

AFJ Report

Peter Roff talks about America No.7

Donald Trump's First 100 Days

By

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For almost a century historians and commentators have regarded the end of a president's first one hundred days as a usual benchmark for measuring success and failure. It began with FDR, who encouraged the evaluation but only after he began his legislative program. He hedged a bit as will Donald Trump.

The administration has been aggressive in laying out its accomplishments since January 20, 2017. Journalists and other influencers have been receiving a steady stream of material from the White House press office highlighting success in job creation, regulatory rollback, strengthening national defense and security, changes in immigration policy, education reform, and a host of other issues broken down into easy to digest, easier to repeat bullet points.

Almost all of them however, with the prominent exception of the nomination and confirmation of Neil Gorsuch to the position of associate justice of the United States Supreme Court, have been actions the president has taken unilaterally using his executive authority. On most of the big issues, the ones that require the president to engage with Congress the jury is still because little has been done.

Some of that might be Trump's fault. Other than a revised budget document containing significant spending cuts and program terminations he sent to Capitol Hill in March – and none of which Congress is required to adopt – he has not proposed much. He's largely left the matter of healthcare repeal to the Congress while senior officials just this week presented an outline of a tax reform package that is, to say the least ambitious that takes the corporate tax rate to just 15 percent. It is I think safe to say he's leading the executive branch but has not yet taken up the reins of government.

A lot of this can be attributed to his personal style. In an interview published Friday the president himself admitted his new responsibilities were more than he thought they would be and that his previous life had been simpler.

His political opponents pounced on this as an admission he was not ready to be president but then again who really ever is? With the possible exception of George Herbert Walker Bush – whose father had been an influential United States Senator and who spent eight years as Ronald Reagan's vice president – no one comes to the job of president of the United States fully prepared for it. All of them have a learning curve of one kind or another to get around. And despite all the elder Bush had done that prepared him to be

chief executive the American electorate opted not to give him a second term in office when he sought it in 1992.

The one thing that stands out in sharp contrast to the beginning of other new administrations is the degree to which partisanship has wrecked any semblance of a honeymoon period for Trump, with Congress and with the media. The Democrats have seized on every item they can to blacken the president's reputation, to continue the argument the election was unfairly influenced by foreign interests, and to suggest his White House is full of boodlers, incompetents, and persons of privilege out to line their own pockets. It would not be wrong to say they are, for example, fully intent on keeping alive the discussion of former Trump National Security Adviser Mike Flynn's contacts with the Russians, the Turks, and other foreign governments in the hopes it might eventually bring down one or two more senior government officials and make the president look bad.

That level of partisanship is an impediment to any kind of success for Trump on Capitol Hill. As long as Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer maintains his current level of antipathy to the president – and it's very high – he will be able to stop most anything the administration wants to do from going forward. To this point Trump has not seized the powers of the presidency Teddy Roosevelt famously referred to as “The Bully Pulpit” to raise the ire of the American people that his agenda is being blocked. That's tough to do in the first one hundred days while your team is still being filled out across the government but it's something of a necessity given the Democrats method of trying to maintain as much of Barack Obama's legacy as possible can be described as “trying to win by whining and waiting.”

On matters more under his control, like national security policy, the president seems to have found his footing more quickly. He's given the Defense Department the authority it needs to prosecute the missions it has been handed in Iraq and Afghanistan. He's had a number of bi-lateral meetings with important global leaders like Prime Minister Abe and President Xi and is in contact with them on a regular basis on critical issues like the North Korean missile tests.

Clearly he's taking steps to establish his position on the world stage, nowhere more so than at NATO – where his criticisms are being taken seriously and real action on the part

of member nations to reform the organization seems to be taking root – at least according to published reports.

His is an administration in process, still struggling to find its footing. “The great lesson of Trump’s career is that what goes around does NOT come around, not even a little,” Eric Dezenhall, the CEO of Dezenhall Resources in Washington and one of America’s experts in crisis and damage control, was quoted as saying recently in one Washington publication. “It is wrong to hold him to the same standard as other presidents. The pundit consensus is that if he fails to deliver on jobs and key legislation that he will be punished for it. Wrong. His main mission is to vex the political and media elite, period.”

On the former Dezenhall is most certainly correct. He should not be held to the same standards as other presidents because he is trying to redefine the presidency. That’s something it takes more than 100 days to do.

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