

Bill Kaplan: McCain, always a hero

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What a week. Trump escalated his demeaning and vicious attacks against Attorney General Jeff Sessions. And, directed more repellant innuendo at Special Counsel Robert Mueller. Moreover, Trump is reportedly exploring if he has the power to pardon himself. The investigations of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election cast a specter over the White House. Collusion with Russia, cover-up and obstruction of justice?

William Ruckelshaus, former deputy attorney general under President Nixon, warned Trump not to fire Mueller. In a New York Times op-ed Ruckelshaus said: “he (Mueller) will conduct a thoughtful and fair investigation”. Note: Ruckelshaus resigned after refusing Nixon’s demand to fire Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. The resultant firestorm – “Saturday Night Massacre” (Cox was fired) – ultimately led to Nixon’s resignation.

Similarly, South Carolina GOP Senator Lindsey Graham said: “firing Mueller could be the beginning of the end” of the Trump presidency. Graham also declared: “If Jeff Sessions is fired there will be holy hell to pay”. Graham plans on introducing bipartisan legislation that would require judicial review before Mueller could be fired. An impending constitutional crisis. Why? Trump’s contempt for the rule of law. Moreover, Trump thinks checks and balances don’t apply to him. There’s more.

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The White House exploded in a rant of profanity by Communications Director Anthony Scaramucci against Chief of Staff Reince Priebus. By the end of the week the craven, hapless and humiliated Priebus had resigned, as the Senate failed to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Note: Priebus and long-time friend GOP House

Speaker Paul Ryan had worked to get the House to repeal the ACA. Ryan, acting like an errand boy for Trump and not as a leader of a separate branch of government, led the charge to take away health care coverage from millions, including thousands of Wisconsinites. But there are still GOP giants in the Senate.

Arizona GOP Senator John McCain, a former Navy pilot imprisoned and tortured by the North Vietnamese for over five years, returned to the Senate with a tragic diagnosis of aggressive brain cancer. However, war hero McCain spoke as a prophetic and wise Senate institutionalist. McCain said: "I voted for the motion to proceed (Senate scrapping of the ACA) to allow debate to continue and amendments to be offered. I will not vote for the bill as it is today. It's a shell of a bill right now. We all know that." Instead, he called for bipartisan open deliberation, using Senate committees. And, McCain declared: "We are an important check on the powers of the Executive".

Early Friday morning, the courageous McCain joined Alaska GOP Senator Lisa Murkowski, Maine GOP Senator Susan Collins and all Senate Democrats, including Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin, in finally defeating GOP efforts to repeal the ACA. Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson, an empty vessel, voted to take health care away from millions. But McCain, Murkowski and Collins reminded Americans that there are still GOP giants. Trump and his enablers are just mean. McCain, always a hero.

Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.