

from our viewpoint...

Large bail outs make statement

What does it mean to the American economy when the government has to bail out our largest banks, insurance companies, brokerages and manufacturers?

We're in deep trouble this time, of course.

That much is obvious.

The taxpayers' bill is past \$1 trillion already, and the meter just keeps on running.

Before this ends, the government may well own a big chunk of Citicorp and other big banks, of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, of insurance giant AIG and of a host of other firms "too big to let go down."

First of all, can this work?

Actually, the government's track record in rescuing big firms is not all that bad, nor has it cost us much money in the end.

When the government bailed out Chrysler Corp. in the 1979 with \$1.2 billion in loan guarantees, the effort was at least a qualified success. Chrysler went on to become a relatively stable firm, though not one fated to make its way in the world. It was bought up by the big German automaker Benz, but even the Germans could not make a winner out of the No. 3 U.S. manufacturer.

After being cut loose to fend for itself, Chrysler quickly faltered. The economic nose-dive the U.S. has suffered this year is not something it, or possibly any of the Big Three, could survive.

Call that one at least a temporary success. We got our money back.

When the eastern railroads were broke in the 1970s, the government formed Conrail in 1976 to "rationalize" the system. Armed with authority to cut away unneeded lines and unprofitable passenger trains, the new railroad began to rise. A crack management team made it a winner. Eventually, the two big eastern carriers bought Conrail and divided the spoils.

Had it remained independent, Conrail would have been a real success. As it was, though, the government's goals were met. The rail system was pared back and began to make a profit. Today, the eastern railroads — once a drag on the economy — are a profit-making business.

So call that one a success.

Can the government save GM or Citicorp?

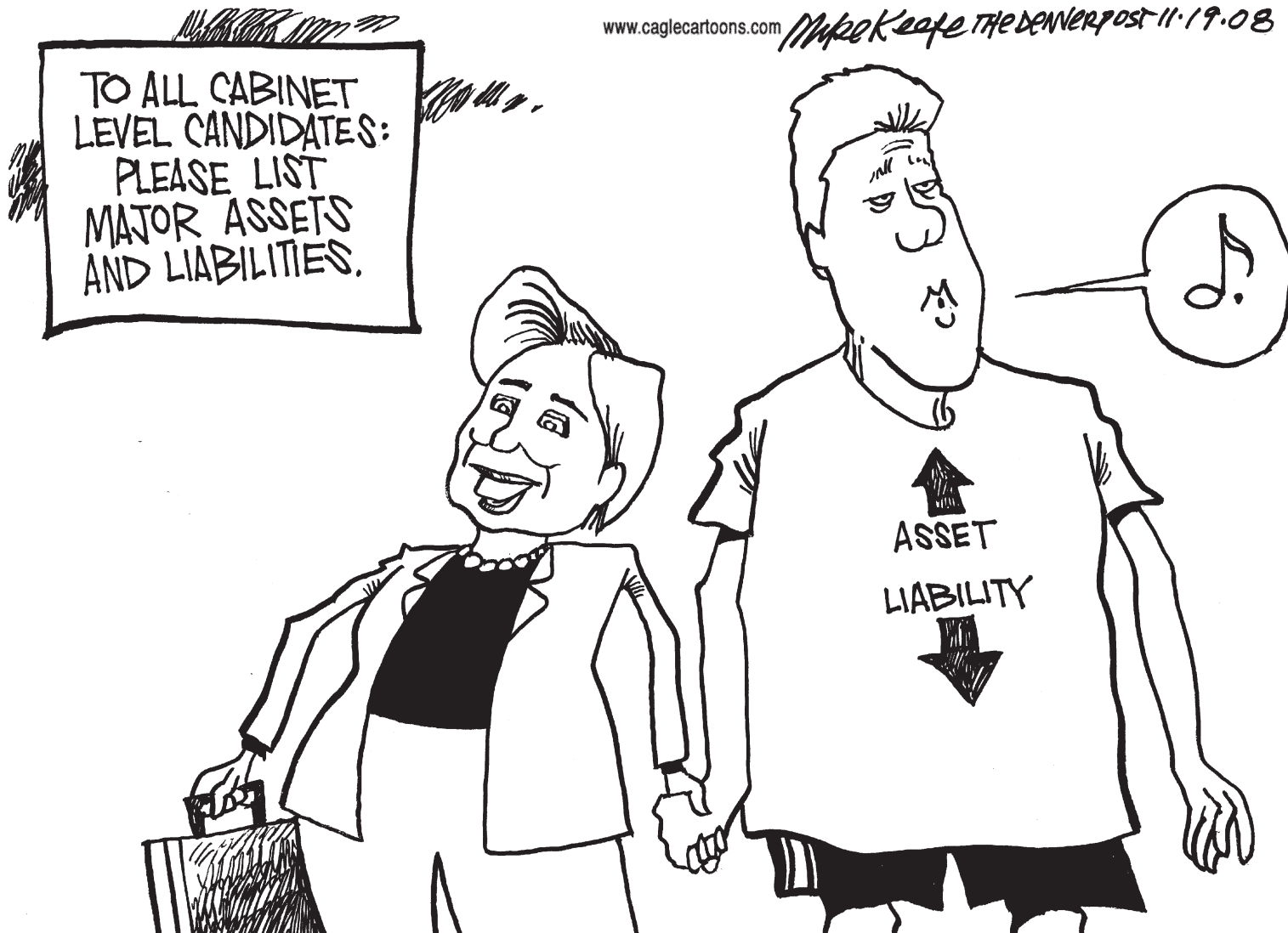
Who knows. Today, the need for cash is so huge, the number of firms in trouble so large, that even Uncle Sugar may run out of cash.

