

National Journal

The Edge: For Obama, Relationships Would Help

May 15, 2013

The Edge is National Journal's daily look at today in Washington -- and what's coming next. The email features analysis from NJ's top correspondents, the biggest stories of the day -- and always a few surprises. To subscribe, [click here](#)."

For Obama, Relationships Would Help

It's no secret that many Democratic lawmakers have never been enamored of President Obama. He lacks schmooze, an element crucial to building relationships on Capitol Hill.

It's something he's moved to remedy in the last few months, wining and dining senators in both parties ahead of critical votes on his second term agenda.

But this week's scandal trifecta has made it pretty clear the charm offensive was too little, too late. Democrats didn't hesitate to condemn the IRS's mishandled tea party probing and the Justice Department's secret search of Associated Press phone records, all on the heels of the House inquiries into Benghazi.

Last year, I asked Democrats what Obama had to lose by keeping them at arms length. A senior Democratic Senate staffer said this: "It's a question of when stuff hits the fan whether there's a plan in place that if you needed the Congress to step up and fight, they would."

Today we have the answer. No.

Chris Frates

cfrates@nationaljournal.com

TOP NEWS

HOLDER: 'THIS IS AN ONGOING MATTER...ABOUT WHICH I KNOW

NOTHING.' Attorney General Eric Holder testified before the House Judiciary Committee today, where he faced questions about the Justice Department's subpoena of telephone records for the Associated Press and its journalists. Asked by Chairman Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., on Justice's failure to notify AP of the subpoenas, Holder said, "I do not know with regard to this particular case why that was or was not done.... I am not familiar with the reasons why the e-mail was disrupted in the way that it was." Holder went on to say, "This is an ongoing matter ... about which I know nothing." [Read more](#)

- At one point in the hearing, Holder tore into Rep. Darrell Issa over an insinuation the California Republican made regarding a document request on Labor nominee Thomas Perez. Holder called Issa's conduct "unacceptable" and "shameful."

ISSA: FORMER IRS HEAD EXPECTED TO TESTIFY AT HOUSE

HEARING. House Oversight Committee Chairman Darrell Issa said Wednesday that he expects former Internal Revenue Service Commissioner Douglas Shulman to testify at a

May 22 hearing that will also feature testimony from Deputy Treasury Secretary Neal Wolin, IRS Inspector General J. Russell George, and Director of Exempt Organizations Lois Lerner. Issa also indicated that representatives of some of the conservative groups targeted by the IRS may testify as well. The oversight hearing will follow a House Ways and Means Committee hearing scheduled for May 17. [Read more](#)

- The IRS said Wednesday that a top Treasury attorney did not tell high-ranking Treasury officials of the targeting of conservative groups, *The New York Times* reports.

LEADING DEM CALLS FOR RESIGNATIONS AT IRS. A top Democrat, House Ways and Means Committee ranking member Sander Levin of Michigan, said during an appearance on MSNBC today that IRS acting Commissioner Steven Miller and Director of Exempt Organizations Lois Lerner should resign following revelations that the IRS targeted conservative groups for additional scrutiny. "My own judgment is just based on the report of the inspector general. I think there's reason to believe that Mr. Miller should be relieved of his responsibilities as well as Ms. Lerner," Levin said. "I think there was a failure of oversight within that agency. [Read more](#)

- House Speaker John Boehner raised the specter of criminal charges in the scandal on Wednesday. "My question isn't about who's going to have to resign; my question is who's going to jail over this scandal," Boehner said. [Read more](#)

REPORT: STEVENS DECLINED EXTRA SECURITY IN BENGHAZI. According to two U.S. officials, U.S. Ambassador to Libya Chris Stevens, who died in the Sept. 11, 2012, attack on the U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi, declined two offers from then-Commander of U.S. Africa Command Carter Ham to increase security, McClatchy reports. The report issued by the State Department's Accountability Review Board for Benghazi did not mention Stevens's conversations with Ham; nor have the congressional hearings and reports on Benghazi. Stevens's former deputy, Gregory Hicks, was not asked about the offers during congressional testimony, and Ham, who is now retired, was not called to testify. [Read more](#)

OBAMA SEEKS REVIVAL OF JOURNALIST SHIELD LAW. After revelations that the Justice Department secretly searched the Associated Press's phone records, the Obama administration is seeking to have Congress reintroduce a bill that would offer greater protections for journalists from revealing confidential sources, *The New York Times* reports. The bill, which would also allow reporters to request a federal judge halt subpoenas of phone records, was introduced in 2009 and was voted out of committee, but it never got a floor vote. The move serves as a challenge to congressional Republicans, some of whom have decried the Justice Department's search of AP's phone records. [Read more](#)

REPORT: WEINER HIRES CAMPAIGN MANAGER; COULD ANNOUNCE BID NEXT WEEK. Former Rep. Anthony Weiner, D-N.Y., has hired Danny Kedem, a veteran of several congressional races, to manage his campaign for mayor of New York City, *Politico* reports. Kedem, who has served as an adviser to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, worked on Mark Murphy's failed 2012 challenge to Rep. Michael Grimm, R-N.Y., in the Staten Island-based 11th Congressional District. According to sources, Weiner is "likely to announce" his mayoral bid next week. [Read more](#)

- **@itrevormoore:** How bummed do you think Anthony Weiner was the first time he heard about Snapchat?

