



Recalling a Manufactured Crisis

President Obama's Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, uttered the increasingly famous dictum: "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste." In other words, a wise leader should take advantage of any dire situation to promote his agenda. The crisis known as 9/11 brought us the Patriot Act, something waiting for an event to "justify" its numerous attacks on liberty. The Pearl Harbor crisis gave President Roosevelt justification to send our nation into World War II, something he had been itching to do for many months.

But what if no crisis occurs? What happens when one's agenda calls for some new government program and there's no crisis to spur its creation? The answer: Create one, even lie and suppress facts to make it seem real. A manufactured crisis occurred in 1957 — the Soviet launch of *Sputnik*. President Obama's mention of it during his January 25 State of the Union address jogged the memory. He stated:

Half a century ago, when the Soviets beat us into space with the launch of a satellite called *Sputnik*, we had no idea how we would beat them to the moon. The science wasn't even there yet. NASA didn't exist. But after investing in better research and education, we didn't just surpass the Soviets; we unleashed a wave of innovation that created new industries and millions of new jobs.

Because of *Sputnik*, the American people were jolted into believing that the Soviets were ahead of us in science and military capability. Talk about a crisis! Worldwide, our nation was immediately considered second-rate. We were told there was a desperate need for a crash program to regain superiority over the USSR. A crash program ensued and its results, as predicted immediately by John Birch Society founder Robert Welch, included higher taxes, more government spending, expanded growth of the federal government, and the start of federal aid to and control over education.

But there's more to the story.

General James Gavin had retired from the U.S. Army by 1966. He had been the military commander of our nation's infant space program based in Huntsville, Alabama. In a December 1, 1966 speech delivered to the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, he said that the team of American scientists he led "had the capability of orbiting a satellite" more than a year before *Sputnik*. He told of making "several entreaties to the Department of Defense seeking authority" to launch one but was "given a written order forbidding me to do so." Gavin also noted that the Soviet plan to orbit a satellite was known well before they launched *Sputnik*. But his repeated requests to his superiors to allow the United States to be first in accomplishing the feat "were received with skepticism if not ridicule."

We don't know whether President Obama and his speech writers know that the *Sputnik* incident was a created crisis. In his State of the Union address, however, he mentioned that the 1957 event prompted the federal government into "investing in better research and education." Consider what happened just in education, where there is no constitutional authorization for federal involvement. The *Sputnik* crisis started the federal government shoveling taxpayer funds into education. The stated goal was to improve



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education, but the obviously intended result saw the federal government gain control over the nation's schools.

Here we are more than half a century later and the best that can be said about the federal government's role in education is that it is a colossal failure. Surveys consistently report that U.S. students are performing poorly. Reading proficiency is so abysmal that remedial instruction is given to many college entrants, math and science test results place U.S. students well below counterparts from other nations, and much of the instruction about our nation's history given at every level is either incomplete or downright false.

As far back as 1983, the federally funded National Commission on Excellence in Education published findings in a report entitled "A Nation At Risk." It stated that the U.S. education system was producing "a tide of mediocrity" in subject after subject. The report's conclusion stated, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

If the federal government and its long list of busy-work requirements were removed from education, and the people in the cities and towns across the nation again exercised their rightful influence over the schools they pay for, this horrifying situation would be reversed in short order. The Department of Education, the eventual result of a manufactured crisis, should be abolished. And whenever our leaders claim a need for more power because of some new crisis, skepticism should rule the day.



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