

DISASTER DEMOCRACY: CAN SOMETHING BE SALVAGED FROM TRUMP'S MELTDOWN?

The WaPo has two panicked pieces about Trump.

First, there's a David Ignatius column that correctly notes we're in a really dangerous place until Biden's win is certified (I'd say, until Inauguration). Along the way, Ignatius points to a terrifying possibility that might (or might not) explain a sudden Kash Patel flight: that he was being considered to replace Chris Wray.

Kash Patel, chief of staff to acting defense secretary Christopher C. Miller, returned home "abruptly" from an Asia trip in early December, according to Fox News correspondent Jennifer Griffin. Patel didn't explain, but in mid-December Trump discussed with colleagues the possibility that Patel might replace Christopher A. Wray as FBI director, one official said. Wray remains in his job.

And another terrifying possibility that, Ignatius notes, is just speculation: that Trump's flunkies may have tried to split NSA and CyberComm to install Ezra Cohen-Watnick as the head of NSA.

But why did Trump loyalists suggest the NSA-Cyber Command split in the first place? Some officials speculate that the White House may have planned to install a new NSA chief, perhaps Ezra Cohen-Watnick, the young conservative recently installed to oversee Pentagon intelligence activities.

To stave off these terrifying, but

unsubstantiated, possibilities, Ignatius advises that some wise Republicans go to the White House and tell Trump to stop.

Trump won't succeed in subverting the Constitution, but he can do enormous damage over the next weeks. Before Jan. 6, a delegation of senior Republicans should visit him at the White House and insist, emphatically: Biden has won. This must stop.

Meanwhile, another WaPo piece describes the vacuum at the White House as Trump ignores people – like Steve Mnuchin – who've long been able to coax some actual responsible policy actions out of him, the kind of people Ignatius might have in mind to talk to sense into Trump.

Mostly, this story is one of a long line of stories on how Trump repays loyalty with humiliation.

His demand for \$2,000 stimulus checks is a direct rejection of the \$600 checks that Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin had personally proposed and negotiated with Democrats and Republicans. Now, Trump's rejection of the deal has confounded many leaders on Capitol Hill because they had thought Mnuchin negotiated the package on behalf of the president. The treasury chief's standing with many lawmakers is now in tatters just days before a full-blown crisis is set to occur.

The president's denunciation of the agreement represented a stunning public broadside against his own treasury secretary, who for four years loyally shielded the president's tax returns, endured repeated presidential tirades in private, and defended even Trump's most incendiary and contradictory remarks. Through it all, Mnuchin had emerged with the unique ability to walk a tightrope

between Trump and congressional leaders, serving as an emissary in difficult negotiations. That all ended on Tuesday, when Trump posted a video on Twitter ridiculing the agreement.

But the more important bit describes how Trump decided, on his own, to blow up the bill that Mnuchin had negotiated. Mark Meadows helped him do so, even though he opposed both Trump's call for \$2,000 checks and (I think) the vindictive video blowing up the bill itself.

Trump's shocking move to possibly blow up the agreement appears to have been his idea alone, according to two people briefed on the matter by White House staff.

White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, who had earlier this month successfully talked Trump out of demanding \$2,000 stimulus payments, helped orchestrate the video released by the White House. But Meadows did not come up with the idea for it and was widely seen internally as opposing the move, according to two people with direct knowledge of the matter.

That is, in the midst of a story describing how yet another loyal Trump supporter was treated like shit (as were the Republicans in Congress who believed Mnuchin could speak for Trump), WaPo describes how Trump is vindictively staging confrontations in defiance of the advice from his closest advisors, with no care for the millions of Americans who get harmed in the process.

This is the man the Republican party has loyally defended in the face of ever increasing allegations of corruption and disloyalty to the country, repaying their loyalty by blowing up their attempt to feign concern about struggling Americans just in time for the Georgia run-off.

It is undeniable we're in a dangerous place right now – because of the armed gangs supporting the President, because he'd love to start a war on his way out, because his temper tantrum is having very real effects for human beings.

But for better and worse, there are no responsible Republicans – or even immediate family members – who can save the day. Those who know Trump best have left town in an attempt to dissociate themselves from what is coming that will leave lasting damage for Joe Biden to clean up.

Nevertheless, we've reached an important moment, where Trump has turned on virtually all remaining institutional parts of the Republican party, from the judges and justices he installed to the Senators who refused to call him on his attempt to coerce Ukraine. Yes, we will still have Matt Gaetz and Jim Jordan, yes, we will newly have Tommy Tuberville.

But significant parts of the Republican party will, because of this tantrum, be prepared to turn on him as soon as he loses the power of the Presidency. And that may provide a way out.

Naomi Klein invented a term "Disaster Capitalism" for the way members of both parties use disasters as an opportunity to loot or facilitate future looting. That's a risk here. But Republicans will have an incentive to distance themselves from Trump. And that may provide an opening to recover from Trumpism.