



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Trump's Towers (1 – 6)

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Contents

- 1. Steve Bannon**
- 2. Five Assessments: Finance, Immigration, NATO, Israel, and Secretary of State**
- 3. The Address to Congress**
- 4. Two Environments: Earth and Defense**
- 5. An Enlightened Duck for Donald**
- 6. Wire Taps**

Trump's Towers (1) **Steve Bannon**

February 23, 2017

Part of President Trump's campaign pledge was to bridge the gap between franchised and disenfranchised citizens. His partner in this effort is one of his key advisors, Steve Bannon.



I have been reading about Mr. Bannon and learning about his background. A substantial number of media outlets have painted him as a prophet of doom, a hater of everything that is not Christian or things not steeped in pure capitalism. He is quoted as saying, "Islam is not a religion of peace. Islam is a religion of submission. Islam means submission."¹

The picture on the left is from a cover of *Time* magazine, with a cover title of "The Great Manipulator."

The article in the periodical reflects the opinion that he helped draft the President's inaugural speech, which *Time* has characterized as "dark and scathing."

Among other things, the *Time* article quoted people who say Bannon is, for example, "...one of the worst people I've ever dealt with," and "...he regularly abuses people. He sees everything as a war. Every time he is crossed, he makes it his business to destroy his opponent."²

Cutting Mr. Bannon some slack, he may not be a people-person. Additionally, he may not countenance what he considers ill-informed opinions. People who do their homework tend to be a bit short with those who do not do their preparations.

The Inaugural Address

As readers of my blog know, I am not a Trump fan in regards to his personality and many of his beliefs. I think he is a narcissistic ass, but I agree with a number of his contentions. Maybe Brannon fits this category as well. I cannot say for sure, as the negative comments about him come from anti-Trump people.

Nonetheless, I do not see in the inaugural address a "dark and scathing" assessment of America. Here are direct quotes from Trump's speech:

For many decades, we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry; subsidized the armies of other countries, while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military. We've defended other nations' borders while refusing to defend our own. And spent trillions and trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay. We've made other countries rich, while the wealth, strength and confidence of our country has dissipated over the horizon.

One by one, the factories shuttered and left our shores, with not even a thought about the millions and millions of American workers that were

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/31/politics/kfile-bannon-on-islam/>.

² *Time*, February 13, 2017, 30.

left behind. The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed all across the world. But that is the past. And now, we are looking only to the future.

We will seek friendship and goodwill with the nations of the world, but we do so with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first. We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example. We will shine for everyone to follow.

With the exception of my disagreeing about the depletion of our military (in relation to the military budgets of other nations), most of Trump's statements are correct. Also, trade agreements, such as NAFTA, have not done as much good as they were advertised to do, but they have not done as much harm as their critics claim. Regardless of trade agreements, automation in America and low-wages overseas are the main causes for American unemployment. Companies are going to use the cheapest resource they can find to produce their products....NAFTA or not.

Anyway, the President's remarks are not dark or scathing. They reflect facts; not alternative facts, but facts. They are mostly on the mark, and this comes from a writer who does not care for Mr. Trump's persona and his reckless off-the-cuff statements.

One part of his speech is disturbing. His ideas lean toward absolutism:

At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America, and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other. When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice.

The bedrock of America has been its citizens questioning America and America's leaders, and given the freedom to do so. It has been the opposite of "total allegiance." Certainly, it has been one of loyalty to the country, but not *total* allegiance.

"When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice." Quite the opposite: Patriotism and prejudice go hand-in-hand.

I am a patriot. But I have my beliefs---perhaps prejudices---about our country's flawed political and financial problems. Nonetheless, looking at other countries, I continue to seek to improve and support our model.

Having studied the careers and early speeches of recent fascists (Hitler, Mussolini, Franco), I find Thump's speech quote above bothersome. That said, I made my stand in an earlier piece that the populist movements behind Trump and Bernie Sanders do not smack of fascism.³ But in that article, I also made the point of the danger of noble ideas becoming tangled-up with extreme nationalism.

Equally bothersome is an emerging idea (coming from this writer) that Donald will not tolerate dissenting voices, even when they are spoken in the Oval Office for his benefit, or from his Republicans in both houses of Congress. Of course, I am writing this assertion from the

³ Available at Blog.UylessBlack.com. Scroll to Series 16 [Politics in America]. Click on Populism vs. Fascism.

remote desert of Palm Springs, and not from the sofa in the Oval Office. So, this idea is taken from afar.

I will continue to question my nascent hunch that people question Donald at their own peril. I hope I am wrong on this matter. I hope Mr. Trump welcomes debate. I hope Mr. Bannon is more open to opposing views than suggested by the quotes above. I am going to stay open to facts...of all kinds; except alternative facts.

