

# Trump: Ready to Lead in First Hundred Days

by Conrad Black

The post-electoral media buzz over the president-elect is surrealistic, in that it seems to reflect the almost universal inability of the U.S. national media to grasp the fact that no one is listening to them and no one cares what they think of anything. The liberal media, the natural enemies and incredulous denigrators of the Trump campaign, have done even more savage violence to their reputation than the anti-Trump conservatives have done to theirs. (The ne plus ultra of this latter bedraggled group is poor Gabe Schoenfeld, who two months ago was soliciting my help in denouncing Donald Trump as a Nazi, but tweeted the world this week that I was just “a convicted felon.” Yes, Gabe, and proud of having successfully fought the injustices of genuine American fascists – the Chicago prosecutors.)

Some of the media are focused on the supposed need for Donald Trump to divest himself of his business interests, rather than just hand control of them over to his family, because of the corrosive danger that he might speak with family members in ways that could redound unfairly to the benefit of those interests.

This is nonsense. He need not be held to a higher standard of enforced disinterest than any of his predecessors just because he is the first serious and successful businessman to be elected president. Obviously he has to avoid direct conflicts and must take effective measures to be sure that his family's interests do not benefit unfairly from insider information. Some mechanism will have to be put in place to give some assurance on these points, but it is a bit rich for the media, which were pretty quiescent with the long-running Clinton pay-

to-play casino, to become so unctuous about the moral imperative of Trump putting the company he has run for more than 40 years so far out of reach that no one he ever sees or speaks with has any association with it.

Equally absurd is the continued overreaction of elements of the media to the president-elect's teaser-tweets. During the campaign, he was admonished not to allow his opponents to goad and provoke him into undignified reactions. It wasn't bad advice, but the counselors in that case should heed their own advice. Donald Trump knows perfectly well that citizenship rightfully acquired can't be revoked, and that most legally competent people have a perfect right to burn an American flag if they wish, just as they can burn a fire-log or autumn leaves. Perhaps this mad notion arises from the same neuralgic zone of his mind that inflicted on us the fatuity of the birther controversy, and that reads the *National Enquirer*. In some circumstances, excessively provocative or offensive displays of disrespect for national symbols can be sanctioned, though not with the draconian consequences of imprisonment and expulsion from citizenship (the punishment the Soviet Union meted out to Alexander Solzhenitsyn).

The media should by now have learned the lesson that it is a more complicated business than it thought it was to assess when Trump is serious, when he is maneuvering tactically, and when he is simply engaging in self-amusement. The country, including the press, has not seen enough of him in this new role to do any more than cautiously report facts. The impulse to lunge, as if at a beleaguered, forlorn hunchback, lingers like an addiction.

All free societies require a free press that contains important responsible elements. The United States is now almost without that, and no one but the media can rebuild the media's credibility, and they can do it only by imposing professional standards of integrity on themselves and steadily rebuilding their professional reputation from the

archeological levels it has plumbed in the late election campaign.

The media seem not to have noticed that Trump is preparing a mighty policy revolution, fulfilling explicitly his reform promises that won him the nomination and the election. All of his selections to date to important positions have been impressive, though there is some legitimate concern about the conspiracy-theory vocation of *Breitbart*, formerly directed by counselor-designate Stephen Bannon. The initial effort to portray Bannon as an anti-Semite was a complete fiction, and his performance as campaign strategist was impressive. The new education secretary, Betsy DeVos, is a strong champion of charter schools and her appointment presages the de-emphasis of the state education systems that have almost been destroyed by the shameful antics of the teachers' unions, to which the Democratic party is bound, hand and foot.

Nominating Elaine Chao, Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell's wife, as secretary of transportation seems somewhat inspired, as she will be largely responsible for implementation of Trump's New Deal like program for putting the unemployed to work repairing scandalously decayed American infrastructure. The new health and human services secretary, Tom Price, is the Congress's ranking expert for the promised radical reform of Obamacare, and Steven Mnuchin, apparently the next Treasury secretary, appears to be well qualified to carry through Trump's promised tax reforms and spending reductions. Attempts to tar him with the brush of Wall Street, 14 years after he left Goldman Sachs and moved to California and set up his own hedge fund, are piffle.

Although we are awaiting the nomination of a secretary of state, it is clear that, as promised, the mad Obama love-in with Iran is almost over, and Trump was right to warn Raúl Castro that if he doesn't do better for the people of Cuba, Trump will revisit Obama's precipitate embrace of that ghastly Stalinist dictatorship, which, in 57 oppressive years, has

driven almost all of Cuba's middle class to Florida, where they greatly enriched that state, and helped deliver it to Trump on Election Day. Everyone who is on the national-security team and most of those auditioning for it look like they will help the new president enact an Eisenhower program – one in which the country has a realistic strategic interest, steers clear of needless danger, and executes theatrical shows of strength where there is no risk. (Eisenhower ended the Korean War and stayed clear of Vietnam, and the Marine landings in Lebanon and the Gilbert and Sullivan saber-rattling over Quemoy and Matsu did not cause a single American casualty.)

The emerging story is that Trump is packing his government with people admirably equipped to work closely with the Republican leadership in the Congress. (It was only nine months ago that Ms. Chao's husband was advising his congressional colleagues to be ready to "drop [Trump] like a hot rock," and two months ago that Speaker Ryan was running like a gazelle for the tall grass.) Trump has declared his intention to put through a comprehensive reform of taxes, spending, infrastructure renovation, health care, campaign financing, immigration, and trade in the first Hundred Days of his administration. The Republican leadership in Congress are working feverishly to prepare the agenda, while the Democrats debate the fate of the vaguely amiable Democratic antique, Nancy Pelosi.

It is obvious to everyone except the myopic Washington press, fumbling about like punch-drunk prizefighters too often concussed to swing at a moving target accurately, that Donald Trump is preparing to come out of the gate like a fire engine and join Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, and Ronald Reagan as a transformative president. Now that he is about to take the oath, apart from a few diversionary tweets, he is cranking up to do what he promised, and has been given a mandate, to do. If the outgoing president had done the same, Mrs. Clinton

would be moving back into the White House.