

COMMENTARY

Mid-year look

By Don Rose

persistent eye problem kept me from my usual column this past Monday, ironically following a week of major actions that cried out for comment, analysis or maybe just plain tears. Since I will be having more surgery done immediately after the Independence Day weekend, I decided to file this sort of interim report on where I see things going, socially and politically as of mid-2010.

First, the enormity of the gulf oil spill and the deceptions of BP represent an ecological tragedy equivalent to war. We will be decades recovering, however they manage to shut down the well—if indeed they actually do shut it down.

Whether deserved or not, Obama will suffer serious political consequences. There is not yet—though there may yet come—a sense that he and his administration moved swiftly and dramatically to take charge. The fact is, they were virtually helpless because no one—but no one—in industry or government is or was equipped to deal with a disaster of this magnitude.

The roots of the problem of course lie in the decades old corrupt relationship between the oil industry and the government. In assigning blame—a fruitless endeavor in many ways—you can put most of it on recent Republican administrations, but the current administration should have been harder at work trying to clean it up before now. We all now look on with a sense of helplessness, while the cable-babblers—even the best of them—keep spewing their own pet whacko solutions.

Things do not look well for the Democrats this fall, but, as I noted in an earlier column, the Republicans true to form appear to be taking sides with BP and the exploitation of that relationship—coupled with further economic insensitivities—might serve to save some Democratic tails.

Moving on to the firing of Gen. Stanley McChrystal and his replacement by Gen. David Petraeus, Obama of course did the right thing politically. But, as Garry Wills and others have noted, changing the generals is not the answer. It is the failing Afghan War policy that calls out for change. I among others called Obama's decision to "surge" the war, even with a so-called pullout date, a clear-cut policy mistake, obviously designed to build macho-cred with conservatives.

A lot of good that has done Obama. Just look how the conservatives are now flocking to support his programs!

McChrystal called the situation in Marja a "bleeding ulcer." With increasing allied deaths and no sense of what a "victory" might be, this ulcer seems more and more like a cancer to me.

So once again we look on helplessly, watch, wait, and perhaps some pray, for Petraeus to pull some kind of rabbit out of a hat.

Turning now to the economy, at least one can say Obama is trying to do the right thing by promoting a jobs bill and extend unemployment compensation. This is not the time for retrenchment and budget cuts. We need to keep spending as we have the past year or more in order to stabilize the recovery.

Obama preached this gospel to the G-20 nations who essentially rebuffed it and are undertaking what may well be disastrous austerity programs. Worse yet, the senate Republicans and a few conservative Democratic allies will neither extend unemployment nor yet pass a needed jobs bill, putting us once again at risk of a double-dip recession, wiping out the gains made thus far.

Again here, the only hope for saving his congressional majorities lies in continuously exposing and rubbing raw the sores caused by this economic cruelty.

For this, Obama and the Democrats will be persistently chided for playing a "blame game." Unfortunately, at the moment that's the only game in town. The opposition party has chosen to do all it can to assure that Obama fails—and they may well cause America to fail in the course of that political destruction.

The only positive glimmer, as I mentioned a week or two ago, is that health care reform continues to build a positive plurality and may soon develop a majority, while the GOP campaigns on overturning the law.

So here we find ourselves in the bizarre circumstance of depending on the most bizarre elements of the Republican Party—the tea-sippers et al—to help the Democrats look more rational and perhaps worth saving.

Tennessee Williams' s Blanche Dubois famously explained she always depended on the kindness of strangers. It looks at the moment as if we progressives must depend on the looniness of the loons to save our own tails.

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4th most-wanted Nazi dies a free man



BERLIN- The sought-after SS sergeant who was No. 4 on the Simon Wiesenthal Center's list of most-wanted Nazi war crimes suspects has died before he could be brought to trial, German authorities said Tuesday.

Adolph Storms, 90, died at his home in the western city of Duisburg June 28. Dorfmund prosecutor Andreas Brendel said he did not know the exact cause of death. Brendel's office charged Storms in November with 58 counts of murder for his alleged involvement in a massacre of Jewish forced laborers in a forest near the Austrian village of Deutsch Schuetzen.

Storms and other unidentified accomplices were accused of forcing at least 57 of the Jewish laborers to hand over their valuables and kneel by a grave before fatally shooting them from behind. A day after the March 29, 1945 massacre,

Storms was alleged to have shot another Jew who could no longer walk during a forced march in Austria from Deutsch Schuetzen to the village of Hartberg.

Several former members of the Hitler Youth who were helping the SS guard the prisoners on the march provided witness statements.

