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Trump: A Powder Keg to Reignite the Spirit of '76-

Donald Trump won. Now what?

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The Art of the Deal – His campaign was marked by so many lies, claw backs, and ridiculous excuses for policy, analysts are stymied. The lies grew a cottage industry of fact-checkers and sparked the creation of websites like trumplies.com. The last tracked around 150 lies per week toward the end of the campaign. In addition to writing articles to track the lies, other national news outlets published pieces trying to explain what was going on inside his mind. Advocates took toward urging audiences to ignore the words and feel the emotion. Repeated commentary included, “He taps into that anger,” and “He has such positive energy.” In the end, apologists repeated the mantra about needing to take him figuratively instead of literally.

That doesn't help the analysts. They publish information that allows politicians to look before they leap. Knowing a piece of legislation or an executive order comes with an astronomical price tag or some form of cultural devastation helps with the weighing and consideration of alternative power plays. But news sources, on top of quoting standup nonsense like his famous meander on the Iran nuclear deal that began, “Look, having nuclear – my uncle was a great professor and scientist and engineer, Dr. John Trump at MIT; good genes, very good genes, OK, very smart, the Wharton School of finance, very good, very smart – you know, if you're a conservative Republican, if I were a liberal, if, like, OK if I ran as a liberal Democrat, they would say I'm one of the smartest people anywhere in the world – it's true! – but when you're conservative Republican they try – oh, do they do a number ...”

Trump was at first loved by Americans tired of the politically-incorrect. They found his spunk and spice refreshing. But it led news agencies to use the word “scary” in coverage. It became clear the candidate was not familiar with the US Constitution, the supreme document for limiting presidential powers. He praised dictators, threatened to use his office to shut down mosques, create a database of Muslims, order the military to commit war crimes, and reinstate stop and frisk – and sue newspapers that gave him negative publicity.

Trump is on record for, back in 1987, saying he would never consider a run for the presidency. Through the years, he embraced very Democrat policies, like abortion and universal healthcare, and he donated bigly to Democrats in high office. But as he learned and grew along the

campaign trail, and Kellyanne Conway proverbially took away the twitter machine, his views morphed. NBC published an article of 141 stances he took while running for office. The only problem is, the stances were on only fifteen issues. For example, on immigration, he would deport all undocumented immigrants, bring the good ones back legally, deport only criminals, triple the ICE force, admit he exaggerated about deporting all illegals, consider softening his stance, offer no amnesty while “working with” illegals, eliminate a path to citizenship, be humane, not consider a deportation force, be solidly consistent, deport all illegals within an hour of taking office and then in time, use a deportation force, and not rule out a path to citizenship.

One would pity the fool charged with preparing the budget for all that. But in a preliminary analysis published in June, Moody’s Analytics explained politicians run on bluster, staking out 100 percent of their negotiation stance. The report, “The Macroeconomic Consequences of Mr. Trump’s Economic Policies,” performed three analyses: one taking the candidate at face value; another assuming the policies would be adopted on a less extreme scale; and a third, “assuming a President Trump will need to negotiate with a somewhat skeptical Congress, resulting in his policies being scaled back and adjusted in response to political realities.” Daniel J. Ikenson at the Cato Institute echoed the sentiment that reality bites, “If the separation of powers doctrine strikes Trump as too quaint, and he wished to push to expand his authority in the trade realm, there is a second constraint that should work: Reality.” Incidentally, Moody’s concluded Trump’s tax “plan” was unsustainable. Another unfavorable analysis of the plan, by Trump’s alma mater, The Wharton School, received a heavy tongue-lashing from the campaign.

Now, we’re supposed to put all this, plus the bully talk and palace intrigue – in addition to allegations of Trump’s personal issues like broken contracts, unpaid debt, giant tax exemptions, violated trade embargoes against Cuba and Iran, and “armada” of Chinese imports – behind us and sign a pledge with the president-elect. “It is a contract between myself and the American voter – and begins with restoring honesty and accountability, and bringing change to Washington,” it reads. If only it could be believed. Without serious analysis, it has some good ideas, like a federal hiring freeze, regulatory relief, and greater freedom for the energy exploration and development industries. The second page is a contract with Congress, Trump again being the agent for restoring honesty to government. But what’s a pledge to the guy who rescinded his pledge to support the GOP nominee during the primaries?

