

May 20, 2013

Richard Epstein chronicles the problems with the Affordable Care Act.

The ACA's new marketplaces are said to allow ordinary individuals to shop for their own policies. This modest goal sounds easy, but it is not. As the current rules demand, all enrollment must be possible online, in person, by phone, fax, and mail. In addition to a website, the exchanges must provide "culturally and linguistically appropriate assistance," along with a navigator program to promote public awareness. They must offer seamless linkage with other public initiatives, and accurate information on premium tax credits and cost-sharing subsidies, all under a program whose key provisions are not yet fully worked out. Already, HHS has distributed over \$3.6 billion to states for implementation, with more to come.

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At this point, the total administrative burden on the federal government has massively increased. Yet neither the federal government nor the states have the human or financial resources to discharge these tasks in a timely fashion, making it highly unlikely that these exchanges will be up and running by January 1, 2014. To achieve that goal, the various private participants on the exchanges must design and post their policies by October 1, 2013.

Unfortunately, these private insurers cannot do their part unless they have enough information to accurately price the "essential minimum conditions" required under the ACA. At present, it is estimated that only around 2 percent of the current plans meet the ACA's outsized legislative ambitions. Nor can the federal government set up, all at once, the federal exchanges that are needed to make this system work. Similarly, the tepid reception to the Medicaid extension program only stretches scarce government resources. With each passing day, it becomes clearer that the entire process is backing up.

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Gabriel Schoenfeld, who was in these pages often before he left Commentary and signed on to the Romney campaign, has written a book about how the loss came about.

Even before my new book, A Bad Day on the Romney Campaign: An Insider's Account, went on sale and could be read, it was suggested to me by former colleagues in a series of e-mails, calls, and statements in the press that I would regret airing "dirty laundry" in public.

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Is this fierce reaction warranted? Am I wrong to speak up? Both questions raise interesting issues.

The ferocity, I believe, comes from fear. Throughout the campaign, the Romney organization was relatively successful in keeping its secrets to itself. Although the problems of the campaign were visible to the world, a code of silence prevailed, and continues to prevail, in its ranks. It exists for reasons of self-protection, to evade responsibility for a loss that was avoidable. Those warning me off publishing have not even read my book, but their anxiety about what I might say is a measure of how much they have to hide.

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Michael Barone says Benghazi and the IRS thuggery are just politics by other means.

What do the Benghazi cover-up and the IRS scandal have in common? They were both about winning elections, under false pretenses.

Winning elections, after all, is something Barack Obama is good at. He obviously loves campaigning and delivering grand orations to enormous adoring crowds.

He loves it so much that he flew off to Las Vegas to campaign the day after the first murder of a U.S. ambassador in 33 years.

What actually happened in Benghazi was out of sync with the Obama campaign line. Osama bin Laden was dead. Al Qaeda was on the run. The global war on terror -- well, don't call it that anymore.

A deliberate effort to mislead the voters was launched. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, White House press secretary Jay Carney and the president himself talked about a spontaneous protest of an anti-Muslim video -- even though no evidence of that came from Benghazi.

The White House and the State Department altered the CIA's talking points -- not just in one minor particular, as Carney claimed, but through 12 separate versions. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice, armed with the talking points, spoke sternly about a spontaneous protest and an anti-Muslim video on five Sunday interview shows.

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Debate moderator Candy Crowley came to Obama's defense when he claimed that he had immediately stated that Benghazi was a terrorist attack -- a claim Washington Post fact checker Glenn Kessler awarded four Pinocchios. ...

Christian Science Monitor Blog says Bob Woodward thinks we should not ignore Benghazi.

Bob Woodward compared Benghazi to Watergate during a Friday morning appearance on MSNBC's "Morning Joe."

The famous Washington Post reporter and former antagonist of President Richard Nixon said the US government's editing of talking points used by public officials in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2012, attacks in Benghazi, Libya, is "a very serious issue."

"I would not dismiss Benghazi," Mr. Woodward said.

Woodward's own main talking point was that he believed there are similarities between the process used to produce the Benghazi talking points and Nixon's release of edited transcripts of the White House tapes.

Citing the lengthy e-mail chain detailing the production of the talking points, released by the Obama administration earlier this week, the Watergate press hero said that in the wake of the Libyan tragedy "everyone in the government is saying, 'Oh, let's not tell the public that terrorists were involved, people connected to Al Qaeda. Let's not tell the public that there were warnings.'"

Forty years ago, Nixon went line by line through his tape transcripts and made his own edits.

"He personally went through them and said, 'Let's not tell this, let's not show this,' " said Woodward on "Morning Joe."

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As to Benghazi, Woodward concluded that the edits "show the hydraulic pressure that was in the system not to tell the truth."

WaPo reporters do a good job exposing Eric Holder's lies that purported to explain and excuse the AP wiretaps.

For five days, reporters at the Associated Press had been sitting on a big scoop about a foiled al-Qaeda plot at the request of CIA officials. Then, in a hastily scheduled Monday morning meeting, the journalists were asked by agency officials to hold off on publishing the story for just one more day.