"I would have liked to have tried the case," Brendel said.

Storms worked for decades as a train station manager until a University of Vienna student doing undergraduate research uncovered his alleged involvement. The student and his professor, Walter Manoschek, tracked him down then visited Storms several times. The professor conducted about 12 hours of interviews in which Storms repeatedly said that he did not remember the killings.

Not all quiet on the Western front

Feds sue to overturn Arizona immigration law



WASHINGTON--The Justice Department filed a lawsuit Tuesday to overturn a tough new Arizona immigration law that has sharply divided people along partisan, ideological and ethnic lines. It also asks the federal courts to grant an injunction to stop the enforcement of the measure before it takes effect late this month.

The Obama administration argues that only Washington can set the nation's rules for arresting illegal immigrants.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Phoenix argues that Arizona's law requiring state and local police to question and possibly arrest illegal immigrants during the enforcement of other laws such as traffic violations usurps federal authority.

Arizona's law requires immigrants to carry their alien registration documents at all times. It also targets businesses that hire illegal immigrant laborers or knowingly transport them.

"A state may not establish its own immigration policy or enforce state laws in a manner that interferes with the federal immigration laws," the brief states. "The Constitution and the federal immigration laws do not permit development of a patchwork of state and local immigration policies throughout the country."

Arizona's Republican Gov. Jan Brewer has accused the Obama administration of failing to secure the border with Mexico, forcing her state to act on its own. "Do your job. Secure the border," Brewer said of the president in a July 1 speech to a Republican group. She pledged to "defend the law against every assault, including attacks by the Obama administration."

In passing the law, state lawmakers complained the federal government isn't doing its job on the border, leaving the border overrun with 700,000 illegal immigrants from Mexico in the last two and one-half years.

Arizona Senators Jon Kyl and John McCain called the Obama administration move "far too premature when it sues a state that is simply trying to protect its people by enforcing immigration law."

Lawyer who defended 'American Taliban' now heads DOJ suit

The federal prosecutor who has been assigned to oversee President Obama's high-profile case against immigration law is Tony West, Assistant U.S. Attorney General for the department's Civil Division. He is no stranger to controversy or the limelight.

West is a member of the so-called "Gitmo 9," a group of lawyers who have represented terror suspects. He once represented "American Taliban" John Walker Lindh, a controversial move that West feared would derail his political ambitions and helped delay his nomination to the department for three months in 2009.

He helped negotiate a 20-year sentence for Lindh, an American citizen who was 21 years old when he was captured in Afghanistan in 2001. Lindh avoided a life sentence by pleading guilty to serving in the Taliban army and carrying weapons. The government dropped its most serious charges, including conspiracy to kill Americans and engaging in terrorism.

West knew the political risk he was taking, recounting to the San Francisco Chronicle that when he was asked to join Lindh's defense team, he sought assurances that Lindh did not take up arms against Americans and didn't help plan the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. West told the newspaper that he accepted the case because he was concerned that Lindh might have been denied human rights and due process.

Now West will lead the U.S. effort to block Arizona's immigration law from its July 29 implementation.

ICIRR applauds Obama administration

The Chicago-based Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights was quick to respond to the filing of the lawsuit.

Executive Director Joshua Hoyt said he applauded President Obama "for recognizing the need to block Arizona's anti-immigrant law that promotes racial profiling and is fueling fear and distrust in immigrant communities. Unfortunately, despite opposition from all over the country, this law remains on the books and poised to take effect later this month."

He added that Obama's address on immigration last week, shows that the administration is stepping up to meet the challenge of enacting immigration reform. "We urge Congress -and Congressional Republicans in particular- to support real reform that would end the explosion of local and anti-immigrant policies that are leading to confusion and chaos all over the country," he said.

McChrystal retires with 4 stars

WASHINGTON--Retiring Gen. Stanley McChrystal will be able to retain his four star-rank, a White House spokesman said.

President Barack Obama agreed last week to waive a Pentagon rule even though the general is short of time needed to retire at his current pay grade.

"The president believes and has talked with Secretary Gates about this, and we will do whatever is necessary to ensure he-somebody who has served the country as he has-can retire at a four-star level," White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said.

McChrystal resigned as top U.S. commander in Afghanistan in late June after he and his staff were quoted in a Rolling Stone magazine article criticizing and mocking administration officials.

A senior Pentagon official said that McChrystal would have been required to hold his rank for three years before qualifying for full retirement benefits. McChrystal was promoted to four-star rank and assigned to command the Afghan war in June 2009. He has been succeeded by Gen. David Petraeus.

