



The Second-Term Scandal Plague

The Longevity Rule About Presidents And Second-Term Scandals Seems To Have Caught Up With Obama

BY DOYLE MCMANUS
 © 2013, Los Angeles Times

What is it about presidents' second terms that makes them seem so scandal-ridden? Simple: The iron law of longevity. All governments make mistakes, and all governments try to hide those mistakes. But the longer an administration is in office, the more errors it makes, and the harder they are to conceal.

Just ask Richard M. Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton or George W. Bush, all of whom spent much of their second terms playing defense.

The longevity rule caught up with Barack Obama last week as he wrestled clumsily with not one controversy but three: the Internal Revenue Service's treatment of "tea party" groups, the Benghazi killings and the Justice Department's seizure of Associated Press telephone records.

Inevitably, the president's Republican critics reached for historical comparisons: It's another Watergate, said some. Another Iran-Contra, said others. To the hyperbolic Rep. Steve King of Iowa, Benghazi alone was worse than Watergate and Iran-Contra combined, "times maybe 10."

So far, though, the three imbrolios don't add up to another Watergate; not even close. But there are enough unanswered questions to keep any administration tied up for months in congressional hearings, and that's exactly what's about to happen.

Let's take the three issues in turn. The IRS scandal is the most straightforward: A mismanaged unit of the tax agency applied political criteria to its scrutiny of applications for tax-exempt status. Despite the initial portrayal of a rogue operation confined to Cincinnati, IRS officials in Washington knew about the problem and failed to fix it. At least one appears to have misled Congress last year by suggesting that tea party complaints were unfounded.

Last week, Obama condemned the IRS conduct as "intolerable and inexcusable," and he fired the agency's acting director.

But every customer of the IRS, not only Republicans, should want an independent investigation to determine whether higher-ups encouraged the Cincinnati cabal.

Benghazi is the most tangled issue, and the most partisan. A State Department review board has already concluded that security for Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens' fatal visit to the Libyan city was inexcusably weak; then-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton accepted responsibility for that.

But the political side of the Benghazi "scandal," which still needs to be in quotes, has focused on other targets. Republicans charge that Obama lied about the attacks, portraying them as spontaneous to avoid weakening his election-year claim that he had put al-Qaida on the path to defeat.

It's true that Obama was slow to blame terrorists for the killing. "We don't have all the information yet," he said on Sept. 25. But by then, other officials had already told Congress that al-Qaida affiliates were involved. That was five weeks before the election; if the White House was trying to mount a coverup, it appar-

ently forgot to tell the rest of the administration.

It's also true that Obama aides presided over an internal debate over what information would be in official talking points. But when the White House finally released emails from that wrangle, they mostly revealed a bureaucratic fight between the CIA, which wanted to trumpet its warnings about Libya, and the State Department, which didn't want to expose its failings. There's no evidence of anyone acting to protect the Obama re-election campaign.

Still, the White House has a problem: It's been acting guilty. Obama spokesman Jay Carney said initially that the White House had little to do with the talking points, and that only one substantive change was made to the text. Those descriptions turned out to be false. It's no wonder Republicans have demanded more answers. But the Benghazi talking points still look mostly like a partisan sideshow, too complicated and murky to engage most voters.

The third controversy, over the Justice Department's secret decision to seize telephone records of dozens of reporters and editors at the Associated Press, is a different kind of scandal. Republicans have been careful about this one because many have long demanded that the Obama administration get tough on leaks of classified information.

But it still fits into the GOP's critique of Obama as imperious and authoritarian. And it puts another dent in Obama's already battered image as a onetime civil libertarian who has grown fond of executive power in office.

If Obama is both smart and lucky, all three controversies will gradually fade away, assuming no more wrongdoing comes to light. His Republican critics already run the risk of repeating their error in the 1998 impeachment of Clinton; if they hound the White House on charges that don't pan out, they'll be vulnerable to charges that they're wasting time on partisan squabbles.

During the Monica Lewinsky scandal, the Clinton White House made a point of putting the president on camera every day to show he was at work on the economy, not his legal troubles. The Obama White House is already following the same path.

