

# OBAMA HAS MADE CIVIL LIBERTIES AND FORECLOSURES WORSE

Greg Sargent and Steve Benen have interesting taxonomies of the Democrats who should buck up and clap louder. I think both bring some needed nuance to the discussion. As part of that, both include some kind of category of lefties who oppose Obama to defend important principles. Sargent doesn't limit that category to any one policy issue.

The second group on the left constitutes high-profile commentators, such as Rachel Maddow and Glenn Greenwald, who are mounting a detailed, substantive policy critique of the Obama administration on issues that are important to them. These folks see their role as advocates for a particular policy agenda, and they don't hesitate to whack the White House when it commits what they see as grave policy missteps. For them to hold their fire because the White House wants them to would be an unthinkable betrayal of the role they've carved out for themselves. This is the "professional left" Robert Gibbs sneeringly alluded to – even though Obama himself has said he craves such criticism.

But Benen does (and he cites a Kevin Drum post in the same vein):

Kevin Drum notes, "If you're, say, Glenn Greenwald, I wouldn't expect you to buy Obama's defense at all. All of us have multiple interests, but if your primary concern is with civil liberties and the national security state, then the problem isn't that Obama hasn't done enough, it's that his policies have been

actively damaging. There's just no reason why you should be especially excited about either his administration or the continuation of the Democratic Party in power."

Right. Glenn not only has a legitimate beef, I honestly can't think of anyone who's offered a persuasive argument to counter Glenn's criticism. I don't know, however, how large a group of voters we're talking about that disapproves of the president based primarily (but not exclusively) on concerns over the national security state.

I'd argue that if Glenn's contingent represents one group of the disaffected, the other two general groups of center-left critics are (2) those who believe the president's accomplishments have been inadequate; and (3) those who are struggling badly in this economy, and expected conditions to be better than they are under Obama.

And note that both Benen and Drum make a clear distinction between those (like Glenn, and I assume they'd include me in that camp) have a legitimate gripe, and those who are unhappy with the state of the economy.

I disagree with their argument—that Obama could not really have done much more with the economy—but I think they present it in good faith.

But on one area, their claim that Obama couldn't do more is absolutely false: on foreclosures.

The Administration has had no requirement to get Congress' approval for their HAMP program. They have the money sitting, unused, at Treasury. Yet long after it became clear that HAMP was not only not helping, but was actually making things worse, after it became clear that other restructuring programs were much more successful, the Administration made little more

than tweaks to the program. And then, as the number of people actually harmed by HAMP piled up, they claimed that the program had succeeded because it helped them get away (thus far) with the Extend and Pretend strategy.

But that introduces another problem with the taxonomies that make a distinction between those with a real gripe and those unfairly holding Obama responsible because the economy has not gotten better.

The failure to do something effective to prevent foreclosures—that is, being satisfied that HAMP helped Extend and Pretend rather than making a sustained effort to help actual homeowners stay in their homes—has made the economy worse. That's by no means the biggest cause of the ongoing crappiness of the economy. But it is one cause.

So even if you buy the argument that Obama couldn't have gotten more stimulus passed, even if you forgive Larry Summers for his "insurance policy," and even if you ignore Obama's decision to renominate Helicopter Ben in spite of his unwillingness to do anything about the full employment part of his job description, you still have to give Obama some of the blame for the economy. Middle class homeowners all over the country are seeing their home values continue to fall, and that's something that the Administration could have at least tried to alleviate.

But they didn't.