The CIA officials, who had initially cited national security concerns in an attempt to delay publication, no longer had those worries, according to individuals familiar with the exchange. Instead, the Obama administration was planning to announce the successful counterterrorism operation that Tuesday.

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Now, some members of Congress and media advocates are questioning why the administration viewed the leak that led to the May 7 AP story as so grave.

The president's top counterterrorism adviser at the time, John O. Brennan, had appeared on "Good Morning America" the following day to trumpet the successful operation. He said that because of the work of U.S. intelligence, the plot did not pose an active threat to the American public.

Holder said this week that the unauthorized disclosure "put the American people at risk." ...

Now for the important stuff. In a working class neighborhood south west of downtown Milwaukee is the Holler House Bar. Not your average bar, but one with its own entry in Wikipedia. Two notable things about the tavern are the bowling alleys (first in the nation, they say) and the patron's bras shed and signed so they can be posted for posterity. Then government idiots got involved and told the owner, Marcy Skowronski to remove the "fire hazard" or face fines up to "\$10,000 per day." Typical government creeps. We can thank Jim Stingl of the Journal-Sentinel for the story with the happy ending. Sounds like the bar has lots of support.

Stripped of the bras that decorated the tavern's ceiling for nearly half a century, the Holler House looked mighty naked.

But on Thursday, justice was restored to the universe. A ridiculous city order to ban the bras as a fire hazard was rescinded.

"Oh my goodness, we won," cried Marcy Skowronski, the always colorful 87-year-old owner of the south side bar. "We're going to have a party to throw the bras back up."

I'll let Skowronski explain what happened when a city inspector stopped in recently.

"We've had bras hanging here for 45 years. It's been a charm of the place. So here comes this gal, and she's walking in here like Lady Astor's pet horse, you know, and she says she wants those bras down because they're a fire hazard. Now how can a bra be a fire hazard unless someone is wearing it? Honest to God." ...

... "We've got a bunch of crazy people who come in here," Skowronski said.

But no crazier than the city's short-lived ban on the frilly things they leave behind.

Hoover Institution

[Watching Obamacare Unravel](#)

The "Affordable Care Act" is becoming an unsustainable mess. It's time to scrap it entirely

by Richard Epstein

On Friday, May 10, President Obama ventured into Ohio to give a [Mother's Day defense](#) of the sagging fortunes of his signal achievement, the misnamed Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The law, the President assures us, "is here to stay"—a comment that is best regarded as a threat and not a promise. His conclusion was not coincidental; support for the ACA has dropped from 42 percent to 35 percent between November 2012 and April 2013.

This recent drop in popularity is not a function of some detailed analysis of the ACA's key provisions. Rather, the public seems to feel that the sheer complexity of the program makes it highly unlikely that it will be able to take effect in any form by its ostensible January 1, 2014 start date. The most obvious difficulty in implementation stems from the unwillingness of many states to participate in its two gargantuan initiatives, even with heavy federal support: the private exchanges (now called "marketplaces") for individuals, and the Medicaid extension to additional individuals.

Growing Pains for the ACA

The most [up-to-date report](#) from the Kaiser Family Foundation reveals extensive resistance on both fronts. The ACA's new marketplaces are said to allow ordinary individuals to shop for their own policies. This modest goal sounds easy, but it is not. As [the current rules demand](#), all enrollment must be possible online, in person, by phone, fax, and mail. In addition to a website, the exchanges must provide "culturally and linguistically appropriate assistance," along with a navigator program to promote public awareness. They must offer seamless linkage with other public initiatives, and accurate information on premium tax credits and cost-sharing subsidies, all under a program whose key provisions are not yet fully worked out. Already, HHS has distributed over \$3.6 billion to states for implementation, with more to come.

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Unfortunately, these private insurers cannot do their part unless they have enough information to accurately price the “essential minimum conditions” required under the ACA. At present, it [is estimated](#) that only around 2 percent of the current plans meet the ACA’s outsized legislative ambitions. Nor can the federal government set up, all at once, the federal exchanges that are needed to make this system work. Similarly, the tepid reception to the Medicaid extension program only stretches scarce government resources. With each passing day, it becomes clearer that the entire process is backing up.

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The ACA’s Grim Cost Estimates

The President’s Mother’s Day offensive touts the ACA’s benefits while making only a passing reference to the current implementation difficulties. Most disturbingly, the speech reveals that the President cannot grasp that no insurance program can work unless it can bring its revenues and payouts into line with each other. The President avoids these budgetary issues by putting, as is his wont, the matter in personal terms, by insisting, for example, that all people get coverage for preexisting conditions at standard rates. In speaking of cancer survivor Natoma Canfield, he said:

A few years ago, her insurance company charged her over \$6,000 in premiums, paid for only \$900 worth of care, told her they’d jack up her rates another 40 percent anyway—even though she’d been cancer-free for more than a decade. Despite her desire to keep her health insurance—despite her fears that she would get sick again—she finally just had to surrender her coverage. Couldn’t afford it. Hung her fortunes on chance. And just a few weeks later, she fell ill, and was diagnosed with leukemia. Just days before health care reform became a reality.

