

MORE ON THE PRESIDENT'S APPOINTMENTS and the CENSUS BUREAU

Stephen L. Bakke – March 14, 2009

Last Time

A little over a month ago I wrote about the “trials and tribulations” of President Barack Obama’s appointments (I will sometimes call him “P-BOB” for short – I used “W” for George Bush, so I think that’s fair). I should remind you that P-BOB denounced the influence of lobbyists for his administration, but had to ask for policy exceptions for his appointments for Deputy Defense Secretary, Health and Human Services Secretary, and his Agriculture Secretary.

At that time I quoted Jack Kelly who recently joked that when Democrats spoke of a “culture of corruption” in Washington, little did we realize that it wasn’t a criticism – rather, it was a campaign promise. I also referred to: the tax issues, and related withdrawal from consideration for appointment, of Former Senator Thomas Daschle and Nancy Killefer; the tax problems of now confirmed Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner; the withdrawal of Commerce nominee Bill Richardson in the wake of an active FBI criminal investigation of him; apparent House rules violations by Labor nominee Hilda Solis; Eric Holder’s confirmation as AG despite his past “unconscionable” circumventing of Justice Department rules; and (take a deep breath) Ron Sims’ as the Deputy Secretary of HUD despite “blatant” violations of Washington state’s State laws and related large fines – still unpaid and growing in size by order of the State Supreme Court.

Let’s focus on the Commerce Secretary job. Bill Richardson is thought by some to have been P-BOB’s second choice for the post behind Penny Pritzker, his campaign finance chairman. Ms. Pritzker pioneered what have been described as the “nefarious instruments” at her now defunct Superior Bank outside of Chicago. Then he chose Republican Senator Judd Gregg for his position. We then learned that Mr. Gregg’s former legislative director was tangentially involved in the Jack Abramoff scandal. P-BOB then decided to move the Census Bureau from the Commerce Department to the White House under the authority of Rahm Emanuel.

More On Politics and the Census Bureau

Now, since my last “RANT”, information has started to “gel” and make a little more sense. According to my “sources”, P-BOB’s decision regarding the Census Bureau was made after California Rep. Barbara Lee, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, and Hispanic groups complained to the White House that Republican Senator Gregg couldn’t be trusted to conduct a complete Census. And the National Association of Latino Officials said it had “serious questions about his willingness to ensure that the 2010 Census produces the most accurate possible count”. By so stating, these liberal groups acknowledge the sensitive political nature of the census process – whether under Democrat or Republican leadership. Will liberal control of the Bureau be less political than can the conservative control? Take another a deep breath!

The Census Bureau was originally placed in the Commerce Department to distance it from politics. Anything that threatens the integrity of the Census has profound implications. Not only is it the basis for congressional redistricting, it provides the raw data by which government

spending is allocated on everything from roads to schools. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also uses the Census to prepare economic data that many businesses rely on. Bruce Chapman, the Census director in the '80s states, "If the original numbers aren't as hard as possible, the uses they're put to get fuzzier and fuzzier". In 2008, this debate prompted seven former Census directors – serving every president from Nixon to "W" – to sign a letter supporting a bill to turn the Census Bureau into an independent agency after the 2010 Census. It read, "It is vitally important that the American Public have confidence that the Census results have been produced by an independent, non-partisan, apolitical, and scientific Census Bureau". Former director Chapman says, "The real issue is who directs the Census, the pros, or the pols". You'd think that an administration that is "banging hard" on the topic of giving science its proper place would encourage an independent, professional Census process – but that's not to be! But I digress.

More Appointees and Even More Fun!

Let's get back to information on P-BOB's appointments. Understandably, Republican Senator Gregg has now withdrawn from consideration because of the Census "manipulation" and his inability to support his prospective boss in many other areas. The new nominee to be Secretary of Commerce (the third or fourth? – who knows?) is former Washington Governor Gary Locke. "Obama's new commerce pick has clean reputation" declared NPR's Tom Banse. The New York Times proclaimed that he has "a largely scandal-free resume". "He's a safe choice because of his strait-laced reputation" says the Washington Post.

However, the Seattle Weekly notes that Locke presided over a \$3.2 billion tax break for Boeing while "never disclosing he paid \$715,000 to, and relied on advice from, Boeing's own consultant and outside auditor". Also, there's the matter of Locke's "favors for his brother-in-law (who lived in the governor's mansion), including a tax break for his company, personal intervention in a company dispute, and Locke's signature on a federal loan application for the company". And the glowing profiles of Locke have largely glossed over his troubling ties to the Clinton-era Chinagate scandal. On top of that entanglement, his political committee was fined the maximum amount by Washington's campaign finance watchdog for failing to disclose out-of-state New York City Chinatown donors. And then there were Locke's fundraising trips to a Buddhist temple in Redmond, Washington, which netted thousands from monks and nuns – something the donors now don't remember doing. Locke was investigated and acquitted, but the actions stand on their own and at least it appears the monks were used as conduits for laundered money.

Moving on. News broke in mid February that Rahm Emanuel, now P-BOB's Chief of Staff, lived rent-free for years in the home of Democratic Rep. Lauro from Connecticut and her pollster husband Stan Greenberg. He failed to disclose the gift, and mandated by congressional rules. But is there more? Can you guess? During that time, he served as chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which gave Greenberg huge polling contracts. Payments to Greenberg were over \$350,000 over a two or three year period. Some experts contend that non-disclosure is not the only issue – additionally, the free rent may be more than "hospitality" – perhaps it's taxable income.

