

CONFIDENTIAL

RELEASE IN FULL

September 3, 2010

For: Hillary  
From: Sid  
Re: Memo #2 on Midterm Strategy: "Throw the bums in"

It is very late—very, very late, later than that. There is no Democratic message. The Obama political team's themes have sunk to the bottom without a ripple during "Recovery Summer." Democratic candidates are like survivors after the ship has gone down, scrambling to save themselves, "sauve qui peut." There has not been a comparable moment since a dazed and confused Michael Dukakis responded to the Republican attack by wandering off to tour western Massachusetts for more than a week in August 1988 rather than campaign for president. (If you have a copy of my book, "Pledging Allegiance: The Last Campaign of the Cold War," read the three chapters "The End of Ideology," "The Birth of a Kinder, Gentler Nation," and "The Dead Democrats," for an acid flashback that will seem like *deja vu*.)

Dept. of I Heard The News Today, Oh Boy: Forget comparisons to 1994, says Charlie Cook, who now predicts the blowout will be bigger than 1980. A poll of September 2, "Quantifying the Enthusiasm Gap," from Public Policy Polling discloses a decline of 7 points for Democrats in key races based on loss of support from within the party. Adding those 7 points would mean wins in almost every crucial contest. Gallup reports on its poll of September 2, "Republicans Hold Wide Lead in Key Voter Turnout Measure": "Gallup finds 54% of Republicans, compared with 30% of Democrats, already saying they have given 'quite a lot of' or "some" thought to the contests." Gallup reveals a 10 point Republican generic advantage over the Democrats.

In a compressed period of time the Democrats must win back their own constituencies, depress Republican enthusiasm, tell a compelling story about the Obama presidency in 25 words or less, and offer an alternative explanation of the Republican motive for wanting to return to power. These tasks cannot be accomplished through philosophical digressions about competing conceptions of government, feeble apolitical metaphors (Obama, playing Ward Cleaver to Wally: "After they drove the car into the ditch, made it as difficult as possible for us to pull it back, now they want the keys back. No! You can't drive. We don't want to have to go back into the ditch. We just got the car out."), or insistent White House demands that the middle class still mired in economic difficulty express their gratitude to the administration and the Democrats for not having experienced the abyss.

In the less than two months left before Election Day there is only one potential path to possible or partial recovery—partisan polarization. This is already being done with a vengeance, but only by Republicans. They have succeeded in nationalizing the election as an exercise in resentment focused on Obama and Pelosi. The Democrats are left in pieces, groping for words.

In my previous memo I wrote about redefining the Tea Party as a takeover operation of the GOP, posing it against the Republican Party and turn its rhetoric inside out against it. In this memo, I explain that polarizing the campaign to Democratic advantage requires personalizing the Tea Party and the Republican Party through a single individual who can be made into a wedge splitting the movement and the party, dampen their base, drive Independents away, activate Democrats, explain who and what Obama has been struggling against, and provide a vivid and repellent image of the Republican quest for power—a man the whole Tea Party and Republican effort has been directed to put in power since the day Obama was inaugurated—yes, John Boehner. As I will show, only by personifying the Republicans can Obama offer a story of his presidency that gives voters a choice. Only when the Democrats characterize the real Republican plan will voters pause and reconsider what the Republicans are asking them to do: *Throw the bums back in.*

The story so far...

The economic story has three acts: Bush's recession, followed by Obama's attempted recovery, followed by Obama's failed recovery. Blaming Bush has a fading political half-life. In September, we've concluded "Recovery Summer," which curdled into Slowdown Summer. Obama put his brand on "Recovery Summer" and now he owns Slowdown Summer—that's his brand for the midterms. The slowdown is on Obama's watch; it's charged to his credit card. Obama's most devoted pundit apologists echo talking points that he's achieved health care, the stimulus and financial reform. Unfortunately, the stimulus was inadequate, financial reform is perceived as abstract, and health care has not gained broad public acceptance with its main benefits yet to be delivered. We are now at the place in the story that is about a false dawn and false messiah.

The political story is that the undeserving rich and the undeserving poor (illegal immigrants) have been rewarded while the deserving, hardworking middle class has paid the price. If the Democratic Party is the party of government and government is owned by Wall Street, the Democratic Party ipso facto has become the party of Wall Street. That's the thematic subtext of John Boehner's attack on Timothy Geithner. That's why Glenn Beck calls Obama a fascist and a socialist. This is not FDR's government; it's not Bill Clinton's government. Government has merged with Wall Street in the public mind as a single Leviathan. The Tea Party and the Republicans have stirred and distilled this brew of resentment.

