

Will the center hold?

By SHEILAH PEPPER

The Gazette Staff Over the past two weeks, I have listened to some people tell me they are optimistic that Barack Obama will govern to the center. (Incidentally, he and his people have used the term "rule" in place of the word "govern." Is that a slip of the tongue or an indication of a mindset?)

I don't share the optimism. Obama has the White House and a substantial congressional majority. By the time he takes office, he may even have something very close to a filibuster-proof edge in the U.S. Senate. While the first 100 days may be relatively calm (barring an international incident), I believe we'll soon see robust moves toward enacting a full scale left wing agenda. Those who have been given power tend to use it.

Another lies in Obama's first two staff appointments - namely Rahm Emmanuel, who can put up a tougher fight than a junkyard dog, and John Podesta, who heads a left-wing think tank (Is that an oxymoron?) called The Center for American Progress, a true distortion of the original meaning of the word 'progress.'

His people have already served notice that they are pouring over 200-plus executive orders issued by President Bush. One which will likely be overturned is the rescinding of the ban on off-shore drilling. Along with that will die any hope of drilling onshore, in our ultra-rich western oil shale, where we have more oil and natural gas underground than the resources of the rest of the world combined. It looks like the cry of "Drill here, drill now!" is dead, sadly for the nation.

Some pundits are opining that Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid will run the show, pulling an inexperienced chief executive behind them. I think those pundits are dead wrong. Pelosi and Reid have benefited from Obama's coattails. They didn't get quite the landslide majorities some Democrats predicted. (Nor did Obama. However, McCain's defeat would have been much greater if it were not for Sarah Palin.)

But make no mistake - elements of the old Chicago thugocracy will be firmly in charge at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Any Democrat in Congress who offers them any opposition will do so at his/her peril. Guess who has the e-mail donation list for those many millions of campaign dollars?

Obama will also have the bully pulpit. An obedient mainstream media will give him plenty of time and exposure. Given his messianic appeal to a large segment of the public, he would have to trip up mightily before these forces desert him.

There are two things I'll be watching. One is the choice of press secretary and the frequency and tone of White House press conferences. Also, it will be enlightening to see how often Obama will appear before the White House press corps and take questions. He obviously won't be subjected to the raw hostility President Bush faced from this pack of vultures. I know one thing - I very much doubt that the correspondent for FOX News will retain a seat in the front rows.

The other issue I'll be watching closely is the revival by Congress of the misnamed Fairness Doctrine. If you are too young to remember it, here is how it worked: Broadcast media were required to offer equal time in any political discussion, for example, on the Sunday morning "talking head" shows. The networks would invite a tough Democrat to appear. He would appear opposite the weakest possible Republican they could find.

Ronald Reagan put an end to this scheme.

Talk radio was born and became vastly popular. Then came FOX News and, eventually, the conservative internet sites.

There are now forces in Congress who want to silence, firstly, talk radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and many others. FOX already invites an opposing view under their "fair and balanced" mantra. The internet will be a low priority as the left wing blog sites roughly equal the number of those on the right, and they are more heavily by such power players as George Soros.

If this Congress succeeds in destroying talk radio, we'll find ourselves going down the short slippery slope to totalitarianism. Given the things currently happening in our economy, and the apologetic appeasing tones from some of Obama's foreign policy people, we may be partly there already.

As an immigrant to this country, I never thought I would see a situation in America where free-loving people would have hunker down and defend freedom on our own shores. But that is clearly where we are heading.

The question we may soon be asking ourselves is does the center exist?

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