

# Countdown to Trumpland: January 2017

Day-by-day details on the road to the  
Inauguration of Donald Trump as U.S.  
President

**Compiled by James M. Flammang:** Editor,  
*Tirekicking Today* ([tirekick.com](http://tirekick.com))

Dated: Monday, January 23, 2017  
(4 Days After Inauguration)

## Installment One

### Delight or Disaster?

**Trump presidency signals either his promised return to a “Great” America or the demise of Constitutional Democracy, with economic tragedy for lower and middle classes.**

As the New Year begins, Americans face a political scene that can only be called unprecedented. To about half the voters in November’s election, the arrival of Donald Trump as president-elect demonstrated a fresh start for the country. To the other half, seeing this willfully ignorant, ill-behaved, flagrantly self-absorbed bully prepare to take the reins of government – despite his fierce distaste for so many of the principles and values upon which this nation was founded – is an occasion for

dread, distress, and abject hopelessness. Not to mention a vastly intensified level of the “fear and loathing” that Hunter S. Thompson found in American political life several decades ago.

Rather than a mere change of administration, promoting different policies and preferences, the Trump version threatens to upend nearly all the benefits that the federal government provides to its residents. In the Trumpian world, as in most of the Republican party itself, the overriding theme is simple: Business and corporate rule are invariably good. Government, especially at the federal level, is inevitably bad.

At the same time, we’re seeing increasing evidence of the prospect of cracking down on dissent at home, as well as ignoring the opinions of world leaders if they conflict with the American president’s fluttery views of the moment.

As for one of those global leaders, most of us don’t seem at all sure how to evaluate the fond admiration that Mr. Trump has expressed for Vladimir Putin. How the menacing head of a former archenemy nation, charged with having his minions interfere with the American election, can abruptly turn into the veritable “best friend forever” of the incoming American president simply defies logic and reason. Of course, just like the definitions of truth and facts changed considerably during the 2016 presidential campaign, much about Mr. Trump bears little relation to logic and common sense.

Dread of and disgust for the hostile, if shaky, principles of Trumpism that appear inevitable has prompted the amazingly quick emergence of a multi-faceted Resistance movement. Concern for the fate of the nation and dismay over the threat of autocratic rule, aided by a coterie of far-right zealots appointed to Mr. Trump’s Cabinet, has prompted countless organizations, publications, groups, and individuals to stand up and declare unity with the opposition. Already, they’re working on ways to lessen, if not push back, the Trumpian maneuvers that will damage millions of Americans while showering the wealthy and powerful with ever-greater riches.

In this age of widespread mistrust of, and anger at, the media, it’s also led plenty of publications – now including *Tirekicking Today* – to turn away from their usual journalistic topics, in favor of devoting as much editorial space as possible to the birth and rise of Trumpism. Even

more important, they're striving to come up with workable ways to resist both specific draconian measures and the overall theme of this new era in American life.

## **Kicking the Tires of Trumpism**

For some time now, we've been cutting back on our coverage of automobiles – the reason for establishing *Tirekicking Today* in the first place, back in 1993. Now, we're breaking even further away from the car business (which is undergoing major changes of its own). We still intend to cover those changes, with respect to such issues as driverless cars, safety, and emissions. On the whole, though, we believe it's far more crucial to write and talk about the threats to democracy and to the daily life of the working classes than to rhapsodize over (or nitpick) the latest oversized SUV, overpowered sports car, or lavishly-featured sedan.

Hence, today marks the first installment of our Countdown to Trumpland. Each episode will focus on a specific threat presented by Mr. Trump's statements and early actions, starting with his (and Rep. Paul Ryan's) intention to kill Obamacare, Medicaid, and Medicare. A new episode will appear in this space each day until the Inauguration on January 20 – and if all goes well, beyond that date as Mr. Trump takes charge.

Almost half a century ago, a professor of government named Andrew Hacker wrote a book called *End of the American Era*. It's taken longer to happen than some of us expected; but now, in 2017, we feel that the American Era is so soundly threatened that its demise may indeed be imminent. If that should happen, modern technology and communication just might help cause the rest of the world to fall, right in step with the Americans. The time to try and stop it from happening is now. Not tomorrow, not after the Inauguration, but NOW.

