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OPINION | COLUMNISTS | DECLARATIONS

The Week They Decided Donald Trump Was Crazy

He inflicts one wound after another on his campaign.



By

PEGGY NOONAN

Aug. 4, 2016 7:40 p.m. ET

I think this week marked a certain coming to terms with where the election is going. Politics is about trends and tendencies. The trends for Donald Trump are not good, and he tends not to change.

All the damage done to him this week was self-inflicted. The arrows he's taken are arrows he shot. We have in seven days witnessed his undignified and ungrateful reaction to a Gold Star family; the odd moment with the crying baby; the one-on-one interviews, which are starting to look like something he does in the grip of a compulsion, in which Mr. Trump expresses himself thoughtlessly, carelessly, on such issues as Russia, Ukraine and sexual harassment; the relitigating of his vulgar Megyn Kelly comments from a year ago; and, as his fortunes fell, his statement that he "would not be surprised" if the November election were "rigged." Subject to an unprecedented assault by a sitting president who called him intellectually and characterologically unfit for the presidency, Mr Trump fired back—at Paul Ryan and John McCain.

The mad scatterbrained-ness of it was captured in a Washington Post interview with Philip Rucker in which five times by my count—again, the compulsion—Mr. Trump departed the meat of the interview to turn his head and stare at the television. On seeing himself on the screen: "Lot of energy. We got a lot of energy." Minutes later: "Look at this. It's all Trump all day long. That's why their ratings are through the roof." He's all about screens, like a toddler hooked on iPad.



PHOTO: CHAD CROWE

Mr. Trump spent all his time doing these things instead of doing his *job*: making the case for his policies, expanding on his stands, and taking the battle to

Hillary Clinton.

By the middle of the week the Republican National Committee was reported to be frustrated, party leaders alarmed, donors enraged. There was talk of an “intervention.”

Here is a truth of life. When you act as if you’re insane, people are liable to think you’re insane. That’s what happened this week. People started to become convinced he was nuts, a total flake.

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It was there in the polls. Fox News shows Mrs. Clinton with a 10-point lead, with Mr. Trump at 78% of the Republican vote, compared with Mitt Romney’s 93% in 2012. Mr. Romney won the white vote by 20 points; Mr. Trump is ahead by 10. “High-end Republicans are walking away,” says a GOP oppo guy. “Who is choking now?” The battleground states, too, have turned bad.

This is what became obvious, probably fatally so: Mr. Trump is not going to get serious about running for president. He does not have a second act, there are no hidden depths, there will be no “pivot.” It is not that he is willful or stubborn, though he may be, it’s that he doesn’t have the skill set needed now—discretion, carefulness, generosity, judgment. There’s a clueless quality about him. It’s not that he doesn’t get advice; it’s that he can’t hear advice, can’t process it or turn it into action.

“He’ll reach out, he’ll start to listen. He’ll change, soften.” No, he won’t. Nor will he start to understand that his blunders are a form of shown disrespect for his own supporters. They put themselves on the line for him, many at some cost. What he’s giving them in return is a strange, bush-league, pull-it-out-of-your-ear, always-indulge-your-emotions campaign. They deserve better.

And while Mr. Trump was doing this, Mrs. Clinton was again lying about her emails, reminding us there’s crazy there, too. She insisted to Chris Wallace that FBI director James Comey endorsed her sincerity and veracity. No he didn’t, and everyone knows he didn’t. She’d have spent the past week defending her claims if it weren’t for Mr. Trump’s tireless attempts to kill Mr. Trump.

His supporters hope it will all turn around in the debates: He’ll wipe the floor with her; for the first time she’ll be toe-to-toe with someone who speaks truth to power. But why do they assume this? Are they *watching* Mrs. Clinton? She doesn’t look very afraid of him. “No, Donald, you don’t,” she purred in her acceptance speech. In debate she’ll calmly try to swat him away, cock her head, look at the moderator, smile. She’ll be watching old videos of Reagan-Carter in 1980: “There you go again.”

She is aware no one believes she’s honest and trustworthy. If there’s one thing Mrs. Clinton knows it’s how to read a poll. She has accepted that people understand her. Her debate approach will be this: In spite of what will no doubt be some uncomfortable moments, she will, in comparison with him, seem sturdy and grounded—normal. That, this week, could be her bumper sticker: “Hillary: Way Less Abnormal.”