SENATE TO VOTE ON TAVENNER NOMINATION FOR CMS. The Senate is scheduled to vote this afternoon on the nomination of Marilyn Tavenner to serve in a permanent capacity as administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services;

she has served as acting administrator since late 2011. CMS has lacked a Senate-confirmed administrator since the 2006 resignation of Mark McClellan. Tavenner previously served as Virginia's secretary of health and human resources under then-Gov. Tim Kaine, now the state's junior senator. She spent 25 years working for the Hospital Corporation of America, beginning in 1981 as a nurse, becoming CEO of a Richmond hospital in 1993 and an HCA division president in 2001. [Read more](#)

TOMORROW

HOUSE TO VOTE ON 'OBAMACARE' REPEAL FOR 37TH TIME. The House is set to vote for the 37th time on Thursday to repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, marking "at least the 43rd day since Republicans took over the House that they have devoted time to voting on the issue," *The New York Times* reports. Given that the House has held votes on 281 days since Republicans gained control in January 2011, the body has spent about 15 percent of its floor time on repeal. "Given that the bill amounts to a takeover of roughly 15 percent of the American economy," Michael Steel, a spokesman for House Speaker John Boehner, said, "that sounds about right." [Read more](#)

IMMIGRATION MARKUP CONTINUES. The Senate Judiciary Committee will continue its markup of an immigration bill Thursday, preparing the legislation for a full-blown floor debate in June.

HEARING ON DRONES AND MILITARY FORCE. Thursday's Senate Armed Services Committee hearing will focus on the laws of armed conflict and the use of military force—in particular, the Authorization for Use of Military Force that Congress passed after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The Obama administration is using AUMF as a justification to kill terrorists from al-Qaida and related groups. The Defense Department's acting General Counsel Robert Taylor will testify alongside Maj. Gen. Michael Nagata, deputy director for special operations/counterterrorism on the Joint Staff, and Brig. Gen. Richard Gross, legal counsel to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On a second panel, a slew of professors and experts will give their opinions.

OBAMA TO MEET WITH TURKISH PM. On Thursday, the president will welcome Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey for meetings and a working dinner.

QUOTABLE

"She's been around since the '70s. It's very rare that we go back a generation. And you know, unless we nominate Bob Dole, we won't be going back a generation. If I was a Democratic hot-shot politician, I would primary her so fast." --former Romney strategist Stu Stevens on Hillary Rodham Clinton (*BuzzFeed*)

BEDTIME READING

FOR MANY UNDOCUMENTED ASIAN IMMIGRANTS, CHOICE DEMANDS SECRECY. *The Atlantic* profiled Tony Choi, an undocumented immigrant from South Korea, as part of a longer piece on the challenges that undocumented Asian immigrants face. Choi said his family required that he tell no one of his status for fear of deportation, and he became so worried that he made an escape kit to get him from his college in Kentucky to his family's residence in New Jersey if someone found out. Undocumented Asian immigrants differ from their Hispanic counterparts, in that Hispanics are more involved with immigration-reform movements, have larger numbers, and generally have more political clout. Emily Ryo, a Stanford law professor, suggested that being undocumented also carries a larger "social stigma" for Asian immigrants. [Read more](#)

PLAY OF THE DAY

A BAD WEEK FOR THE WHITE HOUSE. The continuing turmoil surrounding the Obama administration is a cornucopia for late-night hosts. The *Tonight Show's* Jay Leno called the IRS audit the White House's "high-tech weapon." On TBS, Conan O'Brien was interested in the notion of impeachment and Obama's threat of "President Biden." The *Daily Show's* Jon Stewart was particularly interested in the way Obama found out about the Justice Department tapping the Associated Press' phones and the IRS scandal. *Late Night's* Jimmy Fallon was confused on who would actually investigate Justice. Watch it here

UP

THE RETURN OF THE TEA PARTY. Just months after President Obama's reelection deflated conservative activists, a slew of rapidly unfolding scandals involving government malfeasance is giving the movement new life. Between the IRS targeting conservative groups for extra scrutiny, the Justice Department's seizure of journalists' phone records, and allegations of a cover-up after the attacks in Benghazi, the tea party has been injected with momentum it hasn't seen since its heyday rallying against Obama's health care law, *National Journal's* Beth Reinhard reports. Read more

DOWN

OBAMA'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT. The White House's crisis-management apparatus is lacking, according to veterans of the Clinton and Obama administrations, Bloomberg reports. Faced with the IRS targeting of right-leaning groups, congressional inquiries into the response to the Benghazi attack, and the Justice Department's search of Associated Press telephone records, the White House is attempting to navigate without old hands from the first term, including strategists David Axelrod and David Plouffe. "There's an industrial-scandal complex that exists in Washington, D.C.," said Democratic consultant Chris Lehane, a veteran of the Clinton administration. "You need to have some kind of entity within the building that's capable of managing these situations." Read more

OVERLOOKED

THE GOP'S MOVE ON IMMIGRATION. There's quite a lot being overlooked this week, and the Senate markup of the immigration bill is one of them. Indeed, this week's action shows just how much Republicans have moved on the issue, *National Journal's* Fawn Johnson reports. Exhibit A: Every GOP member of the Senate Judiciary Committee rejected an amendment from Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., to severely limit the number of legal immigrants allowed into the country. The committee's overwhelming "no" vote shows that the battle for Republicans' souls on immigration has shifted from groups that want to reduce the influx of foreigners—such as the Heritage Foundation, NumbersUSA, and the Federation for American Immigration Reform—toward free-market groups that applaud increased immigration, such as Americans for Tax Reform and the Cato Institute. Read more