

Our Most Corrupt President  
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Last week, we explored the meaning and history of political corruption in our country. I emphasize "our country," because if I were doing a global tally of political corruption, it would take a sizable book.

Our founding fathers were trying to create a new sort of government, and they were very aware of how corruption corrodes a society. Far from being naive about a brave new world, they created a government with checks and balances against abuse of power. Our system is not designed to be efficient; rather it is designed to protect us from our worse instincts.

As long as the American government was in the hands of the original founders, their code as gentlemen (keen sense of honor and responsibility) prevailed. However, with the election of Andrew Jackson, a populist, the country entered into four decades of abuse of power. Elections were fueled by clandestine payoffs and alcohol, presidents were weak, negligent, or in someone's pay, and the country suffered. Lincoln broke this pattern, but his assassination ushered in heavily corrupt governments until President Teddy Roosevelt cleaned house.

Over time, most presidential behavior was largely governed by norms, practices honored as important traditions. These norms arose as needed: Presidents revealing personal wealth and disposing of it while in office; annual medical examinations (after the secrecy of FDR's health); gentlemanly language and courtesy; efforts to appoint the best managers of government agencies and departments available; presidential advisors the best and most respected that they could find. By 2008, these norms were practiced.

The above list has been violated in every instance by President Donald J. Trump. He has never released a tax return; never put his businesses into blind trusts; has never released an honest health report; never sought the best men and women to appoint to run government departments; never took advice and never observed courteous speech. The consequence of this behavior has resulted in rampant corruption: he, his family, and most of his appointees have made money out of their positions, or have attempted to destroy the very agencies over which they preside.

So far, in just two years in office, a flood of officials, including relatively good ones, have been driven from office, to be replaced by Trump toadies. In his inner circle, Paul Manafort, Rick Gates, Michael Flynn, Michael Cohn, George Papadopoulos, have all pleaded guilty and will face prison. Almost everybody around Trump lies, just as he does (compulsively): even Chief of Staff John Kelly, who lied despite knowing better, about a Black congresswoman. Rob Porter could not get security clearance because he was a wife beater, yet he handled classified documents.

Almost every department head selected by Trump has had to leave because of blatant corruption, not to mention abuse of power, attempting to scuttle the very agencies they run. The list includes Ben Carson, Urban Development; Carl Icahn, senior advisor on regulatory issues, using the job to further his own financial interests.

Secretary of Health and Human Services resigned over spending more than \$1 million on private and military jets. Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin was a lavish traveler. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt used money for luxury transport, in addition to rolling back every safeguard to clean air and water. These are just a sample. The list is depressingly long.

Then there is the issue of personally benefitting financially from his position as President. His Trump hotels have raked in huge profits, money from Russians, Saudis, and others seeking something for their largesse. Money laundering will undoubtedly be another crime attached to this president. His children have used their positions to seek profits in China, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Trump's son-in-law may well be the next to go to prison. (He sought money from the Saudis to bail out his family's failing business.)

For corruption, we must look at Quid Pro Quo, getting something for one's money. What did Donald Trump give in response to the Russians loaning him money when American banks refused him? How much of our Democracy has been given away?

Congress and the Mueller Report will uncover the Quid Pro Quo.

686 words

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