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Fred Barnes chronicles the decline of this presidency.

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Now, six months later, the Obama administration is in an unexpected and sharp state of decline. Mr. Obama has little influence on Congress. His presidency has no theme. He pivots nervously from issue to issue. What there is of an Obama agenda consists, at the moment, of leftovers from his first term or proposals that he failed to emphasize in his re-election campaign and thus have practically no chance of passage.

Congressional Republicans neither trust nor fear the president. And Democrats on Capitol Hill, to whom Mr. Obama has never been close, have grown leery of him. In the Senate, Democrats complain privately about his interference with the biggest domestic policy matter of 2013, immigration reform. His effect, the senators believe, can only be to weaken the fragile bipartisan coalition for reform and make passage of major legislation more perilous.

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...

Peter Wehner posts on two polls that suggest the American public is finally getting the picture.

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Nearly half of those surveyed—47 percent—believe the president isn't telling the truth when he says he didn't know the IRS was giving extra scrutiny to the applications of conservative groups seeking tax-exempt status. More than half—55 percent—say the IRS actions raise questions about the administration's "overall honesty and integrity." Fifty-eight percent believe the administration's handling of the Benghazi consulate attacks raises questions about the honesty of the White House, while the same number say the Department of Justice's subpoenaing of reporter e-mails and phone records in its leak investigations raise concerns.

For roughly half the public to believe Mr. Obama is lying at this relatively early stage in the congressional investigation is quite high, especially since at this point there's no direct evidence showing the president knew about these scandals prior to May of this year. (Which isn't to say the IRS and the Treasury Department didn't know about the IRS's nefarious activities long

before the 2012 election or that the White House chief of staff and White House counsel didn't know about the scandal prior to when Obama says he learned of it.)

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Remember Stephanie Cutter the white house political operative with the barely contained sneer? She was the one who claimed Romney was a felon. Turns out she was one of those meeting with the IRS head when he visited the executive mansion 157 times. [Hot Air](#) has the story.

Noted [liar](#) Stephanie Cutter is making the media rounds, furnishing Douglas Shulman with an alibi for many of those [White House meetings](#) he attended during President Obama's first term — far more visits than most cabinet secretaries logged. Cutter insists that Shulman's frequent presence at 1600 Pennsylvania isn't the least bit "nefarious" because he was there to attend Obamacare implementation planning sessions. She knows this, she says, because she was in the room: ...

Jeff Jacoby on the boom in Washington, DC while the rest of the country suffers. Give Stephen Fuller credit for this much: He's willing to admit he was wrong.

During the debate leading up to the federal budget sequester, Fuller was a voice of doom. An economist at George Mason University and the director of its Center for Regional Analysis, he predicted that sequestration would be especially calamitous for Washington, D.C., and its surroundings. If Congress didn't stop the automatic spending cuts from going into effect, Fuller warned last year, the Washington area was headed for a "[devastating recession](#)." Some 450,000 jobs, many of them in the private sector, would be wiped out in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

"It's something you don't even want to draw a picture of because it's too scary," he said in a radio interview last summer. In January he described the sequester's impact on the national capital region as an "[end-of-the-world kind of hit](#)."

But the world hasn't ended. Not even in Washington.

In the months since President Obama signed the order to cut federal outlays by \$85 billion, the Washington Post reported last week, the region has added 40,000 jobs. "Income-tax receipts have surged in Virginia, beating expectations. Few government contractors have laid off workers." There is no sign of the economic hellfire and brimstone foretold by Fuller, who says it's a "surprise" to him that Washington's economy is still booming. "We've done better than I expected," he confessed.

The real surprise is that anyone is still surprised by the affluence of the Washington area. ...

According to the [Christian Science Monitor](#), the Ft. Hood shooter's defense may have undermined the claim his crime was a type of "work place violence."

The admission by Army [Maj. Nidal Hasan](#) on Tuesday that he attacked [Fort Hood](#) in 2009 in defense of "the leadership of the Islamic Emirate of [Afghanistan](#), the [Taliban](#)" has suddenly undermined the [Obama administration](#)'s previous contention that the murders of 13 soldiers at the Texas base constituted an act of "workplace violence."

