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Henninger: Obama's Colossal Politics

His laws are so big there are parts no one has ever seen.



By DANIEL HENNINGER

Who wouldn't want to live in Washington? It's a wonderful world, a place where every problem of life can be reduced to just two words. Gun control. Immigration reform. Climate control. The deficit, which of course can be solved in two words: a "balanced approach." Things so hard haven't been so simple since Tinker Bell taught children to fly in "Peter Pan," also with two words—pixie dust.

Gun control stands out. After the Newtown killings in December, President [Obama](#) channeled a national gun-control law through [Joe Biden](#). There was no surprise that he would do so. "If there's just one life that can be saved," Mr. Obama said Monday in Minnesota, using standard Washington risk-benefit analysis, "then we have an obligation to try it."

And so the president will spread gun-control across the land. But consider the discrepancy between the Washington lawmakers and the nation receiving their unitary solutions. Congress has 535 members who work inside the Capitol Building, which you may notice is shaped like a bubble. The rest of the United States consists of 313.9 million individuals spread across a 50-state land mass of more than 9.6 million square miles.

No matter. Mr. Obama's Washington will try to write a gun law that applies in the same way everywhere for each of the

nearly 314 million Americans.



David Klein

Occasionally Washington looks back at what it has done. In 1993, Congress passed the Brady Handgun Violence Protection Act, which created a national background-check system and a list of people forbidden to own a gun: felons, the mentally ill, persons who committed a domestic-violence misdemeanor, drug addicts and the dishonorably discharged. A year later, Congress passed the Federal Assault Weapons Ban, prohibiting 19 models of semi-automatic assault weapons and limiting ammunition magazines to 10 rounds. In other words, they did then what we intend to do again now.

The Brady Law remains in force, but the Assault Weapons Ban expired in 2004. That year, the government formed a panel of specialists at the National Research Council to assess the effects of these gun-control efforts. Its conclusion was that gun-control was a whimper. It said the data on guns and violence "are too weak to support unambiguous conclusions or strong policy statements."

What they said next is even more pertinent: "Drawing causal inferences is always complicated and, in the behavioral and social sciences, fraught with uncertainty." Let's rephrase that. When serious scientists try to solve a problem, they ask, What works? When Washington takes on a problem, it says, Why not?

Legislative grandiosity predates the Obama presidency. But it has achieved its apotheosis in the past four years. Barack Obama's politics aren't just large. They're colossal. His laws are so big there are parts of them no one has ever seen.

Here's a Washington Post summary this week of a story on the Affordable Care Act: "Signing up an estimated 30 million uninsured Americans for coverage under the health-care law is shaping up to be, if not a bureaucratic nightmare, at the very least a daunting task." And we're only in the foothills of Mount ObamaCare.

At the July 2010 signing ceremony for the Dodd-Frank law's 2,300 pages, Mr. Obama announced: "It provides certainty to everybody, from bankers to farmers to business owners to consumers." That's right, universal certainty. Still, the massive law's iconic centerpiece, the Volcker Rule, doesn't exist. And what's the one word seen nonstop after Dodd-Frank in *The Wall Street Journal*? *Un*-certainty.

Conservatives predictably object to all this, but one has to ask: How did liberals, especially on the left and without exception, become such mute footmen for Barack Obama's faceless conglomerate politics?

Years back, a popular notion among liberal thinkers was something called "imperial overstretch." This was the idea that

America's far-flung foreign-policy commitments could bankrupt the country. Mr. Obama believes this, and before Chuck Hagel started talking the other day, he was supposed to explain it. In his State of the Union speech next Tuesday, Mr. Obama will say again that Washington, after Iraq and Afghanistan, needs to "invest" at home. But isn't the federalization of pretty much everything in a diverse country like the U.S. just another exercise in imperial overstretch?

In their own lives, the men and women of the left are all about keeping things simple. Back in the '70s, they were early adopters of E.F. Schumacher's "Small Is Beautiful." Today the watchwords are "handcrafted" and "artisanal." How about some artisanal government?

Don't worry, we get it. This is politics, ergo the goal is to acquire and exercise colossal power, at least for the pros at the top of the Democratic food chain. Still, the evidence piles up daily that what Barack Obama is producing with his countrywide "investments" is a blob, a morass, a mess. In the 2012 presidential election, nearly 66 million people voted for Barack Obama. We're waiting for one Democrat in Congress to express doubt in the president's pixie dust.

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