His compassion for Ms. Canfield’s woeful situation is to be commended. But two key blunders reveal the President’s naiveté. First, it is incorrect to suggest that Ms. Canfield got a raw insurance deal because she only received \$900 worth of care for her \$6,000 of insurance payments. The only way any insurance system can work is for some policy holders to receive less than their premium dollars to free up funds to care for the sick. Second, the refusal of the

insurer to renew the policy at older rates doesn't look unjust when the cancer reoccurred just as it had feared.

No one can say in the abstract whether 40 percent was the right markup. But the President has precipitated a budgetary crisis now that "companies can no longer impose lifetime limits on the amount of care you receive, or drop your coverage if you get sick, or discriminate against children with preexisting conditions." If these individuals are to receive insurance at bargain rates, the program must be able to find added revenues from other individuals to cover the financial short-fall lest the entire program go belly up, leaving everyone worse off.

Getting Health Insurance: A Civic Duty?

This last point has not escaped Ezekiel Emanuel, one of the key drafters of the ACA. In [his recent Wall Street Journal op-ed](#), Emanuel pleaded with the "young invincibles" to enroll in the healthcare program from, as he notes, "a menu of subsidized options." But why should they? As noted, the entire system of exchanges operates on the view that the young and the healthy should be required to contribute enough to cover not only their own costs, but those of the groups who get low rates, lifetime coverage, and protection for preexisting conditions. This prompts Emanuel to suggest, "Every commencement address by an administration official should encourage young graduates to get health insurance."

Emanuel's expansive view of civic duty plays the game both ways when he accuses individuals who don't purchase health insurance of "freeriding" on the public. But their purchase of insurance will allow the preferred plan recipients to free ride on them. Let young people buy their own coverage at market rates, and both forms of freeriding will vanish without the public relations campaign.

The gravity of this financial hit remains, for there is no place for anyone, young or old, to hide themselves from a tide of red ink. The President misleadingly has said that right now the 85 percent of Americans who have private coverage do not have to trouble themselves with doing a thing, because their protections are already built into the ACA "with a wide array of new benefits, tough new consumer protections, stronger cost control measures than existed before the law passed."

But this glittering array of benefits does not come cheap. The current statutory definition of essential minimum benefits is so lavish that no one knows whether that coverage can be afforded at reasonable rates through the private sector. Right now, our collective generosity will mean that the cost of individual coverages in the United States on the exchanges could move up by [about 32 percent](#), in light of the new coverage requirements based [on best actuarial estimates](#).

Unfortunately, what the President neglected to mention is that there is no assurance that employers will decide to keep that coverage once the costs are brought home. It turns out that the penalties for employers will be in the range of \$2,000 to \$3,000 to dump their coverage, which is far less than the \$16,000 or so that it costs them to maintain the existing coverage. It takes little imagination, therefore, for employers to announce to their employees that they will divide the gains from dropping their current coverage through a salary increase of say \$7,000, which makes it likely that the public exchanges will be inundated with new applications for coverages even at the higher rates now predicted for the bloated ACA coverage. That cost

could be in the hundreds of billions if even 10 percent of the roughly 157 million individuals now covered through employee plans find that their coverage has been terminated. Ordinary people are hurt both ways.

Deregulate Now

In this sorry state of the world, the only short-term mechanism that could stop the general blood-letting is a much-needed reversal that pushes back all the key dates for running the plan. The respite in question should not be used only to iron out the difficulties in securing the needed coverage. It should be used to update the information base to decide whether the ACA, on which billions have already been squandered, is so unsustainable that it should be scrapped in its entirety.

As I have [noted before](#), there is only one type of reform that can make progress in meeting the three goals of a sensible health care system: cost reduction, quality improvements, and public access. That reform requires massive deregulation of the many market impediments that are already in place. Lower the costs, drop the excessive mandates, and thin out administrative costs, and people will flock back to the system voluntarily. Do none of these things, and we can be treated to yet another round of presidential anecdotes that ignore the systemic social costs caused by these initiatives.

National Review

[Loyalty to the Truth](#)

There's a duty to speak out about the failures of the Romney campaign.

by Gabriel Schoenfeld

Even before my new book, *A Bad Day on the Romney Campaign: An Insider's Account*, went on sale and could be read, it was suggested to me by former colleagues in a series of e-mails, calls, and statements in the press that I would regret airing “dirty laundry” in public.

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Is this fierce reaction warranted? Am I wrong to speak up? Both questions raise interesting issues.

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My book exposes incompetence, yes. Too often, incompetence is blithely excused in politics. “That’s how campaigns always are,” the experts assure us. For one, if the Republican party hopes to win, that lackadaisical attitude needs to change. Exposing incompetence is a start.

But my book also explores a more fundamental dysfunction of the Romney campaign: a misunderstanding of the very nature of democratic politics itself.

Romney’s top strategists saw the campaign not as a battle for the hearts and minds of Americans, but as a massive marketing and advertising challenge. On November 6, 2012, consumers would be asked to choose between two products. The key task was creating a start-up company called Romney for President, Inc., that, using every available marketing technique, would do what was necessary to ensure that the Romney brand was better known, better liked, and a better seller. The ad men running the campaign thus believed that politics consisted not of leadership by a candidate speaking difficult truths to the American people, but of carefully matching Mitt Romney’s positions to the preferences of voters as they were revealed in polls.

