“There You Go Again”

Ronald Reagan said, “There you go again” in 1980 when, in a presidential campaign debate, President Jimmy Carter misrepresented Reagan’s position on a Medicare issue. Reagan used that phrase again (reluctantly) in 1984, when presidential candidate Walter Mondale tried to create the impression that Reagan, if re-elected, would have to raise taxes.

Those memorable words might also be used to describe President Barack Obama’s recent, repeated and unnecessary attacks on the visitor industry. At more than one town hall meeting, he said:

“When times are tough, you tighten your belt. You don’t go buying a boat when you can barely pay your mortgage. You don’t blow a bunch of cash on Vegas when you’re trying to save for college. You prioritize. You make tough choices.”

President Obama first attacked the visitor industry only a few weeks after his inauguration last year when he said during a nationally-televised town hall meeting that companies receiving taxpayer “bailout” money shouldn’t use corporate jets or “take trips to Las Vegas or the Super Bowl.”

The result was devastating to resort hotels across the nation as dozens, if not hundreds, of convention bookings were hastily cancelled.

Hawaii’s Hilton Hawaiian Village lost a 12,000-room-night booking from Wells Fargo & Co. that would have brought over $6 million in revenue to our state, plus countless hours of job opportunity, wages, and tips for hotel Housekeepers, Banquet staff, and Bell staff, plus work for taxi drivers, hula dancers, and lei-makers throughout Hawaii Nei.

Visitor industry leaders had hoped the furor would die down quickly, but it was not long before some of the biggest agencies of the federal government, including the Department of Agriculture and Department of Justice, issued guidelines that discouraged decision-makers from booking meetings at “locations and accommodations that give the appearance of being lavish or are resort destinations.”

Those actions cost popular resort meeting destinations and visitor industry workers dearly.

Now, President Obama is back on the warpath, attacking the visitor industry, and Las Vegas, in particular, once again.

Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman was furious and could not believe the President had once again attacked his city. Goodman issued what the Las Vegas Sun called a “double-barreled verbal blast” at Obama for telling people not to spend their money in Las Vegas, saying, “Obama is not a friend to Las Vegas. I think he has a psychological hang-up about us.”

President Obama’s statements seem totally out of place, particularly when the federal government is on what historian Victor Davis Hanson describes as a “binge of massive spending, borrowing, expansion of government, and new proposed taxes....”

I have some proverbial advice for “Doctor” Obama: “Physician, heal thyself.” In other words, attend to your own defects, rather than criticizing defects in others.

You are really hurting the visitor industry and the millions of good people who work in it. This industry comprises many businesses, including hundreds of thousands of small businesses. Every convention or company meeting supports hundreds – often thousands – of quality jobs that cannot be exported, jobs that must take place where the customer is sitting, jobs such as tour guides, drivers, entertainers, food and beverage staff, housekeepers, and countless others. Why hurt these people?

Your careless words are causing a lot of damage.