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Republican Perspective

By John Littig

Shared Sacrifice

President Obama has on many occasions called upon us all for “shared sacrifice” in order to address the nation's financial problems. “If everybody took an attitude of shared sacrifice, we could solve our deficit and debt problem next week.” Well OK, let's look at how he's participating in that sacrifice. Let's look at his share.

On April 3, following the lead of the secretary of Defense, the deputy secretary, and a group of senators led by Lindsay Graham, the president announced he would take a five percent cut in his presidential base pay during the period of the sequestration. Rather than having to follow the lead of others, shouldn't he have been the first to take a cut? And by the way, Presidents George Washington, Herbert Hoover, and John Kennedy did not accept their salaries at all.

Against his yearly base salary of \$400,000, his voluntary cut will amount to \$20,000. In addition, he gets a tax-free expense account of \$150,000, travel allowance of \$100,000, and entertainment budget of \$20,000. And his primary income source, outweighing his presidential pay, is book royalties.

Celebritynetworth.com reports the Obama's net worth has increased (mostly on the strength of his royalties) from \$1.3 million when he first took office to \$11.8 million now. So his voluntary pay cut of \$20,000 will amount to less than two-tenths of one percent of his net worth. For perspective, think of it this way: If his net worth were \$1,000, his voluntary pay cut would be less than \$2. Not a lot of pain from that shared sacrifice.

Forty-seven million are on food stamps, jobs remain scarce, gas prices are sky-high, and all American workers got a tax increase last January. Against this backdrop, how are the Obamas tightening their belts?

Recently, the president spent a golfing weekend in Florida with Tiger Woods. Unfortunately, the administration has declined to tell us what this cost the taxpayers. So we won't really know until an organization such as Judicial Watch files a request under

the Freedom of Information Act, or sues to get the information. But the cost to us has been estimated at over \$1 million.

Judicial Watch reports that daughter Malia's March 2012 vacation to Mexico cost us \$115,000. That was a bargain for us taxpayers, compared with the First Lady's trips to Africa and Spain.

In June of 2011, Michelle Obama took her family and staff to South Africa and Botswana. Judicial Watch calculated the total cost to American taxpayers was over \$424,000 for the use of the aircraft alone. The passenger manifest listed Malia and Sasha as "senior staff." The manifest also listed Michelle Obama's mother, Marian Robinson, and niece and nephew, Leslie and Avery Robinson, as well Obama's makeup and hairstylists (Carl Ray and Johnny Wright).

In August of 2010, as reported in the New York Times, Michelle Obama, one of her daughters, two friends and four of their daughters, vacationed in Spain. Judicial Watch calculated the flight cost alone was over \$199,000. Secret Service reports show \$27,000 for a chauffeured tour of Costa del Sol and \$50,000 for a travel planning company.

In February 2013, Malia and Sasha vacationed in the Bahamas, and then followed up with their ski vacation with the First Lady. Again, we won't know those costs until the administration is forced to disclose them.

The Washington Examiner documents 16 First Family vacations just from January 2009 through February of 2012. And the Hawaii Reporter estimates that the First Family's Hawaii vacations alone have topped \$20 million. So the few details shown here are just the tip of the iceberg. Never-the-less, they do give a flavor of the lavish lifestyle enjoyed by this First Family.

Apparently not wishing to be outdone by the First Family, Vice President Joe Biden has gotten into the act and racked up some hefty expenses on his recent stays in Paris and London. At the Hotel Intercontinental Paris le Grand, the one-night hotel bill for Biden and his entourage was \$585,000. That's just the hotel bill, not the transportation, equipment and so on. But the one-night hotel bill for Biden and his posse at London's Hyatt Regency was only \$459,000 - a bargain.

Now the blame-Bush crowd will point out that Bush spent more days on vacation than has Obama and therefore spent more of your dollars. Democraticunderground.com, for example, says that Bush spent \$20 million on flights to his Crawford ranch. OK, but how does that come to more, in eight years, than the \$20 million the Obamas have already spent on just their Hawaii vacations in only four years? So the Bush-spent-more argument is bogus. Furthermore, Bush didn't lecture us about "shared sacrifice."

The Washington Post points out that while Bush spent more days than Obama outside Washington, nearly all his "vacations" were at the Texas ranch or at relatives' homes in Maine. Further, the Post conceded that Bush's vacations, unlike Obama's, were not lavish and he did not "make time for fun." In fact, he usually spent his time mountain biking or clearing brush on his ranch.

It was during these ranch stays that he hosted Russian President Vladimir Putin, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Saudi King Abdullah, Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Anzar, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Mexican President Vicente Fox, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and other world leaders. Some “vacation.”

Now I don't begrudge the president, whoever he may be, of some time off. What is wrong here is the blatant hypocrisy of asking others to sacrifice while the First Family lives it up at our expense.

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