Scripting Romney from morning to night with words favored by focus groups, the strategists running the campaign transformed a man noted for geniality and earnestness into a “severe conservative” who radiated insincerity. Along the way, they created a candidate who, despite his firm convictions on many matters, appeared to the public to have no convictions. Unfortunately, all too often, Mitt Romney willingly helped them along.

Both as a candidate and as a president, George W. Bush had his share of defects. But one of the reasons he twice won presidential elections is that he was exactly who he said he was. Voters could tell, and they liked that. Both as a man and as a governor, Mitt Romney had his share of virtues, and no doubt they would have been on display had he become president. But one of the reasons he lost twice is that he was often not who he said he was. Voters could tell that, too — the artificiality of his focus-group-chosen language was often striking — and they didn’t like it at all.

There is a curious notion of loyalty at work among those attacking me. Mitt Romney’s career in politics is over: He would be the first to admit that he has no further political ambitions. To me, the duty of those who worked in the Romney campaign is to understand our mistakes, so that the Republican party will not repeat them in 2016. I would hope that Mitt Romney, a man of unswerving devotion to our country, would agree.

My book, written in the spirit of honest inquiry, is meant as a corrective aimed at sparking an overdue debate about the fundamentals of American politics.

After the hand-wringing of Republicans across the spectrum, the Republican National Committee’s own flawed attempts at explaining the failure, media reports on the imminent death of the GOP, and attempts to redefine conservatism out of existence, I realized that the party cannot move in the right direction unless it understands what went wrong.

If, in the process of explaining what went wrong, I am labeled “disloyal” by the guild of political hacks who want to keep working in future campaigns without any accountability for their failures, so be it. As the father of three girls who trembles when he contemplates the future of our country, I believe that staying silent is itself a moral failure.

Gabriel Schoenfeld worked on the Mitt Romney for President campaign for nearly two years, first as a consultant, and then as a senior adviser. His new e-book, A Bad Day on the Romney Campaign: An Insider's Account (Penguin), goes on sale on May 14.

Examiner

Benghazi, IRS scandals constitute politics by other means

by Michael Barone

What do the Benghazi cover-up and the IRS scandal have in common? They were both about winning elections, under false pretenses.

Winning elections, after all, is something Barack Obama is good at. He obviously loves campaigning and delivering grand orations to enormous adoring crowds.

He loves it so much that he flew off to Las Vegas to campaign the day after the first murder of a U.S. ambassador in 33 years.

What actually happened in Benghazi was out of sync with the Obama campaign line. Osama bin Laden was dead. Al Qaeda was on the run. The global war on terror -- well, don't call it that anymore.

A deliberate effort to mislead the voters was launched. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, White House press secretary Jay Carney and the president himself talked about a spontaneous protest of an anti-Muslim video -- even though no evidence of that came from Benghazi.

The White House and the State Department altered the CIA's talking points -- not just in one minor particular, as Carney claimed, but through 12 separate versions. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice, armed with the talking points, spoke sternly about a spontaneous protest and an anti-Muslim video on five Sunday interview shows.

The campaign trail press grilled Mitt Romney for his (impolitic) statement immediately after the attacks. Obama went on talk shows and peddled his line about an anti-Muslim video.

Debate moderator Candy Crowley came to Obama's defense when he claimed that he had immediately stated that Benghazi was a terrorist attack -- a claim Washington Post fact checker Glenn Kessler awarded four Pinocchios.

Romney, perhaps worried that Team Obama might wheel out then publicly silent CIA Director David Petraeus in its defense, didn't press the point.

This attempt to mislead the electorate worked. It seems a stretch to say that it determined the outcome of the election. But it certainly helped the Obama campaign.

And what about the Internal Revenue Service's targeting of conservative 501(c)(4) groups? Starting in March 2010 it questioned the tax-free status of one group after another with "Tea Party" or "patriot" in their names.

That's reminiscent of the Department of Homeland Security memo warning of the potential of such groups to engage in terrorist-type violence -- which of course hasn't happened.

An IRS official acknowledged and apologized for this misuse of government power last Friday. She attributed it to low-level IRS employees in Cincinnati. She said she had been informed about it in May 2011. Later, news came out that Tea Party groups received letters of inquiry from Washington and IRS offices in California as well.

The IRS pressed some groups for very detailed information. Has a family member been a member of another organization or plan to run for political office?

The targeting continued into 2012, when criteria were changed to "political action type organizations involved in limiting/expanding Government, educating on the Constitution and Bill of Rights, social economic reform/movement." We can't have people educating people about the Constitution, can we?

The acting IRS director, who assured Congress that no group was targeted because of its beliefs, was informed of the targeting of conservative groups in May 2012. Jay Carney has said that the White House had no knowledge of it until a few weeks ago. Maybe. We'll see.

Top Obama political aide David Plouffe told National Journal's Ron Fournier that the IRS misdeeds did not really matter because Obama opponents were able to spend plenty of money.

