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The America We Knew Is Rapidly Slipping Away

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Of all the terrible things Donald Trump has said and done as president, the most dangerous one just happened on Friday. Trump, in effect, ordered our trusted and independent government office of economic statistics to become as big a liar as he is.

He fired Erika McEntarfer, the Senate-confirmed head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, for bringing him economic news he did not like, and in the hours immediately following, the second most dangerous thing happened: The senior Trump officials most responsible for running our economy — people who in their private businesses never would have contemplated firing a subordinate who brought them financial data they did not like — all went along for the ride.

What they should have said to Trump is this: “Mr. President, if you don’t reconsider this decision — if you fire the top labor bureau statistician because she brought you bad economic news — how will anyone in the future trust that office when it issues good news?” Instead, they immediately covered for him.

As The Wall Street Journal pointed out, Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer had actually gone on Bloomberg TV early Friday and declared that even though the jobs report that had just been released was revised downward for May and June, “we’ve seen positive job growth.” But as soon as she got the news hours later that Trump had fired the very B.L.S. director who reports to her, she wrote on X: “I agree wholeheartedly with @POTUS that our jobs numbers must be fair, accurate, and never manipulated for political purposes.”

As The Journal asked: “So were the jobs data that were ‘positive’ in the morning rigged by the afternoon?” Of course not.

The moment I heard what Trump had done, I had a flashback. It was January 2021, and it had just been reported that Trump, after losing the 2020 election, had tried to pressure Georgia's Republican secretary of state to "find" him enough votes — exactly 11,780, Trump said — to overturn the presidential election and even threatened him with "a criminal offense" if he didn't. The pressure came during an hourlong telephone call, according to an audio recording of the conversation.

The difference, though, is that back then there was something called a Republican official with integrity. And so Georgia's secretary of state did not agree to fabricate votes that did not exist. But that species of Republican official seems to have gone completely extinct in Trump's second term. So Trump's rotten character is now a problem for our whole economy.

Going forward, how many government bureaucrats are going to dare to pass along bad news when they know that their bosses — people like Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent; the director of the National Economic Council, Kevin Hassett; Labor Secretary Chavez-DeRemer; and the U.S. trade representative, Jamieson Greer — will not only fail to defend them but will actually offer them up as a sacrifice to Trump to keep their jobs?

Shame on each and every one of them — particularly on Bessent, a former hedge fund manager, who knows better and did not step in. What a coward. As Bessent's predecessor, Janet Yellen, the former Treasury secretary and also the former chair of the Federal Reserve — and a person with actual integrity — told my Times colleague Ben Casselman of the B.L.S. firing: "This is the kind of thing you would only expect to see in a banana republic."

It is important to know how foreigners are looking at this. Bill Blain, a London-based bond trader who publishes a newsletter popular among market experts called Blain's Morning Porridge, wrote on Monday: "Friday, Aug. 1 might go down in history as the day the U.S. Treasury market died. There was an art to reading U.S. data. It relied on trust. Now that is broken — if you can't trust the data, what can you trust?"

He then went on to imagine how his Porridge newsletter will sound in May 2031. It will begin, he wrote, with "a link to a release from Trump's Ministry of Economic Truth, formerly the U.S. Treasury: 'Under the leadership of President Trump, the U.S. economy continues to grow at record speed. Payrolls data from the Ministry of Truth, a subsidiary of Truth Social, show full employment across America. Tensions in the inner cities have never been so low. All recent graduates have found highly paid jobs across America's expanding manufacturing sector, causing many large companies in Trump Inc to report significant labor shortages.'"

If you think this is far-fetched, you clearly have not been following the foreign policy

news, because this kind of tactic — the tailoring of information to fit Trump’s political needs — has already been deployed in the intelligence field.

In May the director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, fired two top intelligence officials who oversaw an assessment that contradicted Trump’s assertions that the gang Tren de Aragua was operating under the direction of the Venezuelan regime. Their assessment undermined the dubious legal rationale Trump invoked — the rarely used 1798 Alien Enemies Act — to allow the suspected gang members to be thrown out of the country without due process.

And now this trend toward self-blinding is spreading to further corners of the government.

One of America’s premier cyberwarriors, Jen Easterly, who was the director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency during the Biden administration, had her appointment to a senior teaching position at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point revoked last week by Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll after Laura Loomer, a far-right conspiracy theorist, posted that Easterly was a Biden-era mole.

Read that sentence again very slowly. The Army secretary, acting on the guidance of a loony Trump acolyte, revoked the teaching appointment of — anyone will tell you — one of America’s most skilled nonpartisan cyberwarriors, herself a graduate of West Point.

And when you are done reading that, read Easterly’s response on LinkedIn: “As a lifelong independent, I’ve served our nation in peacetime and combat under Republican and Democratic administrations. I’ve led missions at home and abroad to protect all Americans from vicious terrorists I’ve worked my entire career not as a partisan, but as a patriot — not in pursuit of power, but in service to the country I love and in loyalty to the Constitution I swore to protect and defend, against all enemies.”

And then she added this advice to the young West Pointers she will not have the honor of teaching: “Every member of the Long Gray Line knows the Cadet Prayer. It asks that we ‘choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong.’ That line — so simple, yet so powerful — has been my North Star for more than three decades. In boardrooms and war rooms. In quiet moments of doubt and in public acts of leadership. The harder right is never easy. That’s the whole point.”

That is the woman Trump did not want teaching our next generation of fighters.

And that ethic — always choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong — is the ethic that Bessent, Hassett, Chavez-DeRemer and Greer know nothing of — not to mention Trump himself.

That is why, dear reader, though I am a congenital optimist, for the first time I believe

that if the behavior that this administration has exhibited in just its first six months continues and is amplified for its full four years, the America you know will be gone. And I don't know how we will get it back.

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