeds look tortoise-like. A system like that would show big technology firms that Southwest Florida means business. Commercial impact fees might be waived for qualifying new businesses. We could fund educational programs and scholarships that would make us a magnet for the

greatest minds in the nation.

This truly green business model makes sense under any reasoned analysis. Nevertheless, one wouldn't expect it to take hold in most cities, let alone in Lee County. Here, politicians and business leaders will pound their chests about morality and decency. They'll write about the need for fiscal responsibility and diversification while taking on more loans to keep government running. They'll drone about bond ratings and budget shortfalls. They will propose nothing bold or visionary while unemployment continues to rise and our economy keeps crumbling. Meanwhile, our window of opportunity for becoming a green region will quickly shut due to a lack of political courage. In the absence of any real ideas, strongly regulated cannabis commerce might just be one real solution.

Perhaps, someone will come up with a better plan to rebuild our economy from the ground up without incurring more debt. If that doesn't happen, we may all feel the need for a smoke when our entire way of life falls out from under our feet. ■

— Osvaldo Padilla is a former reporter for WINK-TV and The News-Press, where he covered growth and development issues. He has a degree in political communication from George Washington University.



Padilla