The campaign so far...

The Democrats have no story to tell about the Republicans, except about Bush. Having failed to Hooverize Bush and the Republicans at the onset of the Obama administration, only now is he being blamed for the economy. The political problem is twofold: First, Bush is not the one who

tried to sell “Recovery Summer.” Obama has now pinned the economy on himself. Second, Bush is not on the ballot; nor is he in office. There’s no way to vote against Bush. Bush was already repudiated when Obama was elected. The effort to place responsibility for the economic crisis on the GOP therefore has to be renewed and remade, beyond Bush. The story has to be recast, using a new image. Information must be provided that the general public has not put together, doesn’t know, hasn’t been told, or must be reminded. The argument can’t be abstract. The Republican Party must be personified—a basic political tactic used successfully by the Republicans as they demonize recognizable individuals: Obama and Pelosi.

The Republican poster boy...

The election has already been nationalized on Republican terms. It’s a referendum on Obama, Pelosi, and big government betraying the little guy and bailing out Wall Street. The Republicans are cast as the outsiders, untainted and independent minded. They expect to ride that wave. How can their surfboard be overturned and splintered?

At the end of the day, what is the Tea Party and Republican sound and fury really about? After the constant stream of talk and Twittering from Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh and Sarah Palin, what’s really behind the curtain? It turns out the entire Republican promotion of a supposed populist revolt is little more than an elaborate hoax to put John Boehner into power.

John Boehner is not well known. Carefully closeted by the Republicans throughout the midterms, the Speaker of the House in waiting is completely vulnerable to being defined by the Democrats. He can easily become transformed into an image to disillusion, disorient and demobilize the GOP.

How afraid of the Republicans of Boehner’s image? The House Republicans have just produced a TV ad of three Republican House leaders touted as “Young Guns.” Needless to say, Boehner is not one of them. (Democratic Party spokespeople, if there are any, should say that the “Young Guns” ad, featuring the strange looking trio of Eric Cantor, Paul Ryan and Kevin McCarthy, resembles an audition for “Young Frankenstein.”)

Here’s our poster boy: Desperate to claw back into power, sleazy, unprincipled, scandal ridden, a tool of special interests, an old-time political hack, buddy of Jack Abramoff, errand boy for Gingrich and DeLay, responsible for the catastrophic policies that created the economic recession, the bailout king of Congress, who turned the Treasury over to big business without asking for any responsibility or change in return, and then demanded that taxpayers pay off BP for its disaster letting it off the hook, who has exploded the deficit, and would drain the middle class while giving more breaks, loopholes, gifts, and privileges to the special interests, who are contributing \$400 million to the Republican campaign—that’s John Boehner.

Boehner represents what Obama has been up against, what he’s been struggling with since he took office, and what the stakes and the sides are for the future.

Here’s Obama’s story: On behalf of special interests, the Republicans, who in control of the White House and the Congress, corrupted government, its agencies and department, which no

longer enforced the rules, helping to bring about the economic recession. Opposed by the Republicans, Obama has been restoring rules and integrity in government to make the economy work again for all. The Republicans want to return John Boehner to power to play favorites for the special interests and let them run riot again. It's the revenge of the dinosaurs. It's not a Tea Party—it's Jurassic Park—with weird winged creatures flying around.

Boehner is no Newt Gingrich circa 1994. Gingrich had not held power before. He was the Young Turk, the man of bold ideas, a fresh face, representing the energy of his "Revolution." Boehner is a lumbering dinosaur, bearing scars from decades of battles in the swamps, not popular within his own party, loved by nobody, with serious enemies inside the House Republican Conference, dull, slow, especially unattractive to women and young voters, and representing much of what the Tea Party claims to be against.

Boehner expects to spend his time until Election Day leaning forward comfortably on offense. So far, he's been permitted to attack the Obama administration without ever becoming the target himself. Boehner is vulnerable to being hit from all sides. Hitting him from the left is easy. But he can also be damaged on his right for his pro-Wall Street, pro-bailout, pro-TARP record. In less than two months, Boehner should be turned into the personification of the old politics as usual that the Tea Party claims to be revolting against. Boehner should not be attacked principally for obstructing Obama but for being the complete hack. Nobody is politics in either party more ideally stands for partisan corruption.