Hasan's legal argument, which is being considered by the judge, Col. Tara Osborn, may reignite the political furor over how the Obama administration has classified the shootings, as well as arguments about whether the mass shootings constituted the first major Islamic jihadist attack on the US after 9/11. As recently as May 23, President Obama said no "large-scale" terrorism attacks on the homeland have occurred on his watch.

Officials at the US Department of Defense have said there isn't enough evidence to put Hasan on trial for an act of terrorism, and they have worried that such a claim could undermine the Army major's right to a fair trial.

Critics argue that the Fort Hood incident has not been characterized as a jihadist attack in part to give the Obama administration political and policy cover. Moreover, they add, the Obama position works to the detriment of shooting victims, which includes the 32 wounded and the families of those killed. Victims would have been eligible for combat compensation under US law if the Pentagon had classified Hasan not as a murderous US Army psychiatrist but rather as an enemy combatant or an "associated force" under the Military Commissions Act of 2006, they say. ...

WSJ

[The Decline of the Obama Presidency](#)

His second term is coming undone not because of scandal but because of decisions made in the previous four years.

by Fred Barnes

John Dos Passos, the novelist and historian, once said: "Often things you think are just beginning are coming to an end." His observation was made in the 1960s. But it's true today of [Barack Obama](#)'s presidency and the promise of a bright future for his second term.

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Congressional Republicans neither trust nor fear the president. And Democrats on Capitol Hill, to whom Mr. Obama has never been close, have grown leery of him. In the Senate, Democrats complain privately about his interference with the biggest domestic policy matter of 2013, immigration reform. His effect, the senators believe, can only be to weaken the fragile bipartisan coalition for reform and make passage of major legislation more perilous.

The Obama breakdown was not caused by the trio of scandals—IRS, Justice Department, Benghazi—now confronting the president. The decline preceded them. It's the result of what Mr. Obama did in his first term, during the campaign and in the two months following his re-election. But the scandals have worsened his plight and made recovery next to impossible.

To be clear, the two problems—the decline and the scandals—are different matters. The scandals have not been linked directly to the president. They are vexing to the administration, but they are not the source of its current impotence. Instead, Mr. Obama's power and influence have been sapped as a direct result of his own choices and decisions. He also suffers from shortcomings normal to a second term, such as a new, less able team of advisers and cabinet members and the arrogance fed by an impressive re-election.

In his first term, when Democrats controlled the House and Senate, Mr. Obama ignored Republicans—he didn't need their votes to pass the \$800 billion stimulus, the Affordable Care Act (aka ObamaCare) and [Dodd-Frank](#), with its fresh wave of Wall Street regulations. Then, after Republicans captured the House in the 2010 midterm election, his efforts to reach agreements with them proved futile.

Why did Mr. Obama fail at compromise? For one thing, he is rarely able to mask his contempt for Republicans, especially those with conservative views. For another, he began to question Republicans' motives, insisting publicly that their paramount goal in Washington is to protect the rich from higher taxes. As a tactic for encouraging compromise, his approach was counterproductive.

Robert Merry, the editor of the National Interest magazine and a longtime Washington journalist, recently pinpointed a bigger reason for the impasse after 2010: "It is a deadlock born largely of the president's resolve to push an agenda for which he has no clear national consensus." In other words, Mr. Obama is too liberal to find common ground with Republicans. The spending cuts he offers are illusory, the tax increases specific.

Then, after the November election, Mr. Obama spurned conciliation. He upped the ante, calling for higher spending, a new economic stimulus and an increase in the debt limit without congressional approval. Senate GOP Leader Mitch McConnell laughed out loud when he heard the proposal.

Mr. Obama used his last bit of leverage to prevail over Republicans in the fiscal-cliff budget negotiations late last year. With the Bush-era tax cuts due to expire Dec. 31, the president forced Republicans to accept a hefty tax hike on the top 2% of wage earners. His short-term victory has had long-term political consequences. Republicans vowed to oppose new tax increases, which ruled out a "grand bargain" to reduce the deficit and national debt.