And it could be a non-alternative fact that Trump invites facts that alternate with his view of facts. We'll see. Let's let the dice play themselves out and not set our opinions in stone. For now, back to Steve Bannon.

Assessments, so far

From my couch potato sofa in Palm Springs, and therefore of remote experience, I disagree with some of the characterizations of Mr. Bannon that were published in *Time* magazine. From what I have read, he is more intelligent, more nuanced, and perhaps can be more beneficial to our country than Time's characterizations proclaim.

But my last statement also comes with, "I hope so, but I am not sure." I make this statement because I am not certain if Mr. Bannon is an ideologue---and therefore unyielding --- in his beliefs.

I do not favor ideologues, either right or left. They have led to far more harm to our race than they have done good. Commitment to a cause? Yes, it can lead to needed changes. Dedication to a belief? Yes, it can lead to progress. But commitments and dedications must be open to confront opposing commitments and dedications; to objectively determine the best path for the good of the whole country and not a few like-minded ideologues.

Time and again, history tells us that compromise works more often than unbending commitment and dedication to a cause and belief. The latter often leads to disaster.

As is the practice with these reports, we let facts do the talking. Here are quotes taken from a speech made by Steve Bannon.⁴

- "The central thing that binds that all together is a center-right populist movement of really the middle class, the working men and women in the world who are just tired of being dictated to by what we call the party of Davos. [The franchised class of the world. Bankers and such.]"
- "And so the fight here — and that's why the media's been very late to this party — but the fight you're seeing is *between entrepreneur capitalism... and the people like the corporatists* that are closer to the people like we think in Beijing and Moscow than they are to the entrepreneurial capitalist spirit of the United States."
- "That's why to me, it's incumbent upon freedom-loving people to make sure that we sort out these governments and make sure that we sort out particularly this crony capitalism so that the benefits become more of this entrepreneurial spirit and that can flow back to working-class and middle-class people."

⁴ <http://insidethevatican.com/news/newsflash/letter-6b-2017-steve-bannon-words?clid=CMKF7dXYmdICFQSRfgodw1QEww>

I see nothing in Bannon's comments but affirmations for keeping America great and at the same time, honoring America's laws and traditions--and the Joes on the Street gaining some ground against monopolistic and near-oligarchic vested interests of big business.

With a Caveat. Bannon's detractors state that he and Trump (and Bannon's associate, Stephen Miller) are in favor of a nationalist plan based on the idea of *nativism*. This term, which is covered in more detail in part II of this series, favors current residents of a country over those who want to become residents.

But the criticism goes further. Bannon has been accused of wanting to reshape the United States "...by tethering it to its European and Christian origins."⁵

Christian origins? Most of the immigrants coming to America are Catholic. European origins? Are we talking of skin color? The influx of aspirants who want to come to America are not going to be white-skinned. The skin color train left that station years ago.

I hope my initial hopes for the Trump administration and the influential Steve Bannon hold true. I hope my reservations about them will prove false.

As I said, let's wait. We'll see.

⁵ Emily Bazelon, "Department of Justification," *The New York Times Magazine*, March 5, 2017, 38.

Trump's Towers (2) **Five Assessments: Finance, Immigration, NATO, Israel, and Secretary of State**

February 24, 2017

The liberal media has portrayed several of Donald Trump's key appointees as being dangerous to America or being incompetent. In "Donald Trump (I)," I discussed this issue in relation to Steve Bannon, one of Trump's key advisors.

This article continues this discussion, and provides an overview of several other key aspects of the Trump Administration.

The Financial Industry

The initial efforts of the Trump administration include dismantling the Dodd-Frank Act. This effort is laudatory and lamentable, and at the same time, hypocritical. As I have said in other articles, the act is legislative over-kill, yet it came about because of the excesses of the financial industry.

Many of the excesses were illegal and damaged the American economy, but the individuals responsible for this calamity were not prosecuted. The government gained financial redress from these peoples' companies; that is, from the Joes on the Street (the stockholders). Meanwhile, the big guns who created this mess went scot-free and were able to keep their millions of dollars.

I am in favor of men and women creating and enjoying wealth. Mr. Gates and Mr. Zukerman deserve every penny they have earned. But I am not in favor of those who create wealth for themselves that (a) has no social value to society and (b) are road-blocks to subsequent, potential creators of wealth.

The first excess (a) is part of what the Dodd-Frank act has attempted to correct. I have comments on the second excess (b) in other articles. For now, in a surreal maneuver, Trump and Bannon do not support what is known as the Volker rule. This aspect of the act forbids banks from making speculative investments that do not benefit their customers. What could be more logical? What could be more All-American?

The rule prevents a financial institution from proprietary trading with its own accounts. The financial meltdown has been attributed (partly) to proprietary trading. It led, if you can believe this...which is a non-alternative fact...to investment banks betting against instruments they were selling to their customers!

