

## Government Keeps Going Too Far

**The common thread that ties men on women's sports teams and Musk's indiscriminate cutting.**

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Elon Musk arrives before Donald Trump's second presidential inauguration in Washington, Jan. 20. Photo: Kevin Lamarque/Associated Press

I want to talk about a simple thing. It's a preoccupation that came again to mind as I watched President Trump sign, in an East Room ceremony on Wednesday, the executive order ending federal funding for educational programs that mandate biological males be allowed to compete on girls' or women's sports teams.

The mood in the room wasn't triumphal or mean, but grateful and joyous. If you still seek to understand the depth of the president's popularity with his voters, you need look no further than that ceremony, all or parts of which were on cable and broadcast news. It is still amazing to me that the Democratic Party put itself so firmly on the wrong side of this issue. I ask donors and party leaders why, and they can never say how it happened.

My simple thought: that in our politics now we consistently go too far and ask too much. It has become a major dynamic in the past 20 years or so. It manifests in a kind of ideological maximalism. You must get everything you want and grant your foe nothing. In terms of the issue above, you don't ask society to give you something you deserve—good and just treatment of all transgender folk. Instead you insist that others see reality exactly as you do—that if a man experiences himself as a woman, then you must agree that he *is* a woman, and this new insight must be incorporated into all human activity, such as sports.

Reaction to the Trump executive order from those who disagree with it has been curiously absent. The reason is that they know they went too far.

The biggest and most politically consequential example of going too far, in the past generation, has been the Democratic Party and illegal immigration. Everyone knows this so I'll say it quickly. If you deliberately allow many millions to cross the southern border illegally, thus deliberately provoking those who came here legally or were born here, Americans will become a people comfortable with—supportive of—their forced removal, certainly of those who are criminals.

America was usually pretty chill about deportations in the past: They're not how we roll. We stubbornly admire those in our family lines who acted up when they got here, and while there's always been a lot of finger-waving, we've traditionally given new immigrants wide latitude and sympathy. A century ago Irish immigrants filled the paddy wagons, which weren't called that for nothing, and Italians imported an entire criminal organization, the Mafia. Americans have always quietly bragged about the mischief and mayhem in their

families way back, but they've grown stricter and less reflexively sympathetic. That's because the Biden administration went too far.

Jump to what has been going on the past few weeks in Washington, with the unelected [Elon Musk](#) reorganizing, if that's the word, the federal agencies. Here I pick on him, in part to show fairness. He is surely a genius, a visionary, a titan, but there is something childish and primitive about him. He has wild confidence in his ability to engineer desired outcomes, but unstable elements have a way of exploding in the beaker, and like everyone else from Silicon Valley he lacks a sense of the tragic. They think human life can be rationally shaped and perfected, that every problem just needs the right wrench, and in any case they all think they're God.

My fear, here we switch metaphors, is that Mr. Musk and his young staffers and acolytes are mad doctors who'll put 30 chemo ports in the sick body. They'll not only kill the cancer, they'll kill the patient.

But they are up against, or trying to reform, a government whose agencies themselves were often maximalist and went too far.

Of all the agencies being batted about the one we will remember first when we recall this period in history is the U.S. Agency for International Development, so much of whose line-item spending was devoted to cultural imperialism. You have seen the lists. USAID produced a DEI musical in Ireland, funded LGBT activism in Guatemala. It spent \$426,000 to help Indonesian coffee companies become more climate- and gender-friendly, \$447,000 to promote the expansion of atheism in Nepal, and on and on.

When you look at what they were pushing on the world you think: They're not fighting anti-American feeling, they are *causing* anti-American feeling.

Who is defending these USAID programs? Nobody. Obviously not Republicans, but not Democrats either. Everyone knows the agency went too far.

In the past, USAID stonewalled lawmakers when they asked for information. If it had been forthcoming, or even moderately clever, it would have allowed Congress to find, scream about and remove its zanier items and avoided being shuttered, with the job losses that will entail.

"We spent the weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper," Mr. Musk tweeted on Monday. Earlier, he called it "a criminal organization." Mr. Trump called it an agency run by "radical left lunatics." Having seen the line items, who would mourn?

In general, the public seems to be paying attention and accepting, or cheering. Natalie Allison of the Washington Post went to a diner in Plains, Pa., where she asked Tammy Malloy, a waitress who voted for Mr. Trump, how she felt about the first 10 days. Ms. Malloy said she was glad the Pentagon would move against DEI. She added: "There's two genders. I don't care if you identify as a monkey, you're still either a male or female. The last four years shoved it down our throats."

But the Trump White House had better hope there are no catastrophic effects from shuttering USAID efforts that actually help people, contribute to our safety, and enhance our standing in the world. Monitoring and studying Ebola in Africa is one example.

The White House should worry too about what is reportedly happening in other agencies, such as the FBI and the CIA. It looks like chaos, which always entails individual injustice, in this case to some of those who've served the U.S. well, and it will be surprising if there aren't at least some negative national-security consequences. You can't build the plane while flying it.

I circle back to where this column began. An odd thing is that Democratic donors, strategists and party professionals seem incapable of taking offending issues seriously. They think they're arguments being engaged in by those who are about five status-levels below them. This shows disrespect for those who feel the victim, for the 10th-grade girl on the volleyball team who's up against hulking guys or the woman treated roughly by the illegal immigrant with a record. It's as if they can't be bothered to shut down the actual radicals in their party who cause the problem. When things get like this—when the wise men and powerful women refuse to do what they must that the party would survive—parties fail.

Advice for everyone: The big domestic political lesson of the first quarter of the 21st century is “Don’t go too far.” That way lies loss, potentially of more than you can imagine.