## **Installment Two**

### **Which Goes First: Obamacare, Medicare, or Medicaid?**

**All three government-backed health care programs are at risk, from Congressional Republicans as well as president-elect Trump.**

Of all the vows made by president-elect Trump, during the campaign and in the weeks following, none has been stated more often – or with greater intensity – than the promise to remove the federal government from the American health care system. Over and over, he’s insisted that his first act, as the official President, will be to take Step One of killing President Obama’s most noteworthy legacy, the Affordable Care Act. The program that’s regularly referred to, with a derisive tone, as “Obamacare.”

Mr. Trump has actually made it sound as if he intends to begin that first step within moments of his taking the Oath of Office on January 20. Unlike many of his dramatic proposals, repealing Obamacare isn’t merely his own ardent wish: it’s been on the “kill it” list of nearly every Republican, since the day the ACA/Obamacare was enacted.

Both the Republicans and Trump himself have stated emphatically that they want to undo virtually every significant move made by President Obama during his eight-year tenure in the White House. And nothing arouses their ire more than the continued presence of this program, which has allowed tens of millions of formerly-uninsured people and families to obtain health insurance.

Republicans and the president-elect also have Medicare and Medicaid in their sights. Both sit at high points on the Republican chopping block. Mr. Trump and many others have proposed that Medicare be replaced by a system of vouchers, which would allegedly

allow senior citizens to purchase private insurance. Privatization would also be part of the method being devised to shrink Medicaid, which subsidizes health care for millions of Americans whose incomes are too small to purchase insurance, much less pay for medical services in cash.

As vague and harmful as proposed replacements for Medicare and Medicaid are, they at least reflect a bit of thought about the need to offer an alternative, rather than simply destroy the programs and walk away. The plan for the Affordable Care Act is different: there is none. Despite years of harping on the alleged horrors of ACA, not a single tangible solution has been proposed. Therefore, if and when Mr. Trump is able to follow through with the repeal that's been a major part of Republican orthodoxy for so long, somewhere close to 30 million people will suddenly find their health insurance snatched away, with nothing provided in return – whether they obtained that coverage by paying directly, through one of the insurance exchanges, or they qualified for subsidies from the government to cover the cost of premiums.

All we hear from the president-elect are assertions that the substitute for Obamacare will have Americans paying less and getting more in return, because of the far greater efficiency of his fantasy replacement. Meaningless words, obviously, unless they're backed by some evidence of an alternative program that could conceivably work.

Considering that one of the first actions taken early in January by the U.S. Senate, shortly after the session opened, was a vote on repeal of the Affordable Care Act, it's a safe bet that Obamacare will be the first health-care program to be dismantled, or at least eviscerated. Every single Republican voted for repeal, winding up with a 51-49 result. As for the House of Representatives, they've already voted dozens of times for repeal. So, the Act gets no respite from them.

The only possible salvation (a temporary one) consists of a proposal to delay enacting repeal, supposedly to allow time to develop a suitable replacement. Mr. Trump has proposed retaining parts of the original Act – especially the one that prohibits insurers from denying coverage to people with pre-existing conditions.

One way or another, in any case, Americans who are not covered by their employers and cannot afford private insurance face a dire near-future. After being shown a route to becoming insured – often, after months and years of being uncovered – that lifeline, though hardly

perfect, is targeted for either substantial or total destruction, leaving millions of the most vulnerable among us out in the cold, no longer able to meet their health-care needs.

Sadly, few observers and critics of the Trump/Republican health-care debacle have been willing to call it what it is: simple cruelty, knowingly preventing millions from receiving medical care when sickness or accident strikes. Not to mention leaving those with chronic conditions to find their own ways to survive, unable to seek help from medical professionals. What else can we possibly call it but cruel and heartless?

### **Voting Against One's Best Interests**

What's most mysterious about the election is how Mr. Trump managed to bamboozle so many voters – especially those white working-class folks who've been in the news so much lately – into believing that he, and he alone, could supply a solution to the health-care “problem.” And of course, convincing them that there actually *is* a problem, since plenty of analysts have pointed out, after early difficulties, that the Affordable Care Act is actually working at least reasonably well.

