

CAN'T STOP/WON'T STOP: CNN HAS A NEW RACIST BIGOT APOLOGIST

You may remember that CNN recently terminated their go to



racist bigot Trumpian apologist asshole, Jeffrey Lord.

As Politico succinctly put it:

CNN on Thursday fired contributor and staunch Trump supporter Jeffrey Lord after he tweeted a Nazi salute.

Well, yes. That is literally the least you could say about Jeff Lord's "contributions" to CNN. He was, from the start, an unnecessary, and in the face of competent journalism and reportage, complete plant by Jeff Zucker into the CNN family and reportage to do NOTHING but assuage the idiot extremist right wing racist assholes who were watching FoxNews to start with. In short it was insane and counterproductive programming to cater to ignorant racist people that hated, and were not watching, CNN to start with.

The presence of Jeff Lord on CNN was an affront on common intelligence, good journalism and root morality. But there he was. Until Lord actually displayed his inner Trumpian Nazism that was clear under the veneer from moment one, and was

the exact reason Zucker and CNN hired and paid the jerk to start with. Jeff Lord was exactly who Zucker and CNN bought and paid for from moment one. He was exactly what they cravenly wanted.

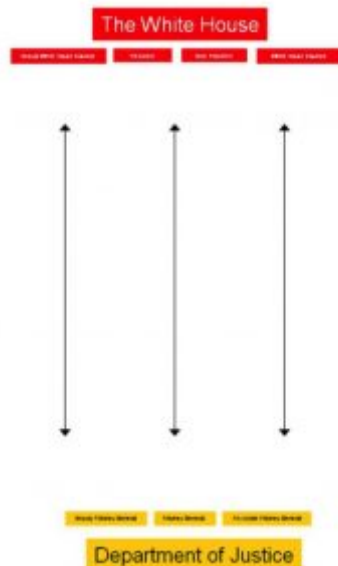
So, did Jeff Zucker, and the worthy geniuses at CNN, learn any lessons by having promoted a clear cut immoral asshole racist Nazi like Lord?

Nope. They have simply found and cultivated a new one.

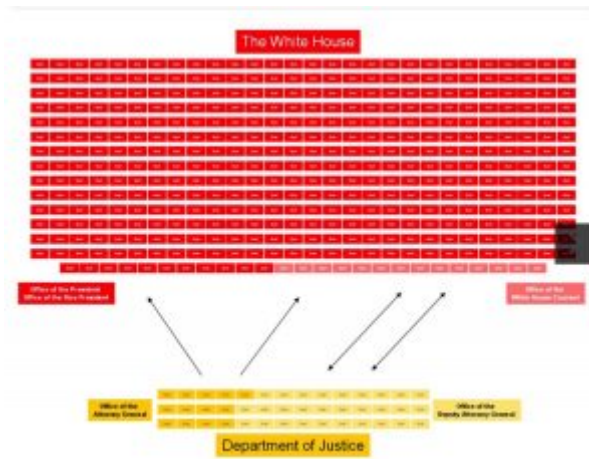
Today's version (and seen on CNN!) is Trumpalo Michael Caputo, who had these gems to say on CNN's The State of the Union show today:

“Our Department of Justice under Obama was the most political Department of Justice in modern times”

Well Mike, that is not quite right. In fact, that would have been the DOJ under George Bush, who your boy Trump is making look good at warp speed. Here is thanks to Senator Sheldon Whitehouse back in 2007, is a graph of political appointee communication of the Clinton White House with the Department of Justice:



Here is, again from Senator Whitehouse, an identical chart of the contacts of the contacts from the Bush/Cheney White House:



Ooof, if you want to talk about root politicization of the DOJ, that is pretty telling, even without going into the Monica Goodling/Karl Rove nonsense.

Caputo goes on to belligerently defend Trump

“...against all this talk of racism”

So, eh, no. For Caputo, in the face of what Trump is doing vis a vis the DOJ, whether firing the Director of the FBI for not covering his ass or asking his Attorney General to kill an investigation of his largest racist supporter Arpaio, is just another hired liar.

But having such an immoral liar to balance actual truth and fair reportage with absolute flat earth level racism horse manure from Trumpland, is what Jeff Zucker and CNN demands. They simply cannot fathom presenting the former without salting it with the latter.

Ted Turner must be beside himself somewhere in Montana. The demand of media, in this case CNN, to “both sides” even in the face of grossly immoral and unconscionable racism and bigotry, is insane. It needs to stop. There is no need to put on an apologist like Michael Caputo just to say you did so. It added nothing, but support for rank ignorance and bigotry. That is not what America’s media should be about.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE ARPAIO PARDON

As you probably already know, Trump has pardoned Joe Arpaio . It



is an abominable act by a lawless jackass. One lawless jackass pardoning another lawless jackass. Trump and Arpaio are really two peas in the same racist bigot pod; both supreme narcissists, ignorant and contemptuous of the rule of law down to their deepest bone.