But a season of scandal still comes with a cost. If Congress spends much of its time on investigations (and one-third of all House committees have announced they plan to do just that), it will have fewer hours to work on other issues. If the White House must focus on defending the president against charges of malpractice, that saps its energy as well.

Any second-term president has limited time after reelection to win legislative battles. Obama's clock is already ticking; his agenda is already in trouble. If the remainder of 2013 is dominated by inquests that widen the partisan divide, the chances for bipartisan deal-making — especially a grand bargain on taxes and spending — will wane even further.

Doyle McManus is a columnist for The Los Angeles Times. Readers may send him email at doyle.mcmanus@latimes.com.

Keehr has been running the food drive for many years, organizing and supervising this wonderful project to help people. And also, the 30-some volunteers who collect and sort the food; and put a lot of love and effort into making it work.

I'm sure Paula will add her letter thanking everyone for their help and support. But she'll never tell you it's largely because of her, that the food drive is a great success. So thanks, Paula. And thanks to everyone who donated food, and time, and care for their friends and neighbors. It makes a big difference. It makes us who we are.

THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

THE DAKOTAS' OLDEST NEWSPAPER | FOUNDED 1861
 Yankton Media, Inc., 319 Walnut St., Yankton, SD 57078

OPINION | OUR VIEW

Gas Prices: No Clear Alternatives

Gasoline prices have become a pain again, as they periodically do. And the situation once again reminds us of how precarious our lines of energy supply really are — and how powerless the fact can make us feel.

It's particularly true with this latest spike, which seemingly came out of nowhere and has seen the price of gasoline in Yankton roar up an astonishing 65 cents in just two weeks. Motorists here are now generally paying \$4 a gallon for fuel — a level which seemed very far off when this month began.

The problem is not in the supply, which is actually brimming these days. *USA Today* reported over the weekend that the national oil inventory in early May was at the highest level it has been since the 1930s. Likewise, national oil production is up, as any North Dakotan can tell you. Thus, the nation is sitting on a lot of oil.

Instead, it's been reported that the problem is due to, as *USA Today* put it, "outages and extended maintenance" at four refineries in Illinois, Indiana, Oklahoma and Texas. Those issues have drastically cut output, which is hitting the Midwest very hard.

However, if the problem continues, the impact won't be confined to the Midwest for very long. Indeed, it is already sending ripples across the rest of the nation as more areas are seeing their prices inch higher.

It could also grow into a bigger problem if another refinery were to encounter problems, according to one petroleum analyst. If that happens, he said, "all hell would break loose."

That "hell" would include hurting the slowly gathering momentum of the economy, especially coming on the heels of a report showing that consumer inflation in April dropped, thus bolstering spending confidence.

Meanwhile, we are plunking more money than ever before (not counting inflationary adjustments) for gasoline — all because of four refineries, and all in the midst of a major domestic oil boom and ample inventory.

None of this even touches on what speculators do to the price of crude oil, which is to put it on a maddening pendulum that causes wide rises and falls in fuel prices. That's another conversation for another day.

It's easy to say that this situation is unacceptable. Not only does such a volatile market wreak havoc with consumers, but it also makes it difficult for local governments and businesses to budget for energy costs when those prices become so dramatically unpredictable. And since fuel is essential to our economy, the fact that this instability can shake our fiscal foundations with very little notice is also something that must be remedied.

The hard part is pointing to a viable alternative. Some may scream out the need for non-petroleum fuels, and that's a noble goal, but that would be a decades-long transition.

Building more refineries might be a better answer, but we would still be at the mercy of "outages and extended maintenance" whenever they cropped up (and for whatever reason). But it should be noted that, although no new refineries have been built since 1976 — and, in fact, some have closed — the capacity of the existing refineries has more than doubled capacity, according to gasbuddy.com.

Declaring a need for "energy independence" has a nice political ring to it, but the impact of that, given our current production and inventory situations, seems questionable at best. (This nation is now exporting more oil than it's importing, so there is no guarantee that the oil produced here will stay here — unless you want to nationalize domestic oil companies.)

