

The Circus Just Arrived ... at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

I'm starting to think the real reason the Barnum & Bailey circus is going out of business has nothing to do with the elephants. Rather, I think, it has to do with the stiff competition it's been getting from the Trump White House.

The three-ring circus that's been coming out of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue makes "The Greatest Show on Earth" look as exciting as a PBS documentary on The Joys of Watching Paint Dry.

If it's not the fights with the president of Mexico and the prime minister of Australia, then it's an obsession with illegal voters who threw the popular vote to Hillary Clinton, or so the president claims. And if it isn't that, it's a fixation on the size of the crowd at his inauguration. And just when you think things are about to calm down, say, for 10 minutes, Mr. Trump rolls out a temporary ban on visitors from seven Muslim-majority countries, places that he believes pose a threat to our national security. Okay, but for whatever reason the rollout is so confusing that it creates needless turmoil at airports and mass demonstrations and the (legitimate) firing of the acting attorney general for refusing to defend in court the president's order, a dismissal that some liberals are only too glad to dub "The Monday Night Massacre." And let's not forget that President Trump decided to talk about what a "disaster" the ratings have been since he left *Celebrity Apprentice*. Oh yeah, he decided to bring that tidbit up ... *at the National Prayer Breakfast*.

If Barnum & Bailey put on a show as "colorful" as the one President Trump has rolled out, they'd still be in business – whether PETA likes it or not.

Does Donald Trump thrive on chaos? Is that why he's giving us so much of it? Maybe, but I think there's something else going on.

When Mr. Trump was running his business out of a skyscraper on Fifth Avenue, he was the boss. His company was private; it wasn't listed on any stock exchange. So he didn't have to please stockholders or a board of directors that could fire him. Inside his tower in midtown Manhattan whatever edict Businessman Trump ordered was the law of his domain. As Mel Brooks so elegantly put it, "It's good to be king."

I'm getting the impression that Donald Trump may think he's still running a business where he gets the final say on everything and doesn't have to answer to anyone. Yes, in his new job he can still make smart deals the way a good businessman would, but now, for the first time in his adult life, he's got people and institutions he has to answer to – whether he likes it or not.

He can't sign executive orders non-stop for the next four years, though you get the impression he just might try. Sooner or later he'll have to deal with a Congress that can tell him no. The federal courts can (and have already) told him no. And while it's true that he'll never have the support of hard-core progressives, if there's too much bluster coming from the White House, he risks losing the support of mainstream Americans who were willing to give him a chance.

And while he doesn't have to kowtow to the news media that he so publicly detests, he does need to understand that the press is another check on his power. That's what the founders had in mind when they drew up the First Amendment. He can call journalists dishonest if he wants, and his top advisor Steve Bannon can tell them to "shut up," but they're not going to shut up and they're not going to be intimidated by this president. He may want bad news as a strategic matter, knowing that a large chunk of the American people don't trust the

media either. But a constant war with the press isn't good for either side – or, more importantly, for the American people.

The introduction of his nominee to the Supreme Court was smooth and professional. We could use more of that from President Trump. Still, Kellyanne Conway might want to gently remind her boss that being president of a company that builds skyscrapers and hotels and golf course is not the same as being president of the United States of America. Not even close.

As for the circus, we go there because a lot of us are hoping something crazy happens. Is the lion going to bite the lion tamer's head off for rudely putting it in the lion's mouth? Are the elephants going to relieve themselves on the guy with the whip's shiny new shoes? Is the guy they shoot out of the cannon going to land in the net or in the first row?

The circus can be fun. But the White House isn't the big top. And at the circus the clowns don't talk.