

Based on the explosive news of the past month, this newsletter, in an attempt to unite us instead of continuing to divide us, is directed at those of us who can't understand why MAGA Republicans support the current efforts of the administration.

As we look at or listen to the daily news, every day it seems, there is something new, startling, but not surprising. Today, while I'm putting notes together for this newsletter, it's the ethics or even the Constitutionality of the administration promoting, profiting from, and planning to deregulate crypto,

There was a recent article in the *New York Times* relating to the difference in approval ratings of the administration's handling of an issue between those who have heard about an issue and those who have not but still expressed an opinion. In this survey "one third of voter hadn't heard about major events." Add these voters to the one in three eligible voters who do not vote that I addressed in my last newsletter and you see a democracy clearly in decline. Democracy is simply government by the people, and, unfortunately, the people's interest in governing is eroding.

Most Americans, regardless of party affiliation or approval of the current President, when occasions arise, are proud to "pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands", but many of them don't really give much thought to what a republic is. We frequently hear quoted a question once asked of Ben Franklin about what kind of a government we have -- - Franklin's answer "a republic if you can keep it." Two centuries later, Justice David Souter who just passed away expressed similar concerns that "public ignorance about how American government works would allow an authoritarian leader to emerge and claim total power."

Trump supporters, like the rest of us, span a range of education level from high school to advanced degrees. Some supporting him think he's personally despicable but the wokeness of the Democrats is even worse. Some support his policies and don't care about his lack of character. Some like both him and his policies. Most of us have friends, family, colleagues or acquaintances who fall into one of these categories. Only if we understand what we're up against, can we develop a successful strategy to combat it --- to both take the wind out of Trump's sails during the next three years and to ensure that we won't subject ourselves to another four similar years under his likely successor, J. D, Vance.

Your and my major concerns with Trump include:

- The proposed Big Beautiful Bill giving the wealthy a 4% increase and the poor a 2% decrease including reduced funding for Medicaid on which 70 million Americans depend and massive cuts to SNAP Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for the poor
- Large funding cuts to AmeriCorps, the leading program for national civilian service strongly supported by every administration since it was introduced by President Clinton in 1993
- The total denial of climate change and our responsibility as the world's leading polluter to continue efforts to diminish global warming
- The coziness with Qatar for family business opportunities, let alone the acceptance of a \$400 million jet regardless of the fact that the possession originally goes to the Air Force, not directly to the President --- not even a pretense of restricting family business deals overseas as originally promised
- The disruption of both our military and economic alliance with Europe, our most important bloc of allies, thus leaving a

vacuum open for our enemies Russia and China all too happy to fill --- and the lack of sufficient funding to adequately arm Ukraine to halt Russian aggression

- Refusing court orders regarding deportation and due process --
- unhinged excoriation of the array of judges and others who have opposed him
- Inhibiting investigation of any presidential wrongdoing by firing government inspectors general and selecting leaders of the Justice Department, FBI and regulatory agencies based on loyalty in lieu of qualifications.
- Defunding FEMA's disaster relief efforts
- dismantling scientific research at US laboratories and universities, dismissing some of the nation's top scientists, and preventing foreign students from participating in our education and contributing to our scientific leadership

Many of Trump's supporters would agree with us on at least some of the above.

They on the other hand give him high marks on the following accomplishments for which many of us would also commend him:

- Tightening up border control (the end if not the means)
- Rounding up and deporting the criminal element of immigrants (again, the end if not the means)
- Working with China and Mexico to actively pursue the drug cartels and stop fentanyl at the border
- Attempting to pursue the benefits of the Abraham Accords which he originated
- Planning a "Golden Dome" missile defense system for the entire country

And, perhaps more significantly, his supporters praise him for just plain “getting things done”, an attribute that we all would like to see more of from our elected officials.

I get all of this. However, preserving democracy and other American values, freedom of speech, compassion for the marginalized, equal rights, independence of the judiciary, and the rule of law, presumably prized by all of us including Trump supporters, are simply not considered by Trump supporters when evaluating his performance --- and therein lies the vacuum all too readily available to be filled by autocracy, kleptocracy, oligarchy or any combination, both here and abroad.

Why is that? Simply because their sources of information, word of mouth from friends, colleagues and family, Fox News, and the newsletters and podcast that they follow dwell on the Trump accomplishments, focus on white Christian nationalist values in lieu of preserving democracy and other American values, and, more significantly, repeatedly emphasize the most distasteful to them of liberal wokeness, e.g. transgender men in women’s sports and other issues related to the LGBTQ, and any benefits afforded immigrant non-citizens.