Should we care?

Economist and experts differ. Some say we simply cannot afford to let so many key players fail. If GM goes down, for instance, thousands of suppliers, dealers and other related firms may follow. The entire domestic auto industry may disappear, and with it the country's best remaining industrial jobs.

Others say bankruptcy is the only way to wash years of poor management, union power and bad decisions away. Purists say only the market can decide who lives and who dies.

Yet so far, the record for government bailouts is fairly positive. So pick your medicine. Chances are you'll be paying for it, one way or the other. — Steve Haynes



Republican party is a grass-roots party

There are a lot of meetings going on among some Republicans trying to figure out what went wrong on Election Day and how the party needs to respond. None of them involve what the media like to call the base, the folks at the grass roots whose votes, after all, determine the outcome of elections.

The gatherings get a lot of media attention because the media mistakenly believe that the people attending them represent the grass roots of the GOP.

They don't. What they represent is the coterie who led the party into eight years of ignoring the traditions and principles of the party pursued so avidly by the Reagan administration, with which they have the effrontery to identify themselves.

They represent the big-government, big-spending Republican Party that turned its back on the grass roots, and to listen to many of them what the GOP needs to do is to do more of the same things that put us where we are.

I have news for them. They are not the Republican Party. They remain wedded to the idea that the party is a party of moderation — the party that can't make up its mind about what is right to do and what is wrong to do. So they try to come down in the middle.

They forget that Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican president, warned us not to believe there "is some middle ground" between what



michael reagan

• making sense

is right and what is wrong.

The grass roots haven't forgotten that and the election results prove it. The "values voters" are alive and well, and they spoke loud and clear where values were at stake.

As Brad O'Leary has noted, a majority of Americans still support traditional American values. He cited initiatives to uphold traditional marriage that were on the ballots in two states carried by President-elect Obama, California and Florida.

Says O'Leary: "In both states, voters passed measures to ban gay marriage. In California, where Obama beat McCain 61 percent to 37 percent, 'values voters' beat special interest voters 52.5 percent to 47.5 percent on the issue of same-sex marriage."

