

What Trump Is Learning From His Presidency

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It is now clear that Donald Trump had never cared about public policy except to the extent it affected his own bottom line as a businessman, and that he's only now starting, as the U.S. President, to think about ideology, and about public policy, and about what the functions of government are and what they ought to be, and how they can most efficiently be carried out in policy. He's in a learning-mode, now, more than a doing-mode. So: what is he actually learning?

Back on 27 February 2017, after already more than a month as President, [he said “Nobody knew that healthcare could be so complicated,” and that “I have to tell you, it's an unbelievably complex subject.”](#) For him, as someone who never had really thought about it before, this fact (the need for authentic expertise in the interests of the public, not of himself) came as an unpleasant shock — after already several weeks in the White House.

He has made clear that he'll be happy to sign anything that Republicans in the U.S. Senate and House can have enough agreement with each other about so as to get onto his desk for him to sign into law.

The latest iteration of this is that Trump, it has recently become clear, would even be delighted to sign into law a healthcare bill that would strip away almost all regulations — almost all legal limitations — on what health insurance companies are allowed to do in the insurance policies they sell. Philip Klein, in the *Washington Examiner*, on the morning of Wednesday July 19th, headlined [“Trump calls Mike Lee in attempt to revive Senate healthcare bill”](#), and reported that Trump had just spoken with Senator Lee — who along with Rand Paul is one of the Senate's two libertarians (believers in eliminating all economic regulations) — and Klein reported there that:

Trump reached out to Lee, R-Utah, on Tuesday afternoon to take his temperature and, according to a spokesman for the senator, Lee reiterated his position that he wanted to free the market from Obamacare's regulations in an effort to drive down premiums and provide more choices.

Trump, according to the spokesman, seemed receptive.

In other words: Trump is “receptive” to eliminating almost all of the Obama regulations on the insurance policies that insurance companies can sell. Lee, who is a sincerely committed libertarian, has demanded that Obamacare be eliminated altogether before it is replaced, and the reason he has required this is that Obamacare has placed legal limitations upon the insurance policies that are allowed to be sold in the United States, and that Lee wants to get

rid of all of them.

Almost everyone in Congress is either an ideologue or else corrupt, or else both (which combination is possible if corruption is acceptable within that person's ideology). Mike Lee is specifically a libertarian ideologue, and no one has been able to corrupt him to violate his ideology, which, one can reasonably infer from this and other examples, excludes him from corruption — from selling it out.

Klein's news-report stated, however, that Lee was willing to compromise it, just a little, if the Republicans can strip out all but the most popular Obamacare regulations:

Lee has indicated that he would be inclined to support the bill if it included a provision that he helped write with Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, that would allow insurers to offer plans that do not have to abide by Obamacare's regulations as long as they offer plans that meet all of the requirements. Cruz eventually agreed to a compromise that would allow insurers to get around most of the regulations, but that maintained Obamacare's requirement that all insurers operate a single risk pool in a given state. That means that as written, insurers would be governed by two drastically different regulatory regimes within a single risk pool, which Lee determined would put upward pressure on premiums.

Lee, it is clear, believes that regulations "put upward pressure on premiums." Reduce the regulations and the cost of "premiums" would go down, he believes. But what about the costs that health insurance *isn't even covering*? Just forget about that, is the attitude. The obsession is: "premiums." What a consumer gets for those premiums, most members of Congress don't even care — they don't think it's their business to be involved in that. Certainly, most of the Republican ones don't. To be involved in that would be "regulation" — and anyone who is even just partially libertarian is against "regulation." The very concept has a bad odor to them.

However, that view, libertarianism, is exactly the opposite of the true understanding not only of health care, but even of just health insurance, because all international experience has made unequivocally clear that in order to drive down even only "premiums," libertarianism is actually poison: libertarianism actually drives *up* both health-insurance premiums, *and* uncovered healthcare costs. Libertarians — even people who are only partially and not exclusively that — ignore the total picture (which includes both premiums *and* what's not covered by premiums). But when premiums are being driven down by means of driving up what consumers pay out of their own pockets (i.e., by means of *reducing* insurance-coverage), consumers tend to put off or delay care until their healthcare-problem becomes very expensive or impossible to treat — and that's not at all the efficient way for a healthcare-system to function. It reduces instead of increases health.

