



Trump reveals the real GOP agenda

Dave Nagle

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It is unclear whether former President Donald Trump unintentionally revealed the real 2024 Republican legislative agenda, or it was a meaningful disclosure to reassure the financial backers of the party that their goals will be the focus of his second term.

The announcement caused only a momentary stir in news coverage and then it was back to the now standard campaign rhetoric: The criminalization of the Justice Department, the competency of the Biden Administration, immigration, and the woke or cultural issues.

When Trump made his announcement, I was encouraged, because I thought there was a chance, just a chance, that the 2024 elections might be about real issues, questions which go to the fundamental purpose of our own representative democratic form of government.

The topics were three:

- The power of the presidency to redirect funds appropriated by Congress. Trump wants to be empowered to disregard congressional direction and either not spend the money at all or divert the funds to different federal functions.
- Secondly, he wishes to diminish what hard-line conservatives have termed the “administrative state.” He would lessen the power of regulation given to federal agencies, like the Environmental Protection Agency, the IRS, Department of Labor, etc.
- And, finally, he would replace the civil service system with political appointees, who would run the administrative state as the president wants, not necessarily as the law would require.

To all these proposals in combination, I can only say: Wow! Nothing coupled together could put before the voting public the very question of the amount of power that should be transferred to the executive branch.

The U.S. Constitution was written on the basic theory of French political philosopher Montesquieu’s advocacy of a government that has a separation of power, which is where the concept of our three branches originated.

Give a president the power to control where the money goes, and you can easily see the result. A red state governor who does not like the EPA will find the funding for the agency stripped, ending their existence in that state. (Given the condition of Iowa's river and streams, I assume our governor would be first in line.) If not, having replaced civil servants with political appointees, the offending rule could quickly be withdrawn.

There is nothing wrong with putting these issues on the ballot represented by the candidates that support them. If the concept of democracy requires anything, it is free choice. However, to see these questions before the public is extremely unlikely. Because you must ask the question: Who really wants these changes to the fundamental structure of American government?

The biggest sources for funding the conservative movement are not Mom and Pop and their small grocery store-generated income. The largest and utmost endowed think tanks (and their corresponding PACs) are the most vigorous proponents: The Heritage Foundation, CATO Institute, and America First Policy Institute. Just as the NRA wrote for years about the need to abolish a meaningful 2nd Amendment, these organizations and others publish, promote, and fund candidates who yearn for extremely diminished government oversight of their businesses.

If they can succeed, John D. Rockefeller, Henry Ford, and the robber barons of the late 19th century would arise from their graves and rattle their bones. For their decedents, an America without an anti-trust department and a wiped-out Securities Exchange Commission would be utopia. In their minds, Nixon's greatest mistake was not Watergate but approving the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA). Now, with an appropriately empowered president, all federal agencies and more could be either diminished in power or even eliminated.

But note this, all these proposed benefits to better government only fall upon those with the most wealth. The very groups who head CATO and the others would receive a pass to practice in the free enterprise system in the most expansive form possible. None of these benefits would fall upon the middle class. H.L. Mencken, who said "When somebody says it is not about the money, it is about the money," was right then and is right now.

Unfortunately, we will not hear of these concepts during the coming federal election. Like Reynolds, GOP presidential candidates will practice the politics of distraction and divert the public attention to issues that would address the danger of a transgender posse to junior high basketball, whether federal funding should be withdrawn from all public universities if they do not appropriately ban a list of books; and how the disabled and poor are the part of our society that is really holding us back and preventing more tax cuts.

A final note: The founder of the America First Policy Institute is Donald J. Trump.