For one thing, we've all heard for years that government is invariably bad and inefficient, so how could a government-backed health-coverage program be any better? (Opponents seldom say much about Medicare, which is considered quite efficient even by many of its conservative critics.) Since Mr. Trump is practically the antithesis of conventional governance, those who truly believe the dictum that the best government is the one that “governs least” evidently found it easy to gravitate toward Trump, accepting or ignoring his personal behavior, moral character, and qualifications for the presidency – despite the threatening, fast-growing shadow that he's placed over the country.

We have to assume, too, that a good many of his strongest supporters never imagined that some, if not all, of Trump's blurted-out proposals for the early days in his presidential term would apply to them. And that at least some of those plans he proffered could make their lives a whole lot worse. Joining the opponents of a program that's continually branded by its critics as inefficient and costly is easy, when you expect that the negative effects of its elimination will be felt solely by

other people. Especially if those folks are presumed to be the ones who supposedly are undeserving, living off the government while “the rest of us” have to work.

## **Taking the Health Care Issue Personally**

Whenever someone screams about how terrible Obamacare is, and how government-backed health care is invariably disastrous, we have to wonder how many of those screechers – from Congresspersons to ordinary Americans – have ever gone without health insurance themselves, involuntarily. Or just talked about it, seriously, with a friend or relative (or a stranger) who has been uncovered for an appreciable length of time. Considering how many workers have had medical-insurance snatched away when losing a job, non-insured folks shouldn't be too difficult to locate.

On a personal note, my wife and I did without insurance for more than a decade, because no insurer would willingly accept her, with her long list of pre-existing conditions and past surgeries. Not at any price.

During that period without insurance, she needed to have a hip replacement. Who paid for it, in advance? We did, with mostly borrowed cash and use of credit cards. We paid that way, even though we disliked the idea of debt and had never borrowed a substantial sum from anyone, for any reason. This time was different. There was no choice. Despite our modest income, we managed to come up with the \$45,000 to cover the bill; and afterward, to pay off the debt as rapidly as possible, cutting back on other expenses.

A few years later, when a second hip replacement became necessary – followed by a replacement knee – we'd become eligible for Medicare – an absolutely godsend for those of us who'd gone without. One thing I learned during our uninsured decade was that few, if any, colleagues and acquaintances who learned about our situation had ever gone without coverage themselves, and found it almost impossible to believe that someone they knew could have done so.

Of course, countless other uninsured folks would have had to omit the procedure altogether, living with the pain and agony, because they were unable to raise even a fraction of the cost.

## Installment Three

### Where Will All Those New Jobs Come From?

**Exaggerating with unbridled fervor, as usual, the president-elect insists that he “will be the greatest jobs producer that God ever created.”**

In his news conference held at New York’s Trump Tower on January 11, president-elect Trump once again claimed that he will bring a huge revival in American jobs. Throughout the campaign and since the election, he’s blamed the sluggish economy and constricted job availability on Democrats in general and President Obama in particular. Invariably, he places his familiar prime suspect at the head of the enemies line: immigrants, who cross the southern border to snatch away jobs from true Americans.

Most certainly, that’s what plenty of his supporters, especially within the white working-class, wanted to hear at the news conference. And wanted to believe. Furthermore, whether stated in words or implied, what Trump still appears to promise to folks who’ve lost their jobs, or are working harder for less money than before, is a return to an idyllic world of easy hiring, thriving workplaces, and economic abundance.

His statement presumes that the current job situation is abysmal, as countless workers remain unemployed, or toil at positions that pay far less than they were accustomed to getting in the past. Without providing any facts or tangible, specific proposals, Mr. Trump boldly conveys the impression that he will somehow unleash a magic revival of that golden era of plenty that so many Americans seem to long for.

Can he really accomplish such a feat? Most labor experts say “No.”