The banking industry is giddy in hopes that Dodd-Frank will be eliminated; if not eliminated then emasculated. The act, again, is over-kill, but its demise will not be to the benefit of the Joes on the Street. It will be of benefit to the Joes on Wall Street.

I have read that Bannon is an iconoclast, that he seeks to "clean out the old order and build a new one in its place."¹ One of his friends, Patrick McSweeney (former chairman of the Republican Party of Virginia) states that Bannon changed as a result of the 2008 financial meltdown. McSweeney states Bannon saw the financial crisis as one in which, "the hardworking folks...got stiffed. And the bankers got bailed out."²

Prior to the 2008 meltdown, I was a strong proponent of America's capital markets. However, during my nearly one-year research of America's financial industry, I came to the

¹*Time*, February 17, 2017, 28.

² *Ibid*, 28.

conclusion that the United States had (has) created a phony brand of free-market capitalism. I wrote a book on this subject (*The Nearly Perfect Storm: An American Financial and Social Failure*).

President Trump, here is some advice:

- Keep the capital requirements aspects of Dodd-Frank.
- Keep the Volker rule.
- Make *all* trading transparent; no closed exchanges.
- Modify a Wall Street whose instruments are not beneficial to society. By that I mean: Prevent institutions from setting up a Las Vegas crap shoot whose errant instruments might bring down America's financial sector.
- If stricter requirements remain in place on how banks make loans for home mortgages, make certain these requirements also pertain to the emerging and rapidly growing non-bank institutions that make mortgage loans to citizens, and are largely immune to Dodd-Frank oversight.³

Immigration

President Trump created a fiasco with his sudden, ill-formed clamp-down on immigration of people from countries that had little or nothing to do with terrorism. Why were Pakistan and Saudi Arabia not included? After all, most of the 9/11 terrorists came from Saudi Arabia. The answer is these countries were not on the hit list because they are allies and confidants with the United States.

Since 9/11, "...white supremacists and other non-Muslim extremists have killed nearly twice as many Americans as radical Muslims, according to the New America Foundation."⁴ While this statement may be true, it begs the issue, which is addressed next:

Nativism? The first responsibility of a nation's government is to protect the nation's borders. America has failed in fulfilling this duty to its citizens. I am in favor of strict immigration laws, but ones that encourage the immigration of talented people from all parts of the world to help the United States continue to populate places such as Silicon Valley. This practice is called the merit-based immigration system.

I support the United States implementing control over illegal immigration. Illegal immigration is altering the milieu of the community in which I was reared in rural southeast New Mexico. The inundation of immigrants is decimating the community's cultural institutions.

What set of Latino migrants, massively deposited into Lea County, New Mexico, give a hill of beans about the two local museums that laud the Anglo Saxon land-settlers who formed the bedrock and backbone of this area a century ago? Museums about dead cowboys? No way, Jose. Let's take in the latest digital shoot-'um-up at the local theatre.

The danger associated with my wish to maintain the cowboy and pioneering culture where I was born and reared is that it can lead to *nativism*. The practice of nativism is a policy of protecting the interests of native-born and established citizens against immigrants.

³ 37.5 percent of mortgages originated in 2014 came from non-bank lenders, according to Inside Mortgage Finance. As examples: Quicken and PennyMac. See: <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/4-non-banks-where-mortgage-130008996.html>.

⁴ Emily Bazeton, "Department of Justification," *The New York Times Magazine*, March 5, 2017, 38.

Some people refer to nativism as *xenophobia*: an irrational fear and dislike of people from other cultures. I admit I have conflicts about the diluting of my hometown's culture; of the possible demise of those two country and western museums in my home county.

It is a phenomenon that I know I must accept for legal immigrants. I draw the line with illegal immigrants. I say so because:

Balkanization? We are a country of immigrants. The beauty of America has been its ability to absorb people who come to this land; to have these people blend-in while keeping their pride in their former lives; in their ancestry---while embracing the creation of a new ancestral family tree.

The problem with America's porous south border is that it has allowed a flood of foreigners; a flood which is impeding their integration into America's mainstream. If this continues, it will lead to the balkanization of our society. There are many reasons nations have failed throughout humans' history. One reason is the balkanization of their citizenry.

Cultural assimilation, while maintaining ties to the old land, defeats balkanization.

Legal Rights for illegal aliens? But this contention goes further. We are told that *illegal* aliens have *legal* rights. That they came here illegally, but by virtue of having arrived here, they take on the rights of those who came here legally.

I may emphasize with their plights, but these people knowingly broke the laws of America. Yet, they expect America to break its laws to allow them to break our laws with impunity?

There was an effort in Florida in 1993 to purge the voter records of noncitizens. *Noncitizens*, yet the effort was blocked in the courts.

I recognize America benefits greatly from immigrants. I am a strong supporter of merit-based immigration. Bring 'um in! They can only help stoke America's engines of commerce and cultural diversity. But our country has failed in this regard.

