

Trump has been on an amazing run

When Donald Trump was elected in 2016, I was determined to treat him fairly by calling balls and strikes as I saw them – criticizing him constructively when I thought he was wrong and supporting him when he was right.

Well, I have never seen a president throw more strikes in so short a time as Trump has over the past few weeks. Consider: Three weeks ago, Trump launched unprecedented military strikes that wrecked the Iranian nuclear program. Four presidents promised to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, but only Trump actively halted it. And then he brought the war between Israel and Iran to an end after just 12 days of fighting.

He then had a triumphant NATO summit in the Netherlands, getting allies to agree to spend 5 percent of gross domestic product on defense. When Trump took office in 2016, only three allies were meeting their commitment to spend a modest 2 percent of GDP on defense. Today, all allies except Canada are on track to reach 2 percent by the end of 2025, and thanks to Trump, they are now preparing to more than double that commitment. Nine years ago, critics feared he would destroy the Atlantic Alliance. Instead, as President Alexander Stubb of Finland put it, Trump has ushered in “the birth of a new NATO.”

While all this was going on, Trump won three major Supreme Court battles: a decision that curtailed the power



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of district court judges to issue nationwide injunctions blocking him from implementing his policies; a second restoring the rights of parents to opt out of LGBTQ+ indoctrination in public schools; and a third upholding his right to fire tens of thousands of workers across the federal government. This brings his record to 11 Supreme Court victories so far in his second term.

He sent the National Guard in June to help quell immigration riots in Los Angeles and drove illegal border crossings to a virtual halt, with apprehensions and encounters at the U.S. southern border last month reaching lowest levels ever recorded.

He struck new trade deals with Indonesia and Vietnam (a major blow to China) and ramped up the pressure on other countries to come to the negotiating table. The job market exceeded expectations, adding 147,000 jobs in June.

He forced the University of Pennsylvania to ban biological males in women's sports, restore women's records, post the definition of a woman on its website and apologize to female athletes it harmed. In the past week, the news broke that Columbia University is nearing a \$200 million settlement with the Trump administration over antisemitic

civil rights violations on campus.

He passed his “One Big Beautiful Bill,” making his 2017 pro-growth tax cuts permanent and delivering on his promise to working-class voters to eliminate taxes on tips, overtime and Social Security. It also increases defense spending and funds his “Golden Dome” defense shield to protect America from ballistic missile attack. And the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and Space Force met their 2025 recruiting goals months ahead of schedule.

He brokered a peace deal in late June in the decades-long conflict between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo – the third conflict (India-Pakistan and Iran-Israel are the others) he has helped end since taking office.

And on Monday, Trump announced that the United States was sending new weapons worth billions of dollars to Ukraine - paid for by European allies, not American taxpayers - including vital Patriot air defense batteries to protect Ukrainian cities from Russian bombardment. And he gave Russian President Vladimir Putin 50 days to end the war or face crippling secondary tariffs that could drive Russian oil and natural gas from the global market, crushing the Russian economy. Putin should look at what happened when Iran ignored Trump's deadline and think hard about his next move.

All that in one month! Love him or hate him, that is objectively a stunning string of accomplishments.

Not all the news was perfect.

Inflation ticked up slightly in June to 2.7 percent, up from 2.4 percent in May. That's still far below the average of 4.95 percent under President Joe Biden and less than the 2.9 percent inflation rate in December 2024, Biden's last full month in office. But the ding to consumer pocketbooks was offset by the \$113 billion in tariff revenue the administration has brought in since taking office (including \$27 billion last month alone), producing an unexpected government surplus.

And, of course, there was a self-inflicted wound of the Justice Department last week refusing to release files in the sex-trafficking case involving the late financier Jeffrey Epstein, after Attorney General Pam Bondi had raised expectations by boasting that she possessed Epstein's “client list.” The resulting brouhaha distracted from Trump's litany of achievements.

There are probably more victories to come – momentum is contagious, and success begets success. But I can't think of a president in my lifetime who has accomplished this much in such a short period of time. Indeed, what Trump achieved in just the past month arguably exceeds what Biden accomplished in his entire four-year term.

When Trump ran eight years ago, he promised we would win so much we'd get tired of winning. Instead, the wins keep coming – and America isn't tired at all.

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Trump's spell broken; now he's a lame duck

BY MATT K. LEWIS
Los Angeles Times

For an entire decade now, Donald Trump has been immune to alienating his supporters — a base so loyal they'd drink bleach if he told them it would own the libs (and some probably did). Stormy Daniels? A spiritual growth opportunity for evangelicals to witness a modern-day King David. Inciting a Capitol riot? Boosted his Q-rating (not to mention his QAnon rating). Bombing Iran? Sure, a few “America First” types grumbled into their microphones about endless wars before dutifully moving on. Trump himself bragged he could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue, shoot somebody and not lose a single voter. He was right.

But the current wave of intra-MAGA criticism — over the Trump administration's defensive insistence that Jeffrey Epstein (a) definitely committed suicide, and (b) never had a client list — feels categorically different.

Trump can usually smother an inconvenient news cycle by tossing a fresh carcass on the table, be it a deranged Truth Social post or a threat to jail an enemy.

This time, however, his suggestion that Rosie O'Donnell should have her citizenship revoked barely registered above ambient noise, as the mob kept hammering him over his refusal to release the Epstein files. His latest weapon of mass distraction is a

not-so-subtle hint that he might fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell. But even that hasn't managed to shift the spotlight away from Epstein.

