Obama in prime time: 7 questions left on cutting room floor

by Larry Elder

President Barack Obama last week conducted his first prime-time press conference. After blaming the "failed theories of the last eight years" for today's economic crisis, he pushed for massive, unprecedented government spending.

Lefty radio talk show host Ed Schultz â€” who once called Republican presidential candidate John McCain a "warmonger" â€” sat in the front row, appropriately next to "reporter" Helen Thomas. Thomas used to attack then-President Bush with her statements masquerading as questions. In her question to Obama, she referred to our Islamofascist enemies as "so-called terrorists" â€” which failed to elicit even a raised eyebrow from the President.

What, no Rush Limbaugh?

Obama even took a question from a "reporter" for the hyper-liberal Web site The Huffington Post. And, unlike Bush, the Obama administration preselected the reporters to be called upon and notified them in advance. Why did the others even bother showing up? If Bush pulled something like this, they'd call it "the discredited doctrine of pre-emption."

We offer seven questions left on the cutting room floor:

1) Mr. President, tonight you criticized those who argue that FDR's policies failed. I'd like to read a passage from the diary of Henry Morgenthau, FDR's Treasury secretary: "We have tried spending money. We are spending more than we have ever spent before and it does not work. I want to see this country prosperous. I want to see people get a job. I want to see people get enough to eat. We have never made good on our promises. â€¦ I say after eight years of this Administration we have just as much unemployment as when we started â€¦ and an enormous debt to boot!" Please comment.

2) Mr. President, this is a two-part question. In your opening statement, you called today's economic situation "the most profound economic emergency since the Great Depression" and later "the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression." But in the 1981-82 recession, unemployment reached 10.8 percent in 1982 versus 7.6 today. Reagan inherited an annual inflation rate of 13.5 percent, while you, sir, came in with a 0.1 percent inflation rate. Prime interest rates reached 21.5 percent at the end of 1980, compared with 3.25 percent at the end of 2008. Reagan did not ask for a "rescue" or "bailout" package. He cut taxes and slowed the rate of domestic spending. Unemployment, inflation and interest rates went down. The Treasury collected more revenue than ever. First, how then â€” at least so far â€” is this the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression? And second, given Reagan's success, why not cut taxes, reduce domestic spending, and leave taxpayers and consumers with more money to save, spend and invest?

3) Mr. President, you say your administration will not torture. You've directed our military to apply the Army Field Manual, which relies on 19 psychological methods of interrogation and excludes waterboarding. Yet you are setting up an interagency panel to decide whether to use interrogation methods not included in the Army Field Manual. Aren't you having it both ways â€” saying you won't torture or use enhanced interrogation techniques, while retaining the option to do so?

4) As a candidate, you called raising taxes a matter of "neighborliness." Your Vice President called paying taxes a matter of "patriotism." Yet your secretary of Treasury, Timothy Geithner, who oversees the IRS, failed to pay some taxes. The International Monetary Fund, where he worked, informed him in writing of his obligation to pay payroll taxes and increased his compensation to offset the payment. He accepted the compensation but failed to pay taxes. Can the head of the department that runs the IRS credibly expect others to pay their taxes, when he failed to pay his own?

5) In one of your first acts as President, you signed an executive order that many call the toughest-ever ethical guidelines. It bans former lobbyists joining your administration from being involved with any matters or agencies that might be related to their former lobbying efforts. It also prohibits anyone from working in an agency he or she lobbied during the past two years. Given that, please comment on why you have granted a dozen personnel waivers to your own ethical guidelines.

6) The respected nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office studies the effects of the various proposed stimulus plans. The Washington Times said, "CBO, the official scorekeepers for legislation, said the House and Senate bills will help in the short term but result in so much government debt that within a few years they would crowd out private investment, actually leading to a lower Gross Domestic Product over the next 10 years than if the government had done nothing." Your comment?

7) Tonight you blamed the economic crisis on the "failed theories of the last eight years," yet tonight you also criticized homeowners who put little or nothing down and purchase homes without the ability to pay their mortgages if "something goes wrong." Sir, which is it?

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