I ask my alt-left, alt-right, alt-middle readers to explain the rationale of treating illegal aliens as if they were legal citizens. I will convey your thoughts in subsequent blog postings.

On an edge with some readers. My liberal readers have criticized me regarding this next idea about immigration. Yet, I have had no one offer a cogent counter-argument, including my alt-left buddies living in Washington, DC.

The practice of a religion, any religion, should not be allowed in America if its practice undermines the principle of the separation of church and state. Specifically: Any adherents to Islamic law that requires the co-joining of church and state should be forbidden from entering this country or practicing this aspect of Islamic law.

I do not make these statements frivolously, because they run-up against the freedom to worship as one pleases. Nonetheless, for centuries, the battles fought among various religious factions have taught us (or should have taught us) that co-joining governance with religion is a deadly concoction.

I am both liberal and conservative. My fiscal, monetary, and economic views are to the right: Get off the sofa and get a job, regardless of what it may be. My views on gays, lesbians, and alternate marriages are to the left: Leave these folks alone to practice what they want to practice.

My friends tell me I am alt-right in regard to the separation of church and state and that of Sharia Law. Call me what you will, the separation of church and state is an inviolate idea to me. Anything that undermines this concept should not be allowed in a republic, in a democracy.

Additionally, it is disingenuous for anyone to come to the United States who subscribes to Sharia law. Why would they wish to live in a country so alien to their beliefs? It is also disingenuous of my friends back east to ignore this fact.

Furthermore, this belief has nothing to do with alt-right, alt-left, or alt-middle. It has to do with the foundation of the American republic; of America's underpinnings.

NATO

I have written about the evolution of NATO in other pieces, of NATO taking on the behavior of a suckled child, suckled by America. Furthermore, that since WWII, the United States has been suckling first, western Europe, and later, eastern Europe.

From the standpoint of Joe on the Street, this suckling---the disproportionate contribution that the U.S. makes to NATO---should be balanced with the other NATO members contributing their obligated share to the NATO pot.

In an amazing display of misplaced priorities, one of the member nations (Germany), which contributes less than the agreed-upon amount to NATO, stated that the country would now abide by its "commitment to raise defense spending by two percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) but added it's a long-time goal that is likely to be reached only by 2024."⁵

Germany is one of the richest nations on earth, yet it sets 2024 (eight years) to do what it should have been doing in the first place. This proclamation is amazing in its arrogance. Germany, good luck if Vladimir Putin comes knocking at your door.

Trump has disparaged NATO, and not just about the fact that it does not pay its dues. He has made statements about NATO being obsolete.⁶

The newly appointed Secretary of Defense, James N. Mattis, has moderated some of Trump's irresponsible assertions. In a pragmatic, even-toned, and realistic manner, he had this to say:

"I owe it to you all to give you clarity on the political reality in the United States and to state the fair demand from my country's people in concrete terms, ... America will meet its responsibilities, but if your nations do not want to see America moderate its commitment to the alliance, each of your capitals needs to show its support for our common defense." All NATO allies, he went on, must fulfill the pledge to spend at least 2% of gross domestic product on defense.⁷

Currently, the U.S., Britain, Estonia, (bankrupt) Greece, and Poland are the only NATO members that meet the two percent commitment (of 28 member states). America's contributions amount to approximately two-thirds of the budget for the alliance. Some countries contribute so little that their military forces are largely irrelevant.⁸ Why should they care if the United States picks up the tab? Let generous Uncle Sam do it.

⁵ <https://www.rt.com/news/377773-germany-nato-military-spending/>.

⁶ <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/16/politics/donald-trump-times-bild-interview-takeaways/>.

⁷ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/mattis-nato-warning-1487291303>.

⁸ Ibid.

Taking Iraqi Oil?

Mr. Mattis has also toned-down Mr. Trump's statement that the United States should have "taken Iraq's oil." Donald made this statement as late as one day after his inauguration.⁹ I can only say: incredible.

To quote from Mr. Mattis:

"All of us ... in America have generally paid for our gas and oil all along, and I'm sure we will continue to do so in the future," Mattis said. "We're not in Iraq to seize anybody's oil."¹⁰

To think that a Secretary of Defense must make this statement to the public about an American President defies credulity. It is surreal.

We should have taken Iraq's oil. What does that mean?

Israel

Sooner or later, Israel's continuing down the road to cultural and religious apartheid will lead to extreme violence against this nation. Certainly, the intransigence of the Palestinians to work with Israel in previous negotiations toward a two-state setup should be taken in the context that Israel is not the sole culprit in this unfolding tragedy.

But the continued annexation of parts of the Palestinians' territory, with nonchalance and in-your-face extremism, will lead to calamity. It is only a matter of time.