Viewed realistically, the notion that Mr. Trump, or any incoming president, can somehow change the labor picture, simply by



willing it to be, is a fallacy. So is the belief that eliminating some of those pesky regulations that allegedly keep employers from hiring more workers will make a major difference. Trying to stop American companies from producing goods outside the country isn't a long-term solution, either, though threatening to impose tariffs on imported goods made at foreign branches of American corporations sounds like suitable punishment to ardent Trump fans.

Sadly, a couple of irritating bits of reality interfere with Mr. Trump's luminous view of the economic near-future in Trumpland:

1. It's not that bad. Most definitely, millions of Americans have lost jobs and wound up in completely different kinds of work situations, making way less than in the past. Or, they've been unable to find *any* kind of work. Even so, according to most experts, the American economy isn't nearly the shambles that Mr. Trump envisions. Back in 2008, when the financial world began to go haywire, unemployment and other indicators of economic health painted a dim, indeed dire, picture. For a while, it looked as if America might even suffer another Great Depression. Today, that picture is vastly more satisfying. For one thing, statistically speaking, the country is near full employment. (The current unemployment rate is well below 5 percent, whereas in 2010 it approached 10 percent.)

2. No president can do it alone. Promises of job creation are easy to make; actual creation is hard, if not impossible, in difficult times. To make a real difference in the job market, Mr. Trump would have to work cooperatively with the more enlightened business leaders – those concerned with the future of the nation, at least as much as their own profits. The president might even have to cooperate with – let's speak softly here – the dreaded union leaders and labor activists, acknowledging that they might actually have useful ideas. Thus far, of course, Mr. Trump appears to believe that only his own ideas, largely expressed in Tweets, could have any validity.

3. External forces matter. As *The New York Times* has pointed out, a president might help “set the tone” for an increase in available jobs, but he or she can do little to counteract the impact of other economic forces, including changing demographics within the country, unanticipated events both global and national, plus the basic cyclical

nature of the economy and progress in the business world.

4. Ousting immigrants provides a false impression. In addition to being cruel and hurtful – arguably un-American – deporting millions of immigrants won't help that much, either. Despite repeated insistence by conservatives – and some liberals – that undocumented immigrants from Mexico and points south are “stealing” American jobs, it's hardly a secret that most of those jobs aren't attractive to American workers. Never have been; never will be. Not many Americans feel lured to work that's hard, low-paying, with low status and no prospects for the future.

If the nation's restaurant kitchens and dining rooms suddenly lost their hard-toiling Latino workers – dishwashers, table-bussers, waiters, sweepers – we patrons might be cleaning our own tables before long. Don't expect to see hordes of Americans clamoring to replace the deportees.

5. Threats set a troubling tone. During the transition period between the election in November 2016 and the inauguration on January 20, 2017 – a period during which Mr. Trump seemed to consider himself already the acting president – he apparently determined that threatening American companies that produce products in other countries would somehow bring back American jobs.

In particular, he took on a trio of auto companies, first asserting that if Ford went ahead with plans to build another factory in Mexico, they'd be slapped with a hefty “border tax” for every Ford brought into the U.S. After a period of intimidation, Ford gave in, stating that the decision to abandon that new plant was made for practical reasons, not as a result of Trump's threats. Next came GM, castigated for making Chevrolet Cruze hatchbacks in Mexico rather than in an American factory. In reality, only a few thousand each year entered the U.S. market; most were shipped overseas from Mexico. Toyota was threatened next, before Mr. Trump eased back on the border-tax issue, at least for the moment.

6. Work is changing, fast and furiously. Most importantly, dramatic change has already taken place in the ways most people work, and the pace of change is certain to increase, largely due to technological innovations but also to shifting attitudes toward labor. Not everyone is fully aware of the shift, or affected by it – yet. But what's been dubbed

the “gig” economy, featuring “casual” or alternative working arrangements, is now almost the sole option for a growing number of workers – especially young “millennials,” fresh out of college.

Some like it that way, not tempted by the prospect of steady, full-time employment. Others would prefer something closer to the latter. Like it or not, though, full-time, 8-hour-a-day jobs have been declining for years and aren’t coming back, no matter who sits in the White House.