The exclusion of Republicans from a role in crafting ObamaCare has also backfired. By failing to ensure that the GOP had some influence on the health-care law, the president gave them no

reason to support its implementation. With ObamaCare more unpopular than ever, House Republicans voted last month to repeal it. The vote was largely symbolic, but it was telling that two Democrats joined the effort. Short of repeal, Republican elected officials across the country are committed to making the law's implementation, beginning this year, as difficult as possible.

Nor is tax reform likely to get anywhere this year or next despite Mr. Obama's support, at least rhetorically, for the idea. He wants to eliminate tax preferences and loopholes so the government can collect more revenue. To win those changes, though, he would need make a bargain with Republicans, offering to cut tax rates, including the top rate on individual income, to generate faster economic growth. That clashes with Mr. Obama's zeal for higher taxes on the well-to-do.

Faced with such obstacles, the president could focus instead on his own domestic agenda—if he had one. He doesn't. He's paying the price for a re-election campaign that was based on attacking his opponent, Mitt Romney, and not much else. In the president's State of the Union address in February, he endorsed a \$9 minimum wage and universal prekindergarten for 4-year-olds, but those proposals lack a popular mandate. If he had campaigned for them last year, they might have better prospects now.

More often than not, presidents focus on foreign policy in their second terms. But Mr. Obama's practice is to downgrade foreign policy in favor of domestic concerns. Where he has sought to restrain foreign governments—Russia, Iran, North Korea—he has been unsuccessful. His speech in May on national security and the terrorist threat revived an issue from his 2008 campaign, the closing of the terrorist prison at Guantanamo Bay. The chance that will happen is slim.

He is also pushing two leftovers from his first year in office, immigration reform and gun control. What's striking about Mr. Obama's handling of both is his complete absence of influence. On gun control, his speeches had zero impact. On immigration, his influence is entirely negative. He can impede a bill. He cannot aid its passage.

All this has left Mr. Obama in a state of weakness. And Democrats are increasingly blaming him. Doug Sosnik, a former senior adviser in the Clinton White House, wrote in a memo last month that Mr. Obama's re-election "was a great political achievement, but the fact that he didn't set out a clear policy agenda for a second term left him without a clear mandate to govern over a politically divided Congress."

Mr. Sosnik, who is now deputy commissioner of the National Basketball Association, added: "There's not a single member of either party [in Congress] who fears paying a political price for not falling in line with the President, making it even more difficult to get members to cast difficult votes."

Mr. Obama's top priority now is winning the House in 2014 while retaining control of the Senate. "I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that we've got Nancy Pelosi back in the speakership," he said last week at a Democratic fundraiser in Chicago. In Mr. Obama's case, "everything" is unlikely to be enough.

Mr. Barnes, executive editor of the Weekly Standard, is a Fox News commentator.

Contentions

The Growing Stench of Corruption

by Peter Wehner

Two new polls—one from Bloomberg National Poll, the other from the [Wall Street Journal/NBC News](#)—show a clear erosion in the public's trust in Barack Obama's honesty and integrity.

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This could well have a corrosive effect on the Obama presidency. For one thing, it means the president's strongest political asset—the fact that many Americans have come to like and trust Obama—is beginning to crumble. For another, it means the president's words will become devalued. Increasingly the claims and denials by Obama and his administration will, on a range of matters, be ignored, since he's an untrustworthy man. And the growing stench of corruption will not only harm the president; it will hurt his party as well.

"Obama's incredibly shrinking presidency is a reminder that politics is a transactional business," George Will recently [wrote](#), "that trust is the currency of the transactions and that the currency has been debased."

Scandals fall on a continuum, from low-grade ones (like "travelgate") to more serious ones (like Iran-Contra, the Lewinsky affair, and Watergate). What determines how serious a scandal is depends on the nature of what was done and whether people in authority, including senior administration officials and/or the president, were involved.

