



D.C. is capital of the absurd

By: Gene Healy – March 4, 2013

Like most of this company town, I'm addicted to Netflix's Beltway "telenovela," "House of Cards," starring Kevin Spacey as a conspiratorial House majority whip. But the show unwittingly flatters D.C., depicting a city of ruthless, steely competence. The real thing is a clown show consumed by trivialities.

On his way into work Friday, a friend heard the Senate chaplain's cry for help, broadcast over WTOP: "As we anticipate across-the-board budget cuts across our land, we still expect to see your goodness prevail," Pastor Barry Black pleaded from the Senate floor, "O God, and save us from ourselves."

To the biblical plagues of locusts, pestilence and the culling of the firstborn, add a 2.3 percent cut in federal government spending for fiscal 2013? What's really worth some wailing and gnashing of teeth is that, faced with a \$900 billion deficit and \$16 trillion-plus federal debt, Congress and the president only managed those meager cuts by accident -- through a "poison pill" gimmick that nobody believed would be triggered.

Or take last week's silly controversy over whether the administration "threatened" Watergate scribe Bob Woodward for reporting that the sequester was the Obama team's idea. Woodward's tall tale of intimidation should have vanished when Politico released the relevant emails, a decorous exchange between economic adviser Gene Sperling and Woodward. Sperling: "I apologize for raising my voice ... [but] as a friend, I think you will regret staking out that claim ... " Woodward: "You do not ever have to apologize to me ... "

Yet "Woodwardgate" dominated the Sunday talk shows. If you wanted some substance, you had to tune into ABC's "This Week," where George Stephanopoulos was interviewing Dennis "the Worm" Rodman about North Korea.

Last Thursday, National Journal's Ron Fournier echoed Woodward's claim that the Obamaites are "abusive." The next day, Fournier was so upset that there'd been no deal to avert the sequester cuts, he tweeted, "bin Laden didn't compromise. [Obama] handled him pretty well." So, a Seal Team Six "double tap" for Speaker Boehner?

Woodward, too, oscillates between power-worship and whining that the White House is mean. He told MSNBC: "Under the Constitution, the president is commander in chief and employs the force. ... [W]e now have the president going out because of this piece of paper and this agreement, 'I can't do what I need to do to protect the country.' That's a kind of madness that I haven't seen in a long time."

That "piece of paper" is a law the president signed. But in Woodward's evolving view, "if the president does it, it's not illegal." As my colleague Ben Friedman cracked, "I knew 'All

the President's Men' was a bad, misleading book, but I didn't realize Nixon was the hero."

Completing his descent into self-parody, on CBS' "Face the Nation" on Sunday, Woodward invited Obama to come to his house for a beer summit to give everyone fake closure on a fake scandal.

Meanwhile, as Jim Antle points out in the American Conservative, despite appearances, bipartisanship abounds: "The same Congress that barely averted the fiscal cliff swiftly passed extensions of warrantless wiretapping and indefinite detention" and favors "profligate drone use." They mainly bicker when the bill for the welfare-warfare state comes due.

On Friday, the Washington Post ran yet another long-faced, hand-wringing feature on how locals are coping with sequestration. "Beleaguered bureaucrats, anxious government contractors and ripple-effect worriers are in dire need of a little levity," so some are heading to comedy clubs to laugh through the tears.

"We all get it," one local comic told the Post. "You have to be able to make jokes and laugh about this situation we're in." Hah, ha. Heh. "O God, save us from ourselves," indeed.