## **Work – and Workers – ain’t what they used to be**

Coverage by *Tirekicking Today* of non-traditional ways to work, and the changing status of the labor movement, will continue and expand during 2017 (and beyond). As Mr. Trump officially takes over the presidency, his appointed Labor secretary, Andrew Puzder, is expected to take a harsh line against such issues as increases in the minimum wage, provision of overtime pay in low-wage situations, and expansion of unions to encompass lower-end employees.

# Installment Four

## Trump Tackles the Media

**As he did during the campaign, the president-elect has continued to insult, verbally assault, mock, and even ban some news services and reporters whose coverage displeases him.**

Hostility to the media is nothing new for American presidents; or for heads of state in most nations. Starting early in his presidential campaign, however, Mr. Trump has taken a considerably harsher, combative stand against the news media and the reporters who cover his events. Those who write anything that displeases him face the prospect of being castigated or, in some cases, even barred from future events that are open to the press.

Many months ago, Mr. Trump blacklisted several professional, well-regarded news organizations, barring their reporters from attending news conferences and other events. His pugnacious approach to the media became shockingly evident during his transition-period news conference, held at Trump Tower in New York City on January 11 (nine days before Inauguration).

During the press conference (his first since July), he verbally attacked Jim Acosta, the reporter from CNN, refusing to take a question from him, evidently as retaliation for the video news channel's latest coverage. Adopting his familiar tactic of injecting insults into the proceedings, Mr. Trump yelled that Acosta's "organization is terrible," adding: "You are fake news."

What's happened during and after the 2016 election simply isn't traditional news coverage. Far from it. Dealing with a petulant, self-absorbed, thin-skinned demagogue adds a complicating measure of uncertainty to the usual journalistic activity, calling for caution as well as audacity.

Making the media's task even harder, growing numbers of Americans share Mr. Trump's animosity toward the press – especially

traditional newspapers and TV news. Sadly, of course, some of the anger directed at the media is valid, as news services seem to fret more about ratings and readership than serious, thorough news coverage.

Too many Americans seem to be fuzzy about the purpose of the press, and the significance of the First Amendment, as a foundation of democracy. As Thomas Jefferson put it long ago: “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.” Who knows what he might say today, about TV and online news reports?

When Mr. Trump began to brand unflattering coverage as “fake news,” no serious observer of the media could deny that the Internet, in particular, is brimming with alleged news reports that are based on fantasy, assembled out of thin air with no facts behind them. As more and more people get their information from the screens of their handheld devices, and many seem increasingly unable to differentiate between fact and fiction, the prevalence of made-up news has become a serious problem.

As if that isn’t bad enough, not much time passed before Mr. Trump began tossing out the “fake news” allegation regularly, not at websites that specialize in fiction masquerading as truth, but at highly-regarded news outlets. Why? Because they’d published stories that reveal uncomplimentary aspects of the Trump phenomenon. That these stories are based on facts makes no difference in the loud criticism they receive, especially in the form of Trump’s late-night Tweets.

More than ever, journalists need to be watchdogs, paying close attention, questioning what seems untruthful or risky, insisting on facts and details wherever possible. They must never back down, never refrain from asking essential questions, or from calling out proposals that are likely to harm American people. Every Trumpian action must be presumed to have an ulterior, perhaps hidden, motive, beyond what appears on the surface.

This doesn’t mean journalists should retreat into paranoiac frenzy. Much of the time, what’s on the surface is all there is. Still, it pays to be vigilant, especially when dealing with a president who’s demonstrated a propensity for obfuscation, distortion, and limited communication.

What happened at the January 11 news conference, leaving CNN's Mr. Acosta standing alone, unbacked by colleagues, added an extra dose of shame to the occasion. As a journalist myself, albeit covering a narrow field, I fear for the future of the traditional media.

## Installment Five

### What About Those Immigrants ... and Refugees?

**President-elect Trump continues to favor walling off Mexico and barring certain Muslims, but the degree of proposed harshness has varied through the transition period.**

Through the transition period between Election Day and Inauguration on January 20, two of president-elect Trump's often-stated proposals remained uppermost. He still promised to wall off Mexico, and to bar certain Muslims from entering the U.S. In each case, the degree of proposed harshness varied sporadically: sometimes easing at least slightly toward leniency, but then reverting to a hard-hearted, no-exceptions approach.