The abuse of power by the IRS is an extraordinary breach of trust, and right now, because of stonewalling, we don't know all who were involved. But sooner or later, with Congress investigating these scandals, we hopefully will. The lethal attacks on the U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi involved the death of four Americans, including the first American ambassador since the 1970s, and misleading the public in the aftermath of the attacks. And the Department of Justice's targeting of reporters is unprecedented, with the attorney general at the center of the scandal and now being investigated for misleading Congress.

This is not the kind of alignment you want to have early in a second term.

Hot Air

[Stephanie Cutter's defense of former IRS commissioner undermines WH talking point](#)

by Guy Benson

Noted [liar](#) Stephanie Cutter is making the media rounds, furnishing Douglas Shulman with an alibi for many of those [White House meetings](#) he attended during President Obama's first term — far more visits than most cabinet secretaries logged. Cutter insists that Shulman's frequent presence at 1600 Pennsylvania isn't the least bit "nefarious" because he was there to attend Obamacare implementation planning sessions. She knows this, she says, because she was in the room:



In response

, Carol Platt Liebau makes an [incisive point](#):

As everyone knows, Stephanie Cutter's expertise is not primarily in the policy area; it is in the realm of politics: Political strategy and communications. She has been described by the [Daily Beast as a partisan "pit bull."](#) Her job isn't the nuts and bolts of governing. She is a political fixer. That's why she was a Deputy Campaign manager for the President's re-election. Given that's the case, it's far from clear why she would have been in meetings with Doug Shulman at all. **The whole point of the IRS' supposed "independence" is to insulate the agency from the influence and machinations of people *exactly like Stephanie Cutter*....**Indeed, [the] time line and Cutter's presence in the IRS meetings makes it more likely than ever that subtle political influence was wielded. Did anyone explicitly order Shulman to target conservatives? Probably not, because given the extent and type of contact he had with White House politicos, no explicit directive was needed. It seems likely that everyone understood each other just fine, and the IRS operated accordingly.

In her haste to douse one IRS/White House fire, Cutter has raised another set of questions. Why did Shulman meet repeatedly with one of the president's most unapologetic and partisan

attack dogs? Is it difficult to imagine the two of them discussing ways to help the president and hurt his adversaries? In any case, no one should be surprised by the new [NBC/WSJ poll](#) showing a solid majority of Americans agreeing that the IRS scandal casts doubt on this administration's overall honesty and integrity. I'd submit that deploying (now-unofficial) spokespeople [like Stephanie Cutter](#) to help clear things up probably won't help matters either. As for the Internal Revenue Service's precious "[independence](#)" about which Jay Carney loves to prattle on, Watergate reporter Bob Woodward [labels it](#) a "fiction:"



It's not "overreaching" Republicans making these Obama-Nixon comparisons. It's [Woodward and Bernstein](#), who have some credibility on the subject matter.



UPDATE – Just to be clear, I'm not alleging that Cutter's presence at these meetings with Shulman is smoking-gun proof of anything. She attended those in her capacity as a White House staffer, not as Obama's Deputy Campaign Manager, a role she assumed later. I'm saying that Cutter's reputation as a hardcore political operative proceeds her (dating back to Kerry '04), so the fact that she was involved in regular discussions with the IRS commissioner doesn't jibe with the White House's preferred distancing mechanism ("the IRS is totally independent from us").

Boston Globe

Washington booms – thanks to other people’s money

When the economy is pinched, D.C. feels no pain

by Jeff Jacoby

Give Stephen Fuller credit for this much: He’s willing to admit he was wrong.

During the debate leading up to the federal budget sequester, Fuller was a voice of doom. An economist at George Mason University and the director of its Center for Regional Analysis, he predicted that sequestration would be especially calamitous for Washington, D.C., and its surroundings. If Congress didn’t stop the automatic spending cuts from going into effect, Fuller warned last year, the Washington area was headed for a “devastating recession.” Some 450,000 jobs, many of them in the private sector, would be wiped out in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

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The real surprise is that anyone is still surprised by the affluence of the Washington area.