The choice...

Right now, the choice in the midterms is between a demonized Obama, Pelosi and big government wrapped up in a package on the one hand and a movement of aroused citizens who want to send them a message on the other. The choice must be transformed into one about John Boehner—the corrupt old politics and failed policies of the past. Everything the Republican Party and their supporters are doing should be characterized as nothing more than an attempt to install John Boehner as Speaker. The Republicans have a candidate in 2010. Boehner is the Republican candidate. He must be made the face of their campaign. Whatever Beck or Limbaugh or Palin say, it's just about Boehner. Fox News? Boehner's campaign committee. "Young Guns?" A deliberate distraction from "Old Yeller."

Obama can be judged by voters only in relation to another figure who is in the arena with him. That is why blaming Bush doesn't work. Saying we can't go back (Bush) and have to go forward (Obama) doubles the focus and isolation of Obama. That formula lacks current context. Without an immediate context Obama is left alone to battle the negative image of himself created by the Republicans. When Obama battles Obama, Obama loses. But when he and the Democrats face an actual opponent voters will be forced to make a real choice.

Voters must be driven to a decision on Boehner as the symbol of the Republican Party in the mid-term elections. He is what this election is all about. Republicans must be pushed off offense and onto defense of a figure they don't much like. Day in, day out, Republicans should be forced to defend Boehner as the symbol of the old politics they are desperate to reimpose. Voters must answer: Do you want John Boehner back in power? *Throw the bums in?*

## Speaker Boehner?

To begin with, Boehner wants to privatize Social Security, slash Medicare, jack up student loans, jack up credit card fees, take away health care, remove the rules for the special interests from AIG to BP, and return to the ruinous policies that created the recession.

Who is this man that the Republicans are straining every fiber, mobilizing every resource and spending hundreds of millions from special interests to make Speaker? As John Batchelor, a radio talk show host of the traditional Republican persuasion, writes on September 3 in *The Daily Beast* (on a subject I suggested to him): "What explains this colossal banality? Grant that Boehner is a foreign-policy tenderfoot after two decades of kissing the hem of the domestic Abramoffs. Still, his remarks on the economy suggest, as Mark Twain taught us to repeat, that he is an idiot as well as a member of Congress. It may be possible that Boehner, one of 12 children of a modest tavern keeper in Cincinnati, has worked so hard at being an anonymous footman since entering Congress in 1990 as part of Newt Gingrich's dynamiters that he's incapable of the cogency associated with historical memory. He might be nothing more than what we see: a maitre de pork, a Buckeye hack on the make, a fall guy who played Newt's bagman for tobacco companies on the floor of Congress once upon a time in 1995, who inherited the IED ruins of the GOP House from the fleeing Tom DeLay in January 2006, who took a palooka's dive for Hank Paulson's TARP folly in 2008, and who has clung to his 'Leader Boehner' with the bravery of a parasite these last years of leading the 'No' team as if it were destiny."

Can the major papers and networks please be prompted to write about Speaker Boehner for starters?

Some grist on Boehner below: (1) from an informative website call SourceWatch; (2) more from a website called downwithtyranny; and (3) Batchelor's article:

### Boehner hands out 'tobacco checks' on floor of House

In late June of 1995 then-GOP Conference Chairman John Boehner handed out "about a half-dozen" checks from the political action committee of tobacco company Brown & Williamson Corp. to fellow Republicans on the floor of the House.

Boehner's chief of staff Barry Jackson stated, "We were trying to help guys who needed to get their June 30th numbers up, their cash-on-hand numbers up. All leadership does this. We have to raise money for people and help them raise money."

Boehner was forced to stop handed out the checks when two freshmen Republicans, "appalled by it," confronted him and voiced their displeasure. Boehner's reaction was one of tempered apology, "I thought, 'Yeah, I can imagine why somebody would be upset. It sure doesn't look good.' It's not an excuse, but the floor is the only place you get to see your colleagues. It was a matter of convenience. You make a mistake, admit it and go on. I just feel bad about it."

