

Political Doublespeak: State of the Union Or State Of Obama?

By [Danny Schechter](#)

Region: [USA](#)

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The political classes in our country seem to relish moments of high ritual and symbolic occasions with TV news routinely bringing these events to a country more engaged with awards shows and sporting contests.

The State of the Union, the annual presidential projection of power enjoys a special status because it showcases the prowess of the incumbent to weave a self-congratulatory narrative before what is in effect a peanut gallery to cheer him on. Widely understood is that the Congress is at a new low in public approval.

Even when half the office holders, cabinet members, Supreme Court Judges (minus 3) and military brass is sitting on its hands, with some glowering hostility, the acoustics make it seem as if the Speechifier-in-chief's every word is receiving a standing ovation. His guests joined in to make it appear as if it was a pep rally or he had won the lottery.

Obama may not be a brilliant politician or program implementer, but he is a good speaker and his speech was crafted like a Hollywood script, sprinkled with humor and closing with a crescendo of bi-partisan patriotic adulation for an injured soldier—the modern equivalent of manipulative flag waving. With wife Michelle beaming love for the obsessive and sicklywarrior with his 10 “deployments,” the goal was to reinforce the halo that Obama was hoping would turn around his low approval ratings.

He knew going in that he was doing it as much for his own morale and that of his posse in suits. He read the Washington Post: “Amid the avalanche of coverage of President Obama's fifth State of the Union — [he's reading the speech!](#) — it's important to remember one simple fact: The State of the Union's ability to shape public perception of a president and his agenda is, um, way overrated.”

The newspaper reporting this reality sandwich to the White House hoppers carried 5,069 items containing the phrase “State of the Union” appearing on its website, hyping an event that they clearly cared more about than the public.

And that's not just for this year. The Huffington Post reported, “Public Opinion And History Agree: The State Of The Union Won't Change Anything.”

Their political analysts write, “The pattern of State of the Union addresses failing to make much of a dent in public opinion isn't new, or unique to Obama's presidency. It's held largely true for [the past five presidents' addresses](#).”

[A new HuffPost/YouGov poll shows the State of the Union](#) may be of minor importance to most Americans. Only 35 percent said that they watched last year's address, and even

fewer — 6 percent — said that they could recall its contents “very well.” Another 23 percent said they remembered it “somewhat well,” while a combined 70 percent said they didn’t remember it very well (28 percent) or didn’t remember it well at all (42 percent).”

So much for the impact of this political uber-coverage!

And what of the speech itself? The New York Times was blistering in its assessment

“A man who entered the White House yearning for sweeping achievements finds himself five years later threatening an end run around gridlock on Capitol Hill by using executive orders, essentially acknowledging both the limits of his ability to push an agenda through Congress and the likelihood that future accomplishments would be narrow.”

The National Journal was equally sarcastic, “It was a good speech about a modest agenda delivered by a diminished leader, a man who famously promised to reject the politics of ‘small things’ and aim big—to change the culture of Washington, to restore the public’s faith in government, and to tackle enduring national problems with bold solutions. ... “

Was that was he was doing? Quite the opposite, writes Ron [Fournier](#) who began his report with a question, “Is that all there is?”

He added,

“Tuesday night was no such moment. It was, instead, a moment in miniature: an executive order to raise the minimum wage for future federal contractors, and another to create ‘starter’ retirement accounts; summits on long-term unemployment and working families; and scores of promises to ‘continue’ existing administration programs.”

William Deane, formerly of CBS and now editor of Our Missing News.com wrote:

“I can’t remember a State of the Union message—and I’ve heard or read about 50 of them— that has declared a go-it-alone policy-if-you-Congress-don’t-do-it-my-way ... We understand President Obama’s frustration over a “just say no,” Congress, but the Congress has that right. The president’s unprecedented: Come along with me or else I’ll do it on my own is bound to anger the GOP majority and invite some form of retaliation.”

There was no love in media land either. Wrap, the Hollywood website reported that one Republican Congressman audibly threatened a reporter to knock him off the balcony. For all the show of unity, many in the audience were seething with disgust.

The Tea Party was in the end furious, not with Obama who is their perennial target, but House Speaker Boehner who they denounced in the speech’s aftermath as a traitor and sell-out. They issued a declaration of war on the Speaker, claiming he is warring on them.,

Fom their official statement issued after the big speech,

“John Boehner declared war against the Tea Party. Publicly and privately, Speaker of the House, John Boehner is waging war on the Tea Party, conservative Republicans, and our values.”

Obama may not have won much support but it seems clear that the main conflict in Washington has moved from the Republican-Democratic axis to a food fight among Republicans. This development must be dismaying to GOP strategists who believed that they had a chance to take over the Senate because of all the discontent with Obamacare.

Liberals must be dismayed too, especially when Obama embraced drones and spying, justified as necessary to stop terrorist and cyber attacks. His call to close Guantanamo has been echoing for five years with the White House opposed and the Congressional Torture Caucus still wedded to punishing terrorists who in many cases never have been.

Writing in the Globalist published in Europe, Editor Stephen Richer asked about the President, “Why has he been so captured by the apparatus? The bubble in the White House is one reason. Relative youth and inexperience another. Fear of being held accountable “in case something happens” a third. But let’s keep personality traits and political considerations to the side. Obama’s hesitation to stand up for democratic controls of the intelligence machinery is indicative of a fundamental misconception of American freedom.”

Maura Stephens, an anti-fracking activist in upstate New York, was aghast at Obama’s stance on extracting natural gas, writing:

“It was very ironic that the day we were honoring Pete Seeger — a hero of peace and the environment — that President Obama would double down on fracking claims. Seeger has been one of our champions in the fight against fracking in New York State, coming to virtually all of our rallies.”

No one in the media pointed out that Seeger sang with Bruce Springsteen at Obama’s 2009 inauguration. On the day that every newspaper carried heroic obits, Obama said nothing.

There were other criticisms of his unwillingness to challenge the over reliance on tests in schools and new standards to close the unequal gap between wages for women and men. That issue woke the audience up, but no new initiatives were floated.

These critics forget that what Obama was ultimately selling was himself.

My sense: we are back to square one.

*News Dissector **Danny Schechter** blogs at Newsdissector.net, and edits Mediachannel.org. His new book is *Madiba AtoZ: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela* (Mandelabook.com.) Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org.*

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Articles by: **[Danny Schechter](#)**

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