The obsession of politicians, who don't want to draw attention to the broader picture of driving down *all* healthcare-costs (while increasing health), including not just "premiums" but out-of-pocket (uncovered) costs, is "premiums," but premiums don't by any means include paying for everything in health care. See the link at the phrase, "quality of care; and the U.S. quality of care is low in comparison to other advanced nations," in [this article](#), wherein America's *unique combination of low quality and astronomically high cost* is documented and is also placed into its broader perspective **so that it can also be understood**, not be at all confusing. This is what public-policymaking is really all about: it's

about the entire system, if it's public-policymaking *in an authentic democracy*. An incomplete view of the system — such as libertarianism demands — is toxic to the public. If politicians don't care about the public but only about their big campaign-donors, then calling the holders of public office "Representatives" of the public is a lie, that's not a real democracy but only a fraudulent one. The U.S. has both the least regulated, and the most expensive, healthcare in the world, and it's inferior even to that in many countries where healthcare costs-per-capita are less than half as high as in the United States.

Moreover, [America's healthcare also costs twice as high a percentage of GDP as in those other countries](#). That fact (America's having by far the costliest, and also one of the lowest quality, healthcare-systems of all industrialized countries) is too "complicated" for the neophyte policy-thinker Trump to grab hold of (he doesn't really care about it), or for the libertarian ideologue Mike Lee even to care at all about (since it contradicts his false theory, libertarianism); but it's undeniably true, nonetheless: America is the corrupt laughingstock of all other countries, when it comes to healthcare. Ideologues such as Lee, and also plain psychopaths such as Trump, have made it become that way; but, still, it's not yet enough "libertarian" to suit them. They want even *more* of it. (Certainly their megadonors do.)

Libertarianism is actually chaos, and that's what America now has in its healthcare; and it's both very expensive and very inefficient. Chaos is unregulated, but it is "unbelievably complex," because the options and sub-options in a chaotic social system regarding healthcare or anything else, are so numerous and so incompatible with one-another, so that the less regulated the system (that's provided under the law) is, the more numerous the regulations themselves must necessarily be. There must be exceptions all over the place — and this frees up anyone who wants to get an edge on the 'free market', to do whatever he or she wants to do — thus it's 'libertarian', such as the U.S. is famous for being: [ideologically committed against socialism, no matter how democratic, how anti-authoritarian, that socialism may, in fact, be. It's all 'communism' they say](#): Denmark has it, so does Sweden, so do many countries, but did we oppose them during the Cold War? Of course not! That type of thinking is for idiots, but plenty of them exist.

And both Lee and Trump want them to wade through all those choices that, even Trump himself now admits, are "unbelievably complex." He thinks it's "complex" for him, but not too complex for ordinary hardworking Americans to study fully and carefully enough so that they can intelligently choose the optimum insurance-policy to meet their own actuarial probability of this disease or that disease, or this type of accident, or that type of on-the-job health-risk? Really?

Trump is running into this same learning-curve when it comes to international trade; and, like with healthcare, he's *not* learning.

Also on July 19th, Shane Savitsky and Jonathan Swan at Axios headlined, ["Trump's own words put his trade policy in jeopardy"](#), and they wrote:

President Trump wants to invoke a national security provision to stop the "dumping" of cheap steel into America, but trade lawyers believe Trump's public statements — and dubious legal reasoning — could expose the administration to significant legal problems.

The White House's rhetoric: The administration in April identified dumping as the impetus for Trump "standing up" for the steel and aluminum industries.

Trump last week on Air Force One: "They're dumping steel and destroying our steel industry, they've been doing it for decades, and I'm stopping it."

Why it matters: International trade experts, including NYU Law professor Robert Howse, told Axios that Trump made a big mistake by identifying "dumping" as his basis for imposing retaliatory tariffs on national security grounds. There are already laws on the books to remedy dumping, and if Trump invokes the national security provision to impose new tariffs, other nations will immediately challenge him because they're operating under a World Trade Organization agreement that has no national security exceptions.

...

... The Trump administration has launched an investigation under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act to explore how to stop foreign countries "dumping" artificially cheap steel into the U.S. market. The Trump administration labels this a national security threat because it undermines American manufacturers. Trump's team would likely try to justify its actions to the WTO by citing Article XXI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which allows countries to make trade decisions based on "the protection" of "essential security interests."