But they would have been able to spend more absent the IRS misconduct. Some Tea Partiers decided to fold up shop rather than face an extended IRS inquiry. Others ran up big legal bills.

The fact is that the targeting of Tea Party groups by the IRS helped Democrats win elections. It's hard to believe that at least some IRS employees intended it to have that effect. Those who leaked confidential information certainly did so.

The president has denounced the IRS misconduct in strong terms "if" it happened. He acknowledged that any targeting of one point of view by a government agency is wrong.

But in 2009 at Arizona State University's commencement he noted that he had not been given an honorary degree and added that the school's president and board of regents "will soon learn all about being audited by the IRS."

That doesn't sound so funny now.

Christian Science Monitor

[Bob Woodward compares Benghazi with Watergate. Is he right?](#)

by Peter Grier

[Bob Woodward](#) compared [Benghazi](#) to [Watergate](#) during a Friday morning appearance on [MSNBC's "Morning Joe."](#)

The famous [Washington Post](#) reporter and former antagonist of [President Richard Nixon](#) said the US government's editing of talking points used by public officials in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2012, attacks in Benghazi, [Libya](#), is "a very serious issue."

"I would not dismiss Benghazi," Mr. Woodward said.

Woodward's own main talking point was that he believed there are similarities between the process used to produce the Benghazi talking points and Nixon's release of edited transcripts of the [White House](#) tapes.

Citing the [lengthy e-mail chain](#) detailing the production of the talking points, released by the [Obama administration](#) earlier this week, the Watergate press hero said that in the wake of the Libyan tragedy "everyone in the government is saying, 'Oh, let's not tell the public that terrorists were involved, people connected to [Al Qaeda](#). Let's not tell the public that there were warnings.'"

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Washington Post

[Some question whether AP leak on al-Qaeda plot put U.S. at risk](#)

by Carol D. Leonnig and Julie Tate

For five days, reporters at the Associated Press had been sitting on [a big scoop](#) about a foiled al-Qaeda plot at the request of CIA officials. Then, in a hastily scheduled Monday morning meeting, the journalists were asked by agency officials to hold off on publishing the story for just one more day.

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Now, some members of Congress and media advocates are questioning why the administration viewed the leak that led to the May 7 AP story as so grave.

The president's top counterterrorism adviser at the time, John O. Brennan, had appeared on "Good Morning America" the following day to trumpet the successful operation. He said that because of the work of U.S. intelligence, the plot did not pose an active threat to the American public.

Holder [said this week](#) that the unauthorized disclosure "put the American people at risk."

The White House and CIA declined to comment for this article. But former White House national security spokesman Tommy Vietor, recalling the discussion in the administration last year, said officials were simply realistic in their response to AP's story. They knew that if it were published, the White House would have to address it with an official, detailed statement.

"There was not some press conference planned to take credit for this," Vietor said in an interview. "There was certainly an understanding [that] we'd have to mitigate and triage this and offer context for other reporters."

AP's story about the foiled plot was at odds with the calming message the White House had been conveying on the eve of the first anniversary of the killing of Osama bin Laden. On April 30, the Department of Homeland Security issued a statement saying that there was "no indication of any specific, credible threats or plots against the US tied to the one-year anniversary of Bin Laden's death."

AP reporters had learned in the spring of 2012 that the CIA had infiltrated the al-Qaeda branch behind the plot, according to the individuals familiar with the story, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak for the record. The plot centered on an attempt to get a bomb into an assailant's underwear, like the bomb that failed to detonate on a Christmas Day 2009 flight to Detroit.

The news service was prepared to publish its scoop on May 2, 2012. But in discussions with government officials, the CIA stressed to AP that publishing anything about the operation to obtain the bomb and thwart the plot would create grave national security dangers and compromise a "sensitive intelligence operation."

Michael J. Morell, the CIA's deputy director, gave AP reporters some additional background information to persuade them to hold off, Vietor said. The agency needed several days more to protect what it had in the works.

Then, in a meeting on Monday, May 7, CIA officials reported that the national security concerns were "no longer an issue," according to the individuals familiar with the discussion.

When the journalists rejected a plea to hold off longer, the CIA then offered a compromise. Would they wait a day if AP could have the story exclusively for an hour, with no government officials confirming it for that time?

The reporters left the meeting to discuss the idea with their editors. Within an hour, an administration official was on the line to AP's offices.

The White House had quashed the one-hour offer as impossible. AP could have the story exclusively for five minutes before the White House made its own announcement. AP then rejected the request to postpone publication any longer.

An AP spokeswoman declined to discuss details of the meeting, AP discussions with government sources or the agencies to which the reporters spoke.

“As we told Reuters a year ago, at no point did AP offer or propose a deal in relation to this story,” said spokeswoman Erin Madigan White. “We did not publish anything until we were assured by high-ranking officials with direct knowledge of the situation, in more than one part of the government, that the national security risk was over and no one was in danger. The only deal was to hold the story until any security risk was resolved.”

Vietor said that it would be a mistake to dismiss the unauthorized disclosure because al-Qaeda failed to carry out its plot.

