

Opinions

Where to point the blame AIG, Washington both at fault

The saga continues. AIG executives received an additional \$165 billion in bonuses while the economy is deep in a recession with people losing houses, jobs and their savings.

In the 18th century, Queen Marie Antoinette once said, "Let them eat cake," to the starving peasantry of France, who were unable to even afford bread.

Wall Street appears to be facing a similar situation. Not in the literal sense, as famine has not yet afflicted

the country, but in sentiment. It is clear that these executives are out of sync with the ordinary, less privileged middle and working class America. Their posh Upper East Side apartments, stretch limos and private jets have inflated a bubble around them that has eliminated empathy and blinded them from any misery or strife, apart from large divorce settlements.

But how are they to be blamed when it is the American ideals of prosperity, capitalism and free enterprise that allowed them to get where they are? All they have done is abide by their contracts. They worked their way up to the top, not through delusions or daydreams but through long, arduous hours and hard work.

Times have changed, though. The world they once had to struggle through is gone, and the world they now live in has no connection with the reality that surrounds the vast majority of America. They are governing companies that affect millions of lives, maybe even billions, based on the premise that "ignorance is bliss." If only it was.

Senate leaders and other top officials may say they take responsibility for the flaw in the proposal that allowed AIG executives to cash in, but the issue does not end there. Just a few individuals do not handle a proposal involving so many billions of dollars. Numerous policy makers were involved

and such oversight is implausible. To believe that such naivety exists among Washington's best and brightest is nothing short of ignorance.

"What do AIG executives pull out of their pocket when they search for a dime?" Chris Dodd," Jay Leno said.

The government has been tactful with its spin tactics, effectively transferring all the attention of a flawed policy onto the AIG executives, who were only taking what was promised to them. Yet again the government fails to hit the roots and only attempts to slaughter the scapegoat.

The policy makers should have stipulated in their proposal that failure will no longer be rewarded rather than attempting to subdue the public outcry with an elitist law that imposes a 90 percent tax on bonuses for companies receiving bailout money. This is the reactive approach rather than the proactive one, with the money already in the executives' pockets.

The conspiracy theorists should be having a field day with this, but there has been little said. Given, it is still the first 100 days of the Obama administration and a tumultuous few days at that. His administration and the members of Congress have been around long enough. They are the ones that need to be held accountable, as this imperfect policy was intentionally written, proposed and passed. The AIG executives' complicity with members of the administration needs to be investigated. The real scandal lies deep down, under the rhetoric of governmental spokespersons.

Aside from that, it is clear such mammoth companies like AIG need to be restructured with individuals who are capable of empathizing with America put in place to run the operations. Fresh faces are needed. Today, AIG is trading at about a dollar per share, with over \$800 billion in assets, one hundred thousand employees and losses amounting to over \$23 billion for the last quarter alone. A dollar stock playing a substantial role in the economy? The model is reprehensible and requires a reality check. Bonuses do not fit the scheme. The government, on the other hand, needs to employ responsible, accountable legislators.

Viva la newspaper

In wake of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer's passing, it is as if the lion that has been stirring over what is to become of the news print industry has been goaded again. Earlier this year the Christian Science Monitor and the Rocky Mountain News joined the ranks of the failed papers, cutting back to mostly or fully online formats. Other major papers are also struggling.

It has become a topic frequenting blogs, magazines and television

shows as journalism schools force their students to question the future of the profession, given the vague and, to be blunt, bleak-looking forecast.

Walk into a small town diner, and you'll find a couple of newsmen woefully discussing the budgeting issues that cut their stories.

The long-term professional journalists are beginning to fade away, yielding to bloggers and citizen journalists like Arianna Huffington. Now the way to write freelance is to start a Web site and get enough hits to attract advertising.

Ironically, despite the obvious blood spilled within the industry — the closing of century-and-a-half old papers and organizations that saw their reporters break famous stories — the mood is harsh but not yet defeated.

Let the television shows and bloggers speculate about the end of an era. But last week's Time magazine pointed out that the Seattle Post-Intelligencer's Sunday paper had almost as many readers as nationwide cable news shows have viewers. Any newsman will make the argument that it is not a question of readership. Some newspapers are even seeing increases.

Subscription is merely a minor part of revenue for papers. It's advertising that writes the checks. With a bleeding economy, ads are scarce and ineffective in print, and they are harder to implement into content.

