

The White House Lays an Egg

By Mel Lavine

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I didn't buy the explanation promoted by the White House and spread last week by the New York Times that vice president Biden "forced" the president to announce that his position on same-sex marriage had finally "evolved."

In what the paper described as a "hastily scheduled television interview thrust on the White House" by Biden's loose tongue on "Meet the Press," the president ended days of "frenzied will-he-or-won't-he expectations" by "taking a stand" on the issue. No longer can there be any doubt. Obama is four-square for same-sex marriages.

But rather than a spontaneous move by Obama to assert presidential leadership, and excite the young, the gay and the liberal base, the week played out in the end as political theatre. As Variety might have said, the administration laid an egg.

It was improbable theatre casting this president and this vice president at odds over gay unions this close to a national election.

So how did the show play? A New York Times and CBS News poll published Tuesday found voters “dubious of Obama’s step on gay marriage.” Voters rejected the view that the president was motivated by principle, not politics, when he declared his support for same-sex marriage. A wide margin – 67 percent of those surveyed – believed Obama made the move “mostly for political reasons.” Twenty-four percent said he made it because “he thinks it is right.” Independents said it was politics. Nearly half of Democrats thought the same.

“If Biden hadn’t said something, I don’t think he (the president) would have said anything, either,” remarked an independent. Another independent believed the president decided more Americans approve of same-sex marriage. “In other words, say what the majority of people want to hear,” she said.

Same-sex marriage was not a big issue with most voters (only 7 percent said it was most important to them) while the economy and jobs were most important to the majority (62 percent). However, the sampling kindled anxiety in the White House. Voters were skeptical of the reported sequence of events leading to the president’s announcement. More calculated than principled was not an image any administration would wish to take into an election.

A month ago a Times/CBS News survey showed Obama and Mitt Romney tied at 46 percent each. The latest poll gave the lead to Romney, 46 to the president's 43. The presumptive Republican nominee was yesterday's moderate, today's radical conservative and tomorrow's who-knows-what?

Politics, it's scary.

Mel Lavine was a television producer for many years with NBC News and CBS News in New York. Contact him at his e-mail address: mellavine@aol.com.