

NATIONAL REVIEW

Scorecard: Trump's First Six Months

Some wins (Gorsuch, regulations, Paris accord), but character flaws continue to tarnish his achievements.

Michael Tanner

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The first six months of the Trump presidency have been dominated by tweets, insults, and investigations. But obscured by all the noise have been important questions of policy. Let us, therefore, put aside issues of style and look more closely at the substance. What has President Trump accomplished?

There have clearly been successes. At the very top of the list is Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, who gives every sign of being the brilliant originalist who was advertised. Trump has been slower in nominating judges to lower courts, but those he has put up, in general, appear to be excellent choices.

On the legislative front, Trump's biggest victory may have been a bill making it easier to fire incompetent employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and protecting whistleblowers in the agency. He has also signed some 15 bills repealing all or parts of Obama-era regulations. Few have been earthshaking, but most have been steps in the right direction. And while his withdrawal from the Paris climate accords was as much symbolism as substance (as were the accords themselves), it was an important signal that America is going to prioritize economic growth.

Nor should we ignore addition by subtraction, so to speak. There are all the regulations that the Trump administration has not enacted, especially compared with what a Clinton administration probably would have done. By some measures, the Trump administration has been the least regulatory presidency since Reagan's. That's not nothing.

But the president has mostly struck out on bigger items. Even if Republicans eventually cobble together some sort of health-care bill, full repeal of Obamacare is, by all accounts, not going to happen. Tax reform remains nothing more than a one-page outline and is unlikely to pass this year. The budget remains stalled, entitlement reform is off the table, and deficits are rising. Congress, of course, shares the blame for these failures. But Trump's distraction, disengagement, and vacillation helped turn bad situations into true disasters.

Then again, we should probably be grateful that many of Trump's other initiatives, such as Ivanka's paid family-leave and child-care programs, the trillion-dollar infrastructure boondoggle, and, of course, the wall are not going anywhere.

And if you want to see a complete policy train wreck, look no further than the president's travel ban, originally intended to bar entry for 90 days for applicants from seven Muslim-majority

countries. Setting aside that the president managed to insult an entire religion and caused enormous personal hardship to innocent people, or that the ban does nothing to make America safer, one can't overlook that the whole exercise ended up bogged down in the courts for longer than the order was originally supposed to be in effect.

Meanwhile, on foreign policy, Trump's flubs and snubs have obscured the fact that he has mostly carried on a pretty traditional approach to most issues. His rhetoric might be more bellicose, but his actual policies are not much different than what President Clinton probably would have done.

Under other circumstances, one might consider these six months as perfectly mediocre, not as bad as critics feared, but no great shakes either. But circumstances are hardly normal. It's all but impossible to separate Trump on policy from Trump's character. From the point of view of his many critics, his petty feuds, continuing misogyny, and relentless assault on the truth have tarnished those things he has accomplished.

Polls show that Trump's support among voters is at record lows at this point in a presidency, but he retains nearly all the support of his base. For some of them, it's enough that he appears to speak for them against the bipartisan Washington establishment. For others, they are enthralled by the way he drives liberals, critics, and the media crazy. For others, not being Hillary or Obama will carry him a long way. Besides, the Democrats are hardly offering much of an alternative.

But if we are looking for real solutions to the serious problems facing this country, the Trump administration is a long way from winning.

Michael Tanner is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and the author of Going for Broke: Deficits, Debt, and the Entitlement Crisis.