Opinion



U.S. President Donald Trump gestures during a meeting on immigration with a bipartisan group of House and Senate members at the White House Jan. 9. (CNS/Shawn Thew, EPA)



by Colman McCarthy

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Elect a racist, expect bigotry.
Elect a liar, expect deceit.
Elect a blowhard, expect guff.
Elect a bully, expect insults.
Elect a fusspot, expect fussing.
Elect a sexual predator, expect groping.
Elect a fool, expect folly.
Elect a vulgarian, expect crudity.
Elect a clown, expect a circus.
Elect a gasbag, expect fumes.
Elect a militarist, expect fire and fury.
Elect an egotist, expect courtiers.
Elect a braggart, expect bunk.
Elect an ideologue, expect "Fox & Friends."
Elect Donald Trump, expect Donald (I'm a genius) Trump.

A year into the presidency of a liar, blowhard, bully, fusspot, sexual predator, fool, vulgarian, clown, gasbag, militarist, egotist, braggart and ideologue, a question: Who elected him?

Not me and not you, unless on Nov. 8, 2016, in McComb County, Michigan, York County, Pennsylvania, or Waukesha County, Wisconsin, your vote was cast for Donald Trump. According to the Cook Political Report, it was 10,704 voters in Michigan, 44,307 in Pennsylvania and 22,748 in Wisconsin, and specifically in those three counties, who decided the Electoral College win. The numbers mean that out of a total of some 139 million votes in 50 states, it was 77,759 votes in three states and three counties that swung it for Trump and made the nearly three million more votes for Hillary Clinton irrelevant.

After a year of enduring Trump's flaws, the temptation is to focus only on his character defects and not on what truly matters: the serial harmfulness of his personal attacks, ones that are real and extend well beyond applause lines for his alleged base.

Journalists "are among the most dishonest people I've ever met," he rages, smearing then as "disgusting," "the worst," "slime," "scum" and "sleaze." They are "a stain on America." They "really don't like our country" and are "out of control."

It's not clear what Trump means by "control" but a look around the world where some controllers are at work offers a clue. The Committee to Protect Journalists, a bipartisan nonprofit based in New York and a group I joined at its founding in 1982, reports that in 2017, at least 42 journalists where killed while doing their jobs. In 2016 it was 48. In the four previous years, the toll ranged from 61 to 74. The committee believes the motive for about two thirds of the deaths is retaliation for reporting news that unknown parties wanted suppressed.

When they aren't being killed, journalists in record number are being imprisoned: 262 last year, 259 in 2016. Elana Beiser, the editorial director of the committee, has it exactly right:

> "Far from isolating repressive countries for their authoritarian behavior, the United States, in particular, has cozied up to strongmen such as Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Chinese president Xi Jinping. At the same time, President Donald Trump's nationalistic rhetoric, fixation on Islamic extremism, and insistence on labeling critical media 'fake news' serves to reinforce the framework of accusations and legal charges that allow such leaders to preside over the jailing of journalists."

Currently the world's leading cager of news people is Turkey: 154 imprisoned the past two years. With human rights groups, including Amnesty International, condemning Erdogan's policies, he has found favor with "my dear friend, Donald." The pair of autocrats displayed their chumminess at a September meeting at the United Nations in New York. "We have a great friendship," exuded Trump, giving his dictator bud "very high marks" for running his country.

At a Washington meeting months before in the oval office, Trump gushed that it was a "great honor" to have Erdogan at the White House. Amnesty International had a different take: "President Trump and President Erdogan are contributing to a global climate of toxic and dehumanizing policies."

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It's imaginable that Trump envies Erdogan who jails reporters while all Trump can do is bluster, as he did in the prophetic 1990 Playboy interview: "When somebody tries to sucker punch me, when they're after my ass, I push back a hell of a lot harder than I was pushed in the first place. … Those people don't come back for seconds."

But they do, as when The Washington Post recently punched with a story about the more than 2,000 falsehoods Trump spewed he in the first year of his presidency. As the lies continue, it's assured that reporters will be back for seconds. And thirds, fourths, fifths and hundredths.

[Colman McCarthy, a former Washington Post columnist, directs The Center for Teaching Peace in Washington.]