

Authoritarianism Has Captivated the Right

David Harsanyi wrote an [interesting column](#) for *The Federalist* on Monday, entitled “*Authoritarianism Is Not Confined To One Political Party: The shared governing philosophy of contemporary liberalism and Trumpism*”.



As you can probably guess, the piece focuses on a topic I’ve written a lot about (and have taken a fair amount of heat for) over the past year and a half: the Right’s embrace of the same political sensibilities and style of governance that we excoriated under the Obama administration.

Harsanyi argues, “One of the few aspects of Obama’s legacy likely to survive the Trump years is his mainstreaming of the notion that the executive branch has an authority to do whatever it likes if the law-making branch ‘fails to act’ – a phrase Democrats used incessantly over the past six years.”

Sure enough, conservative opposition to executive overreach (in the name of “getting things done”) has largely fallen by the wayside under President Trump, perhaps most notably in the area of immigration policy.

The Right rightfully flipped out over (and questioned the legality of) Obama single-handedly changing the legal status of scores of people in this country, but when it came to restricting entry for thousands of potential refugees, oversight and the separation of powers weren’t all that concerning.

When Obama publicly scolded the Supreme Court over its

Citizens United ruling, conservatives (again rightfully) were up in arms. However, when Trump attacked a “so-called judge” (as he put it) for placing a temporary restraining order on his travel-ban executive order, righties portrayed the judge’s action not as a ‘check on power,’ but as obstructionism.

People can agree with a policy, and still recognize a double-standard when it comes to the use of executive power to put it into law, can’t they? Maybe not.

Like so many other components of Trump’s political agenda, the Republican base has traded in principles for actions (often as *payback* against the Left), even when those actions are in direct conflict with the positions the base has long believed in (small government, free trade, individual liberty, etc.)

I totally understand and respect the willingness to give our new president a chance to succeed; we should absolutely do that. But thus far, it appears as though the promises of Republicans to hold Trump accountable for his actions were probably just half-hearted suggestions.

To give credit where credit is true, Trump did throw the *old* base a bone with his [nomination of Neil Gorsuch](#) to the Supreme Court, a move which will undoubtedly earn him additional good will, even with his critics on the Right. As Rich Lowry of *National Review* [wrote](#), Gorsuch is the “anti-Trump” – a federalist who has called our government’s separation of powers “among the most important liberty-protecting devices of the constitutional design.”

So if you’re worried by Trump’s attempt at authoritative governance, like I am, Gorsuch should provide a bit of relief. What I’m extremely skeptical of, however, is the notion that principled conservatives will serve as a positive influence on the Trump presidency. If anything, Trump has been a negative influence on conservatives, and that includes high-profile opinion-makers.

Many (probably most) within the conservative media have pledged allegiance to Trumpism, and that's not a good thing if you legitimately believe in conservatism. Some hosts won't even allow Trump critics on their television shows anymore. This morning, radio-host Hugh Hewitt even [vowed to disallow](#) any Republican who votes against Trump's Labor Secretary nominee, Andy Puzder, from ever appearing on his show again.

Again, this isn't conservatism.

Whatever happened to the Right rejecting collectivism, scrutinizing the powerful, and promoting free thought? Is being a team player all that matters these days?

I guess we'll see in the coming months and years.



The Silliness and the Brilliance of Prop Politics

✘ When President Obama was trying to build support for his highly unpopular Obamacare bill back in 2009, one of the selling points he laid on the American public was that the legislation had the backing of medical doctors. The assertion

was presumed to be a compelling argument for why skeptical Americans should trust the content of the bill. The logic made sense. After all, doctors are highly-educated, respected people in our society. They're the ones whose wisdom and aid we turn to when we're in pain and suffering.

The only problem was that Obama's claim simply wasn't true. Numerous polls taken at the time revealed that a strong majority of doctors stood in opposition to the bill, just like the general public did.

The administration didn't give up on the narrative, however. Since reality wasn't on their side, they relied on perception. A White House photo-op was put together showing the president standing alongside 150 doctors from across the United States, all who supported the bill. To relieve any doubts from the American public regarding the credentials of these doctors, White House personnel passed out lab coats to each and every one of them to wear for the cameras. The sea of white was so brilliant that it would have been deemed racist by MSNBC's Chris Matthews had the event been a Tea Party rally.