And Marcy Wheeler is right that the nation as a whole is not the audience Trump is signaling, and while “Trump’s base” may be part of his audience in making this pardon move, it is likely even more intended for law enforcement. Police unions were almost across the board for Trump, and they do speak for their rank and file. Not to mention that all cops are fine with a pro law enforcement approach of Trump and his DOJ, not just the racist bigot ones.

The ACLU statement on the pardon is good:

ACLU Deputy Legal Director Cecilia Wang said:

“With his pardon of Arpaio, Trump has chosen lawlessness over justice, division over unity, hurt over healing. Once again, the president has acted in support of illegal, failed immigration enforcement practices that target people of color and have been struck down by the courts. His pardon of Arpaio is a presidential endorsement of racism.”

For more from the ACLU, see the Twitter feed of Cecilia Wang, the litigation lead for ACLU on the Melendres and Arpaio litigation (she is seriously great).

But the ACLU doesn't really go far enough. A couple of weeks ago I tweeted:

Because there is no point to which @realDonaldTrump will not shit on the rule of law and sanctity of federal courts. What a piece of shit.

That was a little flippant, but there is simply no question but that the pardon of Joe Arpaio is Donald Trump is degrading the Constitution and undermining the very fabric of the sanctity of courts and Rule of Law itself. If the Presidential pardon was not so unbound, this pardon would not stand up. It violates every iota of the American rule of law. It also is heinously invasive to the separation of powers in that it infringes on the power of the federal courts. But, again, don't buy any nut telling you this pardon is unconstitutional or won't stand up. That is silly, it is Constitutional, and it will stand up.

That said, Noah Feldman did a good piece explaining just what a Constitutional affront this act is, and should be considered:

To see why pardoning Arpaio would be so exceptional – and so bad – you have to start with the sheriff's crime. Arpaio wasn't convicted by a jury after a trial for violating some specific federal statute. Rather, he was convicted by a

federal judge on the rather unusual charge of criminal contempt of court.

Specifically, Arpaio was convicted this July by Judge Susan Bolton of willfully and intentionally violating an order issued to him in 2011 by a different federal judge, G. Murray Snow.

...

Judge Bolton convicted Arpaio of criminal contempt. She found he had "willfully violated" the federal court's order "by failing to do anything to ensure his subordinates' compliance and by directing them to continue to detain persons for whom no criminal charges could be filed." And she held that Arpaio had "announced to the world and to his subordinates that he was going to continue business as usual no matter who said otherwise."

This is the crime that Trump is suggesting he might pardon: willful defiance of a federal judge's lawful order to enforce the Constitution.

It's one thing to pardon a criminal out of a sense of mercy or on the belief that he has paid his debt to society.

It's trickier when the president pardons someone who violated the law in pursuit of governmental policy, the way George H.W. Bush pardoned the Iran-Contra participants, including Oliver North.

But it would be an altogether different matter if Trump pardoned Arpaio for willfully refusing to follow the Constitution and violating the rights of people inside the U.S.

Such a pardon would reflect outright contempt for the judiciary, which convicted Arpaio for his resistance to its authority. Trump has questioned judges' motives and decisions, but this would be a further, more radical step in

his attack on the independent constitutional authority of Article III judges.

An Arpaio pardon would express presidential contempt for the Constitution. Arpaio didn't just violate a law passed by Congress. His actions defied the Constitution itself, the bedrock of the entire system of government. For Trump to say that this violation is excusable would threaten the very structure on which is right to pardon is based.

Go read Noah's entire piece at Bloomberg, you should. It perfectly captures everything I have thought ever since Arpaio was convicted by Judge Susan Bolton in July, and pardon talk started up. And, make no mistake, Arpaio started carping about getting a Trump pardon almost immediately, even if behind the scenes. It started long before the last 10 days.

To add insult to injury, Trump had the gall to issue this announcement after glibly leaving for the personal golf driving range at Camp David with a message to the victims in Texas and the Gulf Coast, who are currently being hammered by a Category Four hurricane and face imminent disaster. Trump's message was "good luck". What a complete cad.

And after callously signing his order implementing his patently discriminatory transgender ban for the military. Chris Geidner has a good report on that.

Just for the record, this is Trump's first pardon issued, and for that he chose the most craven one imaginable. For comparison, both Obama and Bush waited nearly two years, and applied the power only to subjects properly vetted by the DOJ traditional pardon process, a copy of which is here for reference. Arpaio was not even eligible for consideration at this point, much less deserving under the guidelines.

Those guidelines can be found here, pay particular attention to §1-2.112. To be clear, Arpaio had not even been sentenced yet, and was almost certainly not going to be sentenced to incarceration by Sue Bolton. I have known Judge Bolton for nearly 30 years, and I just cannot fathom that she was going to do more than give a nominal fine to Arpaio.

Craven jackass Arapio has already started crowing about his ill begotten good fortune through, what else, Twitter:

Thank you @realdonaldtrump for seeing my conviction for what it is: a political witch hunt by holdovers in the Obama justice department!

