

Obama's State of the Union: Pro-corporate Agenda with Chocolate Covered Rhetoric for the 99%

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When President Obama speaks, most Americans hear what he wants them to hear: lofty rhetoric and a “progressive” vision. But just below the surface the president has a subtly-delivered message for the 1%, whose ears prick up when their buzzwords are mentioned. Obama’s state of the union address was such a speech – a pro-corporate agenda packaged with chocolate covered rhetoric for the masses; easy to swallow, but deadly poisonous.

Much of Obama’s speech was pleasant to the ears, but there were key moments where he was speaking exclusively to the 1%. Exposing these hidden agenda points in the speech requires that we ignore the fluff and use English the way the 1% does. Every time Obama says the words “reform” or “savings,” insert the word “cuts.”

Here are some of the more nefarious moments of Obama’s [state for the union speech](#):

“And those of us who care deeply about programs like Medicare must embrace the need for modest reforms [cuts]...”

“On Medicare, I’m prepared to enact reforms [cuts] that will achieve the same amount of health care savings [cuts] by the beginning of the next decade as the reforms [cuts] proposed by the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles commission.”

This ultra-vague sentence was meant exclusively for the 1%. What are some of the recommendations from the right-wing Simpson-Bowles commission? Obama doesn’t say. [Talking Points Memo explains](#):

- Force more low-income individuals into Medicaid managed care.
- Increase Medicaid co-pays.
- Accelerate already-planned cuts to Medicare Advantage and home health care programs.
- Create a cap for Medicaid/Medicare growth that will force Congress and the president to increase premiums or co-pays or raise the Medicare eligibility age (among other options) if the system encounters cost overruns over the course of 5 years.

There were many other subtly-delivered attacks on Medicare in Obama’s speech, all ignored by most labor and progressive groups, who clung tightly to the “progressive” smoke Obama blew in their face.

Obama’s speech also included a frightening vision of a national privatization scheme to previously publicly owned resources. But it was phrased so inspirationally that only the 1% seemed to notice:

“I’m also proposing a Partnership to Rebuild America that attracts private capital [wealthy investors] to upgrade what our businesses need most: modern ports to move our goods; modern pipelines to withstand a storm; modern schools worthy of our children...we’ll reward schools that develop new partnerships with colleges and employers [corporations]...”

Obama’s proposal plans to “rebuild America” in the image of the wealthy and corporations, who only put forth their “private capital” when it results in a profitable investment; resources that previously functioned for the public good will now be channeled into the pockets of the rich, to the detriment of everyone else.

Allowing the rich to privatize and profit from public education and publicly owned infrastructure (ports and pipelines, etc.) has been a right-wing dream for years. This will result in massive user fees for the rest of us, while further dismembering public education, which Obama’s ill-named Race to the Top education reform is already successfully accomplishing.

Obama’s speech also put forth two massive pro-corporate international free trade deals, which would further drive down wages in the United States:

“We intend to complete negotiations on a Trans-Pacific Partnership [a massive free trade deal focused mainly on Asian nations]. And tonight, I am announcing that we will launch talks on a comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership [free trade deal] with the European Union - because trade that is free and fair across the Atlantic supports millions of good-paying American jobs.”

While praising free trade Obama disarmed labor and progressive groups by throwing in the meaningless word “fair.”

Lastly, Obama’s drone assassination policy was further enshrined in his speech. Drone assassinations are obvious war crimes — see the Geneva Convention — while also ignoring that pesky due process clause — innocent until proven guilty — of the constitution.

But Obama said that these programs will be “legal” and “transparent,” apparently good enough to keep most progressive groups quite on the issue.

There were plenty of other examples of sugar-coated poison in Obama’s speech. It outlined a thoroughly right-wing agenda with no plan to address the jobs crisis — sprinkled with pretty words and “inspiring” catchphrases.

Some labor leaders and “progressive” groups seem dazzled by the speech. President of the union federation, AFL-CIO, Richard Trumka, [praised Obama’s anti-worker speech](#):

“Tonight President Obama sent a clear message to the world that he will stand and fight for working America’s values and priorities. And with the foundation he laid, working families will fight by his side to build an economy that works for all.”

And here is the real problem; as President Obama follows in the footsteps of President Bush, labor and progressive groups have found their independent voice stifled. The close ties between these groups and the Democratic Party have become heavy chains for working people, who find themselves under assault with no leadership willing to educate them about the truth, let alone organize a national fightback to win a massive jobs-creation program, prevent cuts to social programs, and fully fund public education. Obama’s second term will

teach millions these lessons via experience.

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