

# Davy Crockett and the SOCKDOLAGER

*Understanding the limitations of Congress. By Tim Findley*

In the first summer after his election to Congress in 1826, Davy Crockett set off on a ride around his Tennessee district. The already legendary frontiersman wasn't worried about it, but he wanted to firm up support among his friends for re-election. So he admitted later he was surprised when a farmer only reluctantly stopped his plow to tell Crockett he had voted for him once, but wouldn't be doing so again. His reason was even more surprising. It had nothing to do with tariffs and trade or even directly taxes. Farmer Horatio Bunce resented Crockett's vote to award \$20,000 to families displaced in a Georgetown (D.C.) fire, a perfectly humanitarian gesture that Crockett hardly hesitated to make.

"It's not the money," the farmer told him. "It's the principle of the thing. Where do you find in the Constitution any authority to give away the public money in charity?"

A "sockdolager" Crockett described it as he found himself agreeing more and more with the farmer's argument that if Congress has "the liberty to give to any and everything you may believe, or profess to believe, is a charity, and to any amount you may think proper, you will very easily perceive what a wide door this would open for fraud and corruption and favoritism, on the one hand, and for robbing the people on the other."

Farmer Bunce's argument so squarely awakened Crockett to recognizing the limitations of Congress that he campaigned for his next election as a strict adherent to the Constitution and a representative who never again voted to make individual awards from the federal treasury.

Maybe Barney Frank (D-MA) might lately have been skating around his Boston suburbs district unconcerned about how his

economy-killing association with Fannie Mae might put him out, and Harry Reid (D-NV) can't find the bottom to his Vegas-fed campaign chest even after already dumping \$10



million by early June just to be sure he can run against "the darling of the Tea Parties," and Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) might have clicked her glass slippers across a sidewalk on her way to a D.C. fund-raiser where some folks howled for subsidizing home health care, but need only attend a couple of coffees (never tea) in her own Pacific Heights neighborhood to be reassured. None of them seemed worried. Few, in fact, of the 435 representatives and 36 senators up for re-election this year would recognize a Sockdolager from a loud-mouthed heckler.

In an age when campaigning for office is much more like pandering for power, they

just don't get it, and shouting at them will only get you arrested. But something even Davy Crockett wouldn't have a word for is boiling up from the bottom and might just swamp the polls. It is not an oil spill.

While he was still a senator, John F. Kennedy collaborated with Theodore Sorensen to write the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Profiles In Courage." In his foreword, Kennedy acknowledged that the arrogance of presumed power was nothing new in American politics. "The virus of Potomac Fever, which rages everywhere in Washington, breeds nowhere in more virulent form than on the Senate floor. The prospect of forced retirement from 'the most exclusive club in the world' can cause even the most courageous politician serious lack of sleep."

No other president in a mere thousand days in office has inspired more in his image than Kennedy, yet the weaknesses in lack of character, ambivalence to common wisdom, and expression of personal avarice that JFK noted in contrast to the relative few with integrity and courage prevailed even in his time of the "best and brightest." Putting it off this time as just another swing from liberal to conservative public opinion won't quite get it either. Davy Crockett, for example, who some associate with a "right wing" respect for the Constitution, did finally lose his last bid for re-election by fiercely opposing Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act.

But it has been 50 years since Kennedy, with many posers trying to reclaim "Camelot" since. During that time many have noticed the long slide past integrity, beyond respect for the common man except in cynical campaign gestures, further and further into the swamp of the Potomac where only those infected have the privilege, not always the blessing, to speak for the rest.

As a nation, we have become a standing superpower, muscle-bound, with a flabby and sour gut making it ineffective at achieving even unity in its own strength. Our new lead-

ers tour the world, apologizing even to our enemies, expressing shame for our success and embarrassment for the achievements of history's longest standing free society. In the name of all of us, leaders we hardly even seem to know suggest not pride in America, but regret for history they have not even read. Tyrants and corrupt leaders of nations our aid rescued from oppression, poverty, and despair receive standing ovations from our own Congress when they blame American wealth for their problems. Our leaders drop their heads like captive criminals and accept accusations without evidence that our very existence is a mortal threat to the planet itself.

We say we are rich, but we are poorer than we have been in nearly a century. We say we are the land of liberty and freedom while politicians eager to establish their personal legacy slowly strip away our choices. We say we are too powerful to lose against self-proclaimed enemies who infiltrate our schools and destroy our traditional beliefs. To save a frog, our bureaucracies will gladly destroy a farm, but we are not hungry. Not yet. Our own president and his first lady show Memorial Day respect for those who sacrificed their lives by placing their left hands on their chests. A blunder no chief executive should be expected to make? Or a subtle message? We say we have allies and friends, but we leave them hanging like surrogate stooges for attacks aimed ultimately at us. "God Bless America?" the president's former pastor is heard to ask, then answer with a louder shout, "God *damn* America!" And the whole world seems to be laughing.