What a racist bigot ass. Joe Arapio came into office on the wings of lies he told his initial backers. Before we close, a little story I wrote here a few years ago:

Joe Arpaio did not magically come to be Sheriff of Maricopa County. It happened because the two previous occupants of the Sheriff's Office were, shall we say, problematic on their own. There was Dick Godbehere, who was, prior to being Sheriff of the fourth largest county in the United States, literally a lawn mower repairman. No, I kid you not. And he served with the same level of sophistication you would expect of a lawn mower repairman.

Then came Tom Agnos, who was supposed to return "professionalism" to the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO). But Agnos was a subservient Sun City resident who led the MCSO into not just the biggest cock-up in Maricopa county law enforcement history, but one of national and international proportion. The Buddhist Temple Murder Case where nine buddhist monks and acolytes were lined up and shot in the back of the

head, execution style, at the Wat Promkunaram Buddhist Temple on the west side of Phoenix.

It was out of the Buddhist Temple Murders Joe Arpaio came to be. A group of prominent Phoenix trial attorneys, both criminal and civil, wanted an alternative to Tom Agnos and the whitewashing coverup he was conducting on one of the greatest coerced false confession cases in world history. The group of trial lawyers coalesced around the upstart primary candidacy of a local travel agent with a colorful background. Yep, one Joseph Arpaio.

Joseph Arpaio promised that initial group of trial lawyers he would clean up the MCSO, release the damning internal report of the gross misconduct that had occurred in the Temple Murder Case under Tom Agnos, which led to at least four false and heinously coerced confessions, and that he would refuse, under all circumstances, to serve more than one term in office. It was a promise made and, obviously, a promise long ago broken.

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paio did release the internal report on the Temple Murder Case, which led to five plus million dollar settlement for some of the most wrongfully arrested souls in American history. But with that promise kept within a short time of

taking office, Joe Arpaio breached the solid promise he made to the people who gave him the seed funding carrying him into office. And Arpaio has made a mockery of his word, as a man, ever since by repeatedly running for office and sinking Maricopa County into depths of depravity and fiscal distress beyond comprehension, from the vantage of the MCSO.

So, now you know just exactly how Joe Arpaio came into office on the wings of lies. He leaves today on the wings of a Constitutional fraud and spittle in the face of the Rule of Law.

As a parting shot, the picture at the head of this article is of Arpaio at a cocktail party getting a surprise visit from Michael Manning, the local civil rights attorney who has fleeced Maricopa County for over \$50 million because of Joe Arpaio's craven and illegal actions. Arpaio was not thrilled to get his photo taken.

THE ARPAIO PARDON: YOU'RE NOT THE AUDIENCE

In the wake of yet another deranged speech from the president – and his seeming promise to pardon Joe Arpaio – the pundit class has taken to explaining how outrageous an Arpaio pardon would be. Such analysis often focuses on what it would symbolize: which is usually described as some proof that Trump doesn't respect judges, the law, or by others as yet more evidence Trump coddles racists.

I don't disagree with any of that analysis. But I think it misunderstands the audience for the pardon.

As things move forward, Trump will increasingly retain support among his base – who are, to a significant degree, the racists who marched in Charlottesville and the racists who elected him by 10 points in South Carolina over a Christian Conservative candidate. Trump will manage to hold onto power to the extent that his base can sufficiently scare people – more moderate Republican voters, Republican politicians, counter-protestors – such that they won't act against Trump. But the formula by which that base succeeds will depend on Trump's other, more respectable, base: cops.

As I pointed out repeatedly during the election, while some dissidents objected, the National Fraternal Order of Police and many other police groups stood by Trump, even after the Access Hollywood video made it clear the candidate endorsed sexual assault. Trump continues to feed this base, with repeated tributes to cops' roles in keeping "us" "safe."

Meanwhile, Brennan Center's Mike German has started to track a disturbing trend. I believe he, like me, thinks the FBI is generally adequate at infiltrating white supremacist groups to disrupt the most outrageous attacks. But what law enforcement is *not* doing is policing right wing violence at protests the same way it polices left protests.

There have been a number of protests over the last six months where the police – and this is in Portland, Oregon, two in Berkeley, California, one in Sacramento, California, one in Huntington Beach, California – where these protests were well-advertised within the far right movement as, "Come and beat somebody up." And yet the police response wasn't adequate enough to prevent these running street battles. In fact, it appeared the police were standing back and allowing these street battles to go on, which only meant the next rally people were going to be

better prepared to commit more violence. And it conditioned these groups that have been hyper-violent in the past, these far right groups, to come expecting the police would let you commit acts of violence.

In Portland, Oregon, the police actually let the people from the militia groups participate in arresting their political opponents. That was also true in Huntington Beach, where it's almost like the police are sanctioning them to apprehend people and bring them to the police, which is extraordinarily dangerous to give these groups the idea that they have the authority to put hands on people, much less put hands on their political opponents.

So I wasn't surprised to see the violence getting out of hand, and I think we as a nation have to have a serious conversation with our local law enforcement and with the federal government. I'm sure the FBI was aware of any number of people coming to this protest who were subjects of domestic terrorism investigations. Why was there not a more robust response?

