

*Opinion by David Rothkopf*

***It was the cringiest of times. It was the craziest of times.***

Welcome to a moment in which one of the most consequential debates Americans (and people the world across) are having is about whether the President of the United States is just a national embarrassment or has full-on blown a gasket. Is Donald Trump just three fries short of a happy meal, or is he full-on howling-at-the-moon mad?

One senior official in the last Trump Administration told The Daily Beast of presidential appearances in the past few days that Trump “has definitely lost a step.”

With respect to one of those appearances, Trump’s meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, MSNBC’s [Lawrence O’Donnell offered a similar observation](#), arguing that the president is “clearly off his game.” Like leaders in other recent presidential meetings, Carney “both humbled and humiliated Trump at the same time without Donald Trump having the slightest idea it was happening,” O’Donnell said, labeling Trump’s oft-repeated proposal that the U.S. annex Canada as “demented.”

That’s a sentiment that many others have also suggested in response to presidential initiatives—from [seizing the Panama Canal](#) to watching a TV movie about Alcatraz and hours later suggesting the decrepit prison facility, which has been shut down for more than half a century, [should be reopened](#).

Each day we are forced to ask anew, and with more urgency, whether Trump is just an ignorant buffoon not up to the job or whether he is what they might have in the old days called catawampus, past-it, mentally unwell or even broken. How would you categorize the assertion that he doesn’t know whether he is obligated to uphold the Constitution? Has he gone [completely Mad King](#)?

Do his top advisors [slather him with praise](#) in ways that would make Kim Jong Un blush because Trump is just an egomaniac who needs to be surrounded by fluffers? Or is it something worse than that? Is he so fragile they fear the

consequences if they don't slide on the knee pads and polish his balls until they shine like the rest of his cheeseball throne room?

And what do the choices he has made about his team of top advisors say about him? Some have clearly been chosen simply because they will follow him blindly. It's why Marco Rubio gets an additional job every week. Recent performances in front of Congressional committees reveal that others really are just the emptiest of vessels—see for example Kristi Noem (who was this week [fileted like a haddock by Senator Chris Murphy](#) over her mismanagement at DHS) or Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy, who has been more [out of touch](#) than the radio silence-paralyzed air traffic controllers who work for him. Putting a wrestling executive who [doesn't know the difference between artificial intelligence and a steak sauce](#) in charge of the future of education in America is just demented.

But other choices Trump has made represent something much worse—something warped and dangerous. They seem to have been made with the intent of actively doing damage to the United States. HHS Secretary [Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.](#) tops that list. (In a particularly dark irony given the subject of this article, among the areas where Kennedy is embracing the looniest ideas and doing the most damage is mental health, as Norm Ornstein and I discussed on our [“Words Matter” podcast](#) this week.) He's nuts. Picking him was nuts.

RFK Jr. is a man who may actually be, among 360 million Americans, the very worst possible choice to head our department of health and human services. / Andrew Harnik / Getty Images

But crazy begets crazy, and this week we have seen how it is compounded atop our government in many ways. One such example comes courtesy of RFK, Jr., whose first choice for surgeon general, Janette Nesheiwat, flamed out because she may have misrepresented her credentials. Nasheiwat was immediately replaced by a new nominee who [doesn't actually have a license to practice medicine](#) and is rather an anti-vaxx peddler of meshuggah medical theories.

Then consider Trump's right-wing extremist choice to be the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, Ed Martin, whose nomination [crashed and burned](#) because of crumbling GOP support. Trump decided the right person to replace him was Fox News legal commentator [Jeanine Pirro](#), a woman whose own producer at Fox called her “nuts” too.

Not only this, but Trump must think Americans are “nuts” too, and not just because his policies are driving us so. How else to interpret his demonstrating that he has no idea how global trade works? How else to explain the threats to [invade Greenland](#) or the recent decision to shift intelligence assets to back up his bonkers threats?

It is an insult to the collective intelligence of the planet if he decides to call the Gulf of Mexico the [Gulf of America](#); if he appoints, as he just did, a former [Real Housewife of New Jersey to the Holocaust Museum board](#); or if he suggest that everything’s hunky-dory with his wife when she has only [shown up for work 14 days](#) so far since inauguration.

Sure, it’s hardly important whether the woman at his side is the real first lady or an inflatable HOV lane dummy. But when it’s someone deranged like [Laura Loomer](#) or a sociopath like Stephen Miller who plays along with the president’s own batshit impulses to advance their own dangerous interests, it matters. Because sane or not (and he’s definitely not), when [Miller says they’re “looking at” suspending habeas corpus](#), it is a gravely serious matter.

When Trump is getting personnel advice from other folks who seem certifiable, like right wing “influencer” Laura Loomer (second from right) who this week declared the newly chosen Pope Leo XIV to be a “woke Marxist,” it a sign of something several degrees worse than presidential incompetence. / Win McNamee / Getty Images

And working tirelessly to destroy our environment, our economy, our system of justice, our national defenses, and our democracy? Working to do it each and every day? Working to do it regardless of the law or the consequences for future generations of Americans? That’s not just a guy who’s off his feed.

We can, of course, further debate which is crazier: Trump’s behavior or electing a guy like him in the first place. In fact, the problems began with his election and will not end until he is stopped by time or by checks and balances in our system or by the electorate.

But there is also a more chilling possibility that we should not rule out. It is also possible that every bad hire, every profoundly destructive policy initiative, every toxic choice made by Trump is not in fact due to mental defect but, on the contrary, is intentional. That it is consciously thought out and well-executed, part of a plan

with the clear intent of destroying our systems as we have known them and further empowering our enemies at home and abroad.

That's not as funny as the late-night comedian jokes about our slumped, spray-tanned, reality TV windbag president. But it—the possibility that Trump is just the goofy, greedy, generally reprehensible superannuated hand puppet of others whose agenda he is being used to advance—is also, of all the possibilities we may consider for the off-the-rails performance of this government, by far the most likely.

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