

OPINION

The High Price of Obama Fatigue

The IRS isn't Watergate; it's worse than Watergate.

[Wonder Land]

BY DANIEL HENNINGER



With 2½ years left in the Obama presidency, it is at least an open question what will be left of it by December 2016. Or us.

In this week's Wall Street Journal-NBC poll, conducted as the disintegration of Iraq began, Mr. Obama's approval rating has fallen to 41% and his handling of foreign policy to 37%.

Respondents to this poll know what is going on in the world—Ukraine destabilized, Iraq disintegrating, their economy eternally recovering.

Mr. Obama's world this week consisted of flying to the University of California-Irvine to give a speech about a) himself (check the text if you doubt it) and b) climate change. On Wednesday he was in New York City for a midtown fundraiser, an LGBT fundraiser and a third, \$32,000 per person fundraiser at the home of Vogue editor Anna Wintour.

The Hill newspaper ran a piece earlier this week wondering if Mr. Obama is "done with Washington." Jamal Simmons, a Democratic strategist, says, "He's never really made it a secret he's not a fan of this place." Or Syria. Or Ukraine. Or Iraq.

The defenders of the Obama presidency—which increasingly is becoming a project separate from the person—argue that GOP obstruction thwarted the president's agenda. If the Republicans were the rank partisans of Democratic myth, Eric Cantor would still be Majority Leader and Mississippi's Sen. Thad Cochran would be waltzing to his seventh term.

As to the American people now

pushing his approval below 40%, Barack Obama entered office with more good will than any president since John F. Kennedy. If the Obama presidency has run out of aerobic capacity 2½ years from the finish line, it is because of Mr. Obama's own decisions. He did this to himself.

If there's one Obama foreign-policy decision that sticks in anyone's mind it is the "red line" in Syria. It was Mr. Obama's decision last September, at Vladimir Putin's invitation, to step back from his own criteria for punishing Syria's Bashar Assad if he used chemical weapons against his own people. The voters now tanking Mr. Obama's foreign affairs number don't think it's just random bad luck that Russian tanks ended up in Ukraine and some al Qaeda group they've never heard of took over half of Iraq in two days. The world is slipping beyond President Obama's control, or interest. From here on out, it—and we—are in God's hands.

Meanwhile, the Obama domestic presidency is entering its Lois Lerner phase. The Internal Revenue Service says it lost Ms. Lerner's hard drive with emails relevant to its audits of numerous conservative citizen groups. Actually, the IRS says Lois herself lost them because the emails were on her own PC.

Then Tuesday, House Oversight Chairman Darrell Issa said the IRS also lost similarly relevant emails from six other IRS employees. At a hearing Friday, he will ask IRS Commissioner John Koskinen to explain the AWOL emails.

Barack Obama created Darrell Issa.

On Jan. 27, 2010, Mr. Obama used his State of the Union speech to explicitly criticize the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, seated in front of him, for their campaign-finance ruling in *Citizens*

United v. FEC.

The forces Mr. Obama put in motion with this attack were described in a seminal piece for this newspaper by former FEC Chairman Bradley Smith—"Connecting the Dots in the IRS Scandal." Through 2012, a succession of Democratic senators urged the IRS to investigate 501(c)(4) nonprofit political groups. Mr. Obama himself in a March 2010 radio address spoke of "shadowy groups with harmless sounding names" that threaten "our democracy."

Here's a partial list of the American place names where the "tea party" groups audited by the IRS were organized: Franklin, Tenn.; Livonia, Mich.; Lucas, Texas; Middletown, Del.; Fishersville, Va.; Jackson, N.J.; Redding, Calif.; Chandler, Ariz.; Laurens, S.C.; Woodstown, N.J.; Wetumpka, Ala.; Kahului, Hawaii; Sidney, Ohio; Newalla, Okla.

He's right, these people do live most of their lives in the shadow of daily American life, out of the public eye. Still, they considered themselves to be very much inside "our democracy." Then the IRS asked them for the names of their donors, what they talked about, political affiliations.

The IRS tea-party audit story isn't Watergate; it's worse than Watergate.

The Watergate break-in was the professionals of the party in power going after the party professionals of the party out of power. The IRS scandal is the party in power going after the most average Americans imaginable.

L'alto prezzo della stanchezza di Obama



They didn't need to do this. The Obama campaign machine was a wonder, perfecting the uses of social media in 2008 and 2012. But the Democrats were so crazed in 2010 by *Citizens United*, so convinced that anyone's new political money might bust their hold on power, that they sicced the most feared agency in government on people who disagreed with them.

Barack Obama wanted this job. He didn't want it to come with Ukraine, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or Darrell Issa. But it does.

Write to henninger@wsj.com