On the other hand, If you only watch MSNBC, most of what you get is a constant anti-Trump stream including a lot of truth, but also quite a bit of exaggeration and much reporting taken out of context.

Many of us “never Trumpers” tend to equate MAGA Republicans with the self interested who vote only based on what’s in it for them and care little about supporting the social and economic needs of the poor. While this is surely a fit description of most of our MAGA elected officials based on their unwavering loyalty to Donald Trump and the bill they’re trying to pass giving the wealthy a 4% increase and the poor

a 2% decrease, common sense should tell us this does not apply to most the roughly 50% of Americans who generally support Trump, truly MAGA or not, any more than it applies to the other 50% of us.

Seriously, how could it? These same MAGA supporters, native born and immigrants alike, are the same hard working responsible Americans who, in time of local disasters, tornados and floods, for example, rush to take in and support their neighbors and other community residents, whether they know them or not --- the same individuals who raise funds from themselves and others to help the homeless in their communities and outside, cut the grass for a sick neighbor, and when young, volunteer for military service for patriotic reasons.

Baring this in mind, if you don't already do this, take some time out to watch Fox News on a regular not just sporadic basis. Once I started to watch regularly, half an hour after lunch before getting back to the events of my "busy busy" day in retirement, I really began to see the issues quite differently. It can be very compelling, if you have an open mind. To be sure, Fox News rarely changes my mind, but it sure changes my perception of the average Trump voter. Instead of an automatic "how in the world could anyone support Trump on this or that" I frequently come away with "well, while I don't agree, they make a pretty good case and I completely understand the position of one who only follows Fox or right biased social media posts and/or listens to others with similar viewing habits --- or diligently follows both right and left leaning media, but agrees more with the former --- and I'd better follow this a little more closely."

The same goes for Trump's press conferences or addresses to the nation. Karoline Leavitt and even Trump himself can be very compelling to anyone, but especially to one not immersed in politics on a daily basis. I know they're spreading a lot of misinformation usually including lies, but I wouldn't know this if I only followed right wing media.

I have the time available to fact check what I hear/see on cable news, to read the Times and/or the Journal leisurely over a cup of coffee in the morning. However, when I was working full time, I did not have that luxury, and my political leanings were easily influenced by the word of mouth originally of my parents, later by friends and colleagues

So, what am I getting at? I'm getting at "don't expect Trump's shortcomings or failures to bring him down. Yes, based on higher costs of groceries and other household goods due to tariffs, he may be losing the full support of some of his followers, but probably not enough to lose their vote. Every time he loses a court case, or the more egregious he seems to act, or the more spiteful, rude, coarse and unprofessional his rhetoric --- the more his ratings improve. He's always the victim. The courts, even those headed by Trump appointees, are to blame.

In previous newsletter, I have addressed some steps to be taken to combat this, including, of course, civics education, civic engagement and media literacy, three topics for which I constantly advocate --- very important, but the full benefits lie primarily in the future. So, what else can we do?

How do we get "our side" viewed or listened to by the opposition. Hands Off, Act Local and other rallies and Town Halls are extremely important, but they only touch the surface. The type of campaigning done by AOC and Bernie Sanders, and others like Chris Murphy who are starting to take up the fight digs deeper. As I mentioned in a previous newsletter, 21 percent of those who signed up to attend Bernie's events reported that they were Independent, and 8 percent said they were Republicans. All Democrats, many Independents and unaffiliateds, as well as some Republicans support at least some of Bernie's programs, Medicare for all, lowering prescription drug process, higher

taxes for the wealthy, free state college, and raising the minimum wage.

We need much more of this. Every Democratic Senator and Representative must spend more time with their constituents and also branch out to the districts and states where Republicans refuse to face their constituents for fear of the conflict between what Trump tells them to do and what their constituents might want. They're certainly not accomplishing much in DC. And I have to think that somewhere in those 53 Republican Senators and 220 Republican Representatives, there must be at least a dozen or so that will eventually have the courage to oppose Trump and say "that's enough, I'm out" and follow through. It wouldn't take that many to get effective opposition started under the present circumstances.

I think we have a better message, but the Trump supporters think they do, and right now, they certainly have a more effective messenger.

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Step Forward America

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