

SO FAR, NOT GOOD

By John Risley



The Trump administration is now some six months old and I could not be more disappointed in what it has accomplished—or rather, failed to accomplish. Encouraged by the choice of people like Mattis, Tillerson, Cohn, Mnuchin, Ross, DeVos and others, I was optimistic that real progress would be made on tax reform, taming the regulatory burden, infrastructure spending, and yes, tackling the huge issues with the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Surely, I thought, with people as strong as these, partisanship would be cast aside in the interests of launching the economy into a period of much higher growth rates than we have seen since the crisis of '08.

I certainly misread the challenges any meaningful policy reform would face and totally failed to appreciate that the antics the President practiced during the election would continue after his inauguration. Forgive me for assuming the love affair with Twitter and the public condemnation of those not in his circle of affection would end with the responsibility of focusing on the job. I also misread the animosity generated within the liberal left for the sense that Trump had somehow been elected illegitimately. Whether this was Russia convincing Americans not to vote for Hillary, or emphasizing the results of the popular vote versus those of the electoral college, is not the issue. The shock of his victory left his opponents feeling disenfranchised, which has now translated into the Democrats and their media friends doing everything in their power to discredit Trump, members of his family and any policy ideas they and the Republicans generate.

The focus on repealing Obama Care was perhaps misplaced. The real issue here is that the American health care system does produce very good quality care, arguably the best in the world, or certainly the most advanced in many fields. But it does so at tremendous and unsustainable cost. Procedures are encouraged, not outcomes.

Reform is desperately needed but that reform will require that costs are reduced. Any time you try to remove money from a system, there will be huge opposition by those who will bear the consequences of less spending. This won't be easy, but the consequences of no reform will be that those who sought the protection of the insurance offered by the ACA will no longer be able to afford it and be thrown back into the ranks of the uninsured. Those who elected not to join, and pay the nominal penalty for not doing so, will only be further encouraged to remain uninsured.

Shame on the Republicans for not being able to offer a replacement for the ACA which would enjoy their party's support to the extent it could be successfully carried through the legislative process. But similar shame on the Democrats for failing to offer sensible alternatives. No one is winning here.

As great a shame as this is, I am more deeply worried by the extent to which this failure has hobbled the

administration's other policy agenda items. Add to that the ridiculous behavior offered by the hiring and firing of Scaramucci and the in-fighting taking place at the White House and you have to wonder just how long the sensible members of the Cabinet will stick around. Given that none of them needed the job, the concern has to be that they will quit in disgust. This, presumably, would be a highly desirable outcome for those on the left but that is an incredibly selfish attitude. Trump has done nothing which is impeachable and he can't be summarily kicked out of office for losing the respect of his people.

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It might be helpful to put some context around this negative view of Trump. Bill Clinton enjoys huge international respect and his presidency is largely seen as having been very effective. Yet this is a man who practiced disgraceful behavior while in office. Kennedy's leadership is similarly praised, yet he too was an acknowledged philanderer. Beyond that, he ruled his administration with an iron grip and relied very heavily on family members (especially Bobby) to carry out his agenda. You could argue Trump has done nothing which comes close to crossing the line which Kennedy and Clinton clearly ignored.

Is there hope? In my view, only if the sensible members of his team walk into Trump's office and get him to play by a code of practice which restores and builds respect for the office, and the U.S. The world needs its largest economy firing on all cylinders and those who would disrupt the global order—whether they be in the Kremlin, Damascus, North Korea, or Tehran—must be made to understand that there is indeed a line which, if crossed, will bring a response beyond a slap on the wrist.

We live in a time of tremendous opportunity, but one in which the proliferation of arms and dangerous leaders is on the ascendency. We need a strong President to carry us through. Please Mr. Trump.

John Risley, president of Clearwater Fine Foods Inc., regularly engages in policy debate as a member of the World Presidents' Organization, the Chief Executives Organization and as a director on the Board of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives.

FEEDBACK

✉ dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com
 🐦 @AtlanticBus; @ABM_Editor;
 @Clearwatersea; #DevilsAdvocate