*(Associated Press, 5/10/96)*

### Sallie Mae and For-Profit Schools

The single largest contributor to Boehner's leadership PAC since 1989 is Sallie Mae, the student lending giant, with contributions totaling \$122,000.[10]

Boehner, until his recent ascension to the Majority Leader post, was the chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. In this position Boehner was able to oversee and push issues favorable to the student loan industry, including Sallie Mae. Boehner recently championed a bill that would "soften [proposed] cuts to lenders" and "deal a serious blow to the competing direct-loan program."<sup>[11]</sup> The direct-loan program provides loans directly to students through their school, rather than through private lenders and banks. The bill also sought to prevent students from consolidating their loans.

According to *The New Republic*, "Several GAO and CBO studies have found that the direct-lending program costs taxpayers much less than extending loans through lenders like Sallie Mae. Government watchdogs have estimated that every dollar loaned through these middlemen costs the federal government at least 9 cents."<sup>[12]</sup>

Prior to pushing the bill, which was eventually passed and signed by President Bush, Boehner delivered this comforting message to the Consumer Bankers Association, "Know that I have all of you in my two trusted hands. I've got enough rabbits up my sleeve to be able to get where we need to."<sup>[13]</sup>

Boehner has "[o]n several occasions ... been a guest of Albert L. Lord, Sallie Mae's chief executive officer, on the corporate jet, primarily for golf outings in Florida. The company also helped sponsor a party that Mr. Boehner threw in New York at the 2004 Republican National Convention."<sup>[14]</sup>

Boehner's leadership PAC has also received a large amount of money from for-profit schools, who have gained from Boehner's chairmanship of the Education and Workforce Committee. From 2003-2004 Boehner's PAC received \$102,000 from for-profit schools.<sup>[15]</sup>

During the current legislative session Boehner, with the aid of Rep. Buck McKeon, was successful in pushing for the elimination of the 50 percent rule, which stipulated that for a college to receive federal student aid it must teach half of its classes on campus rather than online.<sup>[16]</sup> The *Washington Post* reports that opponents of the rule change include "the United States Student Association, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, the National Association for College Admission Counseling and the American Federation of Teachers."

The for-profit school industry has suffered a number of scandals recently. The largest for-profit, the University of Phoenix, "was fined \$9.8 million by federal regulators who concluded it was so focused on boosting enrollment that it pressured recruiters to accept unqualified students."<sup>[17]</sup>

#### Abramoff Connection

Since 2000, Boehner's political action committee, the Freedom Project, has raised approximately \$32,000 from four of Jack Abramoff's tribal clients.

Boehner, Chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, "received \$32,500 in political contributions from Indian tribes represented by fallen lobbyist Jack Abramoff, placing him in the top tier of lawmakers who got donations from the lobbyist or his clients," Michael Collins reported in the January 5, 2006, *Cincinnati Post*.

"In all, 17 current and former members of Congress from Ohio and Kentucky received campaign donations from either Abramoff or one of the tribes he represents," Collins wrote, with Boehner leading "the pack, taking in even more money than Rep. Bob Ney, R-Ohio, who has become one of the central figures in the political corruption investigation that brought Abramoff down. Ney received \$31,500 in donations from Abramoff and his clients - \$1,000 less than Boehner, the report said."

"Boehner, for example, did not get any political contributions directly from Abramoff, but his political-action committee did get money from four tribes represented by the lobbyist, the report said.

"The Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana gave \$15,000 to Boehner's leadership PAC, the Freedom Project. The other contributions came from the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, which gave \$9,500; the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, which donated \$7,000; and the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, which gave \$1,000. Boehner chairs the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and is said to be considering a run for House majority leader," Collins wrote.

Rents Basement Apartment from Lobbyist

On February 8, 2006 the *Washington Post* reported that John Boehner rents a Capitol Hill basement apartment from a lobbyist whose clients lobby on issues that came before Boehner when he chaired the Education and Workforce Committee.

According to the *Post*, John Milne, the owner of the rented property, was hired by Fortis Health Plans to lobby on the Economic Security and Worker Assistance Act, which was co-authored by Boehner. Milne has also been hired to lobby on minimum wage increases and tax credits for tips, both issues overseen by the Education and Workforce Committee. Milne denies ever lobbying Boehner directly.

