

## Press Watch

### **CARTOON COMPLACENCY**

**By William Nicoson**

In Jeff Stahler's cartoon published by The Cincinnati Post and reprinted February 25th by The New York Times, Bill Clinton sits at his desk reading a paper with the headline, "GOP IDENTITY CRISIS". The cartoon is entitled "ARE YOU BETTER OFF THAN YOU WERE FOUR YEARS AGO?" and Clinton's word-balloon cries "YEP!"

It's possible that some cartoonists and editors really believe that President Clinton believes he's better off now than he was four years ago. But it's a view difficult to reconcile with the facts. After all, whatever else Bill Clinton may be, he's smart.

Who appreciates better than President Clinton that four years ago he was not under investigation by two independent counsel on charges of campaign violations, bribery, conspiracy to loot a failing S&L, conspiracy to defraud Federal agencies at taxpayer expense, and obstruction of justice? Nor were he and his wife struggling to contain hearings by Senate and House committees into their financial affairs and penchant for cronyism. Nor was he battling in the courts to contain an unsavory allegation of sexual harrassment of a state employee while he was Governor.

A trial of his business partners and his successor as Arkansas Governor on some of these charges (looting and fraud) is scheduled to begin early in March. Based on criminal referrals to the Justice Department, it seems likely that evidence at the trial will show that proceeds from the alleged looting and fraud benefitted the President and his wife. From statements publicly made by a convicted member of the alleged conspiracy, the evidence may even show that President Clinton was a co-conspirator.

Two bankers appointed by Governor Clinton to state commissions were recently indicted for derelictions involved in financing of the Governor's 1990 campaign. The President's Deputy White House Counsel, who was Treasurer of that campaign, has been notified he is a target of this investigation. It has recently been revealed that a grand jury is investigating whether one or another of the appointments conferred on these same bankers was purchased by campaign contributions. This is called bribery, and unlike the campaign violations for which staff may provide a shield, Bill Clinton himself made the appointments and allegedly received in person at least some of the contributions. A trial on these matters may be in progress before the November election.

Meanwhile hearings on Capitol Hill examine other matters such as possible obstruction of justice in precluding access of investigators to relevant papers following the death of Deputy White House Counsel Vincent Foster. Ironically, the hearings have been characterized by numerous instances of the discovery of relevant documents long under subpoena, providing fresh suspicions of obstruction of justice. Furthermore, the long delays by the White House in

producing subpoenaed documents have assured continuation of the hearings through much of the election campaign.

Revelations of motives of the First Family in connection with the hypocritical firing of the entire White House Travel Office -- to secure jobs and business for a relative and other cronies while claiming to correct financial mismanagement -- have emerged in on-going hearings of another House committee. Members of the public disinclined to focus on the financial details and legal niceties of other Clinton scandals fully appreciate the political cynicism revealed by the mass firings at the Travel Office.

Revelations arising from any of the criminal, legislative, or civil proceedings now under way may so diminish the President's reputation and credibility as to assure his defeat at the polls. He must therefore derive little satisfaction from the "GOP identity crisis" involving vigorous debate of substantive issues of great import to the nation. He must instead be petrified by the debate likely to break out soon within his own party focused solely on his own personal integrity.

As if this weren't enough, it's recently been disclosed that an independent counsel has begun an investigation of Bill Clinton's 1992 Presidential campaign. That campaign was underway four years ago when his major concern was merely media revelations of assorted transgressions. In fact those revelations were successfully contained until after the election. What a blessed time four years ago must now seem!

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Mr. Nicoson practices law in the District of Columbia.