



THE VIEW

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WHEN DOES OBAMA BECOME THE OWNER?

BY

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I had a friend who, after a long and successful career, retired and made his way to the rocking chair on the front porch of his house in a nearby small Mississippi town. He quickly found that he had far too much energy and an equally great need to partake of the give and take of human interaction to allow himself to waste away on that porch. He discovered a niche in the automotive world at the lowest end possible and converted a vacant spot of ground near his house into a used car lot. Now this was the perfect place for one to dispose of that old clunker with a couple of hundred thousand miles on it. My friend would in turn sell that well-worn vehicle to a client who would generally come by every Friday afternoon to make a payment. He would get a premium if the air conditioner was still reasonably cool. On occasion before sealing a deal, my friend the used car dealer would be asked by a potential buyer if there were any warranties or guarantees on the vehicle that had caught the customer's eye. My friend's answer was always the same, "Yes sir! I guarantee you that if you drive it off this lot and it breaks half-in-two, both halves are yours!"

I thought of this scenario the other day as I watched President Barack Obama, fresh from the triumphant Presidential contest and the glory of an Inauguration before the largest crowd ever assembled for such an event, plunge into the business of governing. Rarely has any newly-minted President had to launch his version of the ship of state into such troubled waters. Had every decision made in those first days been perfect there would have been no assurance of success, given the sheer magnitude of the nation's problems needing hour-by-hour attention. Alas, even as he attempted to put the starting lineup of his cabinet together, President Obama discovered that the sword of personal scandal cuts both ways. He quickly found that when the "tax man" is involved there are skeletons in the Democratic closet just as there are in the Republican closet. Several opportunities to be persuasive on pressing matters of policy were lost to the necessity of defending the President's reasoning for cabinet and sub-cabinet level selections which were in fact flawed based on bad personal decisions of the respective nominees.

Regardless, there is no stopping the show and the big question has begun to loom heavily upon the horizon: When do the myriad of problems of the previous Republican

administration become the dilemmas of the current, new Democratic administration? In short, when does President Obama become the sole and proud new owner of the issues of the day? When does the title to the machinery of government, complete with all of the dents and rattles, change hands? There is ample evidence that that process is indeed well underway. Problems big and small are fast acquiring the fingerprints of the Obama administration. The minute the new President announced that he would be closing the military detention center at Guantanamo Bay he began paying the price of ownership in the media. Stories of “enemy combatants” who had been released only to return to battle immediately followed. The conduct of the winding down of the war in Iraq and the buildup of troop strength in the war in Afghanistan are both taking on the appearance of Obama-owned projects. The same can be said for the next move made by the United States with respect to Iran. The sigh of relief on the part of weary Republicans is perhaps audible as yet another old “clunker” of an issue passes to the other side of the aisle.

No doubt the issue that overshadows all of the others is the “gargantuan” economic crisis. If this were not such a deadly serious matter the give and take between the leadership of the Republicans and Democrats on how to avert a depression and minimize a recession would be great sport. It is clear that the Republican effort to hand over ownership of the economic crisis to the new administration is more akin to turning loose of a tiger’s tale. Will the tiger turn on the Republicans as obstructionists, or will it devour the Democrats as proponents of full blown socialism as many detractors have charged? The 2010 mid-term elections must have seemed a mere glimmer on the far horizon only a few weeks ago, but now they seem as though they are just around the corner. We are living in treacherous times. With all of the issues crowding the stage, as always there are threats and opportunities for both parties. But one thing is certain. President Obama is now in the drivers seat of the machinery of government and we are fast approaching the point where “if it breaks half-in-two” whether fair or not, “both halves are his.”



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