



'Fast and Furious': honesty vs. hypocrisy

By U-T San Diego Editorial Staff

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The House of Representatives is expected to hold Attorney General Eric Holder in contempt of Congress on Thursday for his refusal – backed by President Barack Obama – to provide documents that might explain why Holder's Justice Department chose to lie to Congress in February 2011 about high-level officials' involvement in the "Fast and Furious" fiasco, and why it stood by those lies for most of the year.

If ever a scandal illustrated political hypocrisy, it is this.

We start with the president's baffling decision to assert executive privilege in denying the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, chaired by Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Vista, access to the documents. The White House says it and top Justice Department officials had nothing to do with the "gun-walking" program in which weapons were allowed to be sold to Mexican cartels to try to gain insight into how drug and arms traffickers operate. Then the White House says top administration officials' deliberative processes need to be kept private on a matter in which they weren't involved. Huh?

Republicans say, correctly, that this doesn't make sense, and that exploring why the Justice Department lied to Congress is an absolutely appropriate exercise of oversight. Democrats, meanwhile, cry witch hunt. But when President George W. Bush made similarly shaky claims of executive privilege to try to hide internal deliberations relating to the wholesale firings of U.S. attorneys by his administration, the parties made the opposite arguments.

Every administration promises transparency. Every administration then fails to live up to its promises. And nearly every administration ends up learning that covering up compounds the political damage from its original mistakes.

The talking point that one hears everywhere – Bush started the "gun-walking," Obama shut it down, so this is much ado about nothing – is simply dishonest. Obama's Justice Department expanded the program, and it went desperately awry, with U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry and many Mexicans likely killed by guns the U.S. government allowed into Mexico.

Yes, Republicans are trying to make political hay over this. But so did Democrats when Bush tried to hide his administration's machinations on U.S. attorneys. That's politics.

What matters ultimately, however, is this simple narrative:

Many people, including a U.S. Border Patrol agent, died because of a U.S. government program. The

Justice Department was caught lying about its oversight and handling of the program. Congress wants to know why. Holder says he's done nothing wrong but won't provide the very documents that would establish his innocence.

So why would the attorney general and the Obama administration act in such a fashion? A logical conclusion: They have something to hide.

"They're lying. ... I just know that they're hiding something big," said one interested observer last week.

It was Kent Terry. He isn't a GOP flamethrower. He's Agent Brian Terry's father. He deserves answers, as does the American public, on who knew what and when about the Fast and Furious debacle.

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