

# Heather Cox Richardson

Historian Heather Cox Richardson posted this on her Facebook page. Though it reads like a conspiracy theory, it is easily supported. The Grover Norquist quote (highlighted) is telling.

Taken together, the events of this week reveal that American democracy is in a dangerous place. Tuesday's excerpts from Bob Woodward's book about the Trump White House, Wednesday's anonymous New York Times op-ed, and Thursday's announcement that ICE has subpoenaed 8 years of North Carolina voting records, and Friday's Kavanaugh confirmation hearings point to the last moves in the Movement Conservative attempt to take control of the national government once and for all.

Since the 1930s, when FDR's New Deal used the government to regulate business, provide a basic social safety net, and promote infrastructure, rich people insisted that an active government destroyed their liberty by impinging on how they ran their businesses and by taking their money by taxation. They wanted to turn the clock back to the 1920s, when businessmen ran the country and wealth moved upward. They believed they were the only true conservatives left, and they started a movement to take America back from the misguided majority.

But Movement Conservatives had a problem: voters from both parties liked the New Deal state. So Movement Conservatives concluded they could not win voters by argument; they had to mislead them. First they argued that an active government just redistributed wealth from white folks to lazy people of color and grasping women. They funded think tanks and new media, including talk radio and FNC. When their presidents won, they packed the courts with folks who thought like they did. They suppressed the vote in key states like Florida, so their chosen candidates could win even if they were the less popular candidate. Then they gerrymandered states so that even when Democrats won a majority of the vote, they would not control Congress.

When that happened, a key architect of the Movement Conservative takeover, Grover Norquist, said something interesting. He said: "We don't need a president to tell us in what direction to go. We know what direction to go.... We just need a president to sign this stuff.... Pick a Republican with enough working digits to handle a pen to become president of the United States."

In Donald Trump, these ideologues got their man. Woodward's book details an administration whose officers consider the president "a moron," "an idiot," and who routinely shape his presidency by distracting him from issues, even to the extent of removing documents they don't like from his desk.

The next day's op-ed was even more alarming. Someone claiming to be a senior official said that "unsung heroes" were thwarting the president's worst impulses and were hoping to push the country further along the Movement Conservative path of "free minds, free markets and free people." In short, they have launched a soft coup in the White House, taking control of the country from the president.

This astonishing document seemed designed, at least in part, to keep GOP voters from jumping ship in the upcoming elections by reassuring them that there were really "adults in the room" to smooth Trump's wilder inclinations. But just in case reassuring voters wasn't enough to erase the strong shift away from the GOP, ICE officials have subpoenaed 8 years of voting records from North Carolina two months before the election. They are largely quiet about why, but claims of illegal voting by immigrants have been standard since the 1990s, when Movement Conservatives insisted that Democrats were winning elections by cheating. (Repeated studies have demolished these claims.) This will undoubtedly suppress the vote in North Carolina, and likely elsewhere as people are afraid to show up on the government's radar screen.

These stories all come together in Kavanaugh's Senate confirmation hearings. Kavanaugh is a long-time GOP operative, who came up through Movement Conservative circles to take a key position in government. But he implies that he will not interfere with *Roe v. Wade*, and the Trump administration

has refused to release 96% of his documents to public scrutiny- an unprecedented stonewalling. The documents that have leaked suggest that he will, in fact, vote to overturn that law. Why on earth are they hiding this if they think it's popular?

The answer is, they know what polls confirm: a large majority of Americans opposes their ideology not just on abortion, but across the board. Still, they maintain they are the only ones who truly understand what is best for the rest of us. So they are grabbing all they can as fast as they can. And, if confirmed, Kavanaugh will shift the Supreme Court to a virtually permanent Movement Conservative majority, so that, even if Americans do manage to push the current regime out of power, a new Congress will not be able to pass legislation that cannot win the approval of Movement Conservatives entrenched in the Court.

What is at stake is whether or not we want to be ruled by a small group of ideologues who believe they know what's best for us

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