

Plotting a strategy of revenge

by *Lionel_Van_Deerlin*

The evidence is still accumulating. But already we've learned that an overweening aim of the Bush administration has been to put its stamp on U.S. government far into the future. These people envisioned unchallenged Republican rule stretching toward perpetuity. Rough as it may sound, this had to mean not only defeating Democrats, but destroying them.

GOP strategist Karl Rove has seemed agreeable to almost anything else. The charge that they've tried using federal attorneys for crass political purposes may await further proof. But hardly a day passes that the investigative arm of newly empowered congressional committees fails to turn up fresh examples of abuse. Like the outlandish tale that emerged when Rep. Henry Waxman's Committee on Oversight grilled Lorita Doan. She's the businesswoman Bush chose to head the government's General Services Administration. Her testimony, combined with that of the GSA's inspector general, Brian Miller, laid bare a brazen violation of federal law that occurred last Jan. 26. This was just three weeks after the new Congress was sworn in. White House displeasure over the change was clearly reflected in a "brown bag lunch" it arranged for top employees in GSA, an agency dispensing \$66 billion a year in government contracts.

Oblivious to restrictions of the Hatch Act, or of personal ethics standards, the administration's political gurus circulated two lists of names. The first identified 20 "targeted" Democratic House members considered politically vulnerable because they posted the narrowest victory margins last November. The other list highlighted 20 Republican incumbents also thought to be in danger of losing their seats in the next election.

The point of putting these rosters side by side was made instantly clear by the question, "What can this agency do to help our friends?" For GSA's upper-echelon staffers, the question answers itself. Their jobs, you see, lie in negotiating and awarding government contracts.

An outrageous place for political favoritism? Of course. Yet Bush's guys may be pikers. Remember the Nixon tapes? Barely 35 years ago everyone listened in on plans being hatched for a veritable reign of terror. The tape's date was Sept. 15, 1972 - seven weeks before President Nixon's landslide re-election victory over George McGovern. Advance polling left no doubt the race was as good as over. Rather than relish the impending triumph, however, Nixon already was planning how he'd square things with organizations and individuals who had opposed him.

"They are asking for it, and they're going to get it," he's heard confiding to the young White House counsel, John Dean. "We haven't used our power in the first four years. ... We haven't used the Bureau (meaning the FBI) and haven't used the Justice Department. But things are going to change now!"

"That's an exciting prospect," a bootlicking Dean responds. As the White House lawyer, Dean of course sensed that unprincipled presidential vengeance could take many forms. The Federal Communications

Commission could delay renewal of highly valuable broadcast licenses held by the anti-Nixon Washington Post in Miami and elsewhere. Troublesome individuals might get their comeuppance in future dealings with the dreaded IRS or with any of a half-dozen regulatory agencies each having a majority of members - including a chairman - of the party in power.

An exciting prospect, indeed, and one that was further spelled out with a leaked "enemies list" prepared in the Nixon White House, specifying dozens of persons against whom the president felt determined to move. At a time, the Watergate break-in still commanded attention only as "a third-rate burglary," the enemies list had been compiled by Chuck Colson, one of 19 Nixon associates (ranging from Watergate burglars to an attorney general) who subsequently served time.

Ah, memories that bless and burn. We may shortly witness a lovely bit of irony. No. 17 on Colson's list of soon-to-be targeted Americans was a young black congressman from Detroit, John Conyers. Although then a very junior member of the House Judiciary Committee, Conyers had boldly advanced the possibility of a presidential impeachment.

No flash in the pan, he's now serving his 22nd term, the second most senior House member - And would you believe it? - the Democratic takeover has catapulted Conyers to chairmanship of that same Judiciary Committee. He's one of a handful running the show, poised to hear a host of charges against the Bush administration.

As warbled in the dulcet tones of Justin Timberlake, what goes around comes around.

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