According to the most recent census data, seven of the nation’s 10 wealthiest counties surround Washington — including the only three counties in the United States with median incomes above \$100,000: Loudoun, Fairfax, and Arlington, all in Northern Virginia. In 2010, there were six Washington-area counties in the Top 10; in 2007, there were five. The Great Recession may have left great swaths of America reeling, but it didn’t stop Washington from surging even higher in the income rankings.

If the worst recession in decades couldn’t tarnish Washington’s opulence, sequestration — a political budget maneuver designed to achieve merely a tiny reduction in the growth of federal spending over the next decade — isn’t likely to either.

Coverage of the D.C. area’s high-flying economy sometimes sounds like an episode of “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.” In a front-page article last weekend — “What Sequester? Washington Booms as a New Gilded Age Takes Root” — The Wall Street Journal described the extraordinary wealth of Washington’s “moneyed brain trust,” beneficiaries of a generation’s worth of soaring government budgets and immense political aggrandizement. Examples of extravagance are everywhere, from the flourishing Aston Martin dealership selling sports cars at \$120,000 and up to the Georgetown hotel that charges \$22 for a martini.

Washington hasn't grown so rich because it is home to industries that produce wealth through commerce or manufacturing or invention. Unlike Silicon Valley or Manhattan or Houston or Hollywood, Washington's primary activity isn't the creation of goods and services that have intrinsic value in themselves, and that raise the national standard of living. Government doesn't generate new income — it redistributes income that others have already generated. Through taxes, spending, and regulation, the federal establishment now dominates more of the private economy than ever, directly confiscating trillions of dollars earned in the private economy, and indirectly controlling the fate of tens of trillions more.

“Power is the great aphrodisiac,” Henry Kissinger famously claimed. It is also a great conduit to other people's money. When a single tweak in the tax code can make or break a business, when fortunes are being doled out through federal bailouts and contracts, when regulations can decide the future of industries and interest groups, it stands to reason that so many will spend so much to get a piece of what government controls.

“Most federal activity involves taking money from some people, giving it to others, and keeping a big chunk as a transaction fee,” says the Cato Institute's David Boaz. At its broadest, that “transaction fee” is reflected in everything from overpaid federal employees to Washington's gargantuan lobbying industry to the clustering of America's wealthiest counties in suburban Washington.

If sequestration really meant a sharp decline in government spending and influence, Versailles-on-the-Potomac might have reason to fear those doomsday scenarios. That's why you can be sure that Congress and the president will never voluntarily enact anything of the kind. The federal boom will continue at America's expense, as ever more of America's wealth goes to Washington to be consumed.

Christian Science Monitor

[With Nidal Hasan bombshell, time to call Fort Hood shooting a terror attack?](#)

Maj. Nidal Hasan, the Army major facing court-martial for a mass shooting at Fort Hood in 2009, plans to argue that he acted in defense of the Taliban in Afghanistan. So much for the official US line that the shootings were an act of workplace violence, critics say.

by Patrik Jonsson

The admission by Army [Maj. Nidal Hasan](#) on Tuesday that he attacked [Fort Hood](#) in 2009 in defense of “the leadership of the Islamic Emirate of [Afghanistan](#), the [Taliban](#)” has suddenly undermined the [Obama administration](#)'s previous contention that the murders of 13 soldiers at the Texas base constituted an act of “workplace violence.”

Hasan's legal argument, which is being considered by the judge, Col. Tara Osborn, may reignite the political furor over how the Obama administration has classified the shootings, as well as arguments about whether the mass shootings constituted the first major Islamic jihadist attack on the US after 9/11. As recently as May 23, President Obama said no "large-scale" terrorism attacks on the homeland have occurred on his watch.

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Critics argue that the Fort Hood incident has not been characterized as a jihadist attack in part to give the Obama administration political and policy cover. Moreover, they add, the Obama position works to the detriment of shooting victims, which includes the 32 wounded and the families of those killed. Victims would have been eligible for combat compensation under US law if the Pentagon had classified Hasan not as a murderous US Army psychiatrist but rather as an enemy combatant or an "associated force" under the Military Commissions Act of 2006, they say.

