

THE DEVOSES AND A PENCE PARDON FOR TRUMP

WaPo wrote a long story about how two DeVos machine Republicans, Mike Shirkey and Lee Chatfield, went to the White House and declined to join in Donald Trump's coup attempt. The story either chose not to mention or simply preceded the reports that the lawmakers spent the night at Trump Hotel, running up big bills for Dom Perignon, which doesn't seem like the thing you'd do if you had just turned down a bribe to steal the election.

Presumably because it was written for a national audience, the story didn't get into what ruthless shitholes these men are. These are men who've presided over attempts to undermine Gretchen Whitmer's COVID response and refused to prohibit guns from the capitol building. And while Chatfield knocked down an effort to impeach Whitmer, Shirkey has largely facilitated the kind of eliminationist rhetoric that led to an assassination plot against Whitmer (both condemned the plot after it was thwarted).

MI journalist Susan Demas did a thread on what awful untrustworthy men they are.

Amid reports that Ronna not-Romney McDaniel is the favorite to become RNC Chair again – which stalwarts view as Trump's attempt to run the RNC as his own operation, undercutting any challengers in 2024 – I find this quote in the WaPo story particularly interesting.

A fresh indication that Trump's options are dwindling came Friday from an organization with close ties to his education secretary, Betsy DeVos. The conservative Michigan Freedom Fund, which the DeVos family finances, issued the following statement Friday: "The election is over. The results are in, and here in Michigan, they're not going

to change.”

There have been hints that Betsy and Dick were tiring of Trump already. Betsy's former Chief of Staff, Josh Venable, even joined one of the anti-Trump groups during the election.

That has interesting implications for the fate of two men – Betsy's brother Erik Prince and Trump himself.

To my mind, Erik Prince is one of Trump's easiest pardons, both for his exposure for false statements to Congress about his back channel with Russia and for his efforts to sell mercenary services to China. That's true because, unlike some others (like Roger Stone), Prince successfully lied his way through testimony without generating any other known legal exposure. He told his lies, did his service to Trump, and so couldn't be forced to testify differently once his Fifth Amendment privileges disappeared. And his exposure on China – to the extent that Billy Barr hasn't already killed this investigation beyond repair – doesn't implicate Trump, and so is easy and clean for a President seeking to pay back loyalty. Plus, Prince is a big donor. What's not to like?!?!

But the DeVoses are also very close to Mike Pence (he got Betsy hired, not Trump). And many of Trump's *other* pardons – of people that could implicate Trump himself in crimes if they lost their Fifth Amendment protections – require that he also limit his own legal exposure (and of course, he can only do this on federal cases). He may well be planning a self-pardon, but a safer legal option would be an early resignation followed by a pardon from Pence.

In my opinion, Pence has a real incentive against such a pardon. That's true, in part, because giving a far less controversial pardon to Richard Nixon really doomed Gerald Ford's otherwise reasonable legacy. Pence spends a lot of time in Grand Rapids, where Ford's tainted

history is palpable.

That's also true because Pence has further political ambitions. They may not be *real* ambitions, but a former Vice President would always consider himself a candidate for the Presidency. And counterintuitively, pardoning Trump would actually hurt those ambitions. That's true because he's not the most obvious inheritor of Trump's legacy. Mike Pompeo has a higher profile and the same cachet among the Evangelical right. Don Jr has even suggested he might run, and if he did he could tap right into the furor his father created. Unlike both of them, Pence has mostly been a background figurehead, one who will be blamed for Trump's biggest failing, on COVID. So if Pence pardoned Trump, it would only serve to allow one of the other Trump flunkies from capitalizing on his brand to become the presumptive 2024 nominee; it would hurt his own chances.

Still, unlike Pompeo, Pence is not inextricably linked to Trump's crimes. Indeed, one of the bravest witnesses during impeachment, Jennifer Williams, was his aide. She even corrected her testimony to provide damning details after the fact. Everything we've seen from the Mueller Report also makes it clear that Pence was not in the loop of some of the most devious efforts to undermine America.

But Pence likely knows *of* some of that crime. He has heard some of the details of the Russian "collusion." More importantly, he surely knows how a series of Trump campaign managers have engaged in grift that pursue ever more outrageous ways of getting rich off the process of pitching Trump, with Brad Parscale's version only the most recent. Assuming he's as insulated from this potentially criminal behavior as I think he he is, refusing to pardon Trump would be a way to undercut Trump's legacy without lifting a finger. Even if Joe Biden's Attorney General didn't aggressively pursue new investigations, there are so many known open ones as to make Trump's ongoing criminal

exposure hard to contain.

That puts Pence – and with him, his close allies the DeVoses – in a remarkable position. To be clear, they are every bit as evil as Trump. We should assume however they wield that power will do little to help average Americans. But (caveats about Erik aside), they are differently evil than Trump.

And if they've decided Trump's time is up, they have leverage that others don't.