I hold this view against opposing views of several fine friends. Some are Jews, and some are not. Whatever our views are, I do not think Trump's casual dismissal of a two-state solution...or a one-state solution...whatever works, reflects little more than a slapdash attitude. An attitude that seems to permeate much of his behavior.

I have not covered all of Trump's key appointments. Assessments on the Attorney General, the potential Supreme Court nominee, etc. will come later.

⁹ <http://www.latimes.com/politics/washington/la-na-essential-washington-updates-defense-secretary-mattis-arrives-in-1487537425-htmlstory.html>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Trump's Towers (3) The Address to Congress

February 28, 2017

Tonight, President Trump spoke to Congress and the nation about his plans for his presidency.

As much as I find Mr. Trump's personality distasteful, I found his speech tasteful, sometimes inspiring. More often than not, I found his ideas on the mark. I found some his mannerisms and off-the-cuff comments funny.

However, some reservations:

- How is America to fund Donald Trump's ideas for increased expenditures for new departments and more money for defense?
- He did not discuss the runaway entitlements programs which are eating-up America's wealth.
- He did not address the excesses of Wall Street.
- He did not express a more realistic view of why America has lost so many jobs, not just to misplaced trade policy, but to automation and low wages overseas as well. The truth is automation is more of a threat to future jobs than China's workers. They are also going to suffer the consequences of computers and computer-based robots replacing them.
- He did not offer a more viable approach to ObamaCare, other than it should be dismantled. The truth is: The solution is a Scandinavian state-care approach, which is politically toxic in America. But I fear governmental health care in America---and any proposal for its implementation---will never reach a consensus. In addition, an approach for a replacement will take Congress some time to write.

Congressional Entitlements. On a more expansive format. He did not address the issue of Congressional entitlements, but his audience would not have been very receptive to this subject. We citizens should be, and we should insist Congress members live a bit more like us citizens. Points that need to be addressed (and there are several others):¹

- Congress includes a minimum annual paycheck of \$174,000, which is more than three times higher than the average private-sector salary of \$51,986 in 2010.
- Congressional members have free parking at Reagan and Dulles airports. Having used these airports many times, I find this perk particularly irritating.
- Members are not...hold your nose...subject to insider trading restrictions, even trading on companies or industries that they may be examining in their roles of legislators.

¹ This data is paraphrased or directly quoted from <https://www.fool.com/investing/general/2013/10/20/10-perks-congress-has-that-you-dont.aspx> 10 Perks Congress Has That You Don't.

- A retired member of Congress who has served 20 years will average \$59,000 annually in pension benefits. Why is an elected public servant entitled to a pension in the first place?
- Congress and federal employees enjoy the benefits of Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. Ironically, it has features of ObamaCare: No one can be refused, or charged more, for a pre-existing condition. Dependents under twenty-six are covered. However, these people have a tailored program and do not have to use ObamaCare.

Nonetheless, Trump spoke to some of the basic problems of America's policies. He addressed many of the issues that put him in the White House in the first place.

As much as I have reservations about Mr. Trump possessing much eloquence, he made his points without rancor. He made them with eloquence.

He engaged me during this process. I was surprised and pleased.

Again, let's wait and see what develops as he matures into the office of the Presidency. He may remain narcissistically infantile. He may mature into a Teddy Roosevelt.

But tonight, he did offer some sound ideas about changing American governance.

Trump's Towers (4) **Two Environments: Earth and Defense**

March 1, 2017

The liberal media keeps me informed on left-wing views. The conservative media keeps me attuned to the other side of the political coin. As I have said in other articles, I do not want my writings to be bombastic polemics for alt-right or alt-left. I hope to present food for thought for both factions.

With those ideas in mind, how is a citizen to get a handle on Trump's beliefs about the environment and global warming? Given the effects that melting icebergs will have on earth's inhabitants, it is a significant question. Here is one quote about this issue:

Donald Trump has a lot of things to say about global warming. He's called it an urgent problem, and he's called it a hoax. He's claimed it's a scam invented by the Chinese, and he's denied that he ever said that. He's promised to "cancel" the historic Paris climate agreement, and he's said he still has an "open mind" on the matter.¹

Environmentalists are lamenting the appointment of Scott Pruitt to the position of head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He is noted for suing this agency several times while he was the Oklahoma attorney general. Furthermore:

Some environmental activists have pointed to Trump's unpredictable statements as evidence that he might not follow through on his campaign pledges to dismantle the Obama administration's climate legacy. But Trump has already put one of the nation's most prominent climate skeptics in charge of the Environmental Protection Agency transition. And just last week, one of Trump's top aides assured Americans that the president-elect still believes climate science is mostly "bunk."²

Maybe so and maybe no. Here is what Mr. Pruitt had to say in his initial comments about his taking this office:³

- I believe that we as a nation can be both pro-energy and jobs, and pro-environment. We don't have to choose between the two.

