

Bill Kaplan: Trump's cabinet is the worst

Posted on Monday, Apr 30, 2018

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Last fall, Wisconsin GOP Governor Scott Walker was asked by the Washington Post for his “appraisal” of Trump’s presidency. Walker said: “His (Trump’s) actions speak louder than words. A lot of people get hung up on his tweets. If you look at the actions from where I sit in Wisconsin, this is a solid administration with a good Cabinet”. Walker fabricating. Other conservatives disagree.

GOP strategist Steve Schmidt described the Trump presidency: “From a personnel perspective, we’ve never quite seen the assemblage of crooks, just outright weirdos, wife beaters, drunk drivers, complete and total incompetents ...” (MSNBC). There’s more.

Conservative American Enterprise Institute scholar Norman Ornstein described the Trump Cabinet: “We have a contingent of corrupt kleptocrats, some sadists, a racist, utter ideologues, ... another who ... made as his mission devastating our diplomatic corps. Other administrations have had occasional embarrassments or individuals brought down by scandal. None in our lifetimes like this. Maybe Warren Harding (1920s) would be a contender” (for worst Cabinet).

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Wisconsin’s senators viewed their constitutional responsibility, to approve or reject Trump’s nominees for Cabinet positions, very differently. GOP Senator Ron Johnson voted as a rubber stamp, approving all of Trump’s Cabinet nominees. Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin acted to carefully vet Trump’s nominees, often when it was clear that the White House had not done so. Checks and balances.

Case in point. Disgraced former Trump Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price was forced to resign over his frequent use of taxpayer-funded expensive private air charter flights. But that was only the tip of the ethics iceberg. Baldwin had raised serious concerns over Price's financial dealings as a member of Congress. Legislative favor for drug companies in which he owned stock and from whom he received campaign donations. Insider trading and other misdeeds. Then there was Price's membership in a "fringe" medical group that opposes Medicare and mandatory vaccinations. Johnson, head in sand, saw nothing wrong.

And, how about ethically challenged Mick Mulvaney, director of the White House Office of Management and Budget and acting head of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Mulvaney recently told the American Bankers Association: "If you're a lobbyist who never gave us money, I didn't talk to you. If you're a lobbyist who gave us money, I might talk to you" (New York Times). The very definition of Trump's "swamp". Worse, Mulvaney wants to raise the Social Security retirement age to 70 and means-test Medicare. Baldwin voted no, while Johnson voted for Mulvaney.

Last week, the White House vetting process for Cabinet nominees blew up. Embattled Trump Veterans Affairs nominee Ronny Jackson withdrew, with little support in the Senate for him. He faced serious questions over his lack of management experience and allegations of medical-personal misconduct. And, Environment Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt is on life support as he faces ethical violations and exorbitant travel-security spending.

Any wonder that the New York Times reports that Walker "is unlikely to campaign with the president" this fall, while GOP leaders fear losing the GOP-led Congress.

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