Speaking early in the campaign, Mr. Trump had painted a hateful picture of marauding criminals entering the U.S. from Mexico – ready to rape, if not murder, Americans. Now and then, in contrast, he would take a gentler tone, professing to “love” the Mexican people, despite imminent construction of the giant wall along the Rio Grande.

During one of his Inauguration Day speeches, now-President Trump could hardly have been more clear, using a string of adjectives to describe what will be, in his eyes, a “...beautiful wall.”

Sorry, Mr. Trump, but to millions of other eyes, there's nothing “beautiful” about a monstrous barrier erected between two supposedly-friendly nations, no matter how artistically it was designed.

Trump supporters aren't the only Americans who decry the presence of millions of undocumented migrants in the country. Plenty of critics from each side of the political dividing line speak of uninvited foreigners “stealing jobs” from “real” Americans. Or, taking advantage of public services without paying taxes.

The extent to which migrants from Latin America or elsewhere take jobs that official Americans would otherwise be able to obtain is arguable, to say the least. Studies also show that most unauthorized

immigrants pay plenty of taxes, and don't necessarily use public services more than their American-citizen counterparts. Such arguments fall upon deaf ears in the build-the-wall group, and even among some voters who are aghast that Donald Trump has become president.

Supposedly, according to some of Mr. Trump's proclamations, those to be deported would be criminals. Even if true, many may have committed only minor offenses. Besides, since the anti-immigrant forces consider being in the U.S. without documentation to be a crime, logically, each and every one without a green card or other evidence of official acceptance in the country would appear to qualify as an unwanted alien. Except for having crossed an international border without permission, most undocumented residents are utterly law-abiding, just like their neighbors.

Plenty of those folks who lack "papers" are worried. Seriously worried, well aware that even during the Obama administration, a vast number of families were split by deportation. Parents have been sent back to their home country, even if they haven't been there in decades, leaving behind a spouse and/or children who are American citizens.

At the same time, it's hardly a secret that millions of undocumented workers serve as bulwarks of the American economy, engaged in construction or farm work, clearing restaurant tables, landscaping – demanding, exhausting jobs that pay little, and that most Americans aren't clamoring to fill.

Few call the system what it really is: an insult to Mexicans, who are clearly informed by the wage differential that they are considered inferior – inconsequential and easily replaceable – as players in the global economic world.

For some years now, there's been a threat against the law that makes children of undocumented immigrants U.S. citizens, automatically. With the new administration in charge, unfriendly to foreigners, repeal sounds like a high probability. Also under threat is the "dreamers" law, which has permitted people who were brought to the U.S. without permission, as children, to remain in the country.

Merits of such legislation may be arguable; but simply doing away with them, then sending people who were brought to the U.S. as children back to their birth country, is unconscionable.



## **Punishment, Not Praise**

Rather than showing ourselves as a compassionate people, so many legal Americans reveal little or no concern about the fate of those who come from elsewhere, including those who've faced unthinkable hardships. In so many cases, these are people who've shown astounding courage, stamina, bravery, and persistence, in a quest to reach a better life. Qualities that, in a better world or time, would be valued and sought-after, not ignored or denigrated.

Let's not forget that the very same goal is what inspired countless Americans in the 19th century and into the 20th to travel westward from the limited economic possibilities in the eastern regions of the United States. California may have been the destination of choice for families who traversed the country by covered wagon in the 1800s, as well as those who fled the devastation of the 1930s Dust Bowl in decrepit automobiles. The only real difference is that those migrants had no heavily-guarded national border to cross, to get there.

Instead of praising and rewarding those who've put up with so much to get to the U.S., to try and improve their disastrous lives, they're captured, punished, and deported.

Recently, the illegal immigration rate has been falling, as more undocumented workers find it difficult to get and keep those jobs they'd imagined were readily available within U.S. confines. As a result, growing numbers have been giving up, heading back to their home communities, though painfully aware that prospects there may be even more meager than when they'd left, looking forward to the promise of "el norte."