Emanuel also served on the board of Freddie Mac during the time the government-backed lender lied about its earnings. That's a provable fact. The Federal Housing Oversight Agency later

singled out the Freddie Mac board as contributing to the fraud in 2001-2 for “failing in its duty to follow up on matters brought to its attention”. That means the board members ignored the red flags waving in their faces. This one event led to SEC fines paid by Freddie Mac of tens of millions of dollars. Emanuel was paid handsomely for his “service” to Freddie Mac. More hope and change that we can depend on?

Getting back to the Treasury department, as of this date I believe the only top appointee to Geithner’s staff who is on the job is a hold-over from “W’s” administration – and this with a major economic summit conference looming. Today, I read that one of the appointments to Treasury quietly withdrew without comment. No explanation is yet available.

A more trivial matter involves former Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk, P-BOB’s nominee as the U.S. Trade Representative. He owes an estimated \$10,000 in back taxes from several years ago and has agreed to make payments. He improperly handled speaking fees for tax purposes. And there were some questionable deductions for entertainment expense. That all sounds very familiar. More trivia involves the choice for “urban czar” – whatever that is. Adolpho Carrion, as Bronx borough president, “often received contributions just before and after he sponsored money for projects or improved important zoning changes,” the New York Daily News reported.

Take a breath and move on!

Something caught my eye last week. It was an article by Richard Z. Chesnoff entitled “The Saudis’ Man in the White house”. Many consider Israel as our only true long standing ally in the mid-east – and it’s a democracy! Who was appointed as Chairman of the National Intelligence Council? That’s the inner group that produces vital intelligence estimates for the President, his administration, and the overall intelligence community. His name is Charles “Chas” Freeman and he is a former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and pro-Arab lobbyist who has been openly and loudly hostile to the Jewish state of Israel, and a defender of Chinese oppression. He has recently been president of the Middle East Policy Council – largely funded by the Saudi Royal Family – which is described by some as the lobbying group for the Arab world. That’s enough of an introduction here. There’s a lot about him available so check him out. Even New York’s Senator Schumer is openly urging reconsideration of the appointment. Finding the way to a just mid-east peace would be Freeman’s assignment. Given his background, how can important intelligence assessments be considered objective either in fact or appearance? Good Grief!!

And now perhaps my “favorite”. We have an Attorney General with an attitude. Remember Eric Holder from the discussion above? He really chewed us all out several weeks ago. In his first official public speech since being confirmed he stated, “In things racial we have always been....essentially a nation of cowards” because “average Americans simply do not talk enough with each other about race. And he bemoaned the fact that America frequently “does not....differ significantly from the country that existed some 50 years ago”. Ouch!! Of course, in other parts of the same speech he also had some upbeat “glad tidings”, but those weren’t quoted or reported upon.

His message was ill-timed considering he is the first black AG and was appointed by the first black president. We all know that racial problems still exist in the U.S. He wants to accelerate

talks about our divisions – thus focusing on them. That’s “back-asswards”! First of all we talk about race incessantly. We do! And much of it is good and productive. But harping about old grievances, revisiting past hatred, and similar activities just expose the wounds more than necessary. This causes more antagonism and less social harmony. Unfortunately, there are those among us, of all races, who love to keep racial tensions at a constant boil. We know who they are. Is that the sort of “frank conversation” that we need to do, according to Secretary Holder? I don’t think that’s what he meant, but that’s what he will get from his comments. We need to move on. We’ve already moved far from the “old days” when color meant more than character. While we certainly should continue the progress we have made, we aren’t in the “old days” any more. His timing for such a scolding was ill advised and I think he knows that.

Hope and Change?

More and more examples of “Hope and Change”. Just all part of “post partisan politics”? Right! “Fer’ shur”! You betcha’! UFF DA!

Has Congress turned a blind eye to much of this – and will they continue to do so? If so, is it because so many of their members have been mentioned in similar “entanglements” in recent months – witness Barney Frank, Chris Dodd, Charles Rangel, et. al.?

That’s my story and I’m stickin’ to it! Thanks for “listening”! I feel better!

More will follow soon on many, many important topics like health care reform, and more personal insights into our President’s journey through tough territory. As I said in my December 2008 “essay” on liberal and conservatives thinking, “I want to be on record joining with other conservatives in uniting behind our new President. We must show that we will act more respectfully than liberals did during George W. Bush’s presidency. Such treatment was beyond mere disagreement and criticism. It was undeserved and unprecedented. We who oppose many of Barack Obama’s policies will, I believe, act in accordance with conservative values of decency, while respectfully continuing to oppose him when we disagree”. As Dennis Prager said on election night: “I did not vote for him. I did not want him to be President. But as of January 20, 2009, he will be my President.” I agree, and I’m part of the determined “loyal opposition”.

I extend thanks, as always, to the many writers, commentators, researchers, and others, from both political extremes, whose hard work helps me greatly. They gather details and individually present so much information. About all I do is gather, organize, summarize, and then attempt to fill in with additional comments – commonly referred to as my frequent “RANTS”. Someone recently commented to me that it’s no wonder I have these ideas – I obviously don’t pay attention to both sides of the arguments. I assure you that I approach issues from multiple angles. While I have become a conservative, I still read more liberal columns, books, commentary, and web sites than Al Franken, Al Gore, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Chuck Schumer, Nancy Pelosi, and Harry Reid COMBINED! Maybe you could even throw in a couple more names for good measure.