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It's Groundhog Day all over again in Washington

Veronique de Rugy

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One of the recurring themes after the election of Joe Biden to the presidency has been that it would bring a radical change from Donald Trump's presidency. To be sure, these men have very different backgrounds and personalities. However, when it comes to public policy, in many areas, Biden is decisively following in Trump's footsteps.

I'm not the only one to notice. *The Babylon Bee*, a satirical newspaper, joked, "In a stunning repudiation of Trump's COVID plan, Biden has announced he will throw out masking, vaccinations, and travel bans and replace them with masking, vaccinations, and travel bans." To be fair, the federal government thankfully has only limited room to act in a centralized and national way to respond to the pandemic, which means that adjustments will only be made at the margin.

Yet take the Biden administration's self-proclaimed "ambitious goal" to administer 100 million vaccine doses by the end of its first 100 days.

That target, my friends, is no more and no less than the trajectory the Trump administration was already headed toward on its way out.

Also, while the Biden administration wants to spend large amounts of cash to speed up the distribution, there is evidence that this will do nothing to help — and may even slow down the process — if the money comes with mandates or other strings attached.

The second area where Biden is pursuing moves similar to Trump is with his abuse of executive powers. Here the irony is quite noticeable since Biden's imitation of his predecessor is done in the name of erasing as many of Trump's policies as possible.

But in this case, the student is surpassing the master, so much so that even *The New York Times* felt the need to editorialize on the issue by reminding Biden that "this is no way to make law. ... These directives, however, are a flawed substitute for legislation. ... and they are not meant to serve as an end run around the will of Congress."

Another area where Biden is emulating Trump is in his protectionism. For all the complaints and laments coming from Democrats and from Biden himself, when Trump was playing Tariff Man by pursuing policies catering to politically connected special interests such as steel producers, the new administration has not yet changed the course set by its predecessor. For instance, Trump's "national security" steel tariffs on our European trading partners are still in place, which is disappointing to say the least.

Worse, the new president is doubling down on the counterproductive "Buy American" mandate, which even *The Washington Post* observes is "awful economics." That's correct. Among other

things, “Buy American” provisions force the government to pay more for the services and goods it buys, thus increasing taxes or borrowing, which results in less money available in the private sector to be invested.

When it comes to China, the Biden White House also seems to be committed to emulating many Trump policies, such as the industrial policy. This would be a terrible mistake, as Cato Institute’s Scott Lincicome has documented in a fantastic new paper called “Manufactured Crisis: ‘Deindustrialization,’ Free Markets, and National Security” (the subject of a future column).

Biden’s China policy is set to look very much like Trump’s. Take the misguided notion that the cronny Export-Import Bank can be used as an effective weapon against China. This is unlikely. Based on my long experience studying this export credit agency, it’s devoted to a set of companies such as Boeing and Pemex, which makes it resistant to reform and, hence, to being part of a coherent China strategy. In fact, despite much bluster from its leadership, ever since this strategy was mandated by Congress in 2019, there’s been no fundamental change in the way Ex-Im Bank operates or in the identities of the companies to which Ex-Im Bank extends financing backed by American taxpayers.

However, Biden’s potentially most look-alike Trump behavior has to do with his misleading the American people. Remember all the calls for unity and bipartisanship on the campaign trail and in the inauguration speech? They will all prove untrue if Biden fails to prevent Democrats from pushing a gigantic COVID-19 relief bill through budget reconciliation, and hence, around Republicans.

I could go on and on about the similarities between Trump’s and Biden’s policies.

In other words, the more things change, the more they seem to stay the same.

Veronique de Rugy is a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University.