The fate of unwanted immigrants is of course directly related to that of refugees across the world, fleeing the horrors of murderous dictatorships and deplorable living standards. In stark contrast to most world leaders who've been struggling to keep refugees at bay, a handful, led by Germany's Angela Merkel, have taken a kinder route, trying to "do the right thing," though castigated for her efforts.

So, too, have some individuals gone against anti-refugee opinion. No better example can be found than the gentleman who operates a farm in rural eastern France, at the Italian border. Rather than participate in the efforts to keep refugees away, he's been

shepherding large numbers of them into France, seeing that they get on trains headed west – where they might have at least a chance of finding a new home. This gentleman exhibits a level of courage and compassion that Mr. Trump – and sadly, most Americans – could never begin to imagine.

When you need to do the “right thing,” you find a way. You find the people who best understand the ramifications of what’s happening, and let them develop ways and means to make it happen. In Trumpland, we’re sure to see the opposite.

### **Trump’s Wall: Paid for by Mexico? Not!**

Most of the time, when discussing and planning for any major issue, it’s mainly a question of who’s going to pay. That’s certainly true of such dominant concerns as immigration policy, provision of health care, and availability of any public services.

On January 12, CNN and other news services reported the announcement from Mexican officials that they had no intention of paying for Trump’s wall. That wasn’t exactly headline news for anyone familiar at all with Mexican history and the Mexican people. Theirs is not a culture that takes insults well – and the wall, no matter who pays, would be a monumental insult piled atop the one that’s spanned the U.S.-Mexican border.

A fence is bad enough. Armed, ever-suspicious officers of *la migra* serve as permanent reminders of the difference between two cultures. Harsh border tactics brazenly demonstrate the rule that persons from below the Rio Grande are undesirables: not wanted – needing to be pushed back, insulted, humiliated. Just because they had the presumed misfortune to have been born in a country that’s engaged in constant economic tussle with the United States.

Ironically, they are barred from entering the American southwest which, before wars changed the borders, was largely part of Mexico. Even when they consist of a river or a mountain, borders are politically-devised barriers separating nations on the basis of what usually boils down to one thing: money. Economic differences, enhanced by cultural clashes.

## Installment Six

### Presidential Basics: Character, Integrity, Honesty, Knowledge

**Where does our 45th president stand in each of these vital areas? Does lack of any of them disqualify a person for the nation's top job?**

#### A Question of Character

Relatively early in the 1961 classic film *The Hustler*, Robert Rossen's intriguing study of the lives of pool hustlers, Fast Eddie Felsen (played by a captivating Paul Newman) loses his big game to Minnesota Fats (a role seemingly tailor-made for Jackie Gleason). How could this be? Fast Eddie believes himself to be the best pool hustler in the business.

It's a question of "character," says the film's demonic villain, portrayed by George C. Scott. "Minnesota Fats has more character in his little finger than you got in your whole skinny body."

Okay, so "where do I get some character," Newman asks, with a toned-down version of his trademark smirk. By the end of the movie, following his lady friend's (Piper Laurie) suicide, he's developed some character, all right – enough to win the follow-up pool game. Few movies provide anything close to a rundown of major life lessons, but this depiction of the absence and growth of character is one of them.

Although Donald Trump's avid advisers and supporters would deny any such lack of strong character, the evidence is tragically irrefutable. A man with character would never have mocked Senator John McCain's POW experiences; denounced the Khan family, whose son had died in action; reproached Civil Rights icon John Lewis; called Senator Charles Schumer a "clown"; or taken Pope Francis to task because he expressed an opinion contradictory to Trump's. He could have simply disagreed with the almost universally renowned actress Meryl Streep, rather than declare her "overrated." Alec Baldwin, whose on-target portrayals of Mr. Trump on Saturday Night Live have drawn endless praise, did not deserve to have his overall acting skills derided.

Instead of responding to criticism in a reasonable manner, Mr. Trump has regularly turned to Twitter to unleash verbal assaults at those who have publicly expressed negative opinions.

