Obama's political play should shock no one

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It's amusing to watch the Washington political establishment feign shock, now that President Barack Obama's reform administration has used a clay foot to vigorously kick one inspector general and boot another out the door.

One inspector general foolishly investigated a friend of the president. Another inspector general audited those juicy bonuses given to AIG executives as part of $700 billion federal bailout of the financial industry.

It's a decent man-bites-dog story, at least until North Korea tries lobbing a few missiles toward Hawaii. But until that happens, the political talk shows will buzz about Neil Barofsky, the inspector general overseeing the financial bailout.

Barofsky now claims that his autonomy will be compromised if the Obama Justice Department rules that he is merely a functionary of the Department of Treasury.

"An adverse ruling ... could potentially have a serious impact on the independence of our agency and our ability to carry out our mandate," Barofsky wrote in a letter to ranking senators on Friday.

Just two weeks ago, inspector general Gerald Walpin, who watches over volunteer community programs, was fired. He investigated Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson, an Obama pal and former NBA star. Walpin alleged Johnson misused $850,000 in federal youth grants.

The use of political muscle may be prohibited in the mythic transcendental fairyland where much of the Obama spin originates, sprouting green and lush, like the never-ending fields of primo Hopium.

But our president is from Chicago. Obama's Media Merlin David Axelrod and chief of staff Rahm Emanuel come right from Chicago Democratic machine boss Mayor Richard Daley. They don't believe in fairies.

Daley can't wait to be rid of his own inspector general, David Hoffman, who had the audacity to question why Daley's nephew received $68 million in city pension funds to invest. The mayor insists he didn't know anything about it. Nobody with a functioning brain believes the mayor.

The second that Hoffman's term expires, the mayor will change the locks on his office doors and move Hoffman's house plants out into the cold. Daley might even send some of the same political tough guys who helped elect Emanuel to Congress years ago, all in the name of reform.

It's the Chicago Way. Now, formally, it's also the Chicago on the Potomac Way.
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One fellow who seems surprised is Walpin. He was transformed from dogged inspector general to alleged drooling incompetent last week in just a few spin cycles.

"I am now the target of the most powerful man in this country with an army of aides whose major responsibility seems to be to attack me and get rid of me," Walpin was quoted as saying.

In a letter to Congress explaining Walpin's firing, the Obama White House complained that Walpin failed to disclose exculpatory evidence that would have helped the mayor of Sacramento, and exhibited "other troubling and inappropriate conduct."

The letter, by White House counsel Norman Eisen, also left the impression that Walpin, 77, was a doddering old man just shy of dementia, describing him as "confused" and "disoriented" and all but incapacitated. I don't know whether that's true. But I do know this:

Walpin alleged that Obama's ally, supporter and fundraiser, Sacramento Mayor Johnson, played games with the $850,000 in federal money targeted for the AmeriCorps student volunteer program. Johnson allegedly paid "volunteers" to work on Democratic political campaigns, run his personal errands and even wash his car.

In an April deal with prosecutors in the Obama Justice Department, Johnson was not charged with a crime. But his St. HOPE Academy charity agreed to pay back half of the $850,000, including $72,000 from Johnson himself.

During the presidential campaign, the message expertly spun by Daley's mouthpiece, Axelrod, was that Obama would bring hope and change and transform the cynical politics of the past.

The Washington Beltway media pack, exhausted after the cynicism of the Bush years, was eager for change. Many fired up their Hopium pipes and waited, glassy eyed, for the rapture, all but chanting "Yes We Can." Now they're coming down hard.

So here's my question:

What's the big surprise? What strange, exotic land do they think Obama comes from?

Do they think Obama learned his politics in Narnia, while cavorting with gentle forest creatures, some of which have hooves and serve tea and cakes to journalists and well-mannered English schoolgirls on snowy winter afternoons?

Did Obama learn politics in Camelot, the magical kingdom where federal czars sit at a great round table, all for the good of the simple peasants? Or did he learn politics along that famous highway, you know, the one that's always paved with good intentions?

No. Obama learned his politics in Chicago.

And now all of Washington can learn it, too.

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