Thus, we are left with a confounding situation in which we have few choices. In fact, the only real economic choice for many consumers is to simply consume less and not spend the money. But that's a hard prospect for a nation that is always on the move.

And that is the problem we face — and the solution we simply do not have — as gas prices spin out of control. There is nothing we can really do, it seems, except go along for a very bumpy and unpredictable ride. Again.

kmh

ONLINE OPINION

The results of the most recent Internet poll on the *Press & Dakotan's* Web site are as follows:

LATEST RESULTS:

How closely have you been following the coverage of the IRS scandal?
 Not too much 35%
 Somewhat 28%
 Very closely 26%
 Not at all/never heard of it 11%
TOTAL VOTES CAST 265

The Press & Dakotan Internet poll is not a scientific survey and reflects the opinions only of those who choose to participate. The results should not be construed as an accurate representation or scientific measurement of public opinion.

CURRENT QUESTION:

Will the rising price of gasoline affect your travel plans for the summer?

To vote in the *Press & Dakotan's* Internet poll, log on to our website at www.yankton.net.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
 Today is Tuesday, May 21, the 141st day of 2013. There are 224 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On May 21, 1932, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean as she landed in Northern Ireland, about 15 hours after leaving Newfoundland.

On this date: In 1471, King Henry VI of England died in the Tower of London at age 49. In 1542, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto died while searching for gold along the Mississippi River.

In 1863, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially organized. In 1881, Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross.

In 1892, the opera "Pagliacci," by Ruggero Leoncavallo, premiered in Milan, Italy.

In 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh landed his Spirit of St. Louis near Paris, completing the first solo airplane flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 33 1/2 hours.

In 1941, a German U-boat sank the American merchant steamship SS Robin Moor in the South Atlantic after the ship's passengers and crew were allowed to board lifeboats.

In 1956, the United States exploded the first airborne hydrogen bomb over Bikini Atoll in the Pacific.

In 1959, the musical "Gypsy," inspired by the life of stripper Gypsy Rose Lee, opened on Broadway with Ethel Merman starring as Mama Rose.

In 1972, Michelangelo's Pieta, on display at the Vatican, was damaged by a hammer-wielding man who shouted he was Jesus Christ.

In 1982, during the Falklands War, British amphibious forces landed on the beach at San Carlos Bay.

In 1998, teen gunman Kip Kinkel opened fire inside Thurston High School in Springfield, Ore., killing two students, a day after he'd killed his parents. (Kinkel was sentenced to nearly 112 years in prison.) In the wake of deadly protests, Indonesia President Suharto stepped down after 32 years in power.

Ten years ago: Christie Whitman resigned

as Environmental Protection Agency administrator. The most devastating earthquake to hit Algeria in two decades killed at least 2,200 people. Ruben Studdard edged Clay Aiken to win the second "American Idol" competition on Fox.

Five years ago: Oil prices blew past \$130 a barrel and gas prices climbed above \$3.80 a gallon. Israel and Syria unexpectedly announced the resumption of peace talks after an eight-year break. David Cook won "American Idol" in a landslide over David Archuleta.

One year ago: President Barack Obama and other world leaders meeting in Chicago locked in place an Afghanistan exit path that would keep their troops fighting there for two more years. Former Rutgers University student Dharun Ravi, who'd used a webcam to spy on his gay roommate, Tyler Clementi, who then committed suicide, was sentenced to 30 days in jail (he served 20). A Yemeni man detonated a bomb during a rehearsal for a military parade, killing 96 fellow soldiers; al-Qaida's branch in Yemen claimed responsibility. Grammy-winning polka great Eddie Blazonczyk, 70, died in Palos Heights, Ill.

Today's Birthdays: Rhythm-and-blues singer Ron Isley (The Isley Brothers) is 72. Rock musician Hilton Valentine (The Animals) is 70. Actor Richard Hatch is 68. Musician Bill Champlin is 66. Singer Leo Sayer is 65. Actress Carol Potter is 65. Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., is 62. Actor Mr. T is 61. Music producer Stan Lynch is 58. Actor Judge Reinhold is 56. Actor-director Nick Cassavetes is 54. Actor Brent Briscoe is 52. Actress Lisa Edelstein is 47. Actress Fairuza Balk is 39. Rock singer-musician Mikel Jollett (Airborne Toxic Event) is 39. Rapper Havoc (Mobb Deep) is 39. Actress Ashlie Brillault is 26. Actor Scott Leavenworth is 23. Actress Sarah Ramos is 22.