A similar stunt was pulled this week when the president surrounded himself with children before unveiling new gun control measures that he signed into law by executive order. Unlike the lab coats, the children weren't brought over from the White House prop department. They were instead selected from a group of youngsters that had sent letters to the president following the Sandy Hook massacre, urging him to do something to help protect children from guns.

Just so the public would know the letters were genuine and not simply plagiarized by Joe Biden, they were released to the press. Their content not only revealed our innocent youth's concerns, but also their surprisingly advanced grasp of the balance between freedom and security, as well as our country's current political landscape. One of the letters even seemed to recommend that the president should circumvent the United

States Congress to get the job done.

I wish I could fight back my cynicism here, but either my own children (who are around the same ages as the ones who wrote the letters) are receiving a shockingly inadequate education in comparison, or we've got some parents in this country who are training their kids with some early dictation skills.

Heck, if I had realized that all it would take is a child's letter to get the attention of the President of the United States, I would have had my son write him a long time ago, asking him to stop drowning his generation in debt.

Anyway, there's a reason that prop-politics exist. When it comes to complicated issues like healthcare and gun control, and you're not sure your case for controversial changes can stand on its own merits, it's best to dummy down the message to the lowest common denominator: Knee-jerk reactionism.

Putting a bunch of doctors in front of the cameras helps an argument because the visual image screams: "These people are smart! Listen to them!". Putting a bunch of kids in front of the cameras screams: "These kids are adorable! Help them!"

Is it insulting to our intelligence? For those of us who it doesn't work on, it is. But the truth is that it DOES work on a *lot* of people. So much so that I fear the day when the Obama administration realizes that they can combine the wisdom of a doctor and the innocence of a child into the ultimate public relations juggernaut: Doogie Howser, M.D!

After all, actor Neil Patrick Harris doesn't look all that different than he did twenty years ago.

For the stunt with the children this week, Obama took some criticism including some unflattering comparisons to famous, historical tyrants who also used children as props to push their agenda. I won't go as far as comparing our president to Hitler (and those who do aren't making themselves look

particularly good), but I don't think anyone can argue that there isn't something very tacky about the practice.

Still, if this is the kind of stuff that works on an American public that is largely disinterested in serious issues, I think the Republican Party (that is in desperate need of a perception makeover right now) might just want to consider coming up with some props of their own.

If they do, I have the perfect idea – something that trumps both doctors and children: Puppies!

Let's face it, puppies are often better at making someone feel good than doctors are, and the honest truth is that other people's kids are never as cute as our own. Puppies, however, are universally appealing and endearing.

I'd start with John Boehner. This poor guy and his colleagues in the House have repeatedly tried to restore some semblance of fiscal sanity in Washington, but for their trouble, they're routinely branded as obstructionist *idealogues* who are holding the U.S. economy hostage.

Imagine, however, if Boehner stepped up to the podium at press conferences with a Basset Hound puppy nestled under his arm – one whose droopy, sympathetic eyes matched those of the House Speaker. How could anyone behold such a sight and think this guy's holding *anything* hostage when he's really holding a bundle of cuteness?

Picture Paul Ryan with a brilliant photo of a Labrador Retriever puppy pinned to the top of his economic-projection charts. Maybe then, people would actually look at those charts and suddenly wake up to the reality of how screwed our country's future is.

Chris Christie's with a Bulldog puppy? Hand him the 2016 presidency right now!

At this point, I'll go ahead and clarify something that is probably already obvious to the sane among us: I'm joking about the puppy stuff. I just figured it's worth spelling that out so the handful of lefty-blogs who've reprinted my humor columns in the past (under the premise that they were written in the literal sense) realize that I'm not being serious. Yes, this has happened.

However, there *is* a valid point to be made – one that I've made in other columns: The GOP can't continue to overestimate the commonsense held by an electorate that would re-elect President Obama. They need to accept the reality that a large number of people can have short attention-spans, be painfully gullible, and *still* find their way to voting booths on election day. This reality absolutely needs to be taken into consideration when developing party messaging.