

Trump's actions speak louder than his words

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There are many theories about how Donald Trump was elected president. One explanation is to take a saying that Trump is fond of and flip it: Many Americans had lost so much—decent jobs, a secure retirement, their homes, and the confidence that their children will be better off than they are—they got tired of losing and took a chance on a candidate who promised to be on their side. But Trump's pledges on the campaign trail—to create 25 million good jobs, help working-class Americans get ahead, and end the days of “hedge fund guys getting away with murder [while] the middle class are getting absolutely destroyed”—are taking a back seat to the interests of Wall Street, the wealthy and the far right.

Until now, most Americans had only been spectators to dire assaults on democracy.

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) noted that it took only an hour on Inauguration Day for Trump's “populist words delivered on the steps of the Capitol to ring hollow.” Minutes after he was sworn in, Trump overturned a mortgage fee cut, making it harder for low-income Americans to buy a home. Just weeks into his presidency, he made it easier for Wall Street to prey on people's retirement savings and, while surrounded by Wall Street bankers, signed an executive order gutting Wall Street reforms enacted after the Great Recession.

When he accepted the Republican nomination, Trump said he would deliver for the “forgotten men and women of our country”—laid-off factory workers and communities crushed by the shifting economy. The penthouse populist audaciously claimed: “I am your voice.” But there is a big disconnect between what Trump says and what he does. Tick through his advisers, Cabinet choices and Supreme Court nominee, and there's nary an advocate for the working-class voters Trump courted. He has surrounded himself with a who's who of businesspeople and billionaires who have amassed huge wealth by outsourcing, cutting and automating jobs, and slashing workers' salaries, pensions and health insurance—elites who have prospered as America's “forgotten men and women” have fallen further behind.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin made a fortune foreclosing on homeowners like a 90-year-old woman who was targeted for a 27 cent payment error. Wilbur Ross, the secretary of commerce, has been called a vulture investor for squeezing profits from troubled companies by slashing jobs and gutting pensions. Trump's secretary of education, Betsy DeVos, has spent decades—and many millions—lobbying to destabilize and defund public schools in order to expand for-profit charter, virtual, private and home schools. Secretary of Health and Human Services Tom Price was confirmed despite concerns over his practice of introducing legislation to benefit companies he has invested in. And if Price gets his way, 18 million Americans in the next year alone, including millions of children from low-income families, will lose access to healthcare through the Affordable Care Act and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

While, in a victory for workers, Andrew Puzder withdrew from consideration as secretary of labor, other key confirmations remain, notably Neil Gorsuch for a lifetime appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court.

People for the American Way describes Gorsuch as a “judge who has dependably acted to protect the interests of big businesses at the expense of ordinary Americans.” Among the examples PFAW cites is the *Hobby Lobby* case, in which Gorsuch ruled that corporations are people and so can use their religious beliefs to deny employees insurance coverage for contraception. And, in the “freezing trucker” case—in

which a truck driver was fired after he left his disabled vehicle to find help and escape subzero temperatures—Gorsuch again sided with the corporation rather than the employee.

We've never seen anything like the Trump presidency. The administration's strategy to flood the zone with Twitter attacks, alternative facts and appalling executive orders is dizzying—and that's the point. Trump wants us to be off balance. He wants to do what he wants, without checks and balances. But that plan has been disrupted by a citizenry that is rising up to be that check and balance. From the 5 million callers who overwhelmed the Senate switchboard to protest DeVos' nomination, to the worldwide women's marches, the hundreds of actions in public schools across the country in support of immigrant rights, airport protests of the travel ban, and Jews and Muslims rallying together to say “Never again!”

True populists listen to the people. Instead of repeating the preposterous claim that he is the voice of the people, Trump should listen to what we're saying. We want real economic opportunity. We need affordable, high-quality health-care. We support good neighborhood public schools. We cherish freedom and pluralism. And we will stand up against hatred, discrimination and bigotry. Until January 2017, most Americans had only been spectators to dire assaults on democracy. Given the real and present threat, we've become active participants in its defense and fortification.



Weingarten with the Rev. Dr. William Barber at the Moral March on Raleigh, N.C., on Feb. 11.

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