

## Steele's Disappointing Start

*His vapid critiques of the stimulus and census should have Democrats smiling.*

By Andrew C. McCarthy

February 17, 2009

The GOP wants you to know: It is terribly disappointed.

That is the message of the first salvos fired by or dribbled out of the Republican National Committee under the leadership of its new chairman, Michael Steele. Over the weekend, the RNC issued press releases in response to the passage of the Democrats' appalling stimulus package and the Obama administration's machinations over the 2010 census. It shouldn't have bothered. The releases are self-inflicted wounds that read like self-parody.

The [first](#) decries The Democrats' Disappointing Leadership. Chairman Steele is disappointed that the Democrats are disappointing . . . voters who hoped for change. He's decided it's disappointing that President Obama allowed a 1,000-plus page bill to be written in secret by Democrats who enacted it without any member of Congress conceivably having read it. He finds it disappointing that what is fraudulently called stimulus consists of unabashed pork doled out to the districts of top Democrats. He's disappoint[ed] to find Democrats empowering government instead of turning to market solutions.

Conservatives already wondering whether the GOP has a clue are now left to wonder whether the party even has a dictionary. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th edition, defines *disappoint* as to fail to meet the expectation of. Can anyone seriously be disappointed by the Democrats' plan for radically remaking the American economy?

President Obama, once the candidate of an openly socialist party, has made a career of calling for fiscal and social upheaval, hiding behind such euphemisms as redistributive change, economic justice, and spread[ing] the wealth around. He criticized the Warren Court for not being radical enough which is like saying Nadya Suleman wasn't pregnant enough because it failed to embrace a constitutional theory that would have imposed confiscatory tax policies to underwrite a new New Deal. He is, in short, the most left-wing politician ever elected to the presidency.

With the stimulus, Obama's leftism, and that of his Democratic colleagues, is an ugly display. We are witnessing the most intrusive extension of central governmental control over the lives of Americans in our nation's history. If we ignore the suffocation of freedom and merely account for the financial consequences, a trillion dollars doesn't even begin to cover it. There's interest on that debt. There are the inevitable cost overruns of the bill's innumerable federal spending programs and the inflated baselines it creates for all future government outlays. Even if these were not incalculable, you'd have to add on the next trillion Obama demands on top of the hundreds of billions already spent to nationalize the financial sector. And even that sum doesn't include the tens of trillions in unfunded liabilities for which Uncle Sam is on the hook

from Medicare, Social Security, and its takeover of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Beyond that, the stimulus makes [gigantic strides](#) toward the Left's dream of a government-dominated healthcare system. The stimulus will add billions in welfare payments and resurrect the perverse, 1970s-style incentive for states to add dependents to the dole, [undoing](#) Gingrich-era welfare reform — the signature Republican domestic achievement of the last 20 years, which both reduced welfare rolls and helped significantly improve the lives of former government dependents.

This leaves the RNC . . . disappointed. You have to wonder what it would take to get Republicans miffed.

The three-day weekend would not have been complete, though, without a [second release](#) from Steele's office. This one came in response to the Obama administration's announcement that the 2010 census would be managed directly by the White House rather than by the Commerce Department. This second release combines the insipidness of the RNC's stimulus meanderings with flaming tactical blunders:

It is disappointing that President Obama would make the census about politics rather than an accurate count of the American people by taking control of the process away from career professionals at the Department of Commerce and putting the most partisan chief of staff since H. R. Haldeman in the Nixon Administration in charge.

Where to begin? The census is always about politics — that's why people care about it. An accurate count of the American people is surely of academic interest, but the constitutionally mandated decennial count is the basis for apportioning political representation in Congress (which is known as a political branch of government). As the *Wall Street Journal*'s John Fund [observes](#), the census provides the raw data by which government spending is allocated on everything from roads to schools. Government spending, you may recall, is the engine of the politicized stimulus that has so disappointed the GOP.

