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## Mayor's Race Could Aid Obama

WASHINGTON—President Barack Obama has seen better days. But it would be a mistake to conclude that he can't win re-election, despite his dismal poll numbers.

At the moment, the president is quickly discovering that for every foreign and domestic policy issue, there can be a political consequence. In the Middle East, he seeks to craft a policy fair to both sides, but that leads to attacks at home that he has abandoned Israel. He tries to act responsibly and reduce the federal budget deficit, but that looks like “selling out” to many who are in his Democratic base and still reeling from the recession.

Obama's core political problem, however, results from failure to establish himself as a strong leader, one willing to fight aggressively for what's best for the country rather than taking his scholarly, deliberate approach. What Americans want is not necessarily a president who is always right but someone who stands and fights for them. They want a gut feeling that the president is on their side, that he understand struggles they face to keep or find jobs, and not to lose the home facing foreclosure.

This president's decline certainly seems based much more on how people “feel” about their leader than his specific policies. He needs to get out of the White House to Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, West Virginia and New Mexico. He needs to prove that he is not aloof and understands challenges that millions of Americans, especially those in the heartland, face every day. And, when he's on the grand stage in Washington, he must be the leader that Americans thought they were electing.

### AMERICA'S WIRE

Craig Kirby

The president can't make this comeback by himself. He needs a team that understands the pulse of the country. How could his advisers possibly think that unveiling a deficit-cutting plan that results in headlines about tax increases would be a wise political move? Instead, how about a headline say-

black mayor by defeating a Tea Party candidate last May. Brown was the first Democrat in 20 years to sit in the Jacksonville mayor's office.

One can only conclude that extremist positions promoted by the Tea Party were too outrageous for even Jacksonville's conservative electorate.

The late Lee Atwater, architect of Republican victories in the 1980s, used to court the South assiduously as a GOP electoral base. But at the same time, he

als to win the Democratic presidential nominations in 1984 and 1988, respectively.

In his mayoral campaign, Brown also won by displaying savvy political skills. These are traits that he surely learned as a close ally of Ronald H. Brown (no relation), the former secretary of commerce and Democratic National Committee chairman who led the party's rebirth that resulted in Bill Clinton's presidential victory in 1992. Alvin Brown was seen as more of a centrist than a liberal. He opposed tax increases and gained key financial support from leading Republican fundraisers. He built a broad coalition in Jacksonville, much as Ron Brown had done two decades ago for the Democratic Party.

Most important, Alvin Brown was able to gain support from whites while aggressively energizing a base of African-Americans. In fact, one of the campaign's strategies was to significantly increase the black turnout, which it accomplished.

Brown also gave voters reasons to like him. He came across as energetic, aggressive and confident yet humble, hardworking and the type of person with values who was at ease joining anyone for a beer, a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.

As unusual as it may sound, perhaps the president of the United States could learn lessons about politics and personality from the new mayor of Jacksonville.

*Craig Kirby is a Washington-based political consultant, who managed Alvin Brown's mayoral campaign and was its chief strategist.*

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ing that the president won't allow working families to lose their homes to foreclosures and that he vows to continue the federal role in helping Americans purchase homes?

That would be leadership and smart politics.

Republicans shouldn't start victory celebrations just yet. Election results in Jacksonville, Fla., this spring may have been overlooked in Washington but may be a good barometer for the national electorate.

Florida's largest city is in a conservative region that traditionally tilts heavily toward the GOP. Yet an African-American, Alvin Brown became the city's first

would caution privately that a backlash would occur if this powerful base were perceived as driving national policy for the Republican Party, which needed themes that could also win voters in other parts of the country.

Brown's victory certainly raises questions of whether the GOP's presidential candidates can run viable general election campaigns after aggressively courting the Tea Party during the party's nomination process. The scenario seems to mirror presidential politics in the 1980s when Vice President Walter F. Mondale and Massachusetts Gov. Michael S. Dukakis were dismal general election candidates after wooing liber-

## Saltzman: Why Scrutinize Equity Spending?

I'm pleased, in fact, excited really, that our long-serving Portland City Commissioner Saltzman, has now declared that he's going to “watch very closely” the expenditures from city coffers. It's about time, and too bad, only occurred on Sept. 21, at the Portland City Council's historic vote on equity.

I direct a social justice foundation that has been watching and supporting Oregonians working at the grassroots level, that move community justice issues to the forefront, that develop and enhance the youth and adult leadership in communities of color; that work for racial and economic justice, promoting environmental health, and seeking peace, not war. As a result, MRG Foundation has awarded \$12 million in funding over 35 years, so we know a lot about watching and listening; that's how we all learn from the people and communities that are speaking. So, my concern when I heard Commissioner Saltzman suddenly remind us that he's watching was, what had he been doing the other times?

My problem wasn't as much with his stern facade and statements, although I, too, found it interestingly-timed, and condescending. No, I was struck by the

### GUEST COLUMN

Sharon Gary-Smith

fact that he'd apparently just arrived at this position of watchfulness. If watching closely and expecting results is his mantra, what happened to that attention, given his limited responses while listening to the request for tens of millions of dollars for a new, world class Sustainability Center?

about how their proposed Sustainability Center would promote ‘social equity’ and ‘accessibility.’ They had aspirations of higher diversity numbers among vendors and contractors than have been achieved; they were not so clear when pressed to explain how the city's 50 percent contribution would only yield 25 percent ownership.

They were not so surprising in their lack of specifics about that; or when they offered only poten-

would be as sweet as the sell, Saltzman merely smiled in his familiar way.

So, I was interested at his challenging tones, the rebuke he chose to center on proponents of the Office of Equity & Human Relations, including his colleagues on the Council. Perhaps he hadn't imagined that many Portlanders believed it was time that a city that has repeatedly danced to private developers, and to professional sports, would be called to consider all of us. Maybe Saltzman wasn't aware that a city that's repeatedly overspent on expensive private ventures - including an expensive ‘train’ from OHSU's South Waterfront up to Pill Hill, could be challenged to put \$1 million dollars (only one year guaranteed) toward ensuring equity in all services and departments.

Maybe he didn't imagine there was a real need to centralize processes, procedures and practices, and pay attention to ensuring the development, management, monitoring and measurement of openness, accessibility, equity and opportunity for all, not just the traditional beneficiaries. My momma used to remind us that ‘when you point a finger at others, you're pointing three at yourself.’ We're all watching, Commissioner.

My problem wasn't as much with his stern facade and statements, although I, too, found it interestingly-timed, and condescending

That's the presentation that proceeded — and ran one-half hour overtime into the time-certain OEHR vote.

Perhaps he was lulled because that presentation - and presenters - looked so familiar; primarily European men in suits, including PSU's President; and an Intel executive, a PCC woman administrator, among others. They were big on rhetoric and ‘hopefulness’

tial scenarios about how those high square footage costs would attract diverse ‘space owners’ or increased City ownership over 30 years. Hmm, Commissioner, now that appears to be a place for watchfulness. Even when his colleague, Commissioner Nick Fish, raised questions about the projects potential for intergenerational debt and the possibility of 30 years of not knowing whether the payoff