Tom Edsall, the *Post* author, writes: "The relationship between Boehner, John D. Milne and Milne's wife, Debra R. Anderson, underscores how intertwined senior lawmakers have become with the lobbyists paid to influence legislation." [18]

Actions as majority leader

On July 15, the *New York Times* reported that Boehner had raised campaign contributions at a rate of \$10,000 per day since becoming House Majority Leader in February 2006. [19] Boehner's Freedom Project collected \$759,238 from February through June 2006, Federal Election Commission figures show. In comparison, former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's Americans for a Republican Majority raised \$688,511 during those same months in 2004. [20] His biggest donors were the political action committees of lobbying firms, drug and cigarette makers, banks, health insurers, oil companies, military contractors, and Native American tribes. Despite high scrutiny on congressional trip-taking, Boehner flew to a golf resort in Boca Raton, Florida in March 2006 for a convention of commodities traders, who have contributed more than \$100,000 to his campaigns and are currently lobbying against a proposed tax on futures transactions.

In addition, Boehner's campaign committees hired two people in 2006 from the financial and insurance industry's lobbying wing. One of the hires, Amy Hobart, worked for Boehner before becoming political affairs manager at the Bond Market Association. The group has contributed \$50,000 to Boehner and once lobbied for his legislation aimed at loosening investment restrictions on pension fund managers. [21]

Rep. Mark Foley congressional page scandal

On September 29, Rep. Mark Foley (R-Fla.) announced his resignation from the House following the public revelation of "over-friendly" emails and sexually suggestive instant messages he had sent teenage congressional pages. Following the announcement, Boehner contradicted himself several times regarding his previous knowledge of the emails, as well as if and when he contacted House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) regarding the matter.

[http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=John\\_Boehner](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=John_Boehner)

Conservatives like John Boehner and his Blue Dog allies are putting their collective foot down-- NO. MORE. UNEMPLOYMENT. INSURANCE. EXTENSIONS! Boehner calls helping hard working American families whose breadwinners have been tossed out of work because of his own reprehensible economic policies a bailout. Boehner? The architect of the actual no-strings-attached bailout that he and Bush pushed through in October, 2008, just before the election that tossed them out of control-- and away from the power to keep rewarding their avaricious and corrupt corporate allies? It was one last granddaddy of all bailouts and it was Boehner who forced dozens of Republicans to vote for it who had voted against it the previous week when Bush failed to get it passed. Yes, *that* Boehner. The one who helped Bush push through outrageously unfair tax reductions for the wealthy that unbalanced the entire American economic system and led directly to the staggering deficit he now sheds crocodile tears over. (Yes, and he's still defending the unfair tax cuts for the rich and the cutbacks in services for the country.)

And Boehner has another bailout in mind-- no, not helping ordinary Americans-- helping his buddies at Big Oil. Boehner has taken \$258,350 from the executives and shady lobbyists at the oil industry in thinly veiled bribes-- including \$15,200 from B.P.-- and now he's leading the effort to bail them out.

Congressional Democrats and the White House are toying with different ways to force BP to cover the costs of damages from the Gulf oil spill. But they face stiff opposition from industry... and it seems leading Republicans. In response to a question from TPMDC, House Minority Leader John Boehner backed Tom Donohue, President of the Chamber of Commerce, in saying **taxpayers should help pick up the tab**.

"I think the people responsible in the oil spill-- BP and the federal government-- should take full responsibility for what's happening there."

On Friday, Donohue made clear that he opposes efforts to stick BP, a member of the Chamber, with the bill. "It is generally not the practice of this country to change the laws after the game," he said. "Everybody is going to contribute to this clean up. We are all going to have to do it. We are going to have to get the money from the government and from the companies and we will figure out a way to do that."

The Chamber is extremely influential in Republican politics, so on that level it's not particularly surprising that Boehner has Donohue's back on this one. But the politics of asking the federal government (i.e. taxpayers) to help cover the multi-billion dollar cleanup and rescue efforts are deadly. Look for Democrats to jump all over this one.

Reached in D.C. where he's conferring with Democrats in Congress, Justin Coussoule told us that he found it "odd that John Boehner and his sponsors/benefactors at the Chamber of Commerce both supported the massive no-strings attached Bush bailouts of Wall Street, but now callously refuse to assist hard working families across Ohio and the nation when they need unemployment insurance extensions."





But even more amazing given the horror story we are watching from the Gulf of Mexico now Boehner mimics the Chamber by proposing that “we the taxpayers” help bail British Petroleum out of their oily bath by funding the clean-up of the worst environmental disaster in American history. It is of note that the lax oversight and aggressive drilling without safeguards have been repeatedly cited by Mr. Boehner as “the solution” to American energy needs-- fostering our addiction to fossil fuels while denying global warming and working against development of alternative energy resources.