Particularly since we see over-policing of non-violent protests by groups like Occupy, Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock anti-pipeline protests, not to mention just regular political conventions. The Republican National Convention, you have troops there just to manage the crowds. So I don't understand why in these latest series of events, where groups that have a history of violence and are advocating that they're going to bring people to be violent, somehow the police seem to be caught off guard.

As he explains what I laid out above. Trump can

retain power – which will increasingly require grabbing authoritarian powers – by enabling his street thugs to beat up the government’s opponents.

If you look at the ways authoritarian governments obtain police powers, this is exactly how they do it. They sort of turn a blind eye to street thuggery and allow people to commit political violence against opponents of the government. That street violence becomes unbearable for the public, who demand that the government do something about it so the government can justify stopping protests altogether. And, of course, what the government is really interested in is stopping protests against government policies. We’re seeing that kind of thing, where there are a number of bills in state legislatures that would remove civil liability from people who run over protesters in the street. That’s taken on a very disturbing aspect with the latest murder in Charlottesville.

So while feeding his explicitly racist base with hateful rhetoric is important, it’s even more important to ensure that the cops remain with him, even as he fosters violence.

There is no better way to do that than to convey to police that they can target brown people, that they can ignore all federal checks on their power, with impunity (this is probably one key reason why Trump has given up his efforts to oust Sessions, because on policing they remain in perfect accord).

There is no better way to keep the support of cops who support Trump because he encourages their abuses than by pardoning Arpaio for the most spectacular case of such abuses.

You’re not the audience for this pardon. The cops are.

THE NINE-MINUTE GAP [UPDATE-2]

[IMPORTANT: UPDATES AT BOTTOM]

Consider yourself warned: this won't be a very long post.

There's been a lot of chatter about the timing of the July 26 search warrant's execution on Paul Manafort's Alexandria VA residence. The Washington Post called it a "predawn raid." Some have pooh-poohed this as hyperbole, claiming the warrant was probably executed sometime after 6:00 a.m. EDT. Sunrise happened to be 6:04 a.m. EDT that day, leaving a narrow four-minute window for both "predawn" and "daytime hours" (beginning at 6:00 a.m.) to be accurate.

Some have also noted Trump completely surprised his military leadership the same day as the raid by tweeting an unexpected ban on transgender individuals in the service.

You may also recall reports indicating members of the military sat with bated breath waiting for nine minutes between his first tweet and his next to determine if they were supposed to scramble or take other military action. That overlong ellipsis at the end of the first tweet left them wondering if they were to begin a North Korean strike.

But it wasn't just the same day the raid and the tweets happened. Trump tweeted *just* as the raid must have been underway at Manafort's house.

 Donald J. Trump 
@realDonaldTrump

After consultation with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow.....

5:55 AM - 26 Jul 2017

 Donald J. Trump 
@realDonaldTrump

....Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military. Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming.....

6:04 AM - 26 Jul 2017

 Donald J. Trump 
@realDonaldTrump

....victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail. Thank you

6:08 AM - 26 Jul 2017

What happened to trigger the initial 5:55 a.m. EDT tweet of the series? We know Manafort wasn't in contact with Trump at that time if he was still asleep when the FBI knocked on his bedroom door.

What happened in that nine minute gap between 5:55 a.m. and the 6:04 a.m. *sunrise* tweet containing the decisive wording about a transgender ban, while our military stood by, waiting a possible strike order?

And did any one or all of these tweets serve as a signal, not to the Department of Defense or transgender Americans an intent to change policy, but something else entirely different?

UPDATE – 12:15 a.m. EDT 10-AUG-2017 –

CNN's Jim Sciutto confirmed the search warrant was "no-knock" – timing of the raid may have been earlier than 6:00 a.m. EDT. When did the raid begin and how long between the warrant being served and Trump's tweets?

UPDATE – 1:30 p.m. EDT 10-AUG-2017 –

Jon Kimball says the time stamp on Trump's tweets was PDT, not EDT.

Those tweets began at 8:55am EST. I remember because I was dropping my daughter off for a 9am appt. See -->> <https://t.co/Ti0upRgtc8>

— Jon Kimball (@jonkimball) August 10, 2017

Can somebody explain this back-and-forth timezone in tweets? The link Kimball shares to Trump's tweet shows 8:55. The screenshot I took last night shows 6:55.

Ridiculous situation – I feel like Schroedinger's dead/alive cat-in-a-box.

If Kimball's right and the timestamp in my screenshot is PDT (I use EDT on my desktop, by the way), the nine-minute gap matters not. The deployment of an utterly unanticipated change in policy via tweets to distract from the raid on Paul Manafort's residence is still absolutely relevant.

THE “LIBERAL” NY TIMES FOCUSES ON THE NEXT DISASTROUS GOP DADDY

It is never enough for the “liberal” media. Despite how the “liberal media” gets relentlessly dumped on and marginalized by the right wing nut machine, they are ALWAYS there to hand out some candy to the nutters.