Thought for Today: "Our present addiction to pollsters and forecasters is a symptom of our chronic uncertainty about the future.... We watch our experts read the entrails of statistical tables and graphs the way the ancients watched their soothsayers read the entrails of a chicken." — Eric Hoffer, American philosopher (1902-1983).

FROM THE BIBLE

He who is ... the King of kings and Lord of lords. 1 Timothy 6:15. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

CONTACT US

PHONE:
 (605) 665-7811
 (800) 743-2968
 NEWS FAX:
 (605) 665-1721
 ADVERTISING FAX:
 (605) 665-0288
 WEBSITE:
 www.yankton.net
 EMAIL ADDRESS:
 news@yankton.net

SUBSCRIPTIONS/
 CIRCULATION:
 Extension 112
 CLASSIFIED ADS:
 Extension 108
 NEWS DEPARTMENT:
 Extension 114
 SPORTS DEPARTMENT:
 Extension 106
 ADVERTISING OFFICE:
 Extension 122
 BUSINESS OFFICE:
 Extension 119
 NEW MEDIA:
 Extension 136
 COMPOSING DESK:
 Extension 129

* * *

MANAGERS

Gary L. Wood
Publisher
 Michele Schievelbein
Advertising Director
 Tonya Schild
Business Manager
 David Jeffcoat
Circulation Director
 Tera Schmidt
Classified Manager
 Kelly Hertz
Editor
 James D. Cimburek
Sports Editor
 Beth Rye
New Media Manager
 Kathy Larson
Composing Manager
 Bernard Metcivier
District Manager

* * *

DAILY STAFF

Andrew Atwal
 Melissa Bader
 Derek Bartos
 Brett Beyeler
 Cassandra Brockmoller
 Rob Buckingham
 Randy Dockendorf
 Jeannine Economy
 Jeremy Hoec
 Nathan Johnson
 Muriel Pratt
 Sheldon Reed
 Noelle Schlechter
 Cathy Sudbeck
 Sally Whiting
 Brenda Willcuts
 Jackie Williams

* * *

Published Daily Monday-Saturday

Periodicals postage paid at Yankton, South Dakota, under the act of March 3, 1979.

Weekly Dakotian established June 6, 1861. Yankton Daily Press and Dakotian established April 26, 1875.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078.

* * *

MEMBERSHIPS

The Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan is a member of the Associated Press, the Inland Daily Press Association and the South Dakota Newspaper Association. The Associated Press is entitled exclusively to use of all the local news printed in this newspaper.

* * *

SUBSCRIPTION RATES*

(Payable in advance)

CARRIER DELIVERY
 1-month \$12.09
 3 months \$36.27
 6 months \$72.53
 1-year \$133.09

MOTOR ROUTE
 (where available)
 1 month \$14.51
 3 months \$43.53
 6 months \$87.05
 1 year \$139.14

MAIL IN RETAIL TRADE ZONE
 1-month \$16.93
 3 months \$50.79
 6 months \$101.57
 1-year \$148.82

MAIL OUTSIDE RETAIL TRADE ZONE
 1 month \$19.35
 3 months \$58.05
 6 months \$116.09
 1-year \$186.33

* Plus applicable sales tax for all rates

YOUR LETTERS

Food Drive Appreciated

Mike Covey, Yankton

Yankton — a big thank you! And a pat on the back to all the people who generously donated to the food drive recently. It's heart-warming to see this response by the good and kind people of our city. We can proudly say "we're always ready and willing to help one another here in Yankton." The out-pouring of support for the Contact Center food pantry is obvious proof.

Also, to point out all the people who give their time, and hard work, to make this possible. Paula

WRITE US

Letters, Yankton Press & Dakotan, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078