Opinion
NCR Voices



President Donald Trump and UFC CEO Dana White observe the National Anthem before the UFC Freedom 250, the mixed martial arts event produced by the Ultimate Fighting Championship June 14, 2026, in the Grand Foyer of the White House. (White House/Abe McNatt)



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Last week, I traveled to Washington, D.C. for a series of meetings. As regular readers may know, I lived in Washington for 37 years, from 1980 until 2017, so it is always fun to be back to visit old haunts and connect with old friends.

Not so fun was the sense of profound concern about the future of our democracy that featured in virtually every conversation. We can joke about the vulgar, oversized American flags President Donald Trump has installed on the north and south lawns of the White House: At a distance, you think you are coming to a used car dealership. But, the sense of genuine fear is palpable and it came up over lunches and dinners with both Democrats and Republicans, young and old, professors and journalists, even someone who worked for the president during his first term.

For most of us who live in the hinterlands, it seems like there is not anything we can do about the president's consistent attacks on our democracy and its values: destroying foreign aid programs that save millions of lives, executive orders aimed at disenfranchising voters, undermining the Constitution and the system of self-governance it created.

In Washington, there are people whose day jobs entail confronting these various threats Trump poses to our nation.

One night, I attended a reception for Trevor Potter and the Campaign Legal Center. Potter, who was general counsel to both of Sen. John McCain's presidential campaigns and chair of the Federal Election Commission, is a singularly impressive figure in the defense of democracy. When Trump issues an executive order on a Friday afternoon, it is Potter and his team that work through the weekend so they are ready with a court challenge first thing Monday morning.

When the Trump administration demands state voter files, for example, hoping to strike names off the lists and pretend people are not properly registered to vote, as

they did in Maine, California, Michigan and elsewhere, it is the Campaign Legal Center that drafts the legal challenges.

Beyond the immediate threats to the upcoming midterms, the center works to limit the influence, or at least demand public disclosure, of campaign contributions. This year, according to Politico, Super PACs that do not disclose the source of their money until after the election have spent $48 million in the primaries. The Campaign Legal Center also fights highly partisan gerrymandering efforts and has worked to defend the Voting Rights Act. The next time someone asks what can be done about the corruption of Trumpism, tell them about the Campaign Legal Center and their work fighting the corruption of our electoral system.

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The AFL-CIO has also challenged the Trump administration on several fronts, including Trump's efforts to sack civil servants and replace them with political loyalists. Still, at the AFL-CIO's national convention, something else caught my attention: They passed a resolution praising Pope Leo XIV. After several "Whereas" clauses, the resolution stated, "THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the AFL-CIO hereby honors Pope Leo XIV as an ally to labor for his commitment to address working class issues and for his global fight for social and economic justice; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, we reaffirm our commitment to the principles of Rerum Novarum, advocating for policies that uphold the rights and dignity of all workers."

As we look past this miserable time of Trump and Le Pen and Orban and Farage, to what we might call the post-post-liberal era, Pope Leo XIV's voice and vision, the work of groups like the Campaign Legal Center and the collective strength of organized labor will all play a part.

And if you happen to read Russian, you should write a book about de-Stalinization. Come 2029, I think it will be a hot topic. Look at the crowds who gathered to see Trump's name taken off the Kennedy Center!

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