

How High Does the IRS Scandal Go?

✘ Not long ago on his radio show Mike Huckabee said Benghazi would bring down President Obama.

“When a president lies to the American people and is part of a cover-up, he cannot continue to govern,” Huckabee said. “As the facts come out, I think we’re going to see something startling. And before it’s over, I don’t think this president will finish his term....”

A few days later I went on the Factor and told Bill O’Reilly that, “This is wishful thinking masquerading as political analysis.”

Conservative pundits do this a lot. And frankly it’s getting tiresome. Remember all those “take it to the bank” predictions by conservatives on Fox on how President Obama couldn’t win re-election? Wishful thinking. Not serious analysis.

In the United States of Clueless, the Benghazi cover-up isn’t going to bring Mr. Obama down. We’re a deeply polarized nation, so while Republicans think Benghazi matters, Democrats continue to play the story down and remain loyal to the president. The so-called mainstream media remain loyal also, and a good portion of the population is so uninformed that it thinks Benghazi is the new hot club on South Beach.

What about the AP scandal where the Department of Justice secretly got hold of journalists phone logs to try to find out who was leaking sensitive national security information to the Associated Press? Journalists care about this one because it’s about them. The public couldn’t care less.

Which brings us to the IRS scandal, where agents targeted conservative groups for special tax-exempt scrutiny. It

wasn't just groups that had the name "Tea Party" or "Patriot" in their name. The IRS went after groups that said they wanted "to make America a better place." They asked certain groups what books they read. They told the Coalition for Life of Iowa: "Please detail the content of the members of your organization's prayers."

Yes, it all sounds outrageous, even un-American. And this story may have legs, especially for those Americans who hate the IRS, which put another way, is all Americans except those working at the IRS. But here's the good news about the supposed scandal: We've been assured by the newly ousted acting IRS chief that conservatives were not targeted and in any case politics had nothing to do with any of it.

No one with an IQ of room temperature could possibly believe this nonsense. The IRS, with its immense power, goes after conservative groups demanding information on how its members think, and we're supposed to believe they weren't targeted? And that politics had nothing to do with it?

Steve Miller, the ousted IRS chief who told a congressional hearing these things, should be indicted – for gross arrogance, if not for out and out perjury.

But now the question is, who gave those "few low level" IRS agents in Cincinnati the green light to go after conservatives? How high up did the approval go? Was anyone in the White House in on it?

Let's make an assumption that a lot of conservatives won't make: that Barack Obama – who has called the IRS actions "inexcusable" didn't order anyone to target conservative groups. We have a great big bureaucracy in this country made up of millions upon millions of workers and the president can't possibly know what every one of them is doing.

But we do know that officials at the Treasury Department knew what was going on last year and kept it under wraps until very

recently, long after the presidential election.

And we also know that the head of a Tea Party in Ohio says when his group applied to the IRS for tax-exempt status, it was asked to print out every posting it ever made on its Facebook page and to turn over the names of every person who spoke at its meetings, along with topics, transcripts and handout materials.

Remember, this was in Ohio, an important swing state – before the election.

No serious person who understands how things work really believes that the president picked up the phone and told the IRS chief to go after his enemies. But is it such a leap to assume that IRS agents and their bosses figured they were doing what the president would have liked them to do – but couldn't ask? Is it so hard to connect the dots and figure that they heard all the shots fired by the president and his Democratic allies at the Tea Party and concluded that they couldn't possibly get into trouble for targeting those groups? After all, didn't the president say that some of these conservative groups were involved in shady political business? Yes, he did.

President Obama says he heard about all this when the rest of us did, when it hit the news. He's always the innocent bystander caught up in some mess that is not of his making – or so he would have us believe. But as Peggy Noonan points out in the Wall Street Journal, "A president sets a mood, a tone. He establishes an atmosphere. If he is arrogant, arrogance spreads. If he is too partisan, too disrespecting of political adversaries, that spreads too. Presidents always undo themselves and then blame it on the third guy in the last row in the sleepy agency across town."

And he might get away with it.

I was watching the Factor the other night and one of

O'Reilly's producers asked people on the street in Manhattan about Benghazi. Many didn't know what it was. He then asked a young man to name the vice president of the United States. He couldn't do it. The young man, it should be noted, is a college student – and not a student at any old college. He's a student at Cal-Berkeley, one of the top schools in the country.

This is what Barack Obama has going for him: detached Americans who don't know much about what's going on in the country.

The IRS scandal understandably has riled up Tea Party Americans – and the last time they got riled up the Democrats got creamed in the 2010 midterm elections. It could happen again next year. And if Republicans pick up the Senate, the Obama presidency is over. He couldn't get a jaywalking bill through Congress.

But don't be like those pundits who confuse wishful thinking with political analysis. In the United States of Clueless, Mr. Obama is a superstar. In fact, a new CNN poll shows that 53 percent of Americans approve of the job he's doing. The poll, by the way, was taken *after* the IRS story made news.