"If you were an apologist for Hasan, you can no longer advance the false narrative that he's a disgruntled employee," says Jeffrey Addicott, director of the Center for Terrorism Law in San Antonio, Texas. "He has now labeled himself as a jihadist Islamist murderer, a hardcore jihadist. It's now clear..., in spite of our leadership in this country, including the Department of Defense and Obama, what his motives are."

Osborn, the court-martial judge, is set to decide Wednesday whether to allow Hasan another three months to expand on his "defense of others" argument. The basic reasoning is that he attacked the soldier readiness center on Nov. 5, 2009, because soldiers there were about to be deployed to Afghanistan on a mission to kill Taliban.

Legal experts say it will be tough for Hasan to prevail using that argument, because he won't be able to prove that those soldiers who were shot posed an imminent or direct threat to individual Taliban leaders.

On Monday, Osborn ruled that Hasan could fire his attorneys and defend himself, after deeming him sound enough in mind and body to represent himself in court.

US military law experts said this week that Osborn will have to control the trial "moment to moment" to keep Hasan's cross-examinations and arguments to the facts at hand, but that it will be impossible to prevent him from making jihadist rants or from using the courtroom as a pulpit to promote jihad.

Despite military judges' latitude to keep outbursts to a minimum, the system is not equipped to prevent "someone from using it as a platform," Aitan Goelman, a former Department of Justice terrorism prosecutor, [told the Monitor on Tuesday](#). It gives defendants "a certain amount of latitude to use the system for their own ends."

Hasan's decision to align himself with the Taliban in his defense may, in some eyes, counter the president's recent statements about the conduct of the war on terrorism – especially whether it's time to bring the so-called global war on terror to a close and whether he should assert that no big attacks on the US have occurred during his tenure.

In a major national security speech on May 23, just over a month after the April 15 bombing of the Boston Marathon, Mr. Obama credited his administration for "[changing] the course" of the war against Al Qaeda. "We ended the war in Iraq and brought nearly 150,000 troops home," the president said. "We unequivocally banned torture, affirmed our commitment to civilian courts,

worked to align our policies with the rule of law. ... There have been no large-scale attacks on the [United States](#), and our homeland is more secure."

He did, however, also address the Fort Hood shooting directly, acknowledging that it was an act "inspired by larger notions of violent jihad."

The hair-splitting question thus becomes, was Hasan an alienated American "inspired" by jihad, or was he an actual jihadist? Obama appears to take the former view, while others see in Hasan's defense strategy an admission of the latter.

More immediately, lawyers for the victims say Hasan's statement confirms that soldiers who were killed or wounded during the shooting deserve a different kind of treatment.

"We call on the Army to ... admit that the Fort Hood attack was terrorism, and finally provide the Fort Hood victims, survivors, and families with all available combat-related benefits, decorations, and recognition," said Neal Sher and Reed Rubinstein, the victims' lawyers, [according to ABC News](#).



LISTEN UP
REPUBLICANS...
I'M NAMING
SUSAN RICE
AS MY NEW
NATIONAL SECURITY
ADVISOR!



THE AUDACITY OF DOPES

POLITICS:
THE FINAL
FRONTIER...



THESE ARE THE AUDITS
OF THE IRS
ENTERPRISE...



ITS 5-YEAR
MISSION: TO TARGET
CONSERVATIVE GROUPS...



TO SEEK A DELAY
OF THEIR TAX-
EXEMPT STATUS...



TO BOLDLY WASTE
MONEY ON GOOPY
VIDEOS, LINE DANCES
AND CONVENTIONS
LIKE NO AGENCY
HAS DONE BEFORE.





I HEAR YOU'RE HIRING.



THOUSANDS MORE IRS AGENTS NEEDED TO ENFORCE OBAMACARE

THEY TRIED TO BLAME US... A COUPLE OF ROGUE
IRS EMPLOYEES IN CINCINNATI...
ISN'T THAT
RIGHT, LITTLE
BUDDY?



THAT'S
RIGHT,
SKIPPER.

BUT WE WERE GETTING OUR
ORDERS FROM WASHINGTON...



WHAT'S
THAT?



I MEAN THE "STARSHIP ENTERPRISE."



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