

Bill Kaplan: Trump and Johnson undermine the Constitution

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Many regular folks voted for Trump. They wanted higher paying, secure jobs and adequate-protected pensions. Rural American voters wanted an economic future. However, all have gotten a con job, with permanent tax cuts for corporations and peanuts for most of us. Moreover, the country has an authoritarian leader who demeans others racially and sexually, attacks our institutions and undermines the Constitution.

Trump calls the press “the enemy of the American people”. Arizona GOP Senator John McCain responded: “That’s how dictators get started”. Trump continues to savage news coverage as “fake news”. No institution, including Congress and its leaders, federal judges, the Justice Department and FBI escape Trump’s venom. All norms have been shattered.

Trump fired FBI Director James Comey to end the Russia investigation. Trump asked a soon to be Acting FBI Director, Andrew McCabe, who he voted for president in 2016! Moreover, Trump keeps making outrageous claims: “I have (an) absolute right to do what I want to do with the Justice Department”. Now, the New York Times, “confirmed” by the Washington Post, reports that Trump ordered White House Counsel Donald McGahn to fire Special Counsel Robert Mueller last June. McGahn “threatened to resign rather than carry out the directive”. Even Fox News said Trump “was talked out of firing Mueller”

Why was Trump seeking to end the Russia investigation and its probe into obstruction of justice? What is the White House hiding? And, why has the nation learned only now about Trump’s firing attempt? “The White House has denied nearly a dozen times since June that Mr. Trump was considering firing Mr. Mueller” (NYT). More importantly, why are GOP congressional leaders failing in their institutional and patriotic responsibilities? Case in point.

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Last week, Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson again became a laughing stock. “Johnson irresponsibly recycles nonsense about corruption ‘at the highest levels of the FBI’, offering no evidence because of course there is none” (Washington Post). Johnson was all atwitter about a “secret society” in the FBI that was out to get Trump. After much ridicule, including from some on the right, Johnson “admitted what reasonable people everywhere had already surmised – that the reference to a ‘secret society’, in the context of the full message, was a joke” (NYT). It involved individuals having an affair. Not the first time Johnson has jumped out of an airplane without a parachute. Another example.

Johnson has falsely claimed a relationship between Medicaid expansion and the opioid epidemic. The Washington Monthly called Johnson out: “Republicans are twisting data to support a conclusion they reached previously – which is that they want to undermine Medicaid in order to justify their attempts to kill it. ... the very program that so many states depend on to save lives”. And Trump also wants to slash Medicaid, and the budget for the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. Moreover, the Trump administration has not offered credible solutions to the opioid crisis.

Worse, Trump and Johnson are also undermining the Constitution.

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