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How Many Fights Will Obama Pick With America?
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Politics is a game of addition – successful politics anyway. Great leaders, when faced with a divided electorate, not to mention difficult economic times, use a limited agenda to forge consensus out of broken paradigms. Once they achieve an initial success, they seek a broader consensus. In the 1980's Reagan faced a divided Republican Party and a fractured and dispirited nation. Concentrating on the prosperity issue and our national prestige, Reagan first brought Republicans together and then independents and even many Democrats. Indeed, so successful was Reagan at bringing people together, that in time he could rely on a group of *Reagan* Democrats. Few other Presidents have had such success at building consensus let alone are able to claim a voting block from the other party in their name.

There is little doubt that Obama faced a divided electorate when he first took office and a difficult economic climate. Rather than start with a limited agenda designed to build consensus, Obama did the opposite. Obama chased too many rabbits at once and preferred ideological fights over practical solutions. As a result, the Country is more divided than ever – not less.

The most recent manifestation of that divisive M.O. is the White House's amazing decision to insist on a terror trial in New York. Of course, it remains a jarring ideological decision to treat KSM as a "criminal" versus the warring "terrorist" that he is. As I wrote, in my article [Internment, CSI and Eric Holder's Disarming of America](#)^[1], that decision will have profound negative consequences for decades to come. To the point of this article, Obama is compounding his initial divisive decision (treating him as a criminal) by fighting with New York over the place of the trial. It is a political fight which he cannot win regardless of the outcome of the trial.

In addition to that fight, Obama's first year featured a huge and controversial agenda that has not served his Party or his Presidency well. Keep in mind that successful Presidents achieve but two, maybe three, lasting achievements during their terms – many less than that; hence the need for a targeted and consensus building agenda – not a controversial far-reaching agenda.

Out of the gate, this President chose controversy over consensus. His massive, \$800 billion spending/stimulus bill divided Americans. To be sure, there is not a majority in this country for uncontrolled deficit spending. Indeed, the deficit is at the height of American worries and more Americans than not think the bill has not worked.

Next, Obama took on Cap and Trade. While it is unsurprising that those on the Left – who arrogantly think they can socially engineer the lives of free people also think they can engineer the climate of a 4.7 billion year old planet – there is little doubt that pushing that major agenda was not a consensus building maneuver. Witness the fate of that bill and the cries of moderate Democrats if you think otherwise.



From there, Obama pushed a massive ideological takeover of 17% of the US economy in the form of the Health Care bill. It has been anything but a consensus builder for the Democrats – ask Scott Brown if you are uncertain of that – not to mention the meteoric rise of the Tea Party.

As you can see, on the heels of a massive spending bill, Obama chased at least 3 major ideological rabbits, cap and trade, health care and redefining the war on terror– all within one year. Obama failed to build a consensus on any of those three let alone passed legislation establishing one of them – leaving Obama without a signature achievement at the outset of his Presidency – the time in which most Presidents achieve their success if at all.

Of course, Obama blames the problems he inherited for his troubles. Rather than looking to the economy he inherited, however, Obama should look at the divisive political climate he fostered for his failing polling numbers – [much like Johnson did in 1966 and Clinton in 1994](#) ^[2].

Although, after the first of the year, Obama promised to focus on jobs, his ridiculous fight with New York over terror trials, and his promise to continue pushing his health care take and cap and trade, demonstrates he is not up to the job of bringing this country together. It will be up to the Republicans to fill that leadership void in the 2010 elections.