Having failed at distraction, Trump reverted to bullying. He scolded the press for dredging up old news (“Are you still talking about Jeffrey Epstein?”) He took to Truth Social to tell his MAGA supporters not to “waste Time and Energy on Jeffrey Epstein.” He absurdly claimed the Epstein files were a “scam” and a “hoax” made up by Democrats, and described the folks who “bought into this bull—” as “weaklings” and his “PAST supporters.”

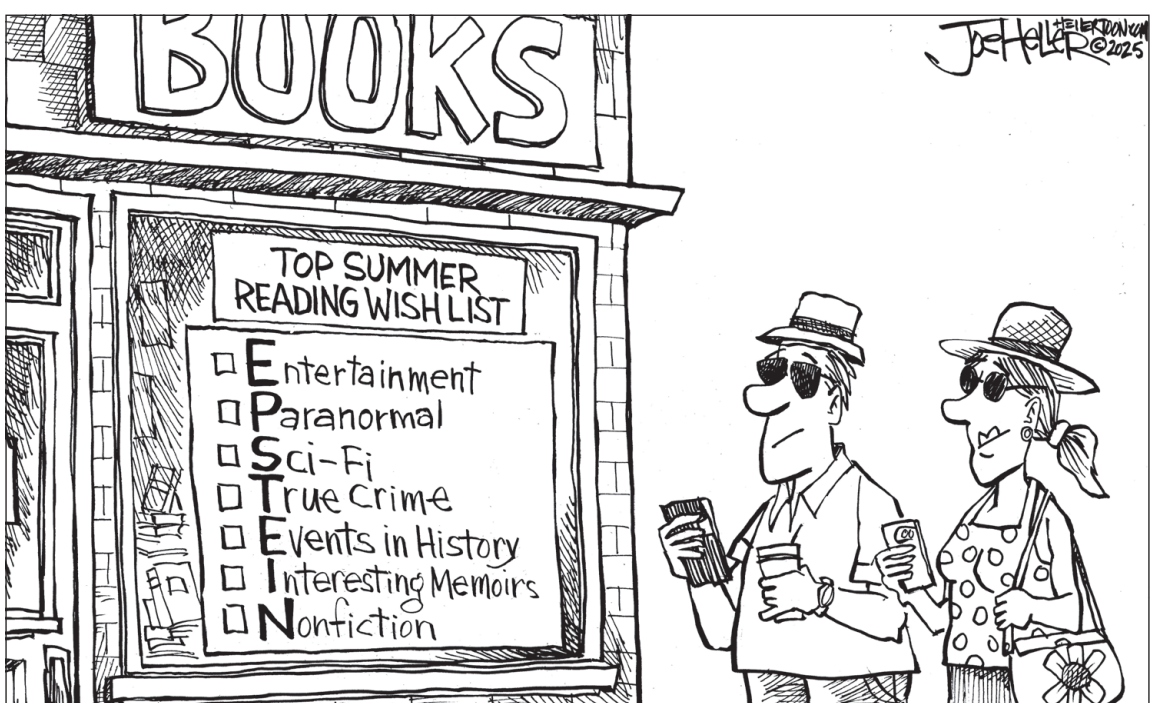
These efforts tamed some of the criticism inside the MAGA tent. But for others, it only reinforced the perception of a cover-up.

So why has the Epstein scandal — of all things — threatened civil war on the right? I have some thoughts.

First: It speaks to where the passions of MAGA really lie. For some percentage of Trump supporters, exposing the satanic, blood-drinking pedophile cabal was supposed to be the deliverable — his raison d'être— the payoff.

Instead they got, what, corporate tax cuts?

Second: The Epstein narrative is too lurid and concrete to be handwaved away. Epstein really was a sex trafficker. There really are those photographs of him palling around with Trump. He really was on “suicide watch.” Minutes



really are missing from the surveillance video near Epstein's cell. Attorney General Pam Bondi really did say on Fox News in February that Epstein's client list was “sitting on my desk right now.” You don't need to be in a tin-foil hat to notice the fishiness here.

And third: The incentives have changed for MAGA influencers. Trump finally feels like a lame duck, and the knives are out, not just to inherit the throne, but for the whole spoils system of the MAGA grift.

To be clear, plenty of the usual sycophants have decided to “trust the plan” and go along with the party line. But others — Tucker Carlson, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Nick Fuentes and assorted alt-right B-listers — seem to have caught the scent of blood in the water.

Even the new cohort of MAGA-adjacent bro

podcasters — guys like Andrew Schulz — have started to openly criticize him. Schulz recently called Trump's failure to release the Epstein files “insulting our intelligence,” which, for that demographic, is tantamount to open revolt.

Here, Trump could really face some attrition. Unlike the evangelical core, these manosphere podcasters (and their legions of young male listeners) are not partisans or ideologues; their support for Trump has always been more middle finger than mission. And middle fingers, as everyone eventually learns, can be directed at new targets anytime.

So how does this end? Eventually, this story will be suppressed or at least professionally ignored. But it won't be fully memory-holed. It will linger somewhere between subliminal and ubiquitous, in much the same way that George W. Bush never fully

escaped the stench of those nonexistent WMDs (even after Republicans agreed to stay the course).

So Trump survives — but he carries with him a dormant virus that could flare up again.

There's a certain irony here that's almost too obvious to point out, except that it's also irresistible: Trump built an entire ecology of paranoia — a system that rewards its most theatrical paranoids. He spent years feeding his ravenous base suspicion and spectacle. And it worked. Until he finally got out-conspiracy-theoried.

Even the best carnival Barker runs out of new tricks eventually. And when the crowd starts peeking behind the curtain, the spell is broken, and the jig is up.

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