

## Principles

I'm [Adam Klugman](#) and you are listening to [AM 620 KPOJ](#), Portland's only Progressive Talk Station. The numbers here are 1-866-452-060, (503) 248-0620 or #620 on your AT&T wireless phone.

If you've listened to this show for any length of time you understand that this isn't really news talk radio show. I mean sure, I like to talk about what is happening in the world, but frankly I don't want this to be a show where I carve of the raw meat of the daily news and throw it out uncooked.

There's enough of that in the media and sometimes I think when we focus too much on the minute of political events, it takes the form of gossip. "He said, she said, he did, she did..." And it becomes a kind of hypnotic trance, like a bad reality show following the last days of a crumbling empire.

Because in the end, it isn't about the who they are and what they did. It's about who we are and about what *we* do. So I'm gonna just keep doing that...

Last week on the show I laid out a bold progressive call to action for the values I stand for, and the kind of people and the collective change of mind and hearts I think it will take to lead this country and our world in an entirely new direction.

I feel strongly about that stand because I believe that it is principle and not policy that needs to come first. I believe that understanding the principles we stand on is what makes truly progressive policies possible.

Principles first. And while many people accuse me of being an idealistic fool for this belief, I actually think it is the most practical position we can take. Because it is principles that guide us, they are the star in the North sky that remind us not only who we are, but where to focus our attention, where we need to take a stand in the world, and continually help us locate our backbone in case of an emergency. And if you haven't noticed, America is in a state of emergency.

But *principles* have gone out of style in recent years, especially for us as democrats.

Barack Obama promised us principled change as a candidate, but as soon he became president, it seems he abandoned those principles in the name of something he believes is compromise, but which is not compromise at all but something much worse. Because ever since Clinton it seems that taking a stand for what we truly believe in has taken a back seat to what is often passed of as "practical." Or "possible." Or politically feasible. And it almost always leads us further away from ourselves and deeper into disaster.

The best example I can think of in recent time is the way [Barack Obama](#) handled the whole health care debacle. As a candidate he said he believed that a [Single Payer system](#) was the best way to reform health care crisis in this country but promised that if he were to become president that he wouldn't push for it because it wasn't politically feasible.

And he kept his promise, didn't he? Now whether you agree with his assessment or not, there seems to me to be something missing from the set up here. The initial conditions of his equation preclude something I think is essential when crafting any kind of political policy: it is right?

Is guaranteeing cradle-to-grave health care for every citizen in this country the right thing to do? Is removing profit from health care the morally superior position? And should private companies make money from the illness of our citizens?

I think Obama knows the answer to that question, but he had a series of political calculations to make, not the least of which was the fact that he took more contributions from the Health insurance industry than any other candidate, including [Hilary Clinton](#) and [John McCain](#). What would those insurance companies say if he suddenly turned around and told them they were out of business? Well, the first thing they would have done is spend millions and millions of dollars to destroy his presidency and make sure he didn't get elected in 2012 - Not very practical.

So why not move a little, Obama thinks? Why not start with a public option, which is close enough, but still keeps my faustian comrades in business? Ok, well the public option isn't going to fly in Congress, so why not remove the public option and just take a stand for just a few of the provisions that really matter, like pre-existing conditions and mandates, and let the states pass their own single payer bills? After all, that's how they did it Canada - One province at a time.

Oh! but wait, if we do that, then states will start passing these bills like crazy, so let's make it illegal for states to implement a single payer plan until 2017. That outta give everyone plenty of time to make piles of money and I'll be out of office by then, even if I get elected to a second term! I mean, so what that 47,000 people a year die from being uninsured...this the best I can do. This is what is practical. This is what is politically feasible-an incrementally amended health care system that leaves a predatory health insurance industry firmly in control?

Ok. That ought to get them off my back and make some powerful friends.

Only it didn't.

President Obama didn't make any friends. Because even that incremental change is weakening because as the entire affordable Care Act is going to be challenged at the supreme court on the one leg it had left: the constitutionality of mandates. And if it gets over turned on the basis of that, say goodbye to [Medicare](#) and [Social Security](#) because these, too, are federally mandated insurance programs that will have a supreme court precedent declaring them illegal. At that point, the pigs will most definitely be on the wing with a series of lawsuits striking down every entitlement program on the books.

Do you see where I am going with this? There's a big difference between compromise and accommodation. In his mind, President Obama was compromising, but he wasn't. He was accommodating and there is nothing more toxic to the soul, whether it is the soul of a human being or the soul of a country, than accommodation. Because accommodation is about giving up, not giving in.

Accommodation is about acquiescence, it's about surrendering our convictions, about abandoning our principles, and when we do that we are without a moral compass, without a true north to guide our decisions, and constantly under siege from the unintended consequences of our inability to take bold stands for the ideals that define us. Because when we continually surrender our principles in the name of what is "realistic" and "feasible" we get out of practice.

We become morally ambiguous to ourselves. And then it's easier the next time to accommodate because we are less clear about where we stand. Add to the that the fact that the zeitgeist of our society, the ideological climate, is continually attacked by a well-oiled,

right wing propaganda machine and we, on the left, are reduced to an inarticulate, political movement left battling shame and confusion and obsolescence in a way that leaves us politically inert.

(\*I mean, I'm all for compromise when you have an honest broker on the other side of the negotiation that wants the highest good for all but simply has a difference of opinion on how to get there. But that is not what we have on the other side of the negotiation in this country. We have corporately owned shills who, by the way, are able to stand on principle: the principle of greed. The principle of self-interest. And they do this so well that even when we have majorities in both houses and the White House, we still can't manage to pass legislation that represents bold, principled stands for what is right. )

So here's what I want to do this hour. I want us to start rebuilding the left from the principles that guide us. I want you to call in and tell me why you are a liberal or progressive or a democrat or whatever you feel comfortable calling yourself. What are the principles that guide your political beliefs and your life?

And I want us all to make it personal. Because I've said it before and I'll keep saying it until we all get it. The center of power is with the individual. We must be able to articulate our beliefs to ourselves first in away that connects emotionally, not just to other people but also to ourselves. Knowing how we feel, refining the ideals upon which we stand as individuals, identifying those principles that we can never surrender, and communicating them clearly and without apology or reticence, will radiate out toward collective in a way that defines and continually redefines who we are as a movement. It's starts with you.

So what does being a progressive mean to you? How do define liberal? What are the principles that guide you and how would those principle translate into policies? And here's an even bigger question-do you think there is anything to gained by running a primary challenger to this president, who has forgotten what means to lead on principle, solely for the purpose of launching our ideals and principles back into the political market place? And if there was to be a primary challenger to this president...who do you think it should be? Who is qualified? I have some thoughts...

We'll be right back.  
You're listening to “[Mad as Hell in America,](#)” with [Adam Klugman](#) on [KPOJ](#).

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