



FEATURE:

Impeachment: week in review

A weekly one paragraph summary report and analysis, including MeetToImpeach news, followed by recaps (with links) of representative on-line articles and essays – typically 1,200 to 2,000 words.

Week ending 9/2/2018
(~ 2,290 words)

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Minneapolis 9/2/18 Edition – (Note: distribution of this week’s Feature was delayed due to Labor Day.) While the past week was replete with contrast-and-context news, there was another relative lull in actual, core impeachment news – enough so to allow for publishing a book review of The Shadow President: The Truth About Mike Pence, by Michael D’Antonio and Peter Eisner. There are no major core impeachment news stories this week... but it was a big week for context, dominated by a series of memorial events for Senator John McCain, who died Saturday August 25th. The culmination was a service the following Saturday morning at Washington’s National Cathedral, where he was eulogized by his daughter Meghan, former Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush, and others. Both the memorials, and President Trump’s own reaction, highlighted their stark differences, including obvious bad blood from Trump’s derogation of McCain’s years of captivity and torture he endured as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. While the traditional role of the President at such times is to unite a country in mourning, President Trump was pointedly not invited to any memorial service... and was reported to have headed to his nearby Virginia golf course at the time of the main Saturday memorial service. Because Trump would be replaced by Mike Pence if he resigned or is impeached and removed, The Shadow President emerged as an important publishing event. The upcoming confirmation hearing for Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh – in progress this

week -- also received major media attention. Much impeachment-related questioning is expected, due partly to Judge Kavanaugh's work in Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's office during the Clinton impeachment proceedings, and due also to claims Kavanaugh takes an expansive view of executive privilege and potential claims of constitutional immunities and safeguards that may come before the Supreme Court. Questioning is likely to culminate in some kind of a demand for him to recuse himself in cases directly affecting President Trump. Finally, reporting has started on what is widely characterized as extensive and explosive content in veteran journalist Bob Woodward's new book, Fear: Trump in the White House. This is likely if not certain to be a major impeachment story, if not the main story, for at least one week to come. Since news of Sen. McCain's death, there has been a visible shift in presidential approval polling aggregators – realclearpolitics.com and fivethirtyeight.com – that is unfavorable to President Trump. It may finally be starting to become clear even to some in Trump's base that somehow, in some way, he's got to leave office – various face saving means of accomplishing this are likely to be proposed. Omarosa's recent book, Unhinged: An Insider's Account of the Trump White House, was #2 on the publishersweekly.com list of the top 25 non-fiction hardcover books – in its second week on the list.

MeetToImpeach Event: The next MeetToImpeach event will be at “People's Plaza” (AKA "Government Plaza", between Minneapolis City Hall and the Hennepin County Government Center, at 4th Street and 5th Avenue) from Noon to 1 PM on Saturday, September 8st. This will be a non-partisan, non-campaign event. It will be delayed or cancelled if there is rain.

Book review: The Shadow President: The Truth About Mike Pence, by Michael D'Antonio and Peter Eisner

Review by: Bob “Again” Carney Jr.

It's tempting to classify The Shadow President: The Truth About Mike Pence, by Michael D'Antonio and Peter Eisner as an “unauthorized” biography – a genre suggested by the first paragraph of their Acknowledgements: “... officials in Washington were quite cautious about speaking to us on the record about events and personalities inside the White House. For that reason, we must offer our gratitude to several sources, including Pence confidants and members

of Congress, without mentioning names... Their efforts stand in contrast to the vice president's aides, who declined repeated requests for even the most basic information." Close... but not quite – while this book is obviously not sanctioned or “officially” cooperated with, many sources are in fact named... including former Indiana Republican Senator Richard Lugar, who Pence was allied with early in his career, and who ran for President in 1996. Pence declined to support Lugar in his losing 2014 re-election primary campaign – the same year Pence was elected Governor.

We are at a point in our nation's history where interest in the vice president is unusually high, due to the widely acknowledged prospect that President Trump may not complete his first term. Another Pence biography has also recently been released by Andrea Neal, a former IndyStar Reporter and Pence nominee to the Indiana State Board of Education, who uses only named sources. However, The Shadow President may be of greater value to people who may be wondering what a Pence Presidency might be like partly because there's no reason (and many “anti-reasons”) to think the authors are trying to sugar-coat Pence. While their new book also falls short of the “hit job” category, from Chapter One, titled “the Sycophant” forward, one gets the sense that there's some kind of publisher's gremlin at work, who has been given editorial super-powers to pack in plenty of red meat (blue meat?) for people of an anti-Trump, anti-Pence bent. With the Chapter One title setting the tone, the obviously upper-crust-elitist gremlin's upturned nose drips steadily with critical remarks about various people on the “anti-Trumper enemy list.”

Through its course, The Shadow President is a straightforward, well sourced and documented, fact-rooted account of the career of Mike Pence, from a forensically accomplished high school student to Vice President of the United States. Having already suggested and characterized some apparent spin and slanting, the narrative is orderly, on-point, and generally well-conceived and rendered for a wide range of readers – an extensive political and current events background and knowledge is not required. Unfortunately, as an organizing principle, the chronological has a serious inherent limitation. On the one hand, brief, sketchy explanations and slants on theological topics are frequently offered up as context for the professions of Pence, his family's beliefs and churches, and his other religious associates. But for this biographical subject a structurally separate chapter – or even some kind of a book-within-a-book approach directed

towards a more extensive, well-sourced and focused treatment of Vice President Pence's religious background and professions might have been unusually helpful.

