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OPINION

Benghazi Panel: It's Finished

or all practical purposes, the House of Representatives' Benghazi special committee is finished.

Whether or not the committee assigned to look into the deadly 2012 attack on the U.S. embassy in Benghazi, Libya which resulted in the deaths of four Americans - still served a

practical, non-political purpose has long been open for debate. But now the thing is dead — its demise brought on by a self-inflicted wound.

This occurred last week when House Majority Leader Kevin Mc-Carthy (R-Calif.), a big favorite to become the next House Speaker, uttered this awkward statement about the committee: "Everybody thought Hillary Clinton was unbeatable, right? But we put together a Benghazi special committee, a select committee, [and] what are her numbers today? Her numbers are dropping. Why? Because she's untrustable. But no one would have known any of that had happened."

Perhaps that isn't precisely what he meant (he has a clumsy way with words, it seems), but the inference is toxic. It sounds like a politician proudly declaring "Mission Accomplished" with a presidential campaign cycle heating up. So maybe it IS what he meant.

And with that, the Republican-led committee lost any chance it might have harbored for some appearance of legitimacy. While Clinton herself tried to keep the committee relevant with her bungled e-mail woes, the panel's integrity can no longer be taken seriously; its stated intent is now "untrustable."

Certainly, it's all political gamesmanship, and Democrats have seized on this gift opening to play some heavy-handed politics themselves. The Democratic members on the committee are threatening to bolt the panel and have released some transcripts of the secret testimony. Clinton herself is now using McCarthy's words in a new political ad, and she accuses the committee of playing politics with the deaths of four Americans. That's a bold, harsh, uncomfortable statement, but in light of McCarthy's blundering remark, it's now fair ammunition

The committee actually left itself open to accusations of partisanship just by still being in existence. According to The Hill newspaper, the Benghazi committee's probe has now lasted longer than the Watergate investigation in the 1970s - which, of course, led to the end of a presidency. While the Benghazi panel is not, as Democrats claim, the longest running congressional investigation ever, it's certainly near the top of the list. And this has gone on and on even though both the House and Senate foreign affairs committees heard from Clinton in 2013 and concluded there was no wrongdoing.

Nevertheless, this particular House panel keeps stumbling on, presumably (or so McCarthy's words imply) with an eye on the 2016 presidential election. And that makes this inquiry look like a political ploy, not a fact-finding tool.

This committee, which could potentially cost the taxpayers more than \$3 million, has frittered away its legitimacy and, thus, any compelling reason to continue.

kmh

HISTORY

By The Associated Press Today is Wednesday, October 7, the 280th day of 2015. There are 85 days left in the year

Today's Highlight in History: On October 7, 1985, Palestinian gunmen hijacked the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro in the Mediterranean. (The hijackers killed Leon Klinghoffer, a Jewish-American tourist, before surrendering on October 9.)

On this date: In 1765, the Stamp Act ngress convened in New York to draw Conare

Charles Rocket was found dead in a field near his home in Canterbury, Connecticut, an apparent suicide; he was 56. Five years ago: New Jersey Gov.

Chris Christie canceled construction of a decades-in-the-making train tunnel between New Jersey and Manhattan, citing cost overruns that had ballooned the price tag from \$5 billion to \$10 billion or more. A toxic red sludge that had burst out of a Hungarian factory's reservoir reached the mighty Danube after wreaking havoc on smaller rivers and creeks.



Bernie Sanders And The Free Market

BY ROBERT B. REICH Tribune Content Agency

Crass distortions of the choices facing the nation sometimes come masked in the media as "political analysis." But whatever they're called. they can't be allowed to stand.

Such was the Washington Post's front-page piece last week, ostensibly an analysis of the policies proposed by Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont.

Sanders, wrote the Post's David Fahrenthold, "is not just a big-spending liberal. His agenda is not just about money. It's also about control."

Fahrenthold claims Sanders' plan for paying for students' college tuition at public universities with a tax on Wall Street trades would mean "colleges would run by government rules.

Apparently Fahrenthold is unaware that three-quarters of college students today attend public universities financed largely by state governments.

And even those who attend elite private universities benefit from federal tax subsidies flowing to wealthy donors. Meg Whitman's recent \$30 million donation to Princeton, for example, is really \$20 million from her plus an estimated \$10 million she deducted from her taxable income.

Notwithstanding all this government largesse, colleges aren't "run by government rules." The real problem is that too many young people

still can't afford a college education. The move toward free public higher education that began after World War II with the G.I. Bill and was extended in the 1960s by leading public universities was reversed starting in the 1980s because of shrinking state budgets. Tuition has skyrocketed in recent years as states slashed education spending.

It's time to resurrect that earlier goal. Besides, the biggest threats to academic freedom these days aren't coming from government. They're coming as conditions attached to funding from billionaires and big corporations that

is increasing as public funding drops. When the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation pledged \$1.5 million to Florida State University's economics department, for example, it stipulated that a Koch-appointed advisory committee would select professors and undertake annual

But health care is already largely financed through government subsidies - only they're flowing to private for-profit health insurers that are now busily consolidating into corporate leviathans.

