

Staff Column: Trump's Sisyphian Task

You all remember Sisyphus, history's first rock star. Or maybe you don't.

He's the king in Greek mythology who was condemned by some angry gods to roll a massive boulder all the way to the top of a steep mountain. The rock would immediately roll right back down and he'd have to start all over. For eternity.

It is a slight overstatement to say that Donald Trump may be looking at Sisyphus with a touch of envy right about now, but the president-elect does face some daunting and hellish tasks. Chief among them is how to live up to his vow to 'bring this country together.'

Sure, he now has a favorability rating of about 50%, way up from a few weeks ago. But that means about half the country still disapproves of Mr. Trump, and many of those folks will never, ever be swayed into thinking otherwise.

Compared to Donald Trump, Barack Obama had a romantic and lusty honeymoon with the American people.

Part of the Trump resistance comes from people who depend on government help, which is traditionally the domain of Democrats. About 100-million Americans receive some form of government assistance other than Medicare or Social Security. In other words, they're 'on the dole,' to use a quaint expression that may now be considered hate speech.

Welfare reform, enacted by Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich, forced millions of Americans to find meaningful work, but the rules imposed by that law have been unraveled. 'One of the most pernicious things that has happened in this country,' Karl Rove lamented on The Factor this week, 'is that President

Obama has systematically and quietly undone a lot of what that welfare reform law did. He has made it easier for people to get on food stamps and get benefits.'

The stark reality is that people receiving means-tested government benefits are far, far more likely to oppose reformers and reforms. They are not very likely to embrace Donald Trump over Democrats promising goodies.

The incoming president faces another Sisyphean challenge. Most reporters, editors, and producers absolutely loathe the man, especially now that he has made so many of them look like utter blotters. (If you have not been paying attention to Word of the Day, that's synonymous with 'fools.')

Time Magazine's editors, as you know, named Donald Trump as their Man of the Year. They really had no choice. But the author of the accompanying piece unloaded on Trump, writing this: 'He cheered when protesters got hit at his rallies, used sexist insults for members of the press.' The article continued, 'Trump regularly peddled falsehoods, without offering any evidence.'

Eight years earlier, when Barack Obama was named Person of the Year, Time lauded his 'Obi-Wan Kenobi calm.' But Trump? He's a 'demagogue,' far more akin to Darth Vader than Mr. Kenobi.

But Time did get one thing right when it snarkily described Trump as 'President of the Divided States of America.' The USA is divided, and the chasm will be exacerbated by the mainstream media's mendacity, pardon the alliteration.

Time has plenty of company in that department. The absurd columnist Richard Cohen is comparing Trump's America to Weimar Germany, ripe for a tyrannical takeover. And Dana Milbank of the Washington Post, last seen wearing orange hunting gear to mock Dick Cheney, has already decided that the Trump team's guiding forces are 'chaos' and 'madness.'

These Trump-haters have lots of company. Their profession was already in decline before he came along, and now it's in absolute free-fall. It is only natural that they resent the man who challenged and usurped their waning power.

So, for starters, Donald Trump faces a hostile media, a recalcitrant bureaucracy, and the resistance of tens of millions of people who cherish their government assistance. Then again, no one said this would be easy.

You should probably pay strict attention, Mr. President-elect, to that bright yellow road sign looming on the horizon: 'Falling Rock Ahead.' But perhaps you can look on the bright side and remember that Sisyphus had to perform his labor for all eternity, which is a darned long time. You are faced with a mere four (or eight) years of boulder-pushing. Feel better?