It is clear that Minority Leader Boehner continues to “dance with them that brought him” and now wants to leave the BP tab for those future those grandchildren taxpayers of whom he regularly namedrops.

Apparently Boehner’s rare compassion is only available to the powerful and connected-- or his regular golfing partners-- but.... I guess that is redundant.



It's important to remember that the Chamber of Commerce and Boehner work hand in glove against the interests of working families so that they can bolster the bottom lines of corporate special interests. Since the spill Donohue and Boehner have been plotting how to force the government (the taxpayers) to pick up the cost of the cleanup rather than B.P. “The head of the United States Chamber of Commerce ... signaled, however, that his group would

figure out a way to get the government to share in the cost of cleaning up the Gulf Coast. "It is generally not the practice of this country to change the laws after the game," said Tom Donohue, the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "...Everybody is going to contribute to this clean up. We are all going to have to do it. We are going to have to get the money from the government and from the companies and we will figure out a way to do that."

That same day Donohue was railing against regulating Big Business in general and the oil companies specifically, a GOP mantra. Although B.P. and other oil giants funneled millions to fund the Tea Party "movement," and help present it as a "grassroots" expression of ordinary Americans, for them it was always all about Drill, Baby, Drill.

Donohue on Friday cautioned against putting too many regulations in place in the wake of the British Petroleum oil spill, saying there may not be enough information yet to make immediate, sweeping policy changes. "I was astounded yesterday that the president took full responsibility for this and said it was the federal government, and not BP, that was running the cleanup," Donohue said at a breakfast for reporters. "Well, it was interesting to hear the admiral from the Coast Guard say, 'We have no capacity to do this cleanup.' They've already broken up the regulatory body into more regulators. They've already got people retiring or being fired. This is the idea that we have to cover our political ass in our very, very difficult time. By the way, both parties do this kind of thing," Donohue added. There's a "mentality in this Congress and this administration that the more regulation, the better," Donohue said. "I'm not too much of an advocate of doing the surgery before the diagnosis. Nor am I an advocate of grounding all the aircraft if there's an aircraft accident, stopping all the trains if there's a train accident," Donohue said. "When you overregulate, you under-job."



By the end of the day, Boehner was hysterical and backing away-- full throttle-- from his cavalier remarks about letting the taxpayers pick up the tab. Digby thinks he must be drunk on Man Tan and nicotine. "Boehner," she wrote, "is walking back his comments about having the government pay for the BP spill, but let's face facts. He was just on autopilot, echoing the Chamber of Commerce line verbatim and then got caught... Boehner is so out of touch and servile to Big Business that he's making mistakes. Big ones."

<http://downwithtyranny.blogspot.com/2010/06/boehner-wants-to-bail-out-his-big-oil.html>

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-09-02/john-boehner-could-this-mediocrity-become-house-speaker-/p/>

The GOP's Oompa-Loompa

by John Batchelor

September 2, 2010 | 10:22pm



**John Boehner (Haraz N. Ghanbari / AP Photo) John Boehner is champing at the bit to take Nancy Pelosi's job come January. John Batchelor takes a closer look at the orange Republican's weaknesses—and the goofballs who'd follow him to power.**

John Boehner is in dress rehearsal to become the Speaker of the House for the putative Republican Congress, and what the feverish partisans among us need to accept is that this chain-smoking, conflict-averse, glad-handing and peculiarly orange-tinged golfer is the pay-off for the last two years of Lilliputian turmoil. No matter how successful the Tea Party and Club for Growth vote on Election Day—60-seat swing! *Coup de main!*—all the king's horses cannot do more come January and the 112th Congress than to wait on the modest brainpower of a 61-year-old professional Ohio pol who, on his best day, is described by a wag as so out of touch with the American culture that he thinks of himself as cool, just like Dean Martin.

His remarks on the economy suggest, as Mark Twain taught us to repeat, that he is an idiot as well as a member of Congress.

What does John Boehner say of his plans for the No. 3 job in the Republic? Two of his recent policy speeches in Cleveland and Milwaukee are so stunningly facile that there is an open question whether the guileless Mr. Boehner is putting us on. Boehner warned with a mighty trumpet, "Never before has the need for a fresh start in Washington been more pressing."

Boehner cried out like a blue-eyed Jeremiah for "a series of immediate actions to end the ongoing economic uncertainty..." Boehner proposed with drum-rolling militancy, "... We must focus on working together to identify our national security priorities ..."