“We shouldn’t pretend that this leak of an unbelievably sensitive dangerous piece of information is okay because nobody died,” he said.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
[City bra ban doesn't hold up](#)
by Jim Stengl



Marcy Skowronski, owner of the Holler House Bar at 2042 W. Lincoln Ave, with the the bag of bras that once hung from the ceiling but were ordered to be taken down by a building inspector.

Stripped of the bras that decorated the tavern's ceiling for nearly half a century, the Holler House looked mighty naked.

But on Thursday, justice was restored to the universe. A ridiculous city order to ban the bras as a fire hazard was rescinded.

"Oh my goodness, we won," cried Marcy Skowronski, the always colorful 87-year-old owner of the south side bar. "We're going to have a party to throw the bras back up."

I'll let Skowronski explain what happened when a city inspector stopped in recently.

"We've had bras hanging here for 45 years. It's been a charm of the place. So here comes this gal, and she's walking in here like Lady Astor's pet horse, you know, and she says she wants those bras down because they're a fire hazard. Now how can a bra be a fire hazard unless someone is wearing it? Honest to God."

Actually, I don't know about Lady Astor or whether she had a horse, but I do believe that bras rarely ignite, either when worn or if repurposed as tavern art. Ald. Bob Donovan, who jumped in on Skowronski's side, said, "I'm no expert, but aren't bras flame resistant anyway? I know some of them are awfully hot."

You get a sense of the bawdy but beloved tradition at the Holler House. Female customers, particularly first-timers, are encouraged to remove, autograph and leave their bras behind because, well, just because. Typically, they modestly wriggle out of them right there on a bar stool, or they retire to the ladies room.

It's a practice that Skowronski herself began one crazy night in the 1960s.

"We all got bombed, all these girls. And we just decided to take our bras off and hang them up," she said.

Dozens of bras dangled from skis, a coal bucket and other odd objects attached to the ceiling. Men's underwear was up there, too. But this week, Skowronski's son-in-law took them down for fear that city inspectors would return and slap them with a fine, which according to the official "order to correct condition" can run from \$150 to \$10,000 a day.

The Holler House, 2042 W. Lincoln Ave., was founded in 1908 by Skowronski's in-laws. She has worked there 59 years. Besides its uplifting decorating style, the bar is known for having the oldest certified bowling lanes in America. To this day, the two lanes require the pins to be reset by hand. Sports Illustrated gave the place lots of ink in a 1988 article, and a sticker on the front door says Esquire magazine named it one of America's best bars.

The Milwaukee Department of Neighborhood Services has inspected the Holler House many times in the past but has never before deemed the bra display a potential inferno. The written order from last month's visit said "curtains, draperies, hangings and other decorative materials suspended from walls or ceilings shall meet the flame propagation performance criteria of NFPA 701."

Ah, yes, the dreaded NFPA rule on non-propagated brassieres. You'd think that every bar in town would have something hanging up that's decorative and flammable.

Realizing its straps were twisted on this one, the department Thursday dismissed the order. The official explanation for the DD-sized mistake says something about the bar having a smaller occupancy rate than originally thought, and therefore a less stringent fire code.

Skowronski had gone downtown this week to appeal the order but was told she missed the deadline. Common sense finally prevailed once Donovan and I started asking questions.

When I stopped at the bar earlier this week, everyone was burned about the bras. Randy Romans, who was there servicing the jukebox as he has for 34 years, said most bars are braless, but these decorations at the Holler House are a harmless conversation piece.

"This place is so old that the bras should be grandfathered in. Or grandmothered in," he said.

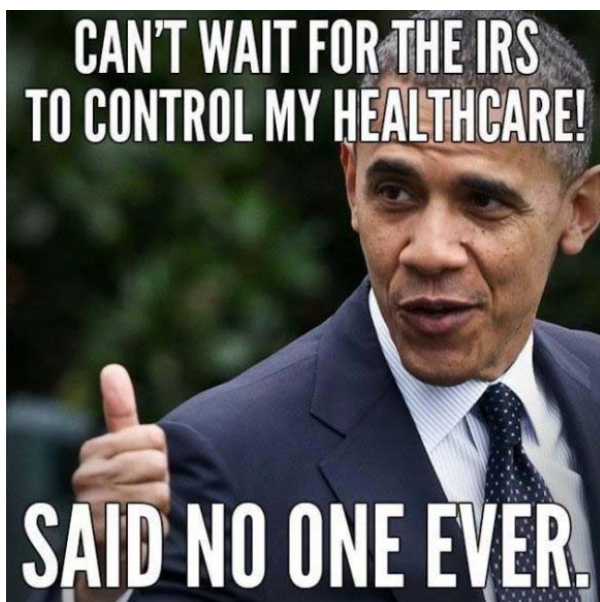
Skowronski said the bar got a thorough cleaning for its 100th birthday, and many of the old, tattered, smoke-stained bras were discarded. Since then, a new collection has been growing.

I asked Nina Hunter, a regular customer and friend of Skowronski, if she ever donated a bra to the cause. "Personally I have not, but I have talked many into doing it," she said. The number one excuse for not leaving a bra behind? They're expensive.

