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OP-ED COLUMNIST

## Well, That Certainly Didn't Take Long

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WASHINGTON

On 9/11, President Bush learned of disaster while reading “The Pet Goat” to grade-school kids. On Tuesday, President Obama escaped from disaster by reading “The Moon Over Star” to grade-school kids.

“We were just tired of being in the White House,” the two-week-old president, with Michelle at his side, explained to students at a public charter school near the White House.

Even as he told the children his favorite superheroes were Batman and Spider-Man, his own dream of being the superhero who swoops in to swiftly save America was going SPLAT!

It just ain't that easy.

Unlike W. and Dick Cheney, who heroically resisted acknowledging their historically boneheaded mistakes, President Obama summoned a conga line of Anderson, Katie, Brian, Chris and Charlie to the Oval Office to do penance, over and over.

“I think I messed up. I screwed up,” he confessed to Couric.

He told the anchors that the man who helped make him president, Tom Daschle, had made “a serious mistake” by not paying taxes on a car and driver. (It should have been a harbinger of doom when Daschle began sporting those determined-to-be-hip round red glasses.)

Mr. Obama admitted that “ultimately it's important for this administration to send a message that there aren't two sets of rules. You know, one for prominent people and one for ordinary folks who have to pay their taxes.”

It took Daschle's resignation to shake the president out of his arrogant attitude that his charmed circle doesn't have to abide by the lofty standards he lectured the rest of us about for two years.

Before he recanted, his hand forced by a cascade of appointees who “forgot” to pay taxes, his reasoning was creeping perilously close to that of the outgoing leaders he denounced in his Inaugural Address: that elitist mentality of “we know best,” we know we're doing the “right” thing for the country, so we can twist the rules.

Mr. Obama's errors on the helter-skelter stimulus package were also self-induced. He should put down those Lincoln books and order “Dave” from Netflix.

When Kevin Kline becomes an accidental president, he summons his personal accountant, Murray Blum, to the White House to cut millions in silly programs out of the federal budget so he can give money to the homeless.

“Who does these books?” Blum says with disgust, red-penciling an ad campaign to boost consumers’ confidence in cars they’d already bought. “If I ran my office this way, I’d be out of business.”

Mr. Obama should have taken a red pencil to the \$819 billion stimulus bill and slashed all the provisions that looked like caricatures of Democratic drunken-sailor spending.

As Senator Kit Bond, a Republican, put it, there were so many good targets that he felt “like a mosquito in a nudist colony.” He was especially worried about the provision requiring the steel and iron for infrastructure construction to be American-made, and by the time the chastened president talked to Chris Wallace on Fox Tuesday, he agreed that “we can’t send a protectionist message.”

Mr. Obama protested to Brian Williams that the programs denounced as “wasteful” by Republicans “amount to less than 1 percent of the entire package.” All the more reason to cut them and create a lean, clean bill tailored to creating jobs.

The Democratic president has been spending so much time trying — and failing — to win over Republicans that he may not have noticed the disillusionment in his own ranks.

Betrayed by their bankers and leaders, Americans were desperate to trust someone when they made Barack Obama president. His debut has left them skeptical about his willingness to smack down those who would flout his high standards or waste our money.

Companies that have gotten bailouts continue to make a mockery of taxpayers.

Until it came to light Tuesday, Wells Fargo, which received \$25 billion in federal funds, was blithely planning a series of “employee recognition outings” to Las Vegas luxury hotels this month.

As ABC reported, Bank of America took its \$45 billion in bailout funds and sponsored a five-day carnival outside the Super Bowl stadium, and Morgan Stanley took its \$10 billion in bailout money and held a three-day conference at the Breakers in Palm Beach. (Morgan Stanley had also still planned to send top employees to Monte Carlo and the Bahamas, events just canceled.)

The New York Post revealed that Sandy Weill, former chief executive of Citigroup, took a company jet to fly his family for a Christmas holiday to a \$12,000-a-night luxury resort in San José del Cabo, Mexico. No matter that the company just got a \$50 billion federal bailout and laid off 53,000 worldwide.

The interior of the 18-seat jet, as described by The Post, is posh, with a full bar, fine-wine selection, \$13,000 carpets, Baccarat crystal glasses, Cristofle sterling silver flatware and — my personal favorite — pillows made from Hermès scarves.

Aux barricades!

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