What explains this colossal banality? Grant that Boehner is a foreign-policy tenderfoot after two decades of kissing the hem of the domestic Abramoffs. Still, his remarks on the economy suggest, as Mark Twain taught us to repeat, that he is an idiot as well as a member of Congress. It may be possible that Boehner, one of 12 children of a modest tavern keeper in Cincinnati, has worked so hard at being an anonymous footman since entering Congress in 1990 as part of Newt Gingrich's dynamiters that he's incapable of the cogency associated with historical memory. He might be nothing more than what we see: a maitre de pork, a Buckeye hack on the make, a fall guy who played Newt's bagman for tobacco companies on the floor of Congress once upon a time in 1995, who inherited the IED ruins of the GOP House from the fleeing Tom DeLay in

January 2006, who took a palooka's dive for Hank Paulson's TARP folly in 2008, and who has clung to his "Leader Boehner" with the bravery of a parasite these last years of leading the "No" team as if it were destiny.

Then again, it is also possible that Boehner has taken on this rinsed-out golfing partner act just because he is struggling to stay youthful, hip, in step with his backroom boys. Boehner may have an envy problem, and, if so, it is making him sillier and sweatier by the week. The problem has names: Eric Cantor, Kevin McCarthy and Paul Ryan. Easily the most self-involved Republican tyros since TR and Cabot Lodge, they call themselves the "Young Guns," and they do this without measurable irony. Not only does the trio offer a new book, *Young Guns*, of sensationally unoriginal genius—"...less Washington and more hope, opportunity and freedom..."—but also they have produced a YouTube video that sets a new standard for suicidal vanity. Appearing in open-necked white shirts, either like frosh virgins or West Hollywood parking valets, they gaze longingly at each other with a soundtrack of celestial choir-wailing and a script written from Frank Capra outtakes. "America is at a crossroads... a new team is ready to bring America back ... together they are ready to make history ... innovative, energetic, forging new solutions ... a new generation of conservative leaders."

As we watch the manly gunslingers stride purposefully down the horse trail together, it is worth considering that this trio is about to be given the keys to the House of Representatives because John Boehner is spooked by their togetherness. It is an incredible fact that John Boehner thinks calling yourself a "Young Gun" is a vote-getter. The "Young Gun" video is humorless, callow, tyrannically stupid—including the phallic Washington monument under photoshopped storm clouds and a cameo with a frightened, angry citizen shouting down the surly, worn Arlen Specter. If the video were less inane, it would be a burden to the GOP comparable to Michael Steele cracks. As it is, it is a threat only to John Boehner's fantasy life.

Consider what the rest of us see in the "Young Guns," who are neither young nor noticeably armed. Eric Cantor, VA-7 (R), has limited social skills and no charisma; his position as majority leader-in-waiting is built on the money he can raise as the only Jewish Republican in the Solar System. Kevin McCarthy, CA-22 (R), is a backslapper and small-talker from a safe district, who can work a room full of Gingrich cronies as a stand-in for the slow-tongued Cantor. McCarthy is useless as muscle, as an enforcer, because, says an observer, "That would put him in a position [where] he was unpopular."

Paul Ryan, WI-6 (R), is the baby-face of the lot, no money, but lots of braininess about taxes and spending. Ryan loves to spew numbers in Cantor's earshot, which makes Cantor feel smart and less bad about the fact that he voted for TARP twice and every other bank bail-out he could find in Nancy Pelosi's kitchen. Ryan also has the problem of two "yes" votes to TARP. Oddly, McCarthy, thinking of his options, rejected TARP twice, but he is too polite to bring it up to his amigos, the "young conservatives" Eric and Paul.

Cantor, McCarthy and Ryan are most of the faces that Boehner sees in his smoke-rings when he orders his food-taster changed monthly and feels a chill as he starts another cigarette. Another face Boehner sees is Mike Pence, IN-6 (R), an older gun, sort of a pop gun, who is generally uninvolved in the intrigues in the House because he fancies himself presidential timber, another Hoosier without a sense of proportion.

Boehner also knows that Cantor has presidential ambitions. Surprised? There is no sentimental limit to the delusions of these fellows, and why would there be? The pollsters tell us that this wave election will sweep out the Democrats. By default and for no other reason, a great deal of

the responsibility in the First Article of the Constitution will then pass to the hands of men who have eyes only for themselves and their self-described guns.

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