There is a sense given throughout the book that Pence is very particular, and guarded, about what he wants you to see, and what he is willing to share about his own beliefs and his own thinking. Pence is presented as someone who appears to have seen himself from an early age as pre-destined to be President. However, after he lost two early races for Congress, he launched a career as a local radio-and-TV personality, saying then that he was done with electoral politics. Of course, one is left to wonder – was this “Rush-Limbaugh-on-decaf” career path predicated on an eventual return to electoral politics? Both before that return to candidacy, and then when in office, first in Congress and later as Governor of Indiana, Pence was very successful in allying himself with both powerful, agenda-driven big-money Republican financial powerhouses like the Koch Brothers, and with the evangelical wing of the Republican Party. He has always been well-financed in his political activity – the book recounts his financial network may have been a factor in President Trump's decision to invite him on the ticket. Pence was also successful during his broadcast career in developing a folksy, friendly, likeable media persona that played well to his audience as it morphed into his constituency. While his political agenda has also been decidedly to the right, especially on social issues, his mild-mannered approach seems to have muffled or masked the extent to which he was determined to advance that agenda.

All of this points the reader towards two major questions. A direct answer is served up for one: Pence was willing to “put up with Trump” -- knowing full well what he was getting into – based on this scenario offered up by D'Antonio and Eisner: “...Pence describes himself as a true ‘Hoosier’ son of Indiana who was ‘a Christian, a conservative, and a Republican in that order...’ [This] revealed both his priorities and the source of his power. For thirty years he had helped lead the Republican Party into a closer alliance with preachers who were turning evangelical Christianity from a religion into a political crusade that engaged in a cultural war against nonbelievers. The aim of many was to destroy abortion rights, roll back the equality gained by gay citizens, and prepare the nation for the Second Coming of Christ... The victimhood claimed by both the libertarians and the Christian Right permitted the construction of an alternate reality that denied their own power and masked their ambition to make politics and culture conform to an ideology that included white Christian supremacy and predatory

capitalism. It also denied the progress they had made in their construction of their own political might. With his oath of office Vice President Pence became both the free-marketeers' hero and the most successful Christian supremacist in American history. ¶Most of Pence's life had been preparation for this moment, and possibly one more. His lifelong goal, set when he was a boy, was the Oval Office itself. Remarkably, he had reached this point by tying his fate to Donald J. Trump, a man whose immorality... Christianity and conservatism abhorred. However, this record also suggested that Pence was more likely to assume the highest office in the land than most vice presidents who had come before. To put it bluntly, Trump was vulnerable to impeachment. If this occurred, Pence would see the hand of God at work in his elevation to the presidency. In the meantime, he would wait, and watch.”

As to the second question, it's more problematic... and is only hinted at. The book repeatedly characterizes the “end times” beliefs of Pence, his wife Karen, and their associates -- the apocalypse prophesized in the Bible is inevitable. On the one hand, the Bible explicitly says Christians don't know when this will happen. But many other Biblical passages describe signs and wonders that will be signals to the faithful: the end is near.

Because we live in the nuclear age, some people who are irreligious, or anti-religious, may be pre-disposed to wonder: it is dangerous to have a Christian who believes in the inevitability of the apocalypse in control of the nuclear codes? This worry may gain force if such a prospective Christian President reportedly believes he is predestined to become President -- and then does in fact become President... not by winning nomination and election, but by drinking deeply of President Trump cultish kool-aid. Altogether, The Shadow President seems to offer irreligious or anti-religious people no escape... no way to avoid confronting this question... but no explicit, direct answer is offered.

On a scale from anti-Christian bigotry to a legitimate issue of existential concern, where and how do we place this question?

First, to be clear, The Shadow President is remarkably void of any deviation from the bland but universal assessment of Mike Pence: he's nice... mid-western, heartland nice. We also learn he has some quirks that are in their own way so weirdly convention-minded as to rise to the level of re-assuring. Would a bringer-of-the-apocalypse order a new wardrobe of garments embroidered with “Governor of Indiana”? (Pence did.) Would a bringer-of-the-apocalypse have

a special red hot-line installed in his Governor's office, hardwired to his wife's matching hot-line on her desk down the hall? (Pence did.)

Let's ask this: Is it possible that God's will is to present to America, and the world, first the unforgettable, nightmarish Trump-example, followed immediately by a kind of ultimate contrast: a nice, normal Midwestern couple who exemplify Christian living, Christian virtues and humility in their lives?

This might happen. If it did, is there any reason why Pence and his wife would not prayerfully experience as reality that this is what everything had been leading up to – that God's purpose had been fulfilled? Based on everything we're told in the book – with a truckload of salt to smother the taste of what never quite goes beyond suggestion -- there's no reason not to think so. Could this be a preparation for America and the world before the end-times? Sure. Would it mean the end-times are imminent? No – the just-described, amazing contrast might find a comfortable home in history books for decades... or centuries. Maybe an ex-President Trump will find religion – guided by Dr. Ben Carson, his former Vice President... and by Meghan McCain, who said explicitly in her eulogy for her father that this is still possible. Maybe the whole “shrouded in secrecy, not forthcoming” rap on Pence is just a myth... a singular nowhere land of mis-spelled potatoes, bounded by an abundance of caution that Christians learn in their dealings with the world.

Still... it must be acknowledged that many irreligious or anti-religious people will not find the prospect of a Pence presidency reassuring. For such readers, all that can be said is that the chasm between two world views -- two fundamentally different understandings -- is stark and unbridgeable. Some say it can be leapt by faith... jumpers, not so much. Literally existential though it may be, The Shadow President doesn't hold or offer the answer to the second question. Existential questions can have only existential answers.

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