



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on October 4, 2011

Black Entertainment TV Founder Criticizes Obama's Class Warfare

Robert Johnson (left), business magnate and founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET), has joined the mounting list of CEOs and business leaders who are questioning President Obama's incessant demagoguing of America's wealthy. On "Fox News Sunday," Johnson suggested that the President "recalibrate his message," so as not to "demean" or "attack" the achievements of so many hardworking Americans. "I've earned my right to fly private if I choose to do so," he declared, "and by attacking me, [Obama] is not going to convince me that I should take a bigger hit because I happen to be wealthy."



Although Johnson did not directly address President Obama's "Buffett Rule" (a proposal that would allow millionaires to pay a lesser share of their income in taxes than middle-income earners pay, such as Warren Buffett's secretary), he grimaced at the notion of raising taxes on the wealthy, as he described how he joined the business world to "create jobs and opportunity [and] create value for myself and my investors." Raising taxes and alienating America's job producers would only suppress such ambition, he implied.

Another wealthy businessman and previous Obama supporter, former AOL executive Ted Leonsis, attacked the President's new tax proposal in a Sept. 25 blog, [titled](#), "Class Warfare — Yuck!" "Economic success has somehow become the new boogie man," Leonsis writes, adding that "some in the Democratic Party are now casting about for enemies, and business leaders and anyone who has achieved success in terms of rank or fiscal success are being cast as a bad guy in a black hat."

During an interview last week with CBS News, the BET founder took a broader tone with the federal government, arguing that the political process is too polarized, and thus has taken a toll on the economy. "I've been in business for over 30 years [and] I've never seen a time when there's been more zero-sum game mentality in the United States among political parties," he [told](#) CBS's Scott Pelley during the interview.

Johnson expounded the idea that from a business standpoint, if one saw two parties arguing so relentlessly, one would not want to conduct business with either of them, but would find other parties with which to work. "And you know what you find, the Chinese who want to do business. You find the Vietnamese who want to do business. You find the Brazilians. You find the Indians want to do business with you."

Although he was careful not to lean too far on either side of the political aisle, Johnson conceded that he believes the "leadership" in both Congress and the White House is severely lacking. He also recommended that political leaders be willing retain office for one term — meaning, take action or voice



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opinions that may be unpopular — *including* the President.

Other prominent business leaders Pelley has recently interviewed have expressed similar sentiments. For instance, Starbucks CEO Howard Shultz asserted, "We have to understand that the problem we have in America today — unemployment, the fracturing of consumer confidence, the lack of lending — all of these things are tied, unfortunately, to the dysfunctionality and the ideology of separate agendas in Washington." Caterpillar CEO Doug Oberhelman echoed Shultz, advising politicians to "check the politics at the door."

Observers note that such "polarization politics" that many in political and business spheres decry can be rather austere, and sometimes seem nothing more than media rhetoric. Conservative columnist George Will [put](#) an interesting spin on such claims:

What debacle? We raised the debt ceiling, we set up the supercommittee, we avoided doing what the president wanted, which was pass the debt ceiling increase cleanly without any cuts in spending. Washington is in gridlock? Washington, in recent years, has passed TARP, the stimulus, Obamacare — big things. Now the country doesn't like a lot of what they did, but you can't say Washington has been gridlocked.

Indeed, the scrutiny over such "gridlock" can be dramatic ploys for exposure. But one thing is certain: Such public disgust over today's political process undoubtedly reflects on the President, and paints a large sign for politicians who berate financial success. After all, when one vilifies the CEOs, investors, and financial moguls of America, one cripples the prospective jobs the unemployed are so desperate to grasp. Critics say that if the President hopes to have any chance at reelection, he ought to cut back on the name-calling.

Photo: Robert Johnson, the billionaire founder of Black Entertainment Television, answers questions during a news conference in New York, Dec. 18, 2002.: AP Images



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