

What do you mean Obama Hasn't *Done* Anything?

A blow-by-blow breakdown of the young president's first year reveals that today's frustration stems not from a lack of policy so much as a lack of common ground.

Consider the record:

A week before he was sworn in, Obama **jammed** part two of the bank bailout down the throat of his own party — a \$350 billion accomplishment.

Two days after he was sworn in, Obama **banned** the use of "harsh interrogation" and ordered the closing of Guantánamo.

A day later, Obama **reversed** George W. Bush's funding cutoff to overseas family planning organizations — saving millions of lives with the stroke of a pen.

Three days after that, Obama **gave a green light** to the California car-emissions standards that Bush had been blocking for six years — an important step on the road to cleaner air and a cooler planet.

Two weeks after that, Obama **signed** the stimulus bill — a \$787 billion accomplishment.

Ten days after that, Obama formally **announced** America's withdrawal from Iraq.

A week later — we're in early March now — Obama **erased** Bush's decision to restrict federal funding for stem-cell research.

In April and June, Obama **forced** Chrysler and GM into bankruptcy.

In June, Obama **reset** the tone of our relations with the entire Arab world with a single speech — an accomplishment that the Bush administration failed to achieve despite a series of desperate PR moves (anyone remember **Charlotte Beers**?) and a "public diplomacy" budget of **\$1 billion a year**.

Also in June, Obama **unveiled** the "Cash for Clunkers" program, a "socialist" giveaway that reanimated the corpse of our car industry — leading, for example, to the billion-dollar profit that Ford **announced** on Monday.

I haven't even mentioned Sonia Sotomayor, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the order to release the torture memos, Obama's push for charter schools, his \$288 billion tax cut, or **the end of Bush's war on medical marijuana**. Or the minor fact that he seems to have — with Bush's help, it must be said — stopped the financial collapse, revived the credit markets, and **nudged** the economy toward 3.5 percent growth in the last quarter.

Oh, and one more thing: President Obama is now a month or two from accomplishing the awesome and seemingly impossible task that eluded mighty presidents like FDR, LBJ, and **WJC** — health-care reform.

Obama's early returns also include a host of remarkably cautious and prudent national-security decisions that seem, these days, to have been completely forgotten:

Appointing a conservative Bush holdover like Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense.

Appointing an establishment centrist like Leon Panetta at CIA.

Appointing a hard-ass like Stanley McChrystal to head up our military forces in Afghanistan, despite McChrystal's **dubious involvement in torture** and **the cover-up of Pat Tillman's death**.

Increasing the number of drone attacks on Al Qaeda — more in the last year **than all the Bush years combined**.

Reinstating, with tweaks, Bush's military tribunal system for Guantánamo prisoners.

Fighting, in another unexpected defense of a controversial Bush policy, lawsuits against the "warrantless wiretapping" program — as recently as this weekend with **a decision** that a leading civil liberties group called "extremely disappointing."

Sending, way back in February, seventeen thousand more soldiers to Afghanistan. As Fareed Zakaira recently **pointed out**, this was just three thousand fewer soldiers than Bush sent to Iraq for his famous "surge."

Noticing a pattern yet? The first half of Obama's accomplishments above is mostly liberal stuff. The bottom half is all pretty dang conservative. Which brings us to *The Problem With America Today*: Blame it on the Internet, on partisan politics, on the economic crash, on the legacy of war or Fox News or Michael Moore, but our vital center is getting stiff — and it is starting to stink.

Liberals are upset because Obama didn't shut down Guantánamo or stop the wiretapping program or end all wars or support gay marriage and kill Don't Ask Don't Tell. Conservatives are pissed off because they hate health-care reform, family planning, ending any war at all, organic gardening at the White House, and government in general.

What's worse, both sides are so angry and righteous that they can't even begin to give credit where it is due. When was the last time you heard a conservative cheer about that \$288 billion tax cut? Or credit Obama for the centrism it took to appoint McChrystal, Panetta, and Gates? And how many liberals choose to be understanding about the practical difficulties of shutting down Guantánamo, achieving equal rights for gays, or tapping Al Qaeda's phones?

And where, on either side, can you find a scrap of humility about the staggeringly complex challenge of Afghanistan and Pakistan? Or a scrap of gratitude at having escaped global financial doom?

So the question, a year since we elected him, isn't how much Obama has accomplished. The question is why we've turned so small and mean that we only see half of it — the half we happen to agree with.

By John H. Richardson
Esquire