Between the product placement and the advertisements that come on Hulu before your show, television and Internet have seen advertising campaigns within their mediums that don't correspond to print.

The issue that newspapers face is not how to win back public support. It is how to cope with new media and to support itself on a vastly different business plan. The climate of advertising and marketing has changed media with new and more interactive mediums, making old styles of journalism and media creation obsolete.

It is the role of newspapers that cannot be made obsolete, as they have distinctive qualities that no other mediums have. The more recently successful papers have been the community papers, offering local and specified content that readers can't find in USA Today or the New York Times.

The large-scale business model of the newspaper industry has seemed to fail, and in order to protect print journalism, some things need to be rethought.

Here's a big one: The role of online content against print stories has conflicted every newspaper. The online option offers itself better to new and more effective forms of advertisements, via videos and non-print ads. Blogs and multimedia content can be offered to attract viewers and advertisers, while the print version keeps its role as a source of classic journalism.

The growth of readership and credibility of community newspapers has cracked the big business, Rupert Murdoch style of media. Independent media has seen sharp increases over the years, accelerated by the Internet.

Now, people can create the media they want to see and are challenging the failures of the professional world.

All of this is accented by the economic landscape the world now faces. Obviously, all business has to be rethought.

That does not mean that the newspaper is headed for extinction. If anything it is moving toward its peak, where it can offer material less in the interest of corporations and more for its readers, and it can expand its revenue possibilities with new business concepts and more effective budgets.

It is a matter of convergence, and all it takes is foresight and a little risk to shape the new era of media and journalism.



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Obama's sound and fury

Public appearances signify nothing without action

Last Tuesday, President Obama made a mistake many Americans found unforgivable: He held a primetime news conference during Motown week on American Idol. OK, maybe only I felt that way.

Still, the president has been making campaign-style appearances throughout the media that are impossible to miss.

From filling out his NCAA basketball brackets, proudly predicting the North Carolina

Tar Heels the next national champions on ESPN, to making off-the-cuff gaffs with Jay Leno about his Special Olympics-level bowling skills, Obama has been keeping his calm, charming likeness in the American consciousness.

Coverage has gotten so extreme that the media carried on a discussion as to whether or not Michelle Obama's bare arms during the State of the Union address were appropriate. To be clear, this isn't a discussion of her second amendment rights but rather the constitutionality of her sleeveless dresses.

Will America get too much of Obama-mania? His appearances are all in an effort to sell to America his economic recovery plan. But "Barack"et-o-logy, chats with Jay Leno and Twittering come at a price.

The campaign is over. America needs the president to shut off the Teleprompter and convince America he is burning the midnight oil to get us out of this financial crisis.

Rasmussen Reports' polling concluded his latest primetime news conference did not sway Americans more in favor of his economic plan. Other reputable polling data concludes that while Obama's popularity

remains high, many Americans are still uncertain about his economic policies.

In fact, his overexposure leads some to have unrealistic expectations about what Obama can accomplish in such a short time.

Truly, part of what attracted many Americans, including myself, to Obama was his ability to communicate with the public using new media effectively. While his opponent fumbled with technology after admitting he had in recent years just learned the art of e-mail, Obama's casual dedication to his Blackberry showed him to be a modern president.

One famous master of new technology in his time was President Franklin D. Roosevelt. His famous "fireside chats," or radio broadcasts, reassured a struggling public throughout the Great Depression, boldening the country's resolve to overcome the economic turmoil. Speaking directly to the American people is essential for a president, and Obama is right to do so.

Sometimes we think that Roosevelt conducted his fireside chats weekly. But in 12 years in office, Roosevelt conducted only 30 fireside chats. By spacing out broadcasts, the public earnestly hung on to his confident words.

Obama would do well to follow Roosevelt's example. The fact remains that Obama is still widely popular with a majority of Americans, and they genuinely hope for his success.

Back in the 1930s, Roosevelt's fireside chats were not all that made the New Deal programs popular. More important was the fact that Americans could see Roosevelt's plans in action.

It then will not be Obama's oratory skills that determine his legacy. America will ultimately remember his ambitious plan's failure or success. Obama has a four-year term in office. Even his most ardent followers will grow weary of his speeches if they are not coupled with tangible results.



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