But the White House might never be able to use its preferred defense for steel tariffs using the GATT because the WTO already has a superseding Anti-Dumping Agreement that specifically disciplines such cases — and it doesn't allow for a dumping case based on "national security" or contain any national security exceptions. Given that the administration has been clear that dumping is a centerpiece of its Section 232 investigation, a WTO member could choose [to] bring a legal challenge under the Anti-Dumping Agreement to preempt the administration's Article XXI plan.

The approach has other problems: Trade experts view Article XXI — designed for emergencies or wartime — as a third rail in international trade law. If Trump invokes it he would threaten the WTO's legitimacy and potentially spark a global trade war. The U.S. also has domestic laws surrounding dumping that were recently expanded by Congress early last year, and White House could face a domestic legal challenge to any action against steel dumping — for example, from an auto manufacturer or a foreign exporter — before it has to face down the WTO.

What trade lawyers are asking: Is this the strategy of a nationalist administration set to paint either an international trade organization or the judicial branch as diametrically opposed to its America first policy or, similar to the roll-out of the travel ban, is the administration not prepared for the impact of the president's public statements?

This displays from Trump the same incompetency at systems-thinking that he displays in regards to healthcare. He doesn't *really* "give a damn" about public policy.

The best thing that can be said about Trump as President is that, unlike his political opponent Hillary Clinton, who had an extensive track-record proving her commitment to overthrowing every head-of-state that is at all friendly toward Russia, and was [so determined to do it as to be willing to bring about nuclear war between the U.S. and Russia](#), Trump just doesn't care at all, except about himself and his family. He had no track-record at all in public life, and, fortunately, had no "regime-change in Syria" commitment at all (though America's [neoconservative 'news' media still grasp at the straws of hope for him to change on that](#) and thus for him to become even more similar to his opponent than [he already is turning out to be](#)). His psychopathy gives the world at least a possibility it'll

survive his term in the White House. Thus, if Clinton were the President, I'd be even less optimistic than I am, about the next few years. Furthermore, there is now the possibility of massive political gridlock in Washington. That could be a great relief. Sometimes, incompetency in a person is a gift to be treasured, to ward off that person's becoming really dangerous — or, at least, more dangerous than he/she would otherwise be. But, of course, the same would have been true regarding Mrs. Clinton. And, either way, it was a con, [not a functioning democracy](#). That's the first thing to understand about America, regardless who won the White House.

UPDATE: Just as this article was being completed, on the evening of July 19th, the neoconservative *Washington Post* headlined the most important breaking news story thus far in Trump's Presidency, "[Trump ends covert CIA program to arm anti-Assad rebels in Syria, a move sought by Moscow](#)", and reported,

"President Trump has decided to end the CIA's covert program to arm and train moderate Syrian rebels battling the government of Bashar al-Assad, a move long sought by Russia, according to U.S. officials. The program was a central plank of a policy begun by the Obama administration in 2013 to put pressure on Assad to step aside, but even its backers have questioned its efficacy since Russia deployed forces in Syria two years later." Obama Administration officials, and other neocons, were quoted there saying such things as, "This is a force that we can't afford to completely abandon. ... If they are ending the aid to the rebels altogether, then that is a huge strategic mistake."

These 'moderate' 'rebels', as the U.S. regime and its 'news' media called them, were [overwhelmingly jihadists, whom Obama had been using as cheap boots-on-the-ground — proxies for far costlier American corpses — so as to overthrow Assad and install a pro-Saud Islamic Sharia-law regime to run Syria instead](#); Hillary Clinton had been intent upon finishing that job — even if it would mean war against Russia. This action by Trump is a sea-change for the better. It is a heroic act by a U.S. President whom the U.S. aristocracy have been trying to oust (in favor of the committed neoconservative Mike Pence) so as to overthrow Assad and any other head-of-state who is allied with Russia. Maybe Trump is learning something important, after all. And maybe he is starting to care, finally, about the welfare of the American public. The present observer, at any rate, is again in a wait-and-see mode, about him.

Investigative historian Eric Zuesse is the author, most recently, of [They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010](#), and of [CHRIST'S VENTRILOQUISTS: The Event that Created Christianity](#).

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