

# Right-wing and liberal media fawn over Obama speech

Patrick Martin  
15 January 2011

President Obama's Wednesday night speech at a memorial service for the victims of the Tucson massacre has been hailed by all sections of the corporate-controlled media, both liberal and conservative. Its main theme—opposing any political analysis of the attempted assassination of Democratic Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords—has become the official line.

The right-wing media celebrated the Obama speech because he whitewashed the role of the political right in providing the ideological impulse for the mentally disturbed gunman, 22-year-old Jared Lee Loughner. The liberals celebrated the Obama speech because they fear nothing more than provoking the right wing and sense that any serious examination of the shooting rampage would lay bare the putrefaction of American capitalism itself.

Both sides of the political establishment agreed that Obama's remarks should close the door on any further discussion over the political nature of the January 8 attack, the first attempted killing of a US representative on American soil in at least 50 years.

Press accounts of the political reaction to the Obama speech cited favorable comments from a host of prominent Republicans: former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, former Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, Arizona Senator Jon Kyl, former presidential candidate and ultra-right pundit Patrick Buchanan, and many others.

The ultra-right pundits were equally effusive. A writer for the *National Review* declared, "Obama has never been more presidential than he was tonight." Neoconservative John Podhoretz of Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* called the speech "a pitch-perfect response to the disgusting national political debate over the past couple of days."

*Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer called the speech a "remarkable display of oratory and of oratorical skill, both in terms of the tone and the content."

Another right-wing *Washington Post* contributor, Jennifer Rubin, devoted her column to a lengthy citation from Obama's speech, in which he invoked religion to preempt any serious analysis of the Tucson massacre.

"'Scripture tells us that there is evil in the world, and that terrible things happen for reasons that defy human understanding,' he said, then quoting the Book of Job, and continuing, 'Bad things happen, and we must guard against simple explanations in the aftermath.'"

Rubin concluded: "It was pretty close to a rebuke to his liberal supporters. He was telling them, and everyone, that the entire process of casting blame for a lunatic's crime is foolhardy and simply wrong. He deserves credit for that. This sounded like much of what I and others have been writing since Saturday."

In the *Wall Street Journal*, columnist Peggy Noonan, a former speechwriter for President Ronald Reagan, said that Obama's speech "reminded me, in fact, of part of the speech Ronald Reagan gave when he first announced for the presidency..."

Noonan cited the same passage quoted by Rubin, declaring, "In saying this, the president took the air out of all the accusations and counteraccusations. By the end of the speech they were yesterday's story."

As Rubin and Noonan demonstrate, the praise from these spokesmen of the right was clearly mixed with a sense of relief that the Obama speech marked an end to any effort to hold them morally or politically responsible for the conceptions that animated the assassin.

Loughner's Internet postings include political notions

that echo those of Glenn Beck (an obsession with gold and silver backing for currency), the Tea Party (hostility to the post-Civil War amendments to the US Constitution), and various Patriot and anti-immigrant groups (his musings on English grammar and language).

Noonan also placed the Obama speech in its broader political context, noting that after his surrender on extending the Bush tax cuts for the rich and the appointment of millionaire banker William Daley as White House chief of staff, “the Tucson speech marks the third time since the election that the president has in effect reached toward the center.”

Liberal pundits were equally effusive, but sought to conceal the real content of Obama’s speech and his repudiation of those liberals who have criticized the vitriolic attacks and incitements to violence by talk radio pundits and Republican politicians.

Glenn Thrush of *Politico.com* turned on the purple prose, describing Obama as “an electrifying campaign performer who is finally mastering the intimate, idiosyncratic language of the American presidency: a passionate and pared-down delivery that grounded his usual soaring rhetoric with expressions of straightforward patriotism, neighborly decency and raw grief.”

Liberal columnist Eugene Robinson wrote in the *Washington Post*: “Listening to Obama’s speech brought back memories of Obama the candidate, a mesmerizing orator with the power to summon visions of a better America. He seemed almost to transcend politics.”

Gail Collins of the *New York Times* gushed, “Maybe President Obama was saving the magic for a time when we really needed it.”

Perhaps the most absurd description came from Jonathan Freedland in the liberal British newspaper, the *Guardian*, who wrote, “[T]he address he gave at last night’s memorial service for the victims of the Arizona shootings was elegiac, heartfelt and deeply moving. It both rose to the moment and transcended it: after days of noise and rancor, he carved out a moment of calm.”

Like the conservative commentators, Freedland noted that Obama “spoke less like a politician than a pastor or priest,” and like them, he hailed the substitution of religious blather for a political assessment: “This is part of the US presidential job description that sets the

office apart: more than mere head of government, an American president is required to be almost a spiritual leader to his nation.”

Actually, the First Amendment of the US Constitution lays down the separation of church and state as one of the most fundamental principles of American politics. It is only in the last few decades, a period of triumphant political reaction, that the president-as-teleevangelist has become a regular practice.

Several liberal media commentaries deliberately disguised the political significance of Obama’s speech, which was an abject surrender to the arrogant demands of the ultra-right that there should be no accountability for the Tucson events.

E. J. Dionne of the *Washington Post* claimed that Obama “pointedly took no sides on the controversy over the role of vitriolic politics in the tragedy.” This is flatly untrue, and the columnist knows it. Obama provided an amnesty for the right and effectively repudiated his own liberal supporters.

Even more duplicitous was the language of the *New York Times* editorial on the Tucson speech, which claimed: “Mr. Obama called on ideological campaigners to stop vilifying their opponents... It was important that Mr. Obama transcend the debate about whose partisanship has been excessive and whose words have sown the most division and dread.”

Obama, however, did not “transcend” this debate. He attempted to shut it down, and in so doing rendered a great political service to the ultra-right.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**