

January 2, 2014

Untroubled in Paradise: Obama's Vacation Winds Down

By Alexis Simendinger

On his calendar, President Obama has four days left in paradise. And let's just say that when it comes to filling up the hours in the lovely state where he was born, gym workouts and golf have outpaced beach-combing and hiking.

There may be Americans who begrudge the president a 17-day vacation in Hawaii, but plenty more were sympathetic to his prediction before departing Washington that Oahu's sun and some sleep would prove restorative after a bumpy year.

In relaxation, Ronald Reagan rode horses and enjoyed friends. George H.W. Bush loved his speedboat. Bill Clinton read books. George W. Bush chopped wood and cleared brush, jogged and rode a bike. And seemingly every president is

fond of a head-clearing, humbling, infuriating round of golf while on vacation.

As New Year's passed at the president's rented Kailua vacation home, he'd already hit the links six times over a dozen days with assorted pals and White House aides (and more golf seemed a certainty before a return to work at the White House on Jan. 6). Only two of those outings were briefly (and distantly) visible to the White House correspondents assigned to trail after Obama around the island. The pool reporters were permitted to glimpse the presi-

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dent swing and putt largely because the Mid Pacific Country Club course is visible from a public street where a casual gallery, including people walking their dogs, stopped to cheer and view the action.

As Washington Post reporter Philip Rucker described the final hole of Obama's five-hour golf outing on New Year's Day, "There were about two dozen onlookers, including a local TV news camera crew and a news still photographer, already in position on the street waiting to catch a glimpse of the golfing president."

(Local journalists, who are not answerable to West Wing handlers, got closer all week to some of the president's escapades because the informal island information-sharing about Secret Service sightings and POTUS's motorcades was so efficient.)

As 2014 began, the president's R&R by the numbers:

Gym workouts: 8
Golf outings: 6
Family hikes: 2
Family snorkeling: 1
Beach trips: 2
BBQ at a friend's home: 1
Restaurant dining with family and friends: 3
College basketball Diamond Head Classic spectating: 1
Visit with U.S. troops, Marine Corps Base Hawaii: 1

Official presidential business described by the White House (but not witnessed by the press corps): 5 (a secure conference call on the South Sudan situation; bill signings; telephone calls to senators to discuss expiration of federal long-term unemployment insurance; health

care enrollment update; and a briefing about the terrorist attacks in Russia).

Because Obama attended private school in Hawaii and has returned there for vacations with his family for decades, Hawaiians by and large are blasé about their famous tourist. "We love you!" a spectator shouted Wednesday as Obama two-putted. "I love you back!" he responded.

Even so, the president has attracted some polite protesters during his visit, including clusters of sign-holders protesting administration policies.

Bush 43 contended with antiwar demonstrator Cindy Sheehan outside his Crawford, Texas, ranch during some of the 490 days he spent there over two terms in office (CBS News reporter Mark Knoller kept count of Bush's downtime near Waco and in Maine, and has a similarly detailed chronicle of Obama's activities).

Last week the president, while golfing at a country club at the start of his holiday getaway, encountered "Frostpaw," a hard-to-miss protester dressed as a polar bear, who traveled to Oahu from Washington to make a policy point.

"Hey, polar bear!" the president shouted when he spied the white, fur-covered creature standing near the greens in Kailua.

Hawaii News Now and other local media beat the national press corps to Frostpaw, who is actually an environmental lawyer named Bill Snape, 49. Perspiring in the heat under a bear costume on behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, Snape was as eager to attract publicity as Obama was eager to shun it. Snape's

message: Don't complete the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada to the Gulf Coast. (The controversial proposed pipeline is among the decisions and announcements on Obama's desk for 2014.)

"Frostpaw's a magnet. People want to have their photo with Frostpaw. People want to touch the fur, touch my head," Snape said during a local interview last week. "That's great. That's what it's all about. That elicits a conversation and questions. We talk about the Keystone pipeline."

A polar bear on Oahu may have been focused on oil sands and pipelines over the last 12 days, but Obama was not. Sight lines and sand traps were more his thing.