- I think our nation has done better than any nation in the world at making sure that we do the job of protecting our natural resources, and protecting our environment, while also respecting economic growth.

¹ <http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2016/11/trump-climate-timeline>.

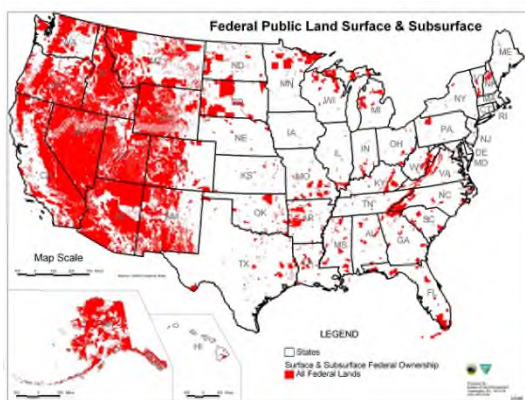
² *Ibid.*

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/21/epa-scott-pruitt-trump-environment-economy>.

- The EPA administrator said he would seek to listen to those under him: “You can’t lead unless you listen.” But he also called the agency to observe process and the rule of law.

Perhaps these statements were made for public relations press releases. But taken at face value, they paint a more positive picture about the EPA’s future---and to the future of our hills and streams---than has been characterized in the much of the media.

Federal Land



As the figure to the left shows, the United States Government “owns around 640 million acres of land (about 28 percent) of the 2.27 billion acres of land in the United States. Around 92 percent of federally owned acres are in 12 Western states.”⁴

The Supreme Court held in *Kleppe v. New Mexico* that “the complete power that Congress has over federal lands under this clause necessarily includes the power to regulate and protect wildlife living there, state law notwithstanding.”⁵

While it is too soon to know how a Republican Congress will treat this ownership, initial indications are that legislation will take place to move the federal government out of the picture and place states in charge of some (all?) of this land. If so, environmentalists fear the land will be sold-off to the highest bidder, or the highest campaign contributor.

Choose your poison. Whom would you prefer to manage this land: Uncle Sam or private enterprise? I do not trust either party. But having been in private business for much of my life; having visited many parts of America that are owned by the public; having seen the desecration that private industry has wrought on private lands, I fear such a transfer will eventually lead to the despoilment of a significant part of America.

Let’s keep an eye on Mr. Pruitt and hope he keeps an eye on protecting a fantastic aspect of this country: its landscape.

Pre-EPA

LA and New York. In 1961, I spent the summer in the Los Angeles area, living with my brother, David, in a house near downtown (the Silver Lake district). The day after my arrival, I decided to get some sun and went up to Dave’s sun deck, a veranda overlooking the Silver Lake area.

I was stunned. The air was fetid. It stank. I could hardly see across a small valley in the back of Dave’s home. After a few minutes, I gave up the sunbath. My experience reminded me of a photo (shown in the figure below) of a view of New York City, taken from the Empire State Building in 1966.⁶ The view from Dave’s sun deck was similar to that shown in this picture.

The EPA helped clean up the air in LA and NYC.

⁴ [https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=land+owned+by+federal+government&*](https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=land+owned+by+federal+government&*.). The figure of Federal land ownership is courtesy of Wikipedia.

⁵ *Kleppe v. New Mexico*, 426 U.S. 529 (1976).

⁶ Jim Dwyer, “Remembering a City Where the Smog Could Kill,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 2017, A21.



Swimming in the Potomac River. In 1970, I took a swim in the Potomac River, a couple miles up-stream from Mount Vernon. I was new to the area and was not aware of how polluted the river was. I learned later that fishing was prohibited in the part of the river where I swam.

I emerged from my swim resembling an ambulatory oil-slick. My once white skivvies were pale gray. My buddies in a boat, immune to the contamination, got their laughs at my naiveté.

The EPA mandates forced chemical plants, chicken farms, and cow ranchers to stop dumping refuse in the upstream Potomac. Now, I can take a swim in the Potomac River without the need to use an abrasive pad to clean my body. If so inclined, I can fish in the Potomac.

Value of the EPA?

The EPA's existence has led to a less dangerous and cleaner America. Because of the experiences just described, I became an environmentalist. I am thankful the agency exists.

However, the EPA has become a large bureaucracy. Its behavior is often self-serving and rigid. None other than Charles Dickens wrote about the dangers of governmental bureaucracies becoming ends unto themselves.

My friend and nephew, Rick Black, puts it well. He says a bureaucracy (such as EPA) can become so big that it "loses its purpose." That it "has no checks and balances" on its power. That it needs to consolidate and not have "fifteen operations addressing one problem." As part of the "fifteen operations problem," he spoke to me about the need to eliminate excessive red tape in doing business.