That the census is, by statute, the responsibility of the Commerce Department does not make it an apolitical exercise. Commerce is a component of the executive (the other political branch of government). That is, the census is going to be run by President Obama's White House, and Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel is going to be deeply involved in it, regardless of where on the org chart the paperwork gets generated. But if you're going to point out that the census is going to be managed by a partisan hack, why reach back 35 years to a Republican administration for your point of comparison? There was no shortage of partisan hacks in the Carter and Clinton administrations. Steele's formulation has the effect of creating political cover for the Democrats rather than putting them on the spot.

And only professional politicians think it's effective to accuse the professional politicians on the other side of making politics about politics. There is a tiny handful of people, most of whom work either in Washington or the mainstream media, who give a hoot about that. Of the remaining 300 million or so Americans, those who care about public policy want to know how it will affect their lives. And the Obama census will affect them dramatically — not because of

who does the counting but because of how the counting is done.

The president, a former community organizer, is steeped in Saul Alinsky's principles of radical revolution—he has studied them, taught them, and written about them. As Alinsky himself wrote, his rules for radicals are essentially about one thing: How to organize for power: how to get it and to use it. They instruct radicals how, through misleading language and stealthy infiltration of the institutions, to seize power. Anyone who has read Alinsky could have predicted that the census would be among Obama's top priorities. It is abstruse and bureaucratic, but it apportions political clout. It is tailor-made for an activist bent on shifting power from red states to blue.

To do that, Obama needs to cook the books. That is what the GOP should be paying attention to. The Constitution calls for an actual Enumeration of the population. Republicans traditionally take the view that this means an actual Enumeration, a real head-count. Democrats believe this method tends to undercount society's ne'er-do-wells and others who live in the shadows, i.e., their constituents. Thus, under the guise of promoting science and technology, Democrats press for sampling, surveys, and statistical models that they say would improve the accuracy of the census but will, in fact, move us away from actual enumeration and toward conjecture. In *Utah v. Evans*, the Supreme Court ruled that actual Enumeration gave Congress latitude to permit statistical counting methodologies but held that the law might rule out gross statistical estimates.

So what's the difference? How far can Democrats push that envelope and count (or double count, or invent) new Democratic constituents? How many non-citizens or imaginary Americans will they include in their tabulations? We don't know. But you can bet the Obama administration plans to do for actual Enumeration exactly what it is doing to stimulus, and for the same reason: to cement a permanent majority to sustain leftist policies.

On the census, Obama gave Republicans an opening by making another rookie mistake. His base erupted over the nomination of Sen. Judd Gregg (a Republican who once proposed eliminating the Commerce Department) as commerce secretary. To mollify the agitators, the administration promised to run the census from the White House—something it doubtless would have done anyway, but the announcement of which (a) publicly embarrassed Gregg, who withdrew from consideration, and (b) underlined the Democrats' unseemly zeal to warp the census for political gain.

But Republicans did not seize the opportunity. Steele and the RNC missed their chance to highlight the real problem: voodoo statistics. Instead they blathered about how crass politics had sidelined the career professionals at the Department of Commerce. With Gregg gone, Obama will simply install a reliable Democrat at Commerce, and the book-cooking and statistical shenanigans will proceed as planned. If Republicans get around to complaining about the real problem, Democrats and the media will smile and point out that the census is being conducted by career professionals at the Department of Commerce—the ones Steele assured us were our insurance against abuse. The RNC will have immunized Obama from scrutiny.

Some 58 million Americans voted against Obama in the last election—more than had ever voted for any winning presidential candidate in U.S. history until George W. Bush's election in

2004. If you penetrate the fog of Obamedia infatuation and discount voters' natural tendency to give the benefit of the doubt to a new president, Obama's popular position is far from commanding. There are plenty of reasons to be concerned and plenty of Americans who would be receptive to a cogent explanation of those concerns. Republican leadership, though, has bought into the myth that Obama is too popular to assail as a radical. So Chairman Steele's strategy, apparently, is to speak in hurt tones about his high expectations and then express his disappointment when Obama does exactly what all the flashing neon signs said he would do.

Call me disappointed.