Skowronski sorted through the bag o' bras removed from the ceiling and pulled out a wide assortment of colors and styles. Many had been initialed by the donor, and some included a smiley face or a short message like, "Sue M. Awesome time! April 2010." One polka dot bra, donated by a regular a week before she died, is framed with her photo. Larry the Cable Guy stopped in one night, and he was given a bra to go as a souvenir.

"We've got a bunch of crazy people who come in here," Skowronski said.

But no crazier than the city's short-lived ban on the frilly things they leave behind..



AT NO TIME WAS THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AWARE



OF WHAT THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION WAS DOING



**WHAT OBAMA AND HIS ADMINISTRATION THINKS OF THE
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to Shield him from the rain



Marines may only use an umbrella
while escorting a lady.

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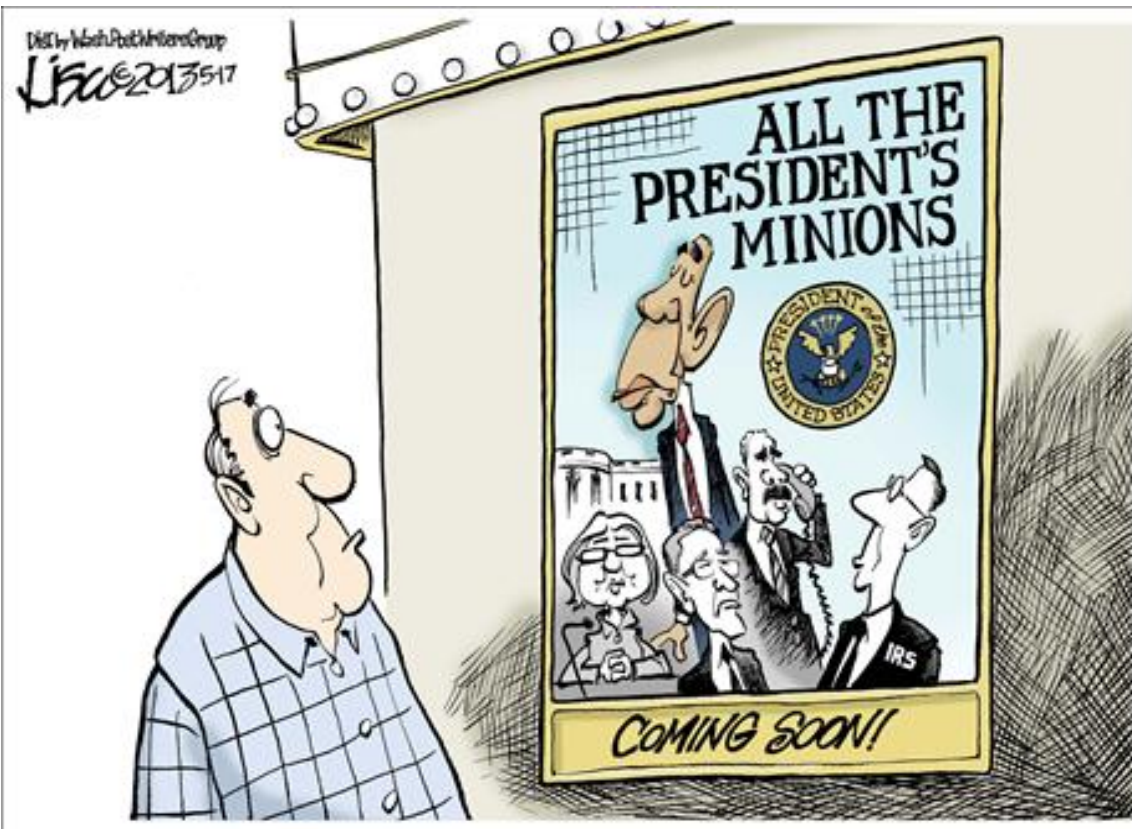
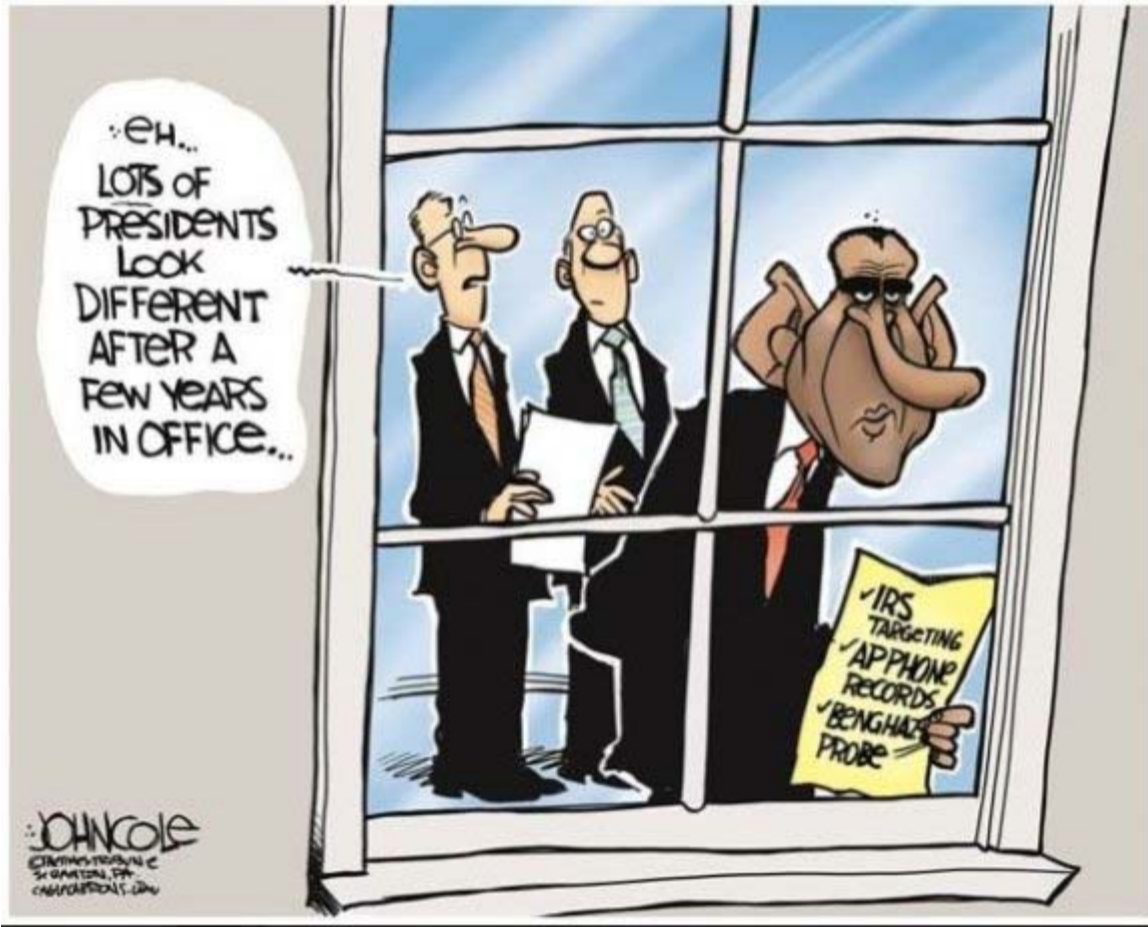


