

Enough with the nonsense: Trump is doing fine

by Conrad Black



Over many years, I have had occasional exchanges of friendly fire with Lawrence Martin of *The Globe and Mail*, who has been sent back to Washington to report on the Trump phenomenon. We first met when he was that newspaper's Washington bureau chief in 1979, and reported to a large group of *Globe and Mail* dinner guests that Teddy Kennedy might wrest the Democratic nomination from incumbent president Jimmy Carter, but that either would easily defeat former California governor Ronald Reagan should the Republicans be so unwise as to nominate him for president.

Still, Lawrence is a competent journeyman reporter and is more thorough and writes better than most journalists. He is not pretentiously worldly nor a washed out cynic, like many in his craft. Nor does he consider every single assignment an opportunity to cause an upheaval, destroy a career, or lift

the rock on an enormous and unsuspected infestation of official venality. All in all, as far as I know him, he is a pleasant and intelligent person who tries to do his job honestly.

But like most foreign journalists assigned to cover the U.S. capitol, he has very little grasp of the extent or potential force of U.S. public discontent. Very few people imagined that Donald Trump could succeed in taking the Republican nomination last year and then the election, campaigning as he was against the entire political class: all factions of both parties, the Bushes as much as the Clintons and Obama, against Hollywood, Wall Street, the national media, the lobbyists, all, he said, complicit in the inexcusable decline of America. All had been responsible for a slow response to the threat of terrorism, a decade of fruitless and costly war in the Middle East that had raised the strength of Iran and generated a huge humanitarian tragedy, the near-collapse of the world financial system, and explosion of debt, a flat-lined economy, increasing poverty and violence in the United States, and a foreign policy of retreat, bluster, apologies to Islam and vanishing "red lines."

This has been the national psychology and mythos of the United States

Canadians generally know the Americans better than other foreigners do, because of proximity and in many respects, similarity. But Canada had to winkle its independence from the British without so annoying the British that that country failed to offer us its protection against a rising America, had to work out a frequently unstable internal relationship between English and French-speaking populations, and has generally been over-shadowed by the United States. For these reasons, it has never had quite as firm a belief as its neighbour in its national right to always become a richer and better country, with minor ups and downs, but with each

generation better off than the last in a country stronger in the world.

This has been the national psychology and mythos of the United States, and despite terrible crises, in particular the Civil War, it has never wavered from that mission and conviction of what was its rightful objective. Woe to any political party that fails to maintain the country on that upward path, held since the country's earliest times to be its pre-destined course.

When the shabby Democratic compromise with the southern states – to keep them in the country while indulging them the moral outrage of slavery – finally came unstuck, Americans rewarded Lincoln's suppression of the insurrection and emancipation of the slaves by electing his new Republican Party 14 times in the next 18 elections (78 per cent of the elections between 1860 and 1928). The country finally became so angry at the Republican authorship of the Great Depression, as well as Prohibition and isolationism, that they elected the Democrats, Franklin D. Roosevelt and his followers, in seven of the next nine elections (also 78 per cent of those between 1932 and 1964). And Americans were so disappointed in the Vietnam War and other sources of domestic discord they blamed on the Democrats that they elected Republicans in five of the next six elections (83 per cent of them between 1968 and 1988).

The presidential cycles keep getting shorter

The cycles keep getting shorter, and the presidency has changed every two terms since then: Clinton was somewhat popular but ultimately rather disappointing; George W. Bush was never especially popular and was ultimately considered a failure. Barack Obama was fairly popular and the country was rightly relieved to have dispensed with the colour bar to its highest office, but he is not generally seen as a successful president. Each of these presidents started with control of

Congress and the voters took it away from them. This is the context – 20 years of gradually intensifying disappointment – in which Donald Trump became the first president never to have sought or held any public office or military command.

The relevance of all this to Lawrence Martin is that, in *The Globe and Mail* on Thursday, he wrote that the Republican party “is on its deathbed,” and that “Trump is isolating himself from important power centres with his approach to governing,” and compares this to the demise of the Canadian federal Progressive Conservatives in the 1990s.

This is all bunk. From 1896 to 1984 (rise of Laurier to retirement of Pierre Trudeau), the Liberals governed for 66 years out of 88, largely on their formula of making federalism work for Quebec while running elsewhere as the only party that could keep Quebec in the country. (It had some similarity to the Jefferson-Jackson formula of winning elections by sweeping the South while picking up enough northerners who were prepared to placate the South, but was less corrupt because of the evil of slavery.) Brian Mulroney shattered the Liberal stranglehold on Quebec (which the Liberals have not regained), but as he tried to complete the approval of a new constitution by adoption of the Meech Lake formula, western elements who resented Quebec and some partisan Liberals who resented compromises with Pierre Trudeau’s version of federalism, sabotaged the effort. Western conservatives defected to the Reform Party, and Quebec’s conservatives angrily ran into the arms of the separatists or Liberals, producing the greatest federalist crisis the country has had.

Canada in the 1990s bears no comparison with current political conditions in the United States

This bears no comparison with current political conditions in the United States. Trump ran against the Republican caucuses in the Congress and his party’s leaders there; Speaker Paul

Ryan in the House of Representatives and Senator Mitch McConnell, reciprocated his disdain. His health-care reform was stopped by three senators for different reasons: the personal antagonism with John McCain; Rand Paul's refusal to vote for anything that isn't perfect; and the fuzzy Susan Collins hearing the Maine forest murmurs.

If Trump can deal with this arithmetic over his tax bill, most of the rest of his program, a radically anti-political correctness series of moderate measures, will flow through after the tax log-jam is broken. If he does not, the battle will move to the mid-term elections next year between the Democratic claim that Trump is ineffectual and reactionary, and his claim that he only needs a few senators to enact his mandate against the crooks of both parties clinging to the official furniture between immersions of their snouts in the public trough. The Democrats have 25 senators up for re-election next year, against only 10 Republicans, and under either scenario, Trump should win, and 30 years of gridlock between the Congress and the White House should end.

The media fiction about a chance of impeaching the president has vanished

At that point, as Lawrence Martin must know, since all politics works this way, everybody scrambles aboard the winning side. As for the claim of Russian collusion with the Trump campaign in the 2015 election, even I, inured as I am to this nonsense, could scarcely credit my senses when I saw the leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee say on Wednesday that it depended on the Steele dossier. This, some readers may recall, was the origin of the "Golden Shower" – no, not the fixtures in the Trump Tower – the allegation that Trump had orchestrated a group of prostitutes in a Moscow hotel room to urinate on a bed because the Obamas had once slept in it. The dossier was commissioned by a Democratic provider of campaign services, Fusion Inc., and there is

increasing evidence that the FBI had a hand in it. Steele himself, an Englishman, has told the U.S. Senate to stuff its summons to appear. The media fiction about a chance of impeaching the president has vanished, except perhaps in Lawrence Martin's mind, because the Democrats are staring down the barrel of much more serious legal problems than Trump is. Special counsel Robert Mueller is now busier trying to keep FBI witnesses from testifying before Congressional committees, and in shakedowns on people over actions long before there was any Trump campaign, than in anything near the president.

What will happen, in Mr. Lincoln's phrase, will be "less fundamental and astounding" than Lawrence foresees. Trump will complete his ambitious takeover of the Republicans, enact most of his program; American decline will stop, and the squalor and grandeur of American politics will continue as it has since the only time a major U.S. political party (the Whigs) actually vanished, 165 years ago.

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