It must be said that all this is so strange on so many levels.

Donald Trump is said to be in love with the idea of success, dividing the world between winners and losers. But he just won big and couldn’t take yes for an answer.

He got it all, was the unique outsider who shocked the entire political class with his rise. He should be the happiest man in the world, not besieged and full of complaint. All he had to do was calm down, build bridges, reach out, reassure, be gracious. In fairness, he could not unite the party. That isn’t possible now—it is a divided party, which is why it had 17 candidates. Mr. Trump won with just less than half the vote, an achievement in a field that big, but also while representing policies that the formal leadership of the party in Washington finds anathema. He was the candidate who would control illegal immigration, who wouldn’t cut entitlements, who opposes an interventionist foreign policy, who thinks our major trade deals have not benefited Americans on the ground. And he won, big time.

From what I’ve seen there has been zero reflection on the part of Republican leaders on how much the base’s views differ from theirs and what to do about it. The GOP is not at all refiguring its stands. The

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only signs of life I see are among young staffers on Capitol Hill, who understand their bosses' stands have been rebuked and are quietly debating among themselves what policy paths will win the future.

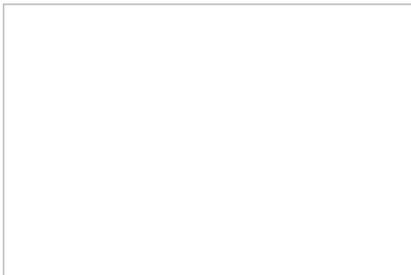
Beyond that, anti-Trump Republicans treat his voters like immoral enablers of a malignant boob. Should Mr. Trump lose decisively in November they'll lord it over everyone, say "I told you so," and accept what they imagine will be forelock-tugging apologies. Then they will get to work burying not only Mr. Trump but his issues.

That's where the future of the GOP will be fought, and found: on whether Trumpism can be defeated along with Mr. Trump.

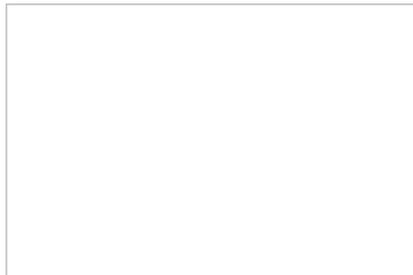
Mr. Trump would care about that if he cared about that.

I end with a new word, at least new to me. A friend called it to my attention. It speaks of the moment we're in. It is "kakistocracy," from the Greek. It means government by the worst persons, by the least qualified or most unprincipled. We're on our way there, aren't we? We're going to have to make our way through it together.

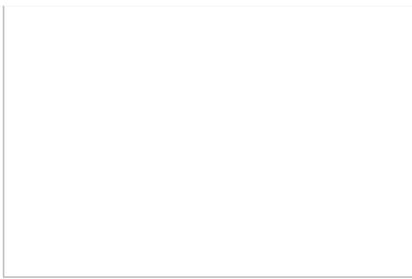
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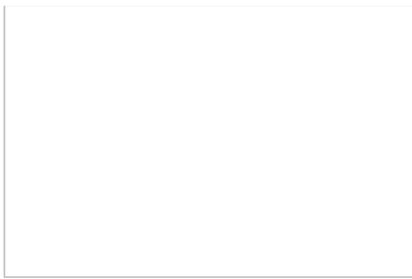


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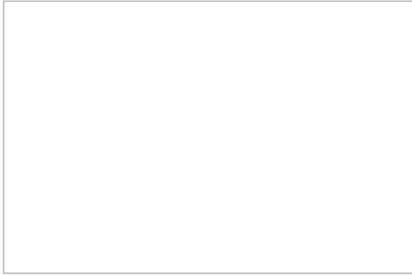
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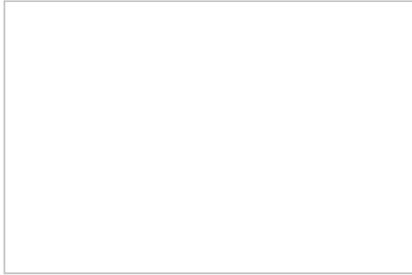
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