Here are the estimable Jonathan Martin and Alexander Burns in the Only Bunk That's Fits To Print Gray Lady:

WASHINGTON – Senators Tom Cotton and Ben Sasse have already been to Iowa this year, Gov. John Kasich is eyeing a return visit to New Hampshire, and Mike Pence's schedule is so full of political events that Republicans joke that he is

acting more like a second-term vice president hoping to clear the field than a No. 2 sworn in a little over six months ago.

Well, crikey, good that the paper of record is covering this. What else they got?

It may get worse, said Jay Bergman, an Illinois petroleum executive and a leading Republican donor. Grievous setbacks in the midterm elections of 2018 could bolster challengers in the party.

“If the Republicans have lost a lot of seats in the Congress and they blame Trump for it, then there are going to be people who emerge who are political opportunists,” Mr. Bergman said.

Well, sorry I asked, turned out it was some entitled crap from a “petroleum executive”. Great call guys!

Swell. Excellent follow up to all those “Ignorant average Trump voters still ignorantly averagely love Trump” reports that are rampant in the beloved balanced media.

Today’s GOP, fronted by Trump and his ilk, is NOT an aberration, but rather the culmination of where the Republican party has been headed for decades, since at least Reagan’s bigoted opening salvo in Philadelphia Mississippi. It is the party of nationalism, racism, bigotry, scientific ignorance and revanchism.

But, hey, never underestimate the ability of the national media to keep on singing like they don’t know their actions helped put this country in the lurch it is in (Her Emails!!). And that their continued refusal to unequivocally call out the current President for the blithering dangerous loon he is, may lead to making the lurch far worse.

The answer to America’s ills do NOT come from

the discredited daddies in the GOP, whether older like Mike Pence and John Kasich, or younger like Ben Sasse. We have seen this movie before, and it sucks in a very disastrous way.

THREE THINGS: BAD, WORSE, AND JUST DEAL ALREADY

I've got to run some errands, only have time for a very quick three things post.

~ 3 ~

Because Trump wants a cheaper Air Force One, the Air Force bought a bankrupt Russian company's canceled Boeing 747s.

EXCLUSIVE: Trump Wanted a Cheaper Air Force One. So USAF Is Buying a Bankrupt Russian Firm's Undelivered 747s
<https://t.co/sIZrj6HmZv>
pic.twitter.com/HloxqVzEFW

– Defense One (@DefenseOne) August 1, 2017

Why does this sound like 1) a crap deal which doesn't solve the need for an attack-resistant AF1, 2) a bail-out for some entity, whether Boeing or whoever in Russia is holding the bag on the down payment?

~ 2 ~

A few days ago I read yet another right-wing character assassination attempt aimed at Robert Mueller, distributing disinformation related to Russia and radioactive materials. Real story completely stretched beyond recognition to attack the special counsel looking into Trump-Russia.

Meanwhile, the Los Alamos National Laboratory has improperly MAILED radioactive materials repeatedly.

This highlights our long-term problems with outsourcing nuclear sites' management to private contractors.

Please let's not allow Trump cut a deal on this matter. It's bad enough we have *Dancing With The Stars'* Rick Perry involved in any way. And watch for more disinfo about Robert Mueller as the Trump-Russia investigation heats up.

~ 1 ~

Baltimore Ravens need to get off it and hire Colin Kaepernick. Baltimore the city needs him. Not only is Kaepernick a good Plan B because of Joe Flacco's back, the Ravens need a reset on their image – many women still don't have a high opinion of the Ravens (or the NFL) after the Ray Rice scandal. And Kaepernick is a solid player worth watching; he doesn't deserve the racist bullshit he's received from the NFL, quietly blacklisted for exercising his First Amendment rights. Football isn't slavery demanding forfeit of human rights, after all – or is it?

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Off to run the roads. This is an open thread.
Behave.

SOWING CONFUSION ABOUT FUSION

The Surrealist artist Salvador Dali, whom you may know best for his quirky mustache and his painting featuring melting clocks, once said:

What is important is to spread
confusion, not eliminate it.

Apropos, when one thinks of Surrealism as a rebellious response to predictable and rigid political dogma up to and after World War I.

Trump has indulged in surrealism throughout the last six months in office, breaking expected and legislated norms of behavior. Some of this is a deliberate effort to effect change on our government; some of it is gaslighting, to force us to look at everything differently, suspiciously, to doubt ourselves.

And some of it is simply ass covering, hiding beneath a fog of bullshit.

On Saturday morning, Fearless Leader tweeted,



This looks like part of a new strategy, to appear as if he is not and has not been sympathetic and in sync with Russia's Putin.

Such a strategy can explain the tenuous stance on Congress' latest Russian sanctions bill. ~~Trump hasn't fully committed to signing the bill; as it was passed on July 25, the bill may be pocket vetoed depending on when Congress decides to go on August break.~~ Trump dragged his feet for a week before signing the bill today with a whiny signing statement expressing concerns about the sanctions.*

But buried in that tweet is an effort to undermine the Steele dossier by replying on Fox News to attack the consulting firm which contracted the dossier's production. Trump himself doesn't mention Fusion GPS nor even the dossier, but relies on the narrative Fox pushes that morning to speak for him.

