

LOOKING TO WASHINGTON

Death By a Thousand Cuts?

Big stories make big news, but the sum of many little stories may be just as important.

We are all familiar with President Trump's "successes," such as withdrawal from the Paris climate accords and gaining confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Gorsuch. The ways that the resistance to Trump has succeeded, such as delaying and partially blocking the travel ban and the massive opposition and (as of this writing) successful mobilization to block the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, are also well known.

But the devil is in the details. The malevolent impact of the Administration's executive orders, regulatory and deregulatory actions, personnel decisions, and withdrawals of grants is beginning to add up.

The New Agenda Foundation's Amy Siskind reminds us that authoritarian governments often take hold through incremental changes that seem shocking at first but quickly become normalized. "Experts in authoritarianism advise to keep a list of things subtly changing around you, so you'll remember," she suggests.

Many of these "small stories" are catalogued on a weekly basis by Siskind's *Medium.com* (https://medium.com/@Amy_Siskind), the source of most of the examples below. Other, similar lists are maintained by

- *TrumpWatch* (https://www.nrdc.org/trump-watch?gclid=Cj0KEQjwv_fKBRCG8a3ao-OQuZ8BEiQAvpHp6KR5rdX-YmqM4MN_SvTbXkkboSjT24r3W6oKGclwgkMaAqNQ8P8HAQ)
- *ClimateDesk* (<http://www.climatedesk.org/>)
- *The "Everything Terrible Trump Has Done So Far" Omnibus* (<https://www.dailykos.com/story/2017/3/21/1645904/-The-Everything-Terrible-Trump-Has-Done-So-Far-Omnibus-Week-9>).

What follows is just a small sampling of actions by the Trump administration.

Civil rights

The Trump administration has made it clear that it has little interest in protecting civil rights for racial and ethnic minorities, women, LBGTQ men and women, Jews, and others.

1. The *White House Council for Women and Girls* has gone dark and will likely be disbanded. The council was created by President Obama in 2009 to monitor the impact of policy changes and liaise with women's groups.
2. The Department of Education announced it will scale back civil rights investigations at public schools and universities, including rolling back efforts to end campus sexual assault and protect transgender students.
3. The Trump administration will not collect LGBTQ census data. At a Senate hearing, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos wouldn't commit to stripping federal funding from private schools that discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. The Commerce Department removed sexual orientation and gender identification from its anti-discrimination policies.
4. The Department of Homeland Security pulled an Obama administration grant to *Life Against Hate*, a group dedicated to countering neo-Nazis and white supremacists. The State Department's anti-Semitism monitoring office will be unstaffed as of July 1, despite the fact that anti-Semitic incidents have almost doubled in 2017.

Energy and the Environment

The Trump administration has no interest in protecting the environment. In the four months since Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt took office, he has moved to undo, delay or otherwise block more than 30 rules intended to produce a safer environment and reduce global warming.

5. Pruitt filed a proposal of intent to undo or weaken the Clean Power Plan, which aimed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from electrical power generation by 32 percent within twenty-five years relative to 2005 levels. The plan is focused on reducing emissions from coal-burning power plants.
6. In late June, the EPA filed a legal plan to repeal a rule curbing pollution in the nation's waterways.
7. The EPA delayed a rule that would require fossil fuel companies to rein in leaks of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, from oil and gas wells.
8. After meeting with the chief executive of Dow Chemical, Pruitt reversed a ban on the use of Dow's Dursban and Lorsban pesticides. These contain a chemical called chlorpyrifos, which the EPA's own scientists have said is linked to damage of children's nervous systems.

Safety and Rights of Working People

Despite its claims to speak for working people, the White House is systematically dismantling regulations intended to protect people on the job.

9. The Labor Department will hold off on enforcing a rule requiring certain employers to submit records of job-related injuries and illnesses to the government for posting online. Employers who were worried about potential employees knowing the dangers facing them can rest easy.
10. The Trump administration plans to disband the Labor Department division responsible for policing discrimination among federal contractors.
11. President Trump signed a measure that will make it easier for firms doing business with the government to get contracts even if they abuse their employees. The measure rolls back President Obama's Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces Executive Order, that required any company bidding on a contract of \$500,000 or more to disclose violations of minimum wage and overtime laws, health and safety regulations, and collective bargaining and civil rights laws and regulations. Those disclosures then had to be taken into account during the bidding process.

Crime and Policing

The U.S. has the highest rate of incarcerating in the world. Black Americans are disproportionately singled out by the criminal justice system. So what does the Trump administration propose to do about it? Make it worse!

12. Despite bipartisan support for reform, Attorney General Jeff Sessions has instituted tougher criminal charging and sentencing policies, which will disproportionately impact people of color. Sessions ordered federal prosecutors to "charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offense" in drug cases, even when that would trigger mandatory minimum sentencing.
13. The Department of Justice has abandoned efforts to rein in discriminatory policing policies. It postponed approval of a consent decree to clean up the Baltimore police Department, and it will "review" agreements previously reached between the Department's civil rights division and troubled local police forces nationwide.
14. Sessions reversed an Obama administration order to phase out the use of private for-profit prisons to hold federal inmates. Over 10% of the current federal prison population are held in such facilities. Studies have shown that private prisons are not as cost-effective or as safe as government-run facilities.

In future articles, we will list some of the actions with respect to schools, immigration, the free press, and voting rights.