Anthem's purchase of giant insurer Cigna will make it the largest health insurer in America; Aetna is buying Humana, creating the second-largest, with 33 million members.

Why should anyone suppose these for-profit corporate giants will be less

'controlling" than government? What we do know is that they're far more expensive than a single-payer system.

Fahrenthold repeats the charge that Sanders' health-care plan would cost \$15 trillion over 10 years. But singlepayer systems in other rich nations have proven cheaper than private for-profit health insurers because they don't spend huge sums on advertising, marketing, executive pay and billing. So even if the Sanders single-payer plan would cost \$15 trillion over 10 years, Americans as a

whole would save more than that. Fahrenthold trusts the "market" more than he does the government, but he overlooks the fact that government sets the rules by which the market runs (such as whether health insurers should be allowed to consolidate even further, or how much of a "charitable" tax deduction wealthy donors to private universities should receive, and whether they should get the deduction if they attach partisan conditions to their donations).

The real choice isn't between government and the "market." It's between a system responsive to the needs of most Americans and one more responsive to the demands of the super-rich, big business and Wall Street — whose economic and political power have grown dramatically over the last three decades.

This is why the logic of Sanders' ideas depends on the political changes he seeks.

Fahrenthold says a President Sanders couldn't get any of his ideas implemented anyway because Congress would reject them. But if Bernie Sanders is elected president, American politics will have been altered, reducing the moneyed interests' chokehold over the public agenda.

Fahrenthold may not see the populism that's fueling Bernie Sanders' campaign, but it is gaining strength and conviction. Other politicians, as well as political reporters, ignore this upsurge at their peril.

Robert B.

REICH

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up colonial grievances against England. In 1849, author Edgar Allan Poe died in Baltimore at age 40. In 1858, the fifth debate between II-

linois senatorial candidates Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas took place in Galesburg. In 1929, former Interior Secretary

Albert B. Fall, one of the main figures of the Teapot Dome scandal, went on trial, charged with accepting a bribe from oil tycoon Edward L. Doheny. (Fall was found guilty and sentenced to a year in prison; he served nine months. Doheny was acquitted at his own trial of offering the bribe Fall was convicted of taking.)

In 1940, Artie Shaw and his Orchestra recorded Hoagy Carmichael's "Star Dust" (as it was spelled then) for RCA Victor. In 1949, the Republic of East Ger-

many was formed.

In 1954, Marian Anderson became the first black singer hired by the Metro-politan Opera Company in New York.

In 1960, Democratic presidential can-didate John F. Kennedy and Republican opponent Richard Nixon held their second televised debate, this one in Washington, D.C.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II concluded his week-long tour of the United States with a Mass on the Washington Mall.

In 1989, Hungary's Communist Party renounced Marxism in favor of democratic socialism during a party congress in Budapest.

In 1991, University of Oklahoma law professor Anita Hill publicly accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of making sexually inappropriate comments when she worked for him; Thomas denied Hill's allegations.

In 2004, President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney conceded that Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction as they tried to shift the Iraq war debate to a new issue, argu-ing that Saddam was abusing a U.N. oilfor-food program. Ten years ago: The Nobel Peace

Prize was awarded to the International Atomic Energy Agency and its chief, Mohamed ElBaradei. Actor-comedian

FROM THE BIBLE

One year ago: North Korea publicly acknowledged to the international com-munity the existence of its "reform through labor" camps, a mention that appeared to come in response to a highly critical U.N. human rights report. Two Japanese scien-tists, Isamu Akasaki and Hiroshi Amano, and a naturalized American, Shuji Na-kamura, won the Nobel Prize for physics for inventing a new kind of light-emitting diode (LED) that promised to revolutionize the way the world lighted its offices and homes

Today's Birthdays: Retired South Af-rican Archbishop and Nobel Peace laure-ate Desmond Tutu is 84. Author Thomas Keneally is 80. Comedian Joy Behar is 73. Former National Security Council aide Lt. Col. Oliver North (ret.) is 72. Rock musician Kevin Godley (10cc) is 70. Actress Jill Larson is 68. Country singer Kieran Kane is 66. Singer John Mellencamp is 64. Rock musician Ricky Phillips is 64. Actress Mary Badham (Film: "To Kill a Mock-ingbird") is 63. Actress Christopher Norris is 62. Rock musician Tico Torres (Bon Jovi) is 62. Cellist Yo-Yo Ma is 60. Gospel singer Michael W. Smith is 58. Olympic gold medal ice dancer Jayne Torvill is 58. goid medal ice dancer Jayne forvill is 58. Actor Dylan Baker is 57. Recording execu-tive and TV personality Simon Cowell is 56. Rock musician Charlie Marinkovich (Iron Butterfly) is 56. Country singer Dale Watson is 53. Pop singer Ann Curless (Expose) is 52. Rhythm-and-blues singer Tori Brotten is 49. Pody singer pusies Toni Braxton is 48. Rock singer-musician Thom Yorke (Radiohead) is 47. Rock musician-dancer Leeroy Thornhill is 46. Actress Nicole Ari Parker is 45. Actress Allison Munn is 41. Rock singer-musician Damian Kulash is 40. Singer Taylor Hicks is 39. Actor Omar Benson Miller is 37. Actor Jake McLaughlin (TV: "Quantico") is 33. Electronic musician Flying Lotus (AKA Stephen Ellison) is 32. MLB player Evan Longoria is 30. Actress Holland Roden is 29. Actress Amber Stevens is 29. Actress Lulu Wilson is 10.

