



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on November 18, 2010

"Poppy" Bush Should Get "Medal of Government"

"How's all this hopey-changeey stuff workin' out for ya?" asked an upbeat Sarah Palin, as her beaming, beauty-pageant smile put a happy face on the angry protests of her Tea Party crowds. Mama Grizzly, the hockey mom, has been waging a pit-bull rhetorical war against the Obama administration with the not-so-subtle hint that things would be better if we had only stuck with the Republicans.

It's an "I told you so" moment, reminiscent of the taunts coming from the ranks of the children of Israel who, during their trial in the desert, began to remember how good things were amid the fleshpots of Egypt.



If only we had let John and Sarah get in there and get all "mavericky" and deal with those god-awful tax-and-spend liberals and tame the deficit and rebuild our defenses with perhaps another war or two (with McCain's "Bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb bomb Iran" replacing the Democrats' complacent "Happy Days Are Here Again" as the administration theme song), we might have fixed the ailing economy and restored the vision of limited, constitutional government and an America everywhere dominant in the world.

Whoa! Have we forgotten so soon? As one of the late-night comedians said, America in this year's elections took control away the party that couldn't fix our economic problems and gave it back to the party that caused them. George W. Bush came into office talking about a more humble role for America in the world, while reassuring old-school conservatives and just plain realists about America's resources that he was opposed to "nation-building." Then came the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and suddenly we were tearing apart Afghanistan to rebuild it into a democracy, with schools and equality and purple-thumb voting for all. And shortly thereafter Saddam Hussein was back in the limelight as the focus of all evil, the man we loved to hate, the Arabian Hitler. Civilization itself would be threatened if we did not send our bombers to bounce the rubble in Baghdad.

And we were into nation-building and rebuilding big time. That's what War of the Month Club "conservatives" like Rush Limbaugh often describe as a sort of American genius for creative destruction. "And if we do Iraq, we'll rebuild it," the bellicose Limbaugh announced on his nationally syndicated talk show not long before the start of "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

Well, that might be one way to stimulate the old economy. But to old-style conservatives like Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, it didn't make a whole lot of economic, diplomatic, or military sense.

"We tax the American people to bomb bridges in Iraq," Paul said during his quixotic run for the Republican presidential nomination in 2008. "Then we tax them again to rebuild the bridges. Meanwhile, our bridges are falling apart."

That was life under Bush '43. And it didn't do our economy a bit of good. Neither did it help those



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"liberated" Iraqis who are dead at the present time and those who are homeless refugees in other lands. It has not done much, either, for those languishing in prison under a regime that appears to be as ruthless, or at least nearly as ruthless, as the one we ousted. And it is a regime that, it turns out, is friendly with the government in Tehran, which is now Enemy No. 1 on the War Party's hit list. Nation-building 101. We seem to be flunking the course.

So little of substance changes from one administration to the next, whether it is from Democrat to Republican or vice versa, that we often forget where one administration left off and the next one began. Was it the Reagan administration that gave away the Panama Canal? No, that was Jimmy Carter, and Reagan railed against it on the campaign trail. But no sooner did Reagan enter the White House than it became a non-issue, never to be heard of again. The effort to repeal the treaty never happened.

Did the siege at Ruby Ridge and the killing of Randy Weaver's wife and dog happen under Attorney General Janet Reno? No that occurred in the final year of the Bush 41 administration, under the auspices of Attorney General Richard Thornburgh. It just resembled in style the horror of Mother Waco's incineration of women, men, and children at the Branch Davidian residence (or "compound" if you prefer the popular media description) in Texas and her Gestapo-style kidnapping of six-year-old Elian Gonzalez by storm troopers in riot gear with automatic weapons, in order to hold the child for deportation to Cuba. So perhaps it is understandable if today many people seem to think that the skyrocketing deficits and bailouts of the financial and auto industries started with Barack Obama instead of Bush junior.

Granted, Obama has added fuel to the flames and made things worse. So he will argue things were even worse under Bush and now he is all that stands between us and the bad old days of Republican rule. But in spite of both the happy talk and the mocking ridicule of the "hopey-changeey stuff," there has been more continuity than change in the "Bushama" administration. And how are the closing of the prison at Guantanamo and the end of "enhanced interrogation techniques" coming along?

So we may be disgusted, but we should not be surprised that President Barack Obama has announced the nation's highest award for a civilian, the Medal of Freedom, will be bestowed upon George H.W. Bush, 41st President of the United States. And why not? Obama is a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, and it surely can be argued that "Poppy" Bush has done as much for freedom as Barry Wonderworker has done for world peace.

Let us review the former President's credentials. Prior to his presidency, he was Vice President for eight years under Ronald Reagan. He was Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, chief of the U.S. Liaison's Office to the People's Republic of China, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Texas. He served in the Navy and was decorated during World War II. Along with former President Clinton, the first President Bush publicly campaigned for contributions to help victims of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. Quite an impressive resumé in what is often described as a career in "public service."

But was it service to the cause of freedom? Yes, give him that for his service in World War II. And give him credit for efforts to help the tsunami and hurricane victims. But the rest of it involved maintaining and advancing his career in government. We too often tend to conflate country and government, which led President Clinton to wonder aloud how people could say they love their country and at the same time express their "hate" (his word) for its government. But we oppose (not necessarily "hate") government when it is out of control and goes beyond its appointed limits — just as we oppose the abuse of freedom by those who perpetrate fraud or violence in the private sector. That should not be too



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difficult for a Rhodes scholar like Bill Clinton to understand.

But it is even worse when we conflate government and freedom. Someone who is pursuing a career in government is serving the cause of freedom? Perhaps and perhaps not. Ron Paul has devoted his time and energy in office to defending and advancing freedom. Nancy Pelosi has not. Janet Reno did not. Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) defended freedom when he cast the lone Senate vote against the Patriot Act in the fall of 2001. He worked against freedom as cosponsor with John McCain of the Campaign Reform Act of 2002, limiting who could say what and when in political advertising. Most officeholders have, at best, a mixed record on freedom.

So for what should a grateful nation honor former President George Herbert Walker Bush? For his approval of, or at least acquiescence in, the aforementioned assault at Ruby Ridge? For waging "storm" over Kuwait/Iraq? For canceling his lifetime membership in the National Rifle Association? For his silence about Mother Waco's incineration of the Branch Davidians and his further silence about her Gestapo raid on the Gonzalez home in Miami? For higher taxes *and* ballooning deficits during a recession? For declaring a "new world order" that takes precedence over our national sovereignty? For not recognizing that the Emir's kingdom of Kuwait was not worth the life of a single American soldier, sailor, airman, or marine? For following Maggie Thatcher's orders? ("Remember, George, this is no time to go wobbly.") For claiming, in clear contradiction to the Constitution he swore to uphold, that he did not need the permission "of any old goat in Congress" to kick Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait? For falsely and maliciously declaring that if the liberal Democrats had their way, Saddam Hussein would be "sitting in Riyadh"? Oh, yeah, "Poppy" Bush really earned this award!

Early in the Clinton administration, when Vice "Predator" Al Gore was put in charge of "Reinventing Government," columnist Joe Sobran asked, "What about reinventing freedom?" It is an important distinction. Bush's honor should be called the "Medal of Government."



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