


# Substantial Disruption



## Happy Birthday, or Something

By Mike Tully

In the Hawaiian Islands, the first birthday is a very big deal. The celebrated “[first baby luau](#)” is a coveted invitation in social circles and has been for generations. The first birthday is important throughout Polynesian culture and elsewhere – Korea, for example. The importance of the first birthday has its roots in much earlier times, before advances in medical science reduced a heartbreaking frequency of infant mortality. Contemporary Hawaiians use the first baby luau to celebrate and honor a new life with a view to the future. Their ancestors celebrated because the honoree still inhabited the planet. The earliest first luaus were focused less on optimism and celebration than survival. Congratulations, you’re a year old and still alive. That’s worth celebrating all by itself.

Which brings us to the first anniversary of the Czar’s administration, which was more like the ancient first birthday celebration than the modern one. Congratulations, you’re a year old and still alive – barely. On anniversary day, January 20<sup>th</sup>, the federal government was shut down by political infighting after the self-professed master dealmaker proved incapable of actually making one. There was nobody there to blow out the candle.

The governmental shutdown ended quickly as the Democrats who led the shutdown (with the help of Republican defectors) wisely chose not to overplay their hand. Nihilism is not a useful tactic when the Czar is better at it. The continuing resolution (CR) that reopened the federal government will barely make it past Ground Hog Day, which passes for a legislative breakthrough in our attention-span challenged national legislature. The CR expires on February 8, at which time we are liable to witness another shutdown – speaking of Groundhog Day. Congressional leaders declare that this short extension will give them time to negotiate a longer lasting resolution – maybe even an actual budget! Don’t place your chips on the possibility. In contemporary Washington, “negotiate” is just another word for “reload.”

The Czar’s power source is also his Achilles heel. He built his political brand on white identity politics, starting with his deranged and racist “birther” campaign and continuing through the infamous “poop crater” meeting in which he denounced dark-skinned Haiti and Africa and pined for more immigrants from whiter-than-white Norway. His embrace of white identity politics gave him his electoral base, which remains loyal. They are his foundation, and he knows it. If he loses them he might as well pull up stakes and console himself with the Stormy Daniels *du jour* in Mar-a-Lago, or Bedminster, or wherever Melania is not. When he rejected a bipartisan immigration compromise by denouncing Haiti and Africa (and, by clear inference, people with dark skin), he was singing from the white identity hymnal.

The block of Democratic senators whose joint action led to the shutdown based their action on their desire to reinstate protections for beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, a favorite *bête noire* of the Czar's base. He tied DACA recipients to the metaphorical railroad tracks on September 5<sup>th</sup> when he decided to eliminate their protections, and the Democrats hoped to pressure him into untying the knots. Unfortunately for the Democrats and DACA recipients, the loudest of the competing voices in the Czar's head are his white-identity political base, whether voiced by gasbag Rush Limbaugh, Senator Tom Cotton, or evil cyborg Stephen Miller. If he rejects them, they will tie him to a rock and nibble at his liver.

Therein lies a dilemma, because the American people, based on [polling data](#), overwhelmingly support DACA recipients and would like to give them a path to citizenship. Democratic and Republican elected officials can read polls and know that resisting such a well-established public sentiment is politically risky. But for the Czar, resisting his white identity political base is even riskier. They not only oppose helping DACA recipients, they oppose current immigration policy and many favor returning to a racist, white-friendly policy like the one adopted in 1924. So, apparently, does the Czar, who [told a gathering in Phoenix](#) on August 31, 2016, he wants "To keep immigration levels, measured by population share, within historical norms." Forget about terms like "chain migration" and "lotteries," even DACA. In white identity politics, immigration policy is about pigmentation.

This is where the Achilles Heel metaphor comes in. The Czar cannot support DACA recipients without risking alienating his white identity political base. He cannot take that risk; it's the only base he's got. But if he listens to them and the news media is riddled with images of charismatic, young patriotic *de facto* Americans being ripped from their families and jobs, the outcry is likely to drown out the white identity contingent. The Czar must either reject the DACA recipients and preserve his base, or reject his base and hope he can build a new coalition from the millions of voters he has spent his initial year alienating.

The media will be filled with stories about the economy, trade policy, Korea, and, of course, the Mueller investigation. But the biggest political story of 2018 and beyond will be the role, and likely demise, of white identity politics in America.