(NB: timing for future reference – Trump's July

29 tweet is at 7:07 a.m. EDT. Embedded Fox and Friends' tweet is 4:15 a.m. EDT with a link to a July 27 story. That's 2:07 p.m. and 11:15 a.m. Moscow time, respectively.)

Fox News' article discusses hedge fund manager Bill Browder's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee in relation to the Foreign Agents Registration Act. He testified on July 26 about Sergei Magnitsky, Russia's corruption, and the Magnitsky Act; in his written statement published the previous day as well as during his testimony (video), he shared that Fusion GPS had been contracted to work against the Magnitsky Act.

This is the point which is pushed by Fox, indirectly by Trump – that Fusion GPS worked for the Russians.

We're meant to question Fusion's agenda; we're meant to believe the talking point sown about that Hillary Clinton and the Democrats were working with the Russians to undermine Donald Trump.

The poisoning of Fusion's image doesn't originate just from Trump or Fox News as quasi-state media.

The GOP jumped into this by posting a so-helpful page about Fusion on July 25 – the same day Browder's written statement was published, days before Trump would make a veiled allusion to Fusion's agenda.



Which should tell us not to put any faith in GOP members of Congress doing the right thing based on how deeply the party is committed to protecting Trump's butt.

Although the GOP may also be protecting more

than Trump by poisoning Fusion's reputation. Fusion was originally hired to do opposition work on Trump – but they were hired to do so by a Jeb Bush supporter. Though the Democratic side of the presidential race eventually had interest in Fusion's opposition research, the work began during the GOP primary race.

The trail to the funder(s) has been conveniently fuzzed. The BBC first reported Jeb Bush or his campaign hired Fusion, but a vigorous denial and a take-down demand changed reports to say that "unidentified Republicans" were responsible for employing Fusion to do anti-Trump opposition work.

The distancing continued with claims Hillary Clinton and/or the Clinton campaign hired Fusion, though it appears the truth is closer to "Democratic supporters" did so after Trump became the GOP's presumptive nominee in spring 2016.

"Democratic supporters" doesn't rule out anti-Trump members of the GOP who crossed the aisle and threw behind Clinton last year.

This may explain why the GOP has been working for some time on linking Fusion to Clinton so tightly – well before Browder's testimony last week. The party is protecting someone(s) in their ranks from not only the Trump-Russia investigation, but Trump and Russia.

There was one other witness who testified before the Senate last week who spoke of Fusion GPS. It's telling that Trump, Fox News, other right-wing media like the Weekly Standard, and the GOP have avoided mentioning this second witness.

Human Rights Foundation's president Thor Halvorssen's statement to the Senate Judiciary Committee outlined Fusion's role in a Venezuelan corruption scandal. Fusion was hired to suppressed mainstream media reporting about investigations and court cases related to the scandal, which included money laundering through at least one major American investment bank.

Venezuela is and has been in a deep state of turmoil for several years; the corruption the U.S. hasn't read about exacerbates Venezuela's condition. Its political crisis has finally cracked the news here, and in part because of the Trump administration's sanctions against its leadership and the amount of Venezuelan oil products the U.S. consumes. The rise in gasoline and oil prices over the last two months may be related in part to market volatility because of Venezuela's crisis.

And while Venezuela may be sitting on a very large oil reserve, so is Russia and whomever now owns that 19.5% share of Russia's largest oil company, Rosneft. The fortunes of GOP investors who own shares in or entire businesses related to oil production and processing also benefit from the increase in oil prices, profits from which may help fund the GOP and its candidates. It's no wonder, then, the GOP and right-wing media focus on tying Fusion to Clinton and Russia in any way possible while avoiding Fusion's work related to Venezuela.

So who does Fusion really work for?

As far as I can tell, any political entity with the money to hire their services. This is the best explanation for Fusion's Glenn Simpson refusal to testify publicly before the Senate – they are competitive intelligence and media guns for hire, and asking them to disclose who hired them in public would damage their ability to contract freely with whomever approaches them, whether Republican, Democrat, or neither in the case of corporations.

There is one other point the Trump-GOP-Fox-right-wing media can't adequately obscure, though they have done what they could to damage Fusion's image.

Last summer, after gathering intelligence about Team Trump's ties to Russia, the former MI6 officer was so concerned about his findings that he approached the FBI to share what he found.

It's both strange and interesting that the

Trump-GOP-Fox-right-wing media smear campaign against Fusion hasn't mentioned this.

Surreal, one might say.

** The sanctions bill was signed while I was in the middle of writing this. I can't write fast enough to keep up with the crazy.*

THREE THINGS: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CABLE, MABEL. OH, AND THE MOOCH

If last night's Twitter timeline was any measure, folks have a LOT to say about premium cable programming let alone the cable television industry. Add the crazy surrounding White House communications and it's best if I just get out of the way and run like hell.