Thought for Today: "Being right half the time beats being half-right all the time." — Malcolm Forbes, American publisher (1919-1990).

evaluations.

The Koch brothers now fund 350 programs at more than 250 colleges and universities across America. You can bet that funding doesn't underwrite research on inequality and environmental justice.

Fahrenthold similarly claims that Sanders' plan for a single-payer system would put health care under the "control" of government.

Kathleen Parker

Robert Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and Senior Fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies. His new book, "Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few," is out now.

The GOP (New) McCarthyism

BY KATHLEEN PARKER

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WASHINGTON - The lede to this column is a deep, guttural groan that originates in the throat and expands into the lungs before collapsing in the pit of the stomach.

How do you spell hmmmgrrrungh?

What else is there to say about House Republicans' inability to get something right? And I say this with compassion, I really do. Because seriously? It's over. Done. Kaput. With Kevin McCarthy's recent response to the simplest question about GOP accomplishments in Congress - from the friendliest interviewer, Sean Hannity, a GOPer could hope for the future may as well be called Democrat.

Here's what McCarthy offered if you happened to be away exploring conspiracies about liquid water on Mars: "Everybody thought Hillary Clinton was unbeatable, right?" he said. "But we put together a Benghazi special committee, a select committee. What are her numbers today? Her numbers are dropping. Why? Because she's untrustable.

The consequences of McCarthy's sleight of tongue can't be overstated. It wasn't just a Washington gaffe - when someone accidentally tells the truth. It was a self-inflicted, potentially fatal wound, not just to McCarthy but to Republicans more broadly, including those running for president.

One minute McCarthy was the near-certain next speaker of the House; the next he was persona non grata as GOP colleagues, their own minds hurtling through various apocalyptic scenarios, hammered him

McCarthy has since tried to cram the bad genie back into the bottle, but the damage has been done and can't be undone.

Essentially, he had handed Clinton the keys to her prison cell. Held hostage these past three years by a series of Republican interrogators about the September 2012 attack in Libya that killed our ambassador and three others, she has been liberated.

The Benghazi hearings that led to the private server, that led to the missing 30,000 emails, that led to the FBI investigation that thus far has led only to the conclusion that she was "hackable" have been reduced in the public mind to a political hit job organized to damage her chances of becoming the Democratic presidential nominee.

This isn't necessarily the whole of it — House Select Committee on Benghazi Chairman Trey Gowdy and others certainly believe there's more to know — but the cement has set on what McCarthy implied. At the very least, any previous suspicions that Republicans were just out to get Clinton have

cleared the bar of reasonable doubt.

One can imagine, meanwhile, that Clinton is performing mental pirouettes and grand jetes, dancing circles around the vast right-wing conspiracy, even as she conveys almost sorrowfully how "deeply distressed" she is by McCarthy's admission.

Miraculously, she managed not to betray the happy tune coursing through the sunlit savannah of her brain's limbic system: Born free, as free as ... I know, I hate it, too. Maybe she and John Boehner can get together and perform a duet of "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah.

Yes, this New McCarthyism is that serious.

The Republican Party, which deserves better than its parts, has suffered a damaging blow when it can ill afford another. Already in disarray with constant inner conflict, the House also faces Boehner's imminent retirement and yet another debt-ceiling crisis looming.

McCarthy should tar and feather himself and ride out of town on a donkey. Then again, couldn't one as easily say, as Howard Dean recently sug-gested on MSNBC's "Morning Joe," that, good grief, McCarthy merely bumbled? That this, too, shall pass?

Not on your life. Does anyone really think Hillary Clinton will let this pass?

At best, McCarthy can try to be convincing when he insists that the Benghazi investigation wasn't politically motivated (cough, cough, this darned weather). Here, let me help you, sir:

"What I meant was that the Republican Congress' greatest accomplishment, by way of its investigations into Benghazi, is to have revealed that Hillary Clinton should never be president."

You see the problem. McCarthy should never have mentioned the word Benghazi in the context of political advantage for the now very obvious reasons. How could someone aspiring to be speaker of the House, No. 2 in line behind the vice president to become president if so required, fail to know this? House Republicans will have to answer this question for themselves when they vote for leadership next week.

Meanwhile, unless Gowdy discovers Clinton's fingerprints on a grenade retrieved from the diplomatic compound in Benghazi, she has every right to denounce any future claim or question as the grandstanding of admitted political scammers.

That growling sound you hear rolling down Capitol Hill and across the Potomac isn't just thunder.

Kathleen Parker's email address is kathleenparker@washpost.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Great Fundraiser Sheila Kuchta, Yankton Heart Foundation

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And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. Daniel 12:3. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.

Executive director. Avera Sacred

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