Rick and I also spoke of the dangers of a bureaucracy that comes to focus on perpetuating itself instead of fulfilling its mandate from Congress and the White House. We agreed that the bureaucrats often protect themselves to the detriment of what they were hired to do in the first place.

Rick speaks with authority. He deals with the EPA frequently. He spoke to me about a chilling example of what a governmental agency did to help perpetuate its existence.

I will not cite Rick's examples of his personal experiences, as he is still working for a living. Being retired, and somewhat immune to bureaucratic retaliations, I can cite numerous

instances of bureaucratic abuse in the U.S. Navy and the Federal Reserve System. If you are interested, send me an email at Ublack7510@aol.com.

Donald and his Ducks. Bureaucratic abuses also come from private enterprises. As examples: Volkswagen's fuel falsehoods and Toyota's brake failures. Because this series is about Trump's administration, we will keep our perspective focused on Donald and his Ducks.

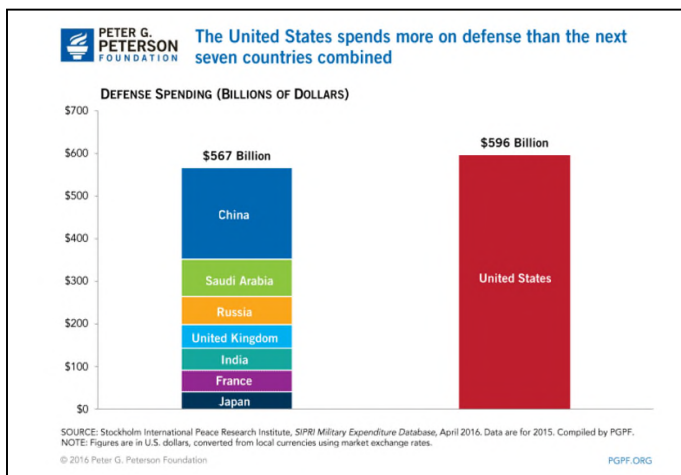
Donald and his Ducks? Yes, I am coining a new buzz-phrase, one to describe Mr. Trump and his administration and (possibly) the ducking of his campaign pledges. I do it in humor, without bias, one way of the other.

Cutting Back the EPA, Cutting More Slack for DOD

Here are excerpts from an AOL news release:⁷

- Trump's budget proposal is expected to cut \$2 billion and 20 percent of staff from the Environmental Protection Agency.
- The administration's forthcoming budget proposal is expected to ramp up military spending by \$54 billion, and impose steep cuts on non-military agencies.
- A 20 percent staff decrease would mean layoffs of 3,000 employees, and a \$2 billion cut would reduce the EPA budget by about 25 percent from its current \$8.1 billion.
- For comparison, the 2016 Department of Agriculture budget was \$140 billion, the State Department's was about \$50 billion, and NASA's was about \$18 billion. The Pentagon budget, which includes military spending, was \$560 billion.
- Trump's idea is to increase military spending by \$54 billion and decrease spending for State Department operations and other organizations, such as the EPA.

I am a defense hawk. I am also an environmental hawk. And I am certain the same kind



of bureaucratic self-perpetuation and self-promotion that exists at the EPA also exists in the DOD

The alt-rights say all-right to more defense spending. Yet, even some of the military higher-ups have recommended paring down some programs.

The United States defense budget dwarfs any other country's defense expenditures. See the figure on the left for some data about this fact.⁸

⁷ <https://www.aol.com/article/news/2017/03/01/trumps-budget-could-cut-3-000-staff-from-the-epa-report-sugges/21866117/>.

How much is enough? How much do we spend on protecting...often as not...other countries' turfs? Will these protections protect ours? I do not know. But then, I am not sitting in the Oval Office with Donald and his Ducks. I wish the Ducks well, as their success will affect my well-being...and yours.

But do not duck the issue Ducks. The figure above reveals this fact: Mr. Trump's promise to invest in the further enhancement of America's defense will come at a high cost. The money to bring this pledge to reality must come from somewhere. \$54 billion is not duck soup.

As well, the EPA can be heavy-handed. Perhaps Mr. Trump's cuts will cut-down its bureaucracy and eliminate its red tape---although Mr. Dickens might think otherwise. We can hope that the cuts will force the EPA to consolidate its operations.

How about the DOD? Given Donald's plans, there will be no cutting-back of DOD's bureaucracy. Some advice for Donald and his Ducks:

Like the EPA, the DOD suffers from Dickens' bureaucratic creep. So, cut down its overhead, Mr. Trump. Do not give it a blank check. Encourage the department to build an airplane---one solitary airplane---that does not cost \$100 million---an airplane that is essentially worthless in a world of increasing urban terrorism.

It is unfathomable that a defense bureaucracy with a budget many times larger than the gross national product of most nations does not lend itself to some offensive cost-cutting.

