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OPINION**Obama the graceless**

BY RICH LOWRY

Republicans needn't trouble themselves to nominate a presidential candidate in 2012. No matter what, President Barack Obama will be running against George W. Bush.

Bush will be Obama's eternal foil. At this rate, when Obama writes his post-presidential memoir, it will be titled "An Audacious Presidency, or How I Saved America From That Bastard Bush." His presidential library will have a special fright-house wing devoted to Bush's misrule. He will mutter in his senescence about 43, like the Ancient Mariner about his albatross.

Obama clearly wants Bush to be the Hoover to his FDR. Since his predecessor left office with a 34 percent job approval, Obama understandably feels moved to scorn and berate him. But Obama's perpetual campaign against Bush is graceless, whiny and tin-eared. Must the leader of the free world — if Obama still accepts that quaint formulation — always reach for the convenient excuse?

No doubt, Obama inherited formidable challenges, but it's usually thus. The

presidency is a miserable job. During our first inaugural marking a presidential transition, John Adams thought he could almost hear George Washington thinking: "I am fairly out and you fairly in! See which of us will be happiest."

Obama complains of having to clean up what he charmingly calls "somebody else's mess." Obama took office during a stomach-churning financial crisis, and he now brags "we've rescued our economy from catastrophe." Who's "we"? When then-Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke confronted Bush with the magnitude of the crisis last fall, he told them to do anything necessary to fight it.

Bush's support of the ideologically uncongenial TARP legislation, together with Bernanke's expansive actions at the Fed, rescued the system. But Obama takes the credit, while pretending Bush heedlessly let the economy burn — a tack that is in equal measures petty and dishonest.

Obama also blames Bush for the deficit, now at \$1.4 trillion. Whatever his own profligacy, Bush didn't compel Obama to spend money nearly as fast

as it could be printed, or roughly double the projected debt over the next decade. Obama's motto apparently is "Stop Bush — before he makes me spend again!"

In international forums, Obama acts as if Bush were the former president of another country, or a disgraced former leader ousted in a coup. He might at least credit his — and his country's — good intentions in toppling Saddam Hussein and promoting democracy in the Middle East. No, he's incapable of it.

Obama should be grateful that Bush ordered the surge in Iraq against Obama's opposition. If he hadn't, Obama likely would have — on top of everything else — inherited a strategically central Middle Eastern country in full-scale civil war. Does Obama express any appreciation, or any humility about his own mistaken call? Of course not.

The acid test of the White House inevitably exposes a president's character flaws: Nixon's corrosive paranoia, Clinton's self-destructive indiscipline, Bush's stubborn defensiveness. Obama in the crucible is exhibiting an oddly self-pitying arrogance. It's unbecoming in anyone, let alone the most powerful man on the planet. ■

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

GUEST OPINION**A world of challenges**

danRATHER

Special to Florida Weekly

The 64th session of the United Nations General Assembly got under way this week, with President Barack Obama addressing the body for the first time with a speech structured around "four pillars ... fundamental to the future that we want for our children: nonproliferation and disarmament; the promotion of peace and security; the preservation of our planet; and a global economy that advances opportunity for all people."

In an address that paid explicit homage to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his vision for the U.N., the echo of Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" could only have been intentional. And it was perhaps fitting to channel FDR at a time when the world's problems are so many and so acute. You know you are facing complex challenges when, in the midst of a worldwide recession, the global economy seems like the easiest item on the agenda.

Each of Obama's four general pillars had within it a specific core of U.S. policy goals, all of which have eluded solutions for many years and several presidential

administrations. Nonproliferation and disarmament has, as its heart, the conundrum of what to do about North Korea and Iran. The promotion of peace and security was exemplified by Obama as a drive to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And the preservation of our planet was, on the day after a U.N. summit on climate change, all about that most pressing of environmental issues.

The pace and dynamic of engagement with North Korea and Iran over the nuclear issue has been not only frustrating, it also has been notable for its failures. North Korea has tested a nuclear weapon. Iran, with each passing day, goes further down the road to processing the highly enriched uranium necessary for nuclear weapons. And now the potential for Obama to diplomatically engage each of these countries has been greatly complicated by recent events — the detention of two U.S. journalists by North Korea and, in Iran's case, the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the harsh treatment of Iranians who protested the election results.

As for the Middle East, even those who see opportunity in the current historical moment consider it fleeting and fragile. The less-optimistic view is that Israel's leadership has committed to a course on settlements that will be all but politically

impossible to undo, and that the Palestinian leadership lacks the unified support and legitimacy to convincingly represent its people. Even in the best case, genuine progress will require intense engagement from the U.S., Europe and the rest of the region. One wonders when and how the diplomatic energy will be mustered.

And then there is the issue of global climate change, in advance of December's Copenhagen climate talks. Despite positive rhetoric from Obama this week, there is little chance of progress at that summit without hard commitments from the U.S. — commitments that Obama won't be able to give because it now seems unlikely in the extreme that a U.S. Congress still wrestling with health-care reform will be able to deliver this year on the president's proposed cap-and-trade legislation for dealing with carbon emissions.

Finally, there is the economy. The four pillars laid out by Obama, in their generalities and specifics, reflect ideals and aims that are not only difficult to achieve but also will be subject to the unpredictable nature of world events. And as Obama said in his remarks, "real change can only come through the people we represent." As he lays out an ambitious and critical international agenda, this American president's chances of achieving his goals on the world stage may depend most of all on the U.S. economy dealing him a more favorable political hand in Washington. ■

MOMENTS IN TIME

► On **Nov. 5, 1911**, Leonard Slye, later known as Roy Rogers, is born in Cincinnati. The singer and cowboy actor launched "The Roy Rogers Show," a mix of music and drama, in 1944. The show always closed with the song "Happy Trails," which became known as Rogers' theme song.

► On **Nov. 7, 1944**, Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt is re-elected president of the United States for a record third

time, becoming the first and only president in history to win a fourth term in office. Three months after his inauguration, Roosevelt died of a massive cerebral hemorrhage.

► On **Nov. 9, 1938**, in an event that would foreshadow the Holocaust, German Nazis launch a campaign of terror against Jewish people and their homes and businesses in Germany and Austria. The violence left approximately 100

Jews dead, and 7,500 Jewish businesses damaged. An estimated 30,000 Jewish men were arrested.

► On **Nov. 10, 1775**, the Continental Congress passes a resolution stating that "two Battalions of Marines be raised" for service as landing forces for the Continental Navy. The resolution created the Continental Marines and is now observed as the birth date of the United States Marine Corps. ■