~ 3 ~

I simply can't write fast enough or better about the situation than many folks have on Twitter already.



Basta.

~ 2 ~

Crazy amount of chatter about cable networks and M&A. Biggest stories:

Discovery to buy HGTV's owner Scripps because of Scripps' audience demographics – heavily weighted toward women.

Charter Communications will not merge with Sprint to expand into cell phone business; it already has a reseller agreement with Verizon.

However, Japan's Softbank, Sprint's parent, is interested in buying Charter Communications. This deserves debate in Congress as well as CFIUS review. There's a reason why Charter isn't Cable but Communications now; do we want additional foreign ownership of another communications network even if it isn't fully into the cell phone business (yet)?

Should note here that a beef I have with my GOP representative on regulating cable networks is on this very point. Rep-who-will-not-be-named sent a pro forma response spouting what is probably party line: FTC has always regulated cable, shouldn't increase regulation by allowing cable to be regulated by FCC.

Except that cable isn't just a series of tubes distributing entertainment content. It's also a

series of tubes carrying our communications.

Again, do we want to allow foreign ownership of these particular communications tube in addition to existing cell phone network ownership?

~ 1 ~

By now you may have heard HBO's most popular series, Game of Thrones, may have been affected by a breach of the cable network's system. Based on conflicting reports, it's not clear what was stolen from HBO, though unlike other recent hacks HBO itself was attacked and not a content creator/producer. It may sound reminiscent of the Sony Entertainment hack but HBO is nowhere as leaky as Sony.

Will winter still come after this hack? You'll have to tell me – this isn't a series I follow.

~ 0 ~

There you have it, your next open thread. Trump-Russia stuff in the last one, please. Everything else here.

MEDITATIONS: WHAT IS THIS THING? EXAMINING TRUMP-RUSSIA

“This thing, what is it in itself, in its own constitution? What is its substance and material? And what its causal nature (or form)? And what is it doing in the world? And how long does it subsist?”

– *Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Book VIII, sect. XI*

When writing about the Trump-Russia investigations, there's invariably push back

questioning the legitimacy of inquiry or the sanity of those who seek answers.

One of the most persistent demands is for unassailable proof the Russians were responsible for hacking the US, whether the DNC or other systems, and any inability to provide such unquestionable evidence invalidates investigations for those who insist on proof.

But such demands may never be met in a way satisfying these demands. Some of these demands are made knowing with certainty that full disclosure of evidence would reveal sources and methods and therefore cannot be made in public.

It's the specificity of these demands which redirects the attention away from what the investigations may find. Rather than allow ourselves to be derailed by what we aren't able to answer, we should rely on first principles and examine what is directly in front of us.

What is this thing?

Pull together what are known facts and look at them. Here are a few; what are they, at face value?

- Then-president Obama warned Trump against Michael Flynn as national security adviser. (10-NOV-2017)
- Trump hired Flynn anyhow, against his predecessor's recommendation. (18-NOV-2017)
- Flynn had a history of breaking rules, including the secret installation of an internet connection in his Pentagon office.
- Flynn had dialogue with foreign agents without disclosing truthfully the nature of his discussions. (29-DEC-2016; possibly more and other contacts earlier)
- Trump kept Flynn on as national security adviser after deputy attorney general Sally Yates warned White House counsel Don McGahn that Flynn could be blackmailed. (26/27-JAN-2017)

- Yates was fired the same day she was to provide White House counsel with more information about Flynn, after she announced the DOJ would not enforce the executive order signed 27-JAN-2017 banning Muslim travelers; the president wrote she was “weak on borders and very weak on illegal immigration.” (30-JAN-2017)
- Flynn denied talking with Russian ambassador Sergei Kislyak in December 2016 about U.S. sanctions on Russia. (08-FEB-2017)
- The Washington Post reported Flynn had spoken with Kislyak about the sanctions according to officials from both Obama and Trump administration with access to reports about Flynn’s communications. (09-FEB-2017)
- Flynn resigned as national security adviser.
- Trump nominated Jeff Sessions as attorney general.
- During his Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing, Sessions said, “I didn’t have—did not have communications with the Russians” when asked if there was any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government in the course of the campaign. (10-JAN-2017)
- In responses to written questions from Senate Judiciary Committee member Pat Leahy, Sessions denied he had been “in contact with anyone connected to any part of the Russian government about the 2016 election”. (17-JAN-2017)
- Reports emerged that Sessions had spoken twice with Kislyak during the campaign season. (01-MAR-2017)
- In a statement later the same evening, Sessions said, “I never met with any Russian officials to discuss issues of the campaign.

I have no idea what this allegation is about. It is false.”

