

ONE NIGHT OF INDIGESTION FOR OBAMA

By now you've heard that Obama risked indigestion just days before his inauguration to reach out to the other side.

Barack Obama took the next big step in his Republican charm offensive on Tuesday night, when he dined with several of the nation's most prominent conservative pundits.

The president-elect arrived at the Chevy Chase, Md., home of syndicated columnist George Will shortly after 6:30 p.m., according to a press pool report. Greeting him at the residence were other luminaries of the conservative commentariat, including the Weekly Standard's William Kristol, New York Times columnist David Brooks, and Charles Krauthammer of the Washington Post.

Just two comments about this. First, remember that two out of three of these men sort-of endorsed Obama as the election came to a close (indeed Brooks was a fan from early on). Here's Brooks, enthusing over Obama's self-efficacy in October.

But other candidates are propelled by what some psychologists call self-efficacy, the placid assumption that they can handle whatever the future throws at them. Candidates in this mold, most heroically F.D.R. and Ronald Reagan, are driven upward by a desire to realize some capacity in their nature. They rise with an unshakable serenity that is inexplicable to their critics and infuriating to their foes.

Obama has the biography of the first group but the personality of the second. He grew up with an absent father and a peripatetic mother. "I learned long ago to distrust my childhood," he wrote in "Dreams From My Father." This is supposed to produce a politician with gaping personal needs and hidden wounds.

But over the past two years, Obama has never shown evidence of that. Instead, he has shown the same untroubled self-confidence day after day.

Here's Will, attacking the Republican ticket's shared inability to think with complexity, in October.

Palin may be an inveterate simplifier; McCain has a history of reducing controversies to cartoons. A Republican financial expert recalls attending a dinner with McCain for the purpose of discussing with him domestic and international financial complexities that clearly did not fascinate the senator. As the dinner ended, McCain's question for his briefer was: "So, who is the villain?"

McCain revived a familiar villain – "huge amounts" of political money – when Barack Obama announced that he had received contributions of \$150 million in September. "The dam is broken," said McCain, whose constitutional carelessness involves wanting to multiply impediments to people who want to participate in politics by contributing to candidates – people such as the 632,000 first-time givers to Obama in September.

Why is it virtuous to erect a dam of laws to impede the flow of contributions by which citizens exercise their First Amendment right to political expression?

"We're now going to see," McCain warned, "huge amounts of money coming into political campaigns, and we know history tells us that always leads to scandal." The supposedly inevitable scandal, which supposedly justifies preemptive government restrictions on Americans' freedom to fund the dissemination of political ideas they favor, presumably is that Obama will be pressured to give favors to his September givers. The contributions by the new givers that month averaged \$86.

Given that Kristol played Higgins to Palin's Eliza Doolittle, he couldn't very well endorse Obama. But in November, he tried to repackage Obama's foreign policy as a continuation of Bush's foreign policy.

Second, remember that all three of these men—and especially Kristol and Brooks—are paid propagandists. If, for the sake of one night of indigestion, he can neutralize propagandists that the Noise Machine has invested a lot of money in, all the better.

I wouldn't want to do it. But if Obama's got the intestinal fortitude to dine with these three, more power to him.