

Bill Kaplan: Ryan and Trump had a bad week

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Ryan and Trump had a bad week

By Bill Kaplan

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House Speaker Paul Ryan and President-elect Trump had a bad week. Before Ryan was reelected as speaker House Republicans tried to secretly eviscerate the House ethics process. The weak-kneed Ryan “was rolled by his caucus” (New York Times). Democratic members of Congress and outraged voters denounced the GOP backsliding. Soon Trump sent a tweet – not condemning Republicans – just complaining about priorities. Trump wants Congress to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA), thereby ending health care coverage for 431,000 Wisconsinites (Urban Institute). House Republicans retreated from their ethics fiasco and moved on to begin repealing the ACA.

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Trump also had to face the music. Senate Republicans held a congressional hearing on Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election. Testimony by U.S. intelligence officials was explosive: “Russians caught cheering Trump” (Washington Post) as they led a covert operation to disrupt and influence the election. Responsibility for the hacking and fake news was tied to Russian President Putin. There’s more.

Ryan and Trump have far more in common than a bad week. Both are acolytes of the long-deceased crackpot Ayn Rand (she opposed Medicare and Social Security and idolized cutthroat business tycoons). Ryan once claimed that Rand inspired him

to get “involved in public service” (Politico). And, Trump “described himself as an Ayn Rand fan” (USA Today). Moreover, Trump has filled his cabinet with super-rich Rand devotees. Is Social Security on the hit list? It gets worse.

Ryan and Trump are prone to hyperbole and outright deception on jobs. For example, President Obama saved the U.S. auto industry and more than a million jobs with loans from the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). “All told the program poured \$426.4 billion into banks and automakers – and got back \$441.7 billion” (Washington Post). A 1930s Great Depression was averted. But Ryan opposed TARP loans to automakers as well as other legislative assistance. Moreover, he falsely suggested that Obama was responsible for the closing of the Janesville General Motors plant, shuttered under President Bush (Washington Post Fact Checker).

But Trump trumps Ryan. In 2008 Trump said: “You have to save the car industry in this country” (NBC News). However, as Obama moved to “save” automakers, Trump backtracked. He told the Detroit News that automakers should move to states that paid workers less. Flash to the present. Trump criticized General Motors and Ford over outsourcing and deceptively claimed jobs saved. The Washington Post said: “Deals the president-elect has criticized or touted are not straightforward”. The New York Times editorialized: “Trump is easily distracted by shiny objects, especially if they reflect back on him. He’s more interested in boasting about how he personally saved 1,000 jobs at Carrier, say, than in policy details that could make a difference in the lives of tens of millions of workers. Never mind that Carrier is only keeping about 800 jobs and that its chief executive said that the company would get rid of some of those anyway through automation.” Is it all about making Trump great?

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