- After calls by Democratic members of Congress for Sessions to resign, Sessions recused himself from any investigations into Russia’s interference in the 2016 presidential election. (02-MAR-2017)

What is this, on the face of it, with regard to Flynn, Sessions and Trump-Russia? What was the nature of Flynn’s and Sessions’ contacts with Russian officials? What were these multiple undisclosed meetings and denials supposed to do, if left unquestioned and uninterrupted? Why would two key figures in the Trump campaign and administration both have contact with Russian officials either during the campaign season or after the election before inauguration, and then lie about the nature contacts?

Similarly, we can look at Donald Trump Jr.’s and Jared Kushner’s actions through the campaign and post-election and -inauguration. We see more undisclosed interactions, more denials and lies, more forced disclosure.

We can also look at Trump’s words and deeds: long sympathetic to Russia, he more than hints that Russia should hack his opponent’s emails during the campaign season. He is not forthcoming about his finances. He does not resolve conflicts of interest. He leans on FBI director to drop the investigation into Flynn’s Russia-related activities, ultimately firing him. His attendance at the G20 meeting yielded private, unrecorded meetings with Russian president Putin. He’s harassed Sessions for having recused himself from the Russia investigations. He vacillated on whether he will or will not sign the latest sanctions on Russia which Congress passed last week.

And in the last 24 hours, after Russia demanded an end to specific sanctions on former U.S.-based Russian compounds, after Russia retaliated by ejecting U.S. diplomatic personnel, Trump does not offer any response, leaving VP Mike

Pence to offer tepid supportive comments for NATO allies.

What is this thing?

THREE *MORE* THINGS: TARSMACKED, SHUFFLED AND SCREWED?

I resent all to hell that we are forking over a metric crap ton of tax dollars every weekend for his Golden Golf Hackness to hang out at one of his courses. This weekend, though, I'd make an exception – and of course, he drags his feet getting out of town, making trouble on the way.

~ 3 ~

You've no doubt heard that White House chief of staff Reince Priebus resigned or quit, depending on which source you read and when. Scuttlebutt says Trump was pissed that Priebus didn't push back at Scaramucci after the profanity-laced interview with Ryan Lizza. Other scuttlebutt says Scaramucci is actually Jared and Ivanka's minion; he's so vulgar and cold he fits in anywhere in Team Trump. So bloody hard to keep the players straight; where's self-sucking Bannon in all this?

Anyhow, apparently His Imminently Golf Hackness tweeted his pink slip from the door of Air Force One.

And Priebusly-of-West-Wing was left on the tarmac without a ride.

Jesus Christ, how mother freaking cold and rude, the only guy who really kept Trump looking like a legitimate member of the GOP, tossed like an empty KFC bag.

Priebus, who is rumored to be the only staffer who didn't sign one of Team Trump's non-disclosure agreements, hasn't figured out he doesn't have to suck up any longer.

I hate that these sloppy mean girls occupying the White House make me feel sorry for that schmuck Priebus.

~ 2 ~

And His Imminently Golf Hackness nominated current DHS director John Kelly as the new White House chief of staff.

Kelly has peeved off some senators; I supposed taking on role of chief fly swatter will be nothing in comparison to his failure to disclose his relationship to military contractors.

Rumor: Kelly is being moved to CoS to make way for Sessions as DHS director, which in turn leaves the AG's position open for a new nominee willing to fire Mueller.

Oh hell, no.

~ 1 ~

Latest buzz is that McCain's vote YES on the Motion to Proceed earlier in week set up the actual failure of H.R. 1628 Health Care Freedom Act vote last night.

The analysis was posted at Reddit, of all places.

... The thing is, the Senate can only consider one budget reconciliation bill per topic per year. Of course, if the bill dies in committee and never comes to an official vote, it doesn't count- which is why they've been able to keep hammering away at the issue.

This bill, though, was allowed to come to the Senate floor, because the Republicans thought they'd secured the votes. Collins, Murkowski and the Democrats would vote no, everyone else would vote yes, and Pence would break

the tie. And then McCain completely fucked them. And it was almost certainly a calculated move; he voted to allow the bill to come to the floor. Had McCain allowed it to die in committee, McConnell could have come back with yet another repeal bill; but he let it come to a vote, and now they can't consider another budget reconciliation bill for the rest of the fiscal year. The Senate needs 60 votes to pass any kind of healthcare reform now. ...

Which opens up a whole mess of questions if this is really what happened...

Did John McCain plan to screw Trumpcare by himself, or was this staged to save the Senate GOP caucus face as I speculated earlier today?

If he had help staging this, who else was in on it? "Yertle" McConnell, who is acting pouty and butt-hurt? If McConnell was in on it, then he deserved a nomination for an acting award.

And was this a final Fuck You to Heel-Spurs-in-Chief, who disrespected McCain's service and time as a POW?

I can't help it; I hope it was payback. And I hope this buys more time to build real fixes for ACA until a Democratic majority can take back Congress.

UPDATE – 12:11 P.M. EDT –

Yep, too good to be true. @Celeste_P says nope. Maverick wasn't super-maverick after all. It was fun to imagine while the illusion lasted.

~ 0 ~

It's the weekend, finally. Hope somebody is lost longer than usual in the rough. Open bar, open thread. Behave and drive safely.