

**Chaos:** If I were to tell you things were chaotic in Washington last week, you might correctly exclaim, "So, what else is new?". But, things seem to be even more chaotic than normal right now. I submit the following rundown for your consideration:

- The President announced his latest strategy for Afghanistan in which he tries to thread the policy needle by giving a timetable for some withdrawal, but at the same time keeps more troops there throughout his term than at any time during the Bush presidency. I don't think he succeeded in pleasing anyone with this plan - certainly not this Member of Congress. He also still has not indicated what it is we are now fighting for and what the desired end-state looks like. Bin Laden is dead and al-Qaeda is largely out of Afghanistan. Are we nation building? I think we are and I don't think that is worth \$2 billion a week and more American lives. I also believe you either fight wars with all you've got, or don't fight them at all. Vietnam taught us that. The President seems to want to fight half a war. Speaker Boehner criticized the President's speech and basically called for keeping all the troops there until this unstated and undefined mission is accomplished. I don't agree with the Speaker anymore than I do with the President, although I give the Speaker credit for at least taking a militarily defensible position (all-in). I am for all-out. A growing number of Republicans and Democrats agree with me.

- The House voted on 2 Libya resolutions last week. One would have given the President authorization for a war in Libya. The other would have given him authorization to offer "support" operations such as logistics, refueling and just about every aspect of military engagement except having a human pull the trigger on a non-automated weapon. The other NATO countries were supposed to do that under this resolution. Both failed passage. I voted against both. Again, I disagree with the President and the Speaker. Providing weapons, fuel, support, logistics, reconnaissance, etc. IS engaging in warfare. There are few things on which the Constitution is more clear than the necessity of obtaining congressional approval to commit U.S. forces in an unprovoked attack on another country. That is what Obama is doing. And, all attempts to authorize his war, even those put forward by the Republican Speaker, have failed. We should be voting on a bill to affirmatively use the congressional power of the purse and defund this war. This is a constitutional imperative and an economic necessity. And, we should not launch unprovoked attacks against other countries.

- Both the House and Senate Republican representatives to the "Biden debt limit talks"

withdrew from those talks last week. Both cited that the Democrats will not come off of their insistence on tax increases. The fact is that each party has a "silo" from which they will not move. Republicans will not accept tax increases. Democrats will not accept any changes to Medicare. I will write you another time about the efficacy of such silos, but let's accept that these exist now and there is unlikely to be a breakthrough on either before the 2012 elections. Even so, we are not doomed. If the net interest on the debt, which cannot be cut, and Medicare are removed from the equation, you still have almost 75% of total federal spending available for cutting or reforming. Even the ultra-liberal AARP opened the door last week to reforming Social Security in order to save it. Tax increases may be off the table, but strategies to raise revenue by reforming the tax code or growing GDP are not.

- The President released 30 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve last week. That is a monumentally awful decision. That reserve is for when the supply and availability of oil is catastrophically reduced. There is plenty of oil. The President cited the Libyan oil disruption as the reason for this decision. That's nuts. Saudi Arabia is already making up that shortfall. The President seems to think that everything revolves around Libya. No, the President did this to try to affect the price of gas before the summer driving season because he is unwilling to do the obvious thing that would really reduce gas prices, which is to start drilling for all our **American** oil in Alaska, the Dakotas, Colorado, the Gulf of Mexico and off the eastern seaboard. Someday, we (taxpayers) will pay to refill this reserve at most likely a higher price than we paid to sell it. A one day blip in oil prices in exchange for more deficit and no energy policy. Not a good trade.

- I'm still working on my Housing Finance Reform Bill. Along with my Democrat co-sponsor, I'm getting a lot of traction and support outside the Beltway. But, I continue to encounter reflexive opposition inside my own Republican caucus. It is amazing to me how many of my Republican colleagues are opposed to government doing anything, including, for example, providing FDIC Insurance on bank deposits. I am starting to wonder about the effectiveness of certain think-tanks that feel the freedom to ignore real life in assessing their positions on things.

It is a topsy-turvy world out there when Republicans oppose wars and Democrats want to expand them, and votes are all over the place. (BTW, does the phrase "topsy-turvy" betray my advanced age? I suspect it does. Good thing my wife's name is not Myrtle). But, I actually wish

this were the norm. More on this next time, my BFFs. (OK, that was a completely lame attempt to counter "topsy-turvey)