

Trump Will Prevail

Ryan and McConnell need to get on board.

by Conrad Black



It is hard not to be a little morose when only phenomena of nature relieve the venomous atmosphere as political Washington prepares to return to the bitter tasks of government. The eclipse was a pleasant diversion, and Hurricane Harvey has filled the whole country with sympathy for the flooded Texans. There is also probably some unspoken relief that, unlike what happened in New Orleans twelve years ago, a quarter of Houston's police have not fled in stolen police cars, while the president breezily told the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency that he was "doing a heck of a job." (He wasn't, and neither was the president.)

The basic problem in Washington is that attrition has stalled the Trump revolution. He gained sufficient support last November to take over the administration, but he didn't run only against the Clintons, Bushes, and Obama. He debunked, with good reason, all factions of both parties, the D.C.

media, Hollywood, Wall Street, and the lobbyists, and for all of them, the war goes on.

The Democrats never mentally accepted the results, pledged scorched-earth resistance, and on this point at least, they have delivered, their task made easier by the contemptible performance of the congressional Republicans, as well as by the president's penchant for bluster and gratuitous combativeness. Trump's own ostensible partisans in the Congress have been sitting on their hands. Almost none of them thought he would be nominated or elected and they are uncertain whether Trump can take hold as president and compel their adherence by his popularity and competence, or whether he will fail from political inexperience and temperamental instability.

A game of chicken has ensued, as the president has pretty well held his following in the country against the frenzied assault of his massed media enemies, while three-quarters of Americans despise the Congress as tainted and ineffectual windbags wallowing in the public trough. Congress has become a useless appendage, a hopeless, stupid, talking shop that, apart from tax cuts after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Obamacare, has done nothing significant since welfare reform in 1996. The mutual antipathy between the president and all of the congressional leaders is obvious and unseemly. Trump shouldn't be tweeting about it, but it is nervy for McConnell and Ryan to criticize publicly almost everything the president does.

Nancy Pelosi, Democratic House leader, styles herself a "master legislator," but she is generally regarded as incompetent, tedious, and politically shopworn. The Democratic Senate leader, Chuck Schumer, must rank as one of the most irritating figures in a crowded field of boring legislative hypocrites. From weeping over the partial travel ban from six countries President Obama had similarly singled out (and claiming that the Statue of Liberty was weeping also), to claiming that Justice Gorsuch was unfit to be confirmed for

unspecified reasons, he has been little more than a common or garden obstructionist, as he and Pelosi leg it to the left, following Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. (The good news is the people aren't there and aren't going there.)

But in their way, the Democratic leaders have been doing their jobs. That cannot be said of Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell. They have achieved nothing in seven months and have lost no opportunity to carp publicly at their president (who put McConnell's talented wife, Elaine Chao, in his cabinet). Both were hostile prior to the election, and both have embraced every anti-Trump argument, including scandalous insinuations that Trump was giving comfort to Nazis and white supremacists. McConnell's understudy, Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee, has even joined in the latest anti-Trump defamatory wheeze: that the president might be mentally unbalanced.

We seem to be at the turning point between two courses. Of the first of these, it is hard to escape the suspicion that most of the Washington establishment of both parties would be eminently consolable if Robert Mueller and his Clinton-packed team of legal helpers were able to terrorize someone into rolling over in the fascistic manner of the American plea-bargain system, with immunity against charges of perjury, and denounced Trump or someone close to him, unleashing a psychotic frenzy in the media and Congress. This scenario is consistent with Mueller's 6 a.m., ten-hour ransack of former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort's home, though Manafort was cooperating entirely with Mueller. It is also consistent with his endless deluge of leaks of confidential information, such as from supposedly private grand-jury proceedings.

The alternative is that the game of chicken ends, the Republicans at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue craft together tax and infrastructure bills that pass, the system starts to work, and economic growth and job creation accelerate. The congressional Republicans have shown no disposition to work

with the president, who has complicated his position by his insouciant belligerency at times. This makes it easy for his media enemies to portray him (unfairly) as a hypersensitive egotist lurching about in the dead of night tweeting from the White House. It is not clear how he can take hold of the government if his supposed partisans in the Congress won't legislate. But if they recognize the debacle that faces them if they allow the game of chicken to go on, and cooperate with the administration, the Washington sky (if Al Sharpton hasn't renamed the city) could brighten quickly.

Ryan and McConnell have misled the country about their ability or intention to pass bills. If they don't become more purposeful, the Republicans will lose the House next year, Ryan will be thrown out as speaker and House Republican leader, and the Republicans will gain a few senators but McConnell will be dumped for his duplicity. They can't really want to go out like that. Suggestions of Trump–Democratic cooperation in the *Wall Street Journal* and elsewhere are moonshine. On this scenario, it will be hopeless gridlock right up to Election Day 2020. There is nothing to justify removing Trump from office even in the probably sordid Mueller process that is underway. In this jungle, a mockery of the American constitutional mythos as it is, Donald Trump, for all his foibles, is the greatest and strongest beast. He is the overwhelmingly preeminent political figure in the United States and will prevail eventually over the shabby retinue of Potomac insiders and cliquish snobs that besets him, as it clings to the official furniture and shrieks righteous epithets at him.

Parenthetically, it is easy to share the president's disappointment in Attorney General Jeff Sessions. He either misled Congress or forgot his conversations with Russians, innocuous though they were, forcing his recusal in the whole nonsensical Russian collusion affair. James Comey, shortly after Trump fired him as FBI director, volunteered to the

Senate Intelligence Committee that he had leaked a self-addressed memo about a conversation with the president (possibly illegally, and the accuracy of the memo is contested) to ensure that a special counsel was appointed (who turned out to be his chum and mentor Mueller). Sessions's promise to crack down on leakers has been a bust. The House Judiciary Committee's request for a special counsel to look at the Clinton Foundation pay-to-play casino, Mrs. Clinton's outrageous treatment of her e-mails, which Comey tried to whitewash, and the whole unsavory Obama "unmasking" episode has gone unanswered. It is not obvious what Sessions thinks he does for a living.

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In his tumultuous career, Mr. Trump has seen off many nastier opponents than these, and he is a man of demiurgic perseverance and energy. He can light the fire of 60 million Americans every time he speaks to a packed hall. He is the oldest, wealthiest, and altogether most improbable person ever elected president of the U.S. and he will not be got rid of easily.

There is a better way: Mr. McConnell and Mr. Ryan may return from their home states suffused with a desire to make the system work, lock arms with their national and party leader, and do what is best for the country and the Republicans. History is replete with more astonishing changes of course. Mr. Nixon went to Beijing; President Sadat went to Jerusalem. In the circumstances, it would be inappropriate to dwell overly on Joachim von Ribbentrop's flight to Moscow 78 years ago this week. There are less earth-shaking precedents for returning clear-headed to Washington from Louisville and Milwaukee.

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