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Republican Perspective

By John Littig

Obama's Phony Scandals

President Obama recently said, "With an endless parade of distractions, political posturing and phony scandals, Washington has taken its eye off the ball." His surrogates in the administration (e.g. Press Secretary Jay Carney) and apologists in the press (e.g. political commentator Chris Matthews) have continued to thrum that theme.

Late-nighter Jay Leno has ridiculed it, "In his speech about the economy, President Obama said we've all been distracted by phony scandals, and it's time we started getting distracted by the phony recovery."

So the new tack by the Obama administration is to pooh-pooh the scandals. Well, there seem to be at least four (correct me if there are more) candidates for "phony scandal" status: operation fast and furious, the Benghazi attack, surveillance of news reporters and IRS abuses. So let's consider.

Operation Fast and Furious

Josephine Terry said, "Attorney General Eric Holder's refusal to fully disclose the documents associated with Operation Fast and Furious and President Obama's assertion of executive privilege serves to compound this tragedy. It denies the Terry family and the American people the truth. Our son, border patrol agent, Brian Terry, was killed by members of a Mexican drug cartel armed with weapons from this failed Justice Department gun trafficking investigation. For more than 18 months we have been asking our federal government for justice and accountability. ... Our son lost his life protecting this nation, and it is very disappointing that we are now faced with an administration that seems more concerned with protecting themselves rather than revealing the truth behind Operation Fast and Furious."

The administration is stonewalling the Terry family, Congress, and the American people. I doubt Josephine Terry is relieved to hear that this scandal is a phony.

The Benghazi attack

The administration left the diplomatic facility in Benghazi unprotected and then failed to mount a rescue effort when the facility was attacked, leaving four Americans dead - including the ambassador. They have since refused to furnish Congress with information regarding the attack, including access to the survivors - or even their names. As then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said "What difference at this point does it make?" And, 11 months after, they have failed to kill or catch even a single one of the attackers. The administration did, however, falsely blame the attack on a YouTube video.

Patricia Smith, the mother of Sean Smith who was killed in the attack, said "I love my country Š but I don't like my government, because they don't tell the truth."

So we have four dead Americans, no explanation or accountability, no retaliation, and a false story about the attack.

To top it off, President Obama said "Benghazi, while obviously mistakes were made, is a figment of a right-wing press." He likely believes this figment is a phony scandal.

Surveillance of news reporters

The Department of Justice logged incoming and outgoing calls, and their duration, for work and private numbers of Associated Press reporters and for reporters in the House of Representatives press gallery.

AP President Gary Pruitt said, "There can be no possible justification for such an overbroad collection of the telephone communications of the Associated Press and its reporters. These records potentially reveal communications with confidential sources across all of the newsgathering activities undertaken by the AP during a two-month period, provide a road map to AP's newsgathering operations, and disclose information about AP's activities and operations that the government has no conceivable right to know."

In addition to the surveillance of AP reporters, the Department of Justice spied on Fox News reporter James Rosen. When asked about this in sworn testimony, Attorney General Eric Holder said, "this is not something I've ever been involved in, heard of or would think would be wise policy." Later, NBC News reported that, contrary to his sworn denial, Holder had in fact personally approved a search warrant for the Rosen's email account and phone.

The AP reporters and Rosen must be pretty surprised to learn this scandal is just a phony.

IRS abuses

CNN reported that acting IRS Commissioner Steven Miller resigned "amid controversy over IRS targeting of conservative groups that applied for federal tax-exempt status Š Miller was aware employees were targeting conservative groups in May 2012, according to the agency. But Miller Š didn't tell Congress about it when he testified before an oversight committee in July - despite being questioned on the issue." President Obama said the agency's misconduct was "inexcusable."

Later, the IRS official in charge of exempt organization applications, Lois Lerner, appeared before the House Oversight Committee. But she refused to testify, invoking her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

So you have a top-level manager resigning, another taking the fifth, and the president himself saying, “Americans have a right to be angry about it, and I’m angry about it.” Since he finds this scandal inexcusable and is personally angry about it, he must be quite a contortionist in order to label it as phony.

So there (without considering the NAS collecting all your phone calls!) you have four examples of Obama administration scandals. No way of knowing which, if any, the president is labeling as “phony.” They all seem pretty genuine. Belittling them won't make them go away.

The “phony scandal” mantra is a blatant political maneuver to shift attention away from the actual misdeeds and onto those who are investigating and reporting on them.

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