

Substantial Disruption



Welcome to the Pence Presidency

By Mike Tully

The pellet with the poison's in the flagon with the dragon; the vessel with the pestle has the brew that is true.

- Danny Kaye, "[The Court Jester](#)," 1955

“Laughable and absurd.” That’s how Vice-President Mike Pence described [a report in the New York Times](#) that he was conducting a shadow presidential campaign focused on the 2020 election. He [denounced](#) the *Times* article as “disgraceful and offensive to me, my family and our entire team.” “The allegations in this article are categorically false,” he protested, “and represent just the latest attempt by the media to divide this administration.” Suggesting the *Times* information was – you guessed it – “fake news,” he tweeted, “my entire team will continue to focus all our efforts to advance the president’s agenda and see him re-elected in 2020.” He wrapped up with what passes as a rhetorical flourish on Planet Pence: “Any suggestion otherwise is both laughable and absurd.”

He is, of course, lying.

With cratering polls, major political embarrassments, a pattern of increasingly bizarre behavior and the hot breath of Robert Mueller’s bloodhounds bearing down on him, Trump’s presidency has the shelf life of yesterday’s *pico de gallo*. It would be political malpractice for Pence not to be making preparations to replace Trump by 2020 -- or sooner. The *Times* also reported that Pence is not the only ambitious politician visiting primary states, meeting with donors, and raising money. Ohio Governor John Kasich never quit running. Two young too-young senators, Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Ben Sasse of Nebraska, are positioning themselves to make a run. U. N. Ambassador Nikki Haley recently hired her long-time pollster, according to the *Times*. Since when does the U. N. Ambassador need a pollster? Toss in her habit of foreign policy free-lancing and she’s clearly in. The cherished campaign debate tradition of the “Kids’ Table” is guaranteed to continue in 2020!

But none enjoy the profile or the mega-rich contacts of Pence, who has courted donors and luminaries from Koch to [Coach](#) (Calipari). While it makes sense to woo the Koch Brothers, as well as [Tony Perkins](#) and Kentucky coal magnate Joe Craft, what does John Calipari bring to the effort? Oh, yes; Coach Cal is the acknowledged champion of “one-and-done-ers,” kids who play for their school for a year, then take off well before the expiration of the standard four-year term required to earn a college degree. Pence has a personal and professional interest in people who fail to complete four-year terms.

Mike Pence, unlike Donald Trump, has an ethos. While he may be a bit fuzzy on what century he is living in, he leaves no doubt about what he believes. Pence has [described himself](#) as "a Christian, a conservative, and a Republican, in that order." Donald Trump, on the other hand, lives in a magical world centered on the Wonderful Wizard of Himself. One of these days the Wizard's hot air balloon will float him out of the Oval Office and Pence knows the knot on the tether is getting looser.

Pence has another advantage: his Presidency has already begun. When you look at what the Trump administration has actually accomplished, it's the Pence agenda. Pence is a [cultural warrior](#) who opposes marriage equality, voted against anti-gay hate crimes, supports using religion as leverage against civil rights laws, and enjoys a 100% rating by the Christian Coalition for his alleged "pro-Family-Values" voting record (which, ironically, includes an anti-Family-Values vote against paid parental leave). He is strict on immigration, supports a ban on Syrian refugees and wants to crack down on so-called "sanctuary cities." Like his ideological soulmate, Attorney General Jefferson Beauregard Sessions, he strongly opposes the legalization of marijuana. And, speaking of Sessions, many of his close associates and colleagues wondered why he did not resign when the President recently used him as his [personal piñata](#). The reason may be that Sessions is gritting his teeth and biding his time, waiting for Trump to get the bum's rush from Congress once Mueller's investigation opens the door and makes the unofficial Pence presidency the real thing. We are already witnessing the budding of the Pence-Sessions administration. It is likely to bloom once Trump is off the scene.

That is a troubling prospect for those who loathe Trump, but fear Pence. While Trump is the most cringe-worthy Chief Executive in history, he at least is relatively ineffective, like a sprinter who preps for the race by tying his shoe-laces together. For most Americans, Trump's greatest benefit is that he is too incompetent to create, pursue and implement an agenda. Of course, the downside is that his clumsiness might trigger a nuclear war – which is probably the most persuasive argument for a Pence presidency: cultural war instead of nuclear war.

Pick your poison. There is no "brew that is true."