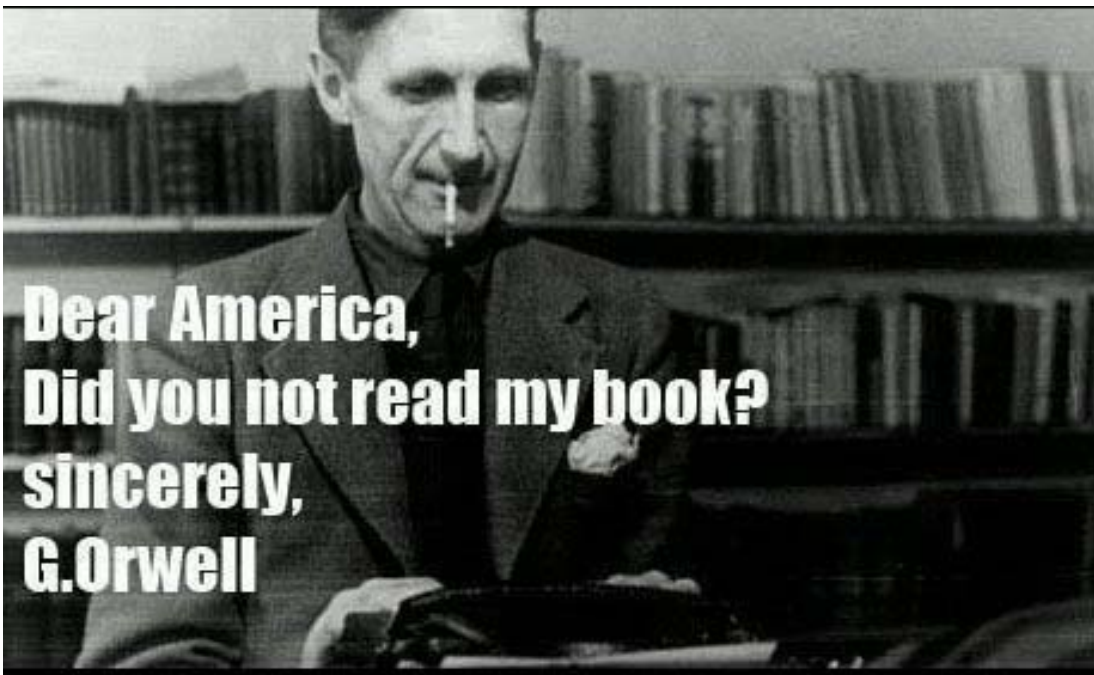


Did you REALLY make that Marine hold your umbrella?

NEWS ITEM: IRS IS BUILDING A MASSIVE DATABASE TO ENFORCE OBAMACARE







" BUT WHAT IF KING GEORGE HAD HAD THE IRS? "