



Opinion

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It's too late for progressives to be careful what they wish for

Progressives sought an ever more powerful presidency. Now, to their horror, they have it with Trump.

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Progressives have the presidency they have long desired but a president they abhor. James Madison warned them: “Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm” (Federalist No. 10).

Theodore Roosevelt’s “stewardship” theory of the presidency was that presidents may do anything they are not explicitly forbidden to do. Woodrow Wilson considered the separation of powers a dangerous anachronism impeding enlightened presidents (e.g., him). He postulated a presidential duty of “interpretation”: discovering what the masses would want if they were sensible, like him. Wilson’s former assistant secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, used radio to enable the presidency to mold opinion. Lyndon B. Johnson, who became an FDR loyalist in Congress in 1937, commanded a large and obedient congressional majority (1965-1966) as no subsequent president has.

Donald Trump’s rampant (for the moment) presidency is an institutional consequence of progressivism. Progressives, who spent recent years trying to delegitimize the Supreme Court and other federal courts, suddenly understand that courts stand between Trump and the fulfillment of his least lawful whims. Including his disobeying Congress’s unfortunate, but detailed and lawful, ban of TikTok.

Politico recently published a well-reported story that partially refuted its headline, which was: “As Trump steamrolls Washington, courts flex their power to slow him down.” Steamrollers are not what they used to be, given that at least 10 federal judges have impeded him regarding birthright citizenship, spending freezes, the dismissal of federal workers and the structure of some agencies.

Progressives’ indiscriminate hysteria is helping Trump. Does the Constitution or democracy or *something* require the U.S. Agency for International Development to remain forever as it always has been: ill-focused and inadequately supervised?

The first sentence of the first paragraph of the lead story in Sunday's Washington Post reported Elon Musk's "vision" of a "dramatically smaller" government. If so, of his many "visions," his one about making humanity an "interplanetary species" (Mars, here we come) is not his least realistic.

Four years from now, the government will be larger than it is today. Here is today's government, about which Musk evidently knows as little as he knows about politics:

Thirty-six percent of the budget is Social Security and Medicare, which Trump says are untouchable. Unless the population instantly (and miraculously) stops aging, spending on both programs will grow a lot in four years.

Twelve percent of the budget funds defense, which Trump wants to increase. Fourteen percent is for debt service, which now costs more than defense. It is not optional and will be higher in 2029 because the debt will be at least \$7 trillion larger than it now is.

Democrats should more carefully pick the hills they are willing to die on. The country is heartily sick of illegal racial discrimination and unconstitutional compelled speech that is the diversity, equity and inclusion industry (which, per a Goldwater Institute report, costs \$1.8 billion in education alone every four years). Corporate America adopted DEI programs pell-mell following the moral panic after the murder of George Floyd. Corporations are jettisoning DEI not to placate Trump but to avoid the nuisance and litigation DEI entails. (A theory: Woke college graduates, with degrees in gender studies or similar intellectual cul-de-sacs, dislike business but acquire MBAs so they can join corporate human resources departments and continue grinding their ideological axes.)

Considerable employment churning is a constant and generally wholesome consequence of economic dynamism. On average, more than 1.5 million private-sector workers are laid off *per month*. Few Americans are sad that eternal job security is not an ironclad entitlement for 3 million federal civilian employees.

And about the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, without which America prospered during its first 235 years: Is it really wrong to favor extinction of this anti-constitutional contraption that can "declare," without congressional guidance, what business practices are "abusive"? Unlike any entity created by Congress since 1789, the CFPB is untethered from oversight: Its funding, *determined unilaterally by its director*, comes not from Congress but from the Federal Reserve.

There is a perennial progressive lament that the Constitution's framers — with their annoying separation of powers and their pesky, because independent, judiciary — made swift, radical zigs and zags by government *too hard*. Too bad.

A prediction: On Jan. 20, 2029, whoever is inaugurated on the West Front of Congress's building will inherit a presidency more circumscribed than today's. Courts, especially the one across First Street NE from the Capitol, will have done their duty regarding presidential overreaching. And Congress, provoked by the same, will have begun to flex its atrophied muscles.