



Perry Diaz

PerryScope

By Perry Diaz
Sacramento, California

Perry Diaz

Cool Under Fire

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., August 24 (PinoyGlobal)

- After 200 days in office, President Barack Obama is under fire over the economy, the war in Afghanistan, and healthcare reform. But it is healthcare reform that has ignited a maelstrom of public outcry. With an uncooperative Congress, Obama took the only road to get the changes he promised the American people; that is, go back to the people.

Never in recent U.S. history did a president interact -- directly and indirectly -- with the American people than Obama. He is a regular fixture in cable news, has his own radio talk program, and conduct town hall meetings across America. Obama is in virtual "campaign mode" which he is very good at. And when Obama connects his program of government with what he promised the American people during the campaign, how could he possibly go wrong?

But it is not easy for Obama. Being the first president of African-American descent, he walks a balancing act on a tightrope with no safety net underneath. He is cognizant that one mistake could end his credibility and political future. And there were several times when he was teetering with one foot on the rope and the other foot in the air trying to prevent a fall.

But one thing that he demonstrated while trying to regain his balance was his coolness. He never lost his composure. He never panicked. And he demonstrated statesmanship in the face of crisis.

During one of his press conferences, a reporter asked Obama what he thought about an incident in Cambridge

where a white police officer, Sgt. James Crowley, arrested a black Harvard professor, Henry Louis Gates, in his own home. Obama responded to the racially sensitive incident and said that Crowley had acted "stupidly." That one word -- "stupidly" -- created a torrent of criticism from whites across the country. The Republican Party, sensing an opening to discredit Obama, further fanned the whites' emotion. I wonder how the whites would have reacted if the president was white?

Obama took the brouhaha over his comment as an opportunity to take charge of the situation. He called Crowley and Gates and invited them for a beer at the White House. Their get-together, which was billed by the media as the "Beer Summit," was a priceless public relations victory for Obama. Once again, he proved that he has what it takes to be a leader.

But Obama's biggest test in his presidency is how he is going to sell his healthcare reform to the American people? Smart as he is, he knows that healthcare reform is a battle that has been waged in decades past and failed each time. Sen. Edward Kennedy, Sen. Hillary Clinton and several other heavyweights in Capitol Hill tried but failed. During those battles in Congress, the sitting presidents didn't take any position knowing that they were threading on dangerous and unpredictable waters.

But this time around, Obama took the bull by the horn. He faced the powerful and influential health insurance cartel who

dug in around Capitol Hill ready to fight Obama and his Democratic allies in Congress. They're well entrenched and have a large war chest that would sustain a long and protracted war with anyone who would imperil their foothold in the health insurance industry.

Had Obama continued his uphill assault on Capitol Hill, he would have lost the battle. The members of Congress are a strange group of people. They would proclaim their loyalty to the president only if the president had total control of the situation. Simply said, a weak president would be rendered inutile in getting his programs passed in Congress.

And it is for this reason that when Obama realized that the House Democrats aren't solidly behind his healthcare reform -- due mainly to opposition from 52 conservative-leaning Blue Dog Democrats -- he took his case to the people. And the people are listening. He has brought the war to a battlefield that he unquestionably dominates.

His initial public sorties proved him right. The people were so agreeable that he tried very hard to convince the audience to attack his proposed reforms. He was confident that he can argue his case before the people attending the town hall meetings and the millions watching on television. And that's the milieu where Obama's "mojo" -- or magic charm -- works best.

The most controversial component of his healthcare reforms came out to be "public option." He argued that a government-run insurance would provide affordable health insurance to the 47 million Americans who don't have any health insurance and don't have the means to buy insurance coverage. He said that "public option" would insure that all Americans can afford to buy insurance, arguing that the health insurance provided by private insurance companies is beyond the means of poor Americans including the more

than six million Americans who lost their jobs to the worst recession since the Great Depression.

But politics took over and the outcry against "public option" turned ugly and nasty. The Republican Party became the catalyst for dissent against "public option." Suddenly, small but vociferous rallies mushroomed in various cities. It's interesting to note that the people in these rallies were virtually all-white. Makes one to wonder who are the people orchestrating these rallies.

Recently, Obama softened his stand on "public option." He said that it is basically up to Capitol Hill to determine if a "public option" should be included in healthcare reform legislation. His critics were caught off guard. And in a spontaneous outburst, they declared that Obama has lost his "mojo." But the truth is, Obama just disarmed them with the only weapon they had against healthcare reform.

With "public option" no longer a key component of healthcare reform, the critics were left with nothing to fight against. Once again, Obama proved that he could easily take back control of the debate on any issue.

As to how healthcare reform eventually would look like is now up to Congress. The Senate is against "public option" and the House is for it. If both chambers pass their own version of healthcare reform, then the two chambers would have to meet in conference to work out the differences between their bills. Whether "public option" is to be included or not, Obama will win.

So the battle is back in Capitol Hill. Obama has done his job and he'll just have to wait for the final product for his signature. Once again, he has shown that he can take the heat without getting burned, he is always in control of the situation, and he is cool under fire.