

Political Reality May Finally Be Catching Up To Trump

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One of the most astounding things about the campaign and presidency of Donald Trump has been the resilience of his supporters despite the President's outrages, insults, flip-flopping, backflip-flopping, and lack of policy accomplishments, essentially defying the conventional political calculus. Trump is truly the "Teflon Don". Much of that is because Trump has an enormous propaganda machine behind him and knows how to play the media like a fiddle. It is also indicative of how limited the conventional political calculus has become.

But it looks like political reality is finally going to catch up to Trump. Trump's campaign promise to renegotiate all these "bad" trade deals was music to the ears of the manufacturing base in the Midwest and allowed him to make inroads in the traditional Democratic strongholds of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania as well as swing states like North Carolina and squeak by with an Electoral College victory. His promise to repeal and replace Obamacare appealed to those with high insurance premiums, many of whom probably didn't even know whether they were covered by the ACA or not. And his promise to build a border wall had enormous appeal to white nationalists afraid of the rising power of minority populations in this country as well as to the white Christian evangelical community.

Yet, well over one year into his Presidency, his major accomplishment has been the appointment of Neil Gorsuch to Merrick Garland's stolen seat on the Supreme Court, a result that primarily only has appeal to his evangelical supporters. The tax cut has proven to be meaningless for his base and is seen even by them as a huge handout to the top 1%. And his continual promises that his supporters will see progress on his various promises "very soon" is beginning to wear thin, especially with the GOP in control of both houses of Congress.

Moreover, Trump seems to have come to believe the snake oil he was selling and clearly thinks that following through on his "promises" will be the key to Republicans maintaining full control of Congress in the fall. Additionally, he also believes that, as he declared in his convention acceptance speech, "I alone can fix it", and is now essentially ignoring any advice that goes against his instinct and belief. That means that Trump is moving ahead with a major trade war with China, and possibly with Canada and Mexico, as well as doing everything in his power to pretend that his border wall is actually being built and that the immigrant hordes are being kept at bay.

The problem for Trump is that, while his approach may make great campaign fodder when you are out of power, it creates serious problems within his own base and the Trump/Republican coalition when it is actually implemented. When it comes to trade, Trump's tariffs are already having a negative effect. Even though the aluminum and steel tariffs have been watered down with exemptions for numerous countries, the **price that US companies pay for aluminum has nearly doubled**. Whatever increase in domestic steel and aluminum production that the tariffs inspire will hardly offset price increases like that.

In addition, China responded to those tariffs by **imposing their own on US pork and fruit**, duties focused on hitting Trump's rural, agricultural base of support, especially in the Midwest and West Coast. Trump has proposed additional tariffs on \$150 billion worth of Chinese goods and the Chinese have responded in kind, with tariffs **focused primarily on soybeans**, another important and widespread product in the agricultural Midwest.

Similarly, Trump's border wall and immigration crackdown are also creating difficulties for his base. The **continual shortage of agricultural workers** is being exacerbated by the immigration crackdown, with crops going unpicked. His proposed border wall will need to expropriate private land in order to actually get built. Even in Texas, the majority of the state and an **even larger proportion of border land-owners oppose it**.

When it comes to health care, the attempt to repeal Obamacare made a lot of the country aware that the ACA actually benefitted them and, combined with virtually no effort from Trump to actually replace it with something cheaper and better, created a firestorm that barely kept the program alive. Now, voters are **more worried about obtaining health care next year than any other issue** and actually blame Trump and the GOP for not bringing down costs.

A few days ago, Robert Leonard, a radio news director in Iowa, wrote that bankers for farmers in his area had said “that with commodity prices down and the tariffs imposed, **approximately 10 percent of our farmers probably won’t make it this year**, and 10 percent more will likely fail next year. They also shared the news that in Iowa, larger agribusinesses are buying up smaller farms that are in financial trouble, and that people are starting to make comparisons to the farm crisis of the 1980s, when approximately 10,000 Iowa farmers lost their farms.” And this is merely the result of the initial round of tariffs. The full impact, if the tariffs on the full \$150 billion get enacted and the Chinese retaliate, has not even begun to be felt.

Now, it’s possible that Trump is just bluffing as usual. That appears to be what has happened with the NAFTA renegotiations, where, after initial bluff and bluster, it appears that a **deal will be reached** that will probably not contain any radical changes. So far, the only tariffs that have actually been implemented are the ones on steel and aluminum, with lots of exemptions, and now primarily focused on the Chinese. There are unconfirmed rumors that negotiations are ongoing with the Chinese. If those negotiations actually bear fruit, it may look a lot like NAFTA, more of a tweak than a major change.

Trump may be taking a similar tack with the border wall, knowing that it will never get built. Dispatching the National Guard and attacking California and Mexico are just mere deflections for that failure.

The problem is that, at this point in his term, the failure to follow through on his promises brings almost as much criticism from elements of his base as actually fulfilling them. **Anne Coulter has been ripping Trump** for not only his failure to get funding for the wall but also for signing the latest budget deal. Meanwhile, Midwest legislators are lobbying Trump to back off on his tariff threats. **Ben Sasse, ever mindful of which way the wind is blowing, said of Trump tariff threats**, “Hopefully the president is just blowing off steam again but, if he’s even half-serious, this is nuts...Let’s absolutely take on Chinese bad behavior, but with a plan that punishes them instead of us. This is the dumbest possible way to do this.”

Trump has defied conventional political reality for a long, long time. But, eventually, he needed to govern. Promising to bring back coal and steel sounds good until that actually costs manufacturing jobs. Promising to renegotiate “bad” trade deals sounds great until it decimates farmers and ranchers dependent on exports. Yes, Trump is still a master fraudster and he has an enormous and powerful propaganda machine behind him. But there is no doubt that Trump is on the ballot again this November and his merely holding together the Trump base will probably not even be enough to prevent the Democrats from winning the House. And now, the conflict between Trump’s campaign promises and his actual policies is finally beginning to fracture even his own incredibly resilient base.

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