However, and putting on my defense hawk hat, aspects of our military have been deteriorating. Cuts since 2013 have hampered operations and especially maintenance. According to the Wall Street Journal, "Some 62% of the Navy's mainstay F-18 fighters---and 74% of the Marines'---are grounded for lack of parts for maintenance or otherwise deemed unfit for service."⁹

I recognize I am giving mixed signals here, but it is foolhardy to spend billions on airplanes, yet not provide the money to keep them in flight.

Another Perspective

In addition, it is important to understand that federal spending of our tax dollars in apportioned as follows:¹⁰

Benefit programs:	62.8%
Military:	14.7%
Other:	15.1%
Debt service:	07.3%

The gradual breaking of America's financial back is not coming from defense spending. It is coming from entitlement programs, and increasingly, debt service.

⁸ http://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison.

⁹ "Trump's Defense Buildup," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 4-5, A12.

¹⁰ Office of Management and Budget (fiscal 2017). Secondary source: *USA TODAY*, March 1, 2017, 7A.

Trump's Towers (5) An Enlightened Duck for Donald

March 4, 2017

One of my readers told me that using the phrases, "Donald and his Ducks" and "Donald's Ducks" might be considered too frivolous for my making serious points about the Trump presidency. Granted, they are flippant, but so is Donald. Turn-about is fair play.

For this article, we can be pleased that Donald's Duck for national security advisor is Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster. Here is a summary of General McMaster's background:

He earned a commission as a second lieutenant upon graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1984. McMaster earned a Master of Arts and Ph.D. in American history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). His thesis was critical of American strategy in the Vietnam War, which was further detailed in his 1997 book *Derelection of Duty*.¹

Even *The New York Times*, a newspaper disposed to dispose of Mr. Trump, has this to say about the man:

In the messy history of the Iraq war, General McMaster emerged as one of the best American commanders. The key to his success was simple, yet revolutionary at the time: He insisted that his soldiers treat Iraqis with dignity and deference. He made keeping civilians safe and working to resolve local conflicts priorities over killing and demeaning as many suspected insurgents as possible. "Every time you treat an Iraqi disrespectfully, you are working for the enemy," he warned his troops.²

General McMaster will be in charge of the National Security Council. We hope that the presence of Steve Bannon on this council---a strange appointment from Donald---will not hamper McMaster's carrying out efforts to keep Donald's defense ducks in a row.

¹ First source: Wikipedia, which references *Spector, Ronald (July 20, 1997). "Cooking Up a Quagmire," New York Times, February 20, 2017.*

² *The New York Times*, February 22, 2017, A22.

Trump's Towers (6) Wire Taps

March 6, 2017

President Trump has accused the Obama administration of wire tapping Trump Towers. While this accusation is possible---after all, the NSA did warrantless surveillance a few years ago---there would be a paper trail. The trail would come from NSA, the FBI, the CIA, or other government agencies. If discovered, there would also be accountability of the individuals who established the operations.

Trump sent several tweets this week accusing Obama of conducting a "Nixon/Watergate" wiretapping scheme on Trump Tower during the election.¹

This claim is a fantastic allegation. Donald says Obama's administration broke the law, as did those organizations (or organization) that had the technical ability to do the taps.

I have come to expect incendiary outpourings from Donald and his tweets. But this one took me aback. If true, it means high level officials could be sent to prison. Below are paraphrases from several Internet sites about this issue:

- The FBI director, James Comey, asked Justice Department officials to reject President Donald Trump's claims. Of course he did. Otherwise, he could be seen as breaking the law. This situation puts the FBI director in the crosshairs of his boss.
- As discussed in other papers on this blog, wire tapping requires a court order. A special court (the United States Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC)) must authorize surveillance operations against a suspected mal-doer.
- Requests for these wire taps are made by the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).
- Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper denied any suggestion that Trump Tower communications were wiretapped before the election.
- The President of the United States cannot order wiretaps.²

What are we to make of Trump's allegations? If they are true, we Americans are witnessing an America that is declining into an Orwellian-surveillance nation. If they are not true, we are witnessing the behavior of an unhinged President.

For the latter possibility, it is not an unhinged President such as that of Nixon in his last few weeks in office. For now, it is a president who has four years in office to go.

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/03/trumps-unfounded-claims-of-a-nixonwatergate-wiretapping-scheme/518625/>

² This statement must be taken in the context that former Vice President Cheney and his underlings were able to persuade (I do not know what other word to use) the NSA to engage in illegal gathering of metadata. And in fairness, this activity may have come from an over-zealous NSA. As of now, we do not know all the circumstances of the NSA metadata gathering operations.) We do know that Cheney circumvented the President to implement his own versions of combating terrorism...at least during the first term of the President.

And not a President in which Nixon held the hand of a stable Kissinger, but one in which Trump holds his own hands of egocentric spontaneity.