Often called a “bully” during the campaign and transition period, Mr. Trump comes across as having the psyche of a schoolboy. As a result, it’s easy to picture him as the nastiest bully in the schoolyard.

## **Lies, Promises, Betrayal?**

Everybody in politics lies. That’s the conventional wisdom, relied upon by supporters of a particular political figure when that person is caught in an egregious falsehood.

It’s not true, of course. Yes, politicians tend to exaggerate, to speak in vague terms when clarity could be risky, to “cherry pick” statistics and opinions to buttress their beliefs and proposals, to emphasize that which favors their position and ignore that which does not.

Yet, few political persons, past or present, can even begin to approach Mr. Trump’s propensity for propagating outright falsehoods, utterly devoid of facts and reason. Considering the way so many of his thoughts come to light late at night, in the form of angry or bitter Tweets, we can only assume that the subjects pop suddenly into his head. That rationale seems all the more likely when observing that many of those late-night proposals or observations don’t last very long before either disappearing, or metamorphosing into something different.

During the campaign, fact-checkers found falsehoods in the words of every candidate who said more than a handful of words. Almost invariably, though, Mr. Trump took the honors handily, having uttered way more dubious or dead-wrong statements than anyone else, including those dubbed “pants on fire” comments.

What remains to be seen as Mr. Trump takes power is what will happen when his many promises and vows fail to materialize. Will his supporters see the failings as betrayal? As incompetence? Or will he continue to blame others – notably Democrats – for his flawed performance, and be believed by the tens of millions who welcome our journey into Trumpland?

## Willful Ignorance

Even if we accepted as fact Mr. Trump's claims of having one of the biggest brains in the world, would that mean he was capable of making high-level strategic decisions without benefit of any tangible knowledge – the kind provided by experts in a given field? Well-honed logic and reason would be immensely valuable, of course, but not when they're accompanied by a sheer dearth of knowledge of the subject at hand.

Worse yet, those decisions are to be made by a president who, evidently, intentionally shuns the words of those who actually know something about the topic being considered. Instead, he appears to rely primarily upon whatever snippets of ideas pop into his head, ready to be honed quickly into insulting, vengeful Tweets. Rather than being welcomed, those who have knowledge of the subject matter in question, but express views that don't jibe with those of the incoming president, risk being castigated as enemies.

In the days before Inauguration, some of Mr. Trump's own cabinet members have been expressing opinions that diverge from what the great man has proclaimed. Many of those appointees have been faulted for being allergic to facts themselves, maintaining ideologically-based opinions that veer far away from the recommendations of experts. Yet, in their hearings before Congress, some appointees have suggested that Mr. Trump's pronouncements – some of which change back and forth at his whim – don't necessarily constitute the best approach for serving the federal agencies that they will soon be heading.

What's shocking isn't the fact that the new president makes so many statements that reflect utter ignorance. Rather, it's that his form of ignorance is willful. He comes across as proud to know little, if anything, about aspects of governance – whether of bureaucratic procedures, economic principles, social trends, history, or any other serious issue.

Then again, Mr. Trump is far from alone in his disdain for knowledge and expertise. Could any other major country in the world have once had a political party called the Know-Nothings?

**Post-Inaugural Update:** Now that Mr. Trump is officially President of the United States, *Tirekicking Today* isn't about to stop reporting on the devastating, disruptive impact of his tenure. Like so many who are enthusiastically participating in the Resistance that's been developing since Election Day, we will continue to provide both news and commentary (similar to our Installments above) on Mr. Trump, his policies and proposals, and his ultra-wealthy cabinet members.

Most notably, we will strive to keep up with opposition efforts to President Trump's plans – and those of nearly all Republicans in Congress – to dismantle the Obama legacy (starting with the Affordable Care Act). Unless their efforts can be restrained, we've no doubt that the Trump administration will devastate the daily lives and future possibilities of the millions of Americans who fall well outside the fabled one-percent.

In this era of harsh challenges to traditional, corporate-backed media, the continued presence and diligence of smaller news outlets such as ours is especially crucial.

.

© All contents copyright 2017 by Tirekicking Today