Who in that fog off the Potomac really speaks for us? Is it their courage that drives their principles beyond undeniable public opinion? Or is it their cowardice?

"Profiles In Courage" quotes a letter from a California congressman in 1934 to one of his constituents: "One of the countless drawbacks of being in Congress is that I am compelled to receive impertinent letters from a jackass like you in which you say I promised to have the Sierra Madre mountains reforested and I have been in Congress two months and haven't done it. Will you please take two running jumps and go to hell."

Insulting as that is, how many of us would favor getting some response like that instead of the customary (and usually off the point) form letters sent out from congressional offices. Aside from how they might choose to orchestrate it, we have no reliable access to

our representatives in Congress. They are protected from the public like pregnant pandas, and many of them make no secret of their contempt for "lower class" citizens like Sarah Palin and the Tea Party Movement in general. Too often their own social bigotry shows in what seems more like a contest between Nashville and Hollywood.

The media tell us elections aren't won with votes anymore, they're won with money. Elected representatives spend as much as half their time in office doing nothing else than begging or bargaining for more contributions. Winning in the Senate takes about \$2 million. In the House it's a bargain \$500,000 in some districts. One "average" American shill of some kind still had to come up with \$10,500 just to file for a primary run in South Carolina, then didn't campaign at all. But he still won. The media couldn't believe it. Somebody must pay, and some deals must be made, somewhere.

## A "sockdolager" is something like an early winter day when you stroll too far out on the ice and begin to hear it crack.

That is a lot of what Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi does. She's been a Democrat Party fund-raiser since she learned the art from her father, a political boss of Baltimore, Md. Now, if she wants to hold the majority in Congress, it's expected she'll help her friends find the dough. One more reason why legislation is made by debts. In Chicago, they used to call it extortion. Pelosi will deny that, but she knows that her future with the big gavel depends on helping her friends get elected. Vote out a few Democratic incumbents, and you'll vote Pelosi off the podium.

"Right-wing conspiracy!" shrieked Hillary Clinton when a grassroots movement began against her husband a decade ago. It's similar to the charges of "racism" and "fascism" against the Tea Party Movement today. Actually, the Tea Party is more an assembly of grandmotherly ladies and guys with store-bought suits. But if you look closely, there's a tempest in every cup.

They're not just angry; they are deeply disappointed and worried for their future. Take away their pride, strip away their patriotism, and they start to lose faith in themselves. It is not racism in a culture still welcoming to any legitimate citizen who believes in honest opportunity and freedom. Nor is it ignorance

and greed that resists the intrusion of more and more bureaucrats believing they are social police empowered to control the habits, lifestyles, and means of making a living for anyone not "politically correct."

Don't smoke, don't drive without a helmet or a seat belt, don't salt your food, avoid sugar, and don't even think about bringing your groceries home in a plastic bag—all good social advice that some elected representatives have used to make their reputations by turning them into laws. They *saved* a little owl by banning even limited logging in overgrown forests, and the forests burned out of control. They set about to *rescue* small fish by drying up thousands of acres of farms. They drove out ranching families there for generations by claiming their *hobby* of raising cattle was *ruining* the West. They warned of overpopulation and when the birth rate fell below replacement figures they eagerly advised amnesty for undocumented aliens. The people, by objective numbers, opposed sweeping health-care reform, and they were ignored. Scientists admitted they lied about global warming, but Obamacrats went on anyway planning economy-crippling taxes on fuel consumption. They outsourced jobs and industries, then

borrowed huge amounts of money from potential enemies. To pacify the poor, they provided bargains on new housing, but no new jobs. As a result, banks collapsed and once formidable industries went bankrupt.

Long-standing American standards of journalism are still collapsing, yet we are overwhelmed with information from new technology, too much of it spinning out unreliable data and outright lies. The senior-most White House correspondent is forced to resign at 90 after publicly being heard saying Jews should "get the hell out of Palestine" to an uncredentialed man with a cell-phone video camera. Forget *The Times*, we are all journalists now. And in New York, construction is beginning on a huge new mosque Muslim leaders say will bring Islamic Law to Gotham, while just a block or so away, where the World Trade Center once stood, there remains an open, empty pit, like a hole in the heart of America.

A sockdolager is something like an early winter day when you stroll too far out on the ice and begin to hear it crack. You whap yourself on the forehead and say, "I should have known." Many are still there on the Potomac, unaware they are standing above very deep water. ■