Now Deal with It –

So, if you are among those feeling the president-elect is wafting fact-free toward an office he believes will give him unbridled power; “it’s on you” to make sure the story doesn’t end badly. Gene Healy, author of *The Cult of the Presidency*, reminds us, “In living memory, presidents have conducted themselves abominably in their personal relationships, lied us into war, and in former Nixon aide John Dean’s memorable phrase, ‘used the available federal machinery to ***** political enemies.’” Michael Gerson of the *Washington Post* wrote, “The founders might have been appalled by the election of a Trump-like president; they would not have been surprised by it.” That’s why they assembled the best system of checks and balances for national governance in history.

On the down side, the firewalls intended to separate the branches of government have seriously eroded, most notably through the Bush and Obama administrations. The executive branch has

notoriously expanded its domain through unelected regulatory agencies, which in many cases have assumed power for legislating, enforcing, and adjudicating their own policies. On the bright side, Trump is aware of the problem and his plan, which Republicans hope the team he is assembling will make him take seriously, addresses some of these issues, albeit in broad brushstrokes. Trump also indicates he will “cancel every un-Constitutional executive action, memorandum, and order issued by President Obama.” The only problem with that is, Trump’s Originalist action would run afoul of Activist interpretations sanctioning Obama’s actions.

Analysts at the New York Times have separated the items on Trump’s contract into items he can and cannot do without the restraint of Congress. Since Congress holds the proverbial purse strings and both houses now enjoy a Republican majority, some overhauls are not likely to move forward at a revolutionary pace. Among these are the trillion-dollar infrastructure bill. Analysts aren’t sure whether this includes already-approved projects or not; and a variety of creative financing ideas are now afloat for how to pay for it all. Also unlikely to gain traction is daughter’s Ivanka’s expanded entitlement program, since over half of the federal budget is already going toward Medicare/Medicaid and Social Security. Trump’s plan calls for increased spending on the military, stronger immigration enforcement, and a new violent crimes task force – while at the same time cutting taxes.

Actions that do not require an act of Congress would include his nomination of a Supreme Court Justice to replace Antonin Scalia. Trump says he will nominate somebody from his list, but he has produced at least two lists to date, one of which included the name of Senator Mike Lee, who said he would reject the nomination. Trump could also “label China a currency manipulator.” This won’t help a whole lot since market analysts see no signs of intentional tinkering; and, if anything, the currency is overvalued, not undervalued as Trump suggests. Trump could also unilaterally and legitimately “take action against foreign abusers of trade.”

Some of Trump’s foreign policy statements dropped along the campaign trail are hair-raising. They include a combination of the trigger-happy and hubris-infused, “I would also quickly and decisively bomb the **** out of ISIS,” “I would know how to ... defeat ISIS very quickly, and I’m not going to tell you what it is,” “Our military is a disaster,” “I know Russia well. I had a major event in Russia two or three years ago, Miss Universe contest,” “I know more about ISIS than the generals do. Believe me,” and “I’m speaking with myself, number one, because I have a very good brain and I’ve said a lot of things ... My primary consultant is myself.” Added to that is his famed praise of dictators; disdain for NATO allies; and preposterously naïve isolationist economic policies, including the irresponsibly flippant Trumpism, “Who the *** cares if there’s a trade war?”

Granted, policy analysts are often as steeped in political bias as candidates are in sound-bite rhetoric. But a report published by the Peterson Institute for International Economics noted it’s a little late for Congress to pass anything to stop Trump from following through with absurd trade policies. Lawsuits would be likely, but they take time. The most immediate blowback; if Trump enacts steep tariffs, withdraws from trade agreements, or bans outsourcing; could take the form of military retaliation from destabilized economies and alliances. Implemented literally, his campaign rhetoric is a recipe for more refugee crises. But the most beautiful part of this hot mess is people are realizing again that freedom is not free.