

How Did President Obama Do in His Fifth Year of Leadership?

By Julie Pace and Nancy Benac of The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It was a moment for Barack Obama to savor.

His second inaugural address over, Obama paused as he strode from the podium last January, turning back for one last glance across the expanse of the National Mall, where a supportive throng stood in the winter chill to witness the launch of his new term.

"I want to take a look, one more time," Obama said quietly. "I'm not going to see this again."

There was so much Obama could not — or did not — see then, as he opened his second term with a confident call to arms and an expansive liberal agenda.

He'd never heard of Edward Snowden, who would lay bare the government's massive surveillance program. Large-scale use

after years of partisan rancor on Capitol Hill.

"My expectation is that there will be some popping of the blister after this election, because it will have been such a stark choice," he'd said.

Instead, great expectations disappeared in fumbles and failures.

Obama's critics doubled down. Fractured Republicans, tugged to the right by the tea party, swore off compromise. The president's outreach to Congress was somewhere between lacking and non-existent. Obama's team dropped the ball — calamitously — on his health care law. Snowden's revelations had Democrats and Republicans alike calling for tighter surveillance rules. Foreign leaders were in a huff — Brazil's president snubbing the offer of a White House state dinner, Germany's Angela Merkel incensed that her cell phone calls had been intercepted. The president's misplaced pledge that

STAND UP



PHOTO BY SUSAN TREED

Julie Weitz and Teri McClain joined hundreds of people at the StandUp Washington - March and Rally Against Gun Violence On Sunday Jan. 13. Participants marched from Westlake Park to Seattle Center Mural Amphitheater to remember the teachers and children killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut and demand the state legislature and Governor do something to curb gun violence in Washington.

of chemical weapons in Syria was only a threat. A government shutdown and second debt crisis seemed improbable. His health care law, the signature achievement of his presidency, seemed poised to make the leap from theory to reality.

Obama had campaigned for re-election on the hope that a second term would bring with it a new spirit of compromise

people who liked their health plans would be able to keep them ran into a harsh reality as millions saw their coverage canceled.

The year ended with a small-bore budget deal that was welcomed as breath of fresh air, a telling sign of how wildly things had veered off course in 2013.

White House communications director Jennifer Palmieri called it a year of "fits and

starts" for the president — and predicted better days ahead.

"We'll probably come out of 2013 in better shape in terms of Congress and the White House being able to function together," she said. Yet Obama's agenda of gun control, immigration reform, a grand budget bargain and more sits unfulfilled. Obama's job approval and personal favorability ratings are near the lowest point of his presidency, with increasing numbers of Americans saying they no longer consider him to be honest or trustworthy. Abroad, too, positive views of Obama have slipped, with confidence in him doing the right thing in world affairs dropping.

The mantra for the Obama White House has always been to take the long view. Officials scoff at the "who's up, who's down" churn of Washington's chattering class and recall with glee Obama's ability to rebound from moments in his first term when his presidency was declared in peril.

But as Obama embarked on his second term, some of his closest outside advisers warned him that the next four years would have to be different: He was operating on a shorter leash, and might have just 18 months, perhaps as little as a year, to accomplish big domestic priorities.

All Obama needed to do was look to his prede-

cessors to see how quickly trouble can consume a second term. Richard Nixon resigned. Ronald Reagan got ensnarled in

'No More Evictions!'



PHOTO BY LISALOVING

Home foreclosure victims, from left, Debbie Austin, Patricia and Darren Williams, and a supporter, picketed the Multnomah County Building in May along with about 50 protesters. They called on Sheriff Dan Staton to stop evicting families, disputing their evictions by banking corporations. Austin, a cancer patient, cried as she told the protesters that armed officers forced her out of the house wearing nothing but a t-shirt and underwear. After an all-night sit-in, Staton and County Chair Jeff Cogen agreed in principal to a moratorium on evictions, and the group We Are Oregon declared a victory.



First Lady Michelle Obama met with family members of victims of gun violence in February. She is pictured here with Teresa Raiford, whose nephew Andre Payton was shot in Portland September 2010. Raiford is lobbying for gun control measures including universal background checks. Visit demandaplan.org to learn more.

the Iran-Contra affair. Bill Clinton was impeached for lying about his dalliances with Monica Lewinsky. And George W. Bush lost the public's trust through his botched handling of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath and the unpopular Iraq War.

Obama's team thought it had a strategy for overcoming the second-term curse. They would make a quick play for stricter gun control measures, then capitalize on the GOP's post-election anxiety by pressing for an immigration overhaul and floating the possibility of a big budget deal.

Each of those efforts failed and Obama quickly found himself consumed by an unending series of distractions.

Some were fleeting, like the revelations that the Internal Revenue Service was applying extra scrutiny to conservative groups. But others threatened long-term damage to his presidency: the National Security Agency disclosures and the disastrous rollout of the "Obamacare" health law.

Some events were beyond Obama's con-

Salute to African American Leaders in Portland



Portland history makers were honored at the Portland Prime restaurant in February. Among the honorees were: Tony Hopson Sr., Mark Washington, Roy Pittman, Rakeem Washington, Joyce Harris, Ancer Haggerty, Rev. T. Allen Bethel, Michael Montgomery, Paul Knauls and Howard White.

See OBAMA on page 4