In Florida, which he recalls Obama won, the margin of victory for values voters was even more substantial — 62 percent of Floridians voted against gay marriage, while only 38 percent voted in favor.

Most damning for the GOP moderates was

Obama's ability to portray himself as a tax cutter. Obama constantly told the voters that his economic plan would cut taxes for 95 percent of Americans, which would equate to 274 million Americans receiving a tax cut.

Yet the big-government, big-spending Republicans whose voice is David Brooks, The New York Times columnist who insists that the GOP must abandon its traditions and values and go merrily down to road to the land of moderation where nothing is really right, and nothing is really wrong.

He neglects to tell his readers that this is the road that leads to lost elections.

The future of the Republican Party is in the hands of the party's grass roots. In the months to come some of us will be concentrating on organizing the people who are the real base of the party and fighting to restore the party's values as represented by my father's administration.

What we stand for is worth fighting for. And it is what will save the party of Abraham Lincoln and Ronald Reagan. Let the moderates have their meetings. We'll be busy taking over the reins and restoring the GOP.

Mike Reagan, the elder son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk radio stations nationally. E-mail comments to Reagan@caglecartoons.com.

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Mr. Obama, bring on the change.

Bring on that new dawn of American leadership you say is at hand.

Bring on your soaring rhetoric, your mandate from the media, your party's near veto-proof legislative majority.

Get down to Washington in January and use your political superpowers to begin solving what you say are "the greatest challenges of our lifetime — two wars, a planet in peril and the greatest financial crisis in a century."

Yes you can try.

We your people understand, as you have said, that the road ahead will be long, our climb will be steep and we may not get to wherever very liberal place you're taking us to as a nation in one year or — rather conveniently for you — even in one term.

But we know you and your cronies from the hard-left side of Chicago are already working on where you'll find the money to pay for that generous to-do list of neo-New Deal stuff you've been promising your adoring fans for the last two years.

There's a recession on, but yes you can try.

Meanwhile, if you truly want to make America a better place and change the cruddy way things have been done in Washington for the last 60 years by both major political parties, here are a couple of daring ideas to get you warmed up and let you prove that you're more than just talk:

First, you should fulfill your old promise to get us out of Iraq ASAP. And you should do the same with the war in Afghanistan, an even more hopeless quagmire. Despite the hawkish hallucinations you had during the election campaign of winning the war in Afghanistan and capturing bin Laden, Afghanistan also does not deserve to have another American drop of blood or dollar spent on it.

While you're at it, and if you're serious about bringing real change, try ratcheting down the bloated warfare state that Republicans and Democrats have built and abused for their political ends.

First, tell the thugs of the world we'll leave them alone if they don't threaten our national security or harbor al-Qaida summer camps, but if they mess with us we'll quickly kick their butts.

Yes you can try



bill steigerwald

• newsmakers

Then slash the defense budget at least 40 percent. For starters, and to save scores of annual billions, close 75 percent of our overseas military bases — we have more than 820 installations in at least 39 countries. That includes 56,000 people in Germany, 33,122 in Japan and 10,000 in Italy — three rich nations that can and should be providing for their own defenses.

Good luck. But yes you can try.

On the homefront, there's another hugely important change you could quickly bring America: Call off the federal government's bipartisan war on drugs.

You could get on TV some Tuesday night and tell your fellow Americans the truth most

of them have known for decades: The dirty drug war waged by government on its own people has failed by every measure.

Then reassert your forgotten call for America to start treating all drug use as a health issue instead of a criminal justice issue. Then give your presidential blessing to the decision by Massachusetts voters last week to approve the country's first marijuana decriminalization initiative.

Then make marijuana as legal as beer. Then pardon all nonviolent drug offenders. Then decommission the DEA. Then, using your best oratorical skills, declare a great victory in America's never-ending war against too much government and too little personal freedom.

You might be impeached within 24 hours. But yes you can try.

Bill Steigerwald is a columnist at the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. E-mail Bill at steigerwald@caglecartoons.com.

