

Demanding Law and Democracy: The First Wave of Defenders

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First Edition

The pursuit of dictatorship rests on crushing the spirit of the people who value democracy and the rule of law. Through a series of rapid and dramatic actions, a would-be dictator can quickly try to squelch opposition, stoke fear, and eliminate hope for a democratic resurgence or adherence to the rule of law. Make people give up before they even have the opportunity to push back.

In the face of such efforts, evidence that people and organizations are pushing back directly challenges the dictator's storyline. It shows that hope and cooperation are viable avenues. It shows that people are not afraid. And the more people who push back, the harder it is for the pro-dictatorship forces to repress the opposition, the media, the courts, and other proponents of the rule of law, humanity, and good governance.

This is where we sit in early February 2025. The Trump administration and its Republican loyalists have glorified corrupt and illegal actions to shatter the federal government and weaken their political opponents through illegitimate means. My aim in this short booklet is not to recount those corrupt and/or illegal actions; the mainstream media has done so, sadly often without accurately framing the Republican moves as illegal, corrupt, unconstitutional, racist, or the like.¹

Rather, my aim is to demonstrate that in the face of Republican power grabs and criminal moves, **the push back to defend the United States from the Trump/Republican administration is real and has involved frequent action to stymie Trump**. People have already been speaking out, government officials are resisting illegal orders, lawyers are filing lawsuits, and people are taking to the streets. These are the very actions that can work to block the growth of Republican-led dictatorship. Saying no to dictatorship in a myriad of ways is the very embodiment of hope and rejection of fear.

In short, the best way to defeat a bully is to directly call him out. Repeatedly.

In the remainder of the booklet, I offer a few initial examples. Opposition (or defense or resistance or push back) is happening and, in some cases, it is already working. This document is just a sample of much more that is happening.

Note: If you have additional examples, please email jpressman2020@gmail.com

¹ Will, say, the *New York Times* - in the voice of the reporter or headline writer - ever be willing to characterize a Trump action as illegal, unconstitutional, or racist?

January 20, 2025

In New Hampshire, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued the Trump administration, arguing that his ending of birthright citizenship is unconstitutional.

As one media outlet explained: “Birthright citizenship was established by the 14th Amendment, passed after the Civil War. The 1898 U.S Supreme Court opinion in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* held that that birthright meant children born in the U.S. to noncitizens are automatically U.S. citizens. And in 1940, Congress passed a law codifying the birthright doctrine into federal statute, which exists today.”²

January 21

At the National Prayer Service, with Pres. Trump and VP Vance seated in front of her, Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde called on them to show empathy. In her sermon, she said: “Let me make one final plea, Mr. President. Millions have put their trust in you and, as you told the nation yesterday, you have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are gay, lesbian and transgender children in Democratic, Republican, and Independent families, some who fear for their lives.”

Not only that, but Bishop Budde later declined to apologize for her call for empathy.³ When members of Congress drafted legislation to condemn her remarks, the United Church of Christ spoke out, opposing the bill and saying: “Bishop Budde’s words and actions are consistent with many faith leaders over the centuries and today who have provided voice in the call for justice. The voice of faith leaders must be heard in the public square calling truth to power in all times. **We commend the courage and wisdom of Bishop Budde and other**

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<https://newhampshirebulletin.com/2025/01/21/aclu-files-suit-in-new-hampshire-to-block-trump-birthright-citizenship-ban/>

³ Alana Wise, “Bishop Mariann Budde tells NPR 'I won't apologize' for sermon addressing Trump,” *NPR*, January 22, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/22/nx-s1-5270918/bishop-mariann-edgar-budde-trump-interview>.

faith leaders who bring a message of justice and hope for the oppressed.”⁴
(emphasis added)

January 22

In an order dismissing the case against two January 6 rioters who admitted they engaged in criminal assault against law enforcement officers, US district judge Beryl Howell called the rationale of Trump’s pardon “flatly wrong.”⁵ Many other judges processing similar orders made similar statements, noting that Trump’s pardon did not wash away the strong, extensive evidence of violence, insurrection, and guilt on January 6, 2021.

In a different court order, Tanya Chutkan, a US district judge, wrote the pardons “cannot whitewash the blood, feces, and terror that the [January 6] mob left in its wake.”⁶ She added “no pardon can change the tragic truth of what happened on January 6, 2021.”

January 24

Hannibal “Mike” Ware, Chairperson of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), wrote a letter to the White House rejecting the administration’s firing of 17 Inspectors General: “At this point, we do not believe the actions taken are legally sufficient to dismiss Presidentially Appointed, Senate Confirmed Inspectors General.”⁷ (Inspectors General are largely independent officials at federal agencies who address ethical complaints and root out corruption.)

January 27

Until she was escorted out of her office by “security agents,” Phyllis Fong, the inspector general of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, refused to accept her

⁴ <https://www.ucc.org/faith-expressed-freely-statement-on-congressional-response-to-bishop-budde/>

⁵ https://ecf.dcd.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/show_public_doc?2021cr0073-134;
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jan/23/judges-trump-january-6-pardons>

⁶ [https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/68344110/30/united-states-v-banuelos/;](https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/68344110/30/united-states-v-banuelos/)
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jan/23/judges-trump-january-6-pardons>

⁷ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25504469-hannibal-ware-cigie-letter-to-sergio-gor-wh/>

firing (which took place without any due process).⁸ In 2022, Fong's office opened a probe of Neuralink, a company owned by Elon Musk.⁹

January 28

U.S. District Judge Loren AliKhan temporarily paused the Republican freeze on Federal spending.¹⁰

Gov. JB Pritzker of Illinois said on camera that "Donald Trump's administration is lying to you." @calltoactivism.bsky.social wrote, "Pritzker slammed the White House for saying the spending freeze wouldn't affect Head Start and Medicaid."¹¹

January 30

Gov JB Pritzker of Illinois signed an order barring January 6 rioters from securing state jobs in Illinois.¹²

Nick Gottlieb, Director of Employee and Labor Relations at USAID, rescinded an order to fire almost 60 leaders at the U.S. Agency for International Development, which administers foreign aid programs all around the world. Gottlieb was then placed on administrative leave.¹³

Michael Richards, superintendent of schools in Harrisonburg (VA) City Public Schools, called certain administration statements, supposedly about gender ideology in his schools, "false." He added: "I will not be intimidated. I will

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/usda-inspector-general-escorted-out-her-office-after-defying-white-house-2025-01-29/>

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<https://www.reuters.com/technology/musks-neuralink-faces-federal-probe-employee-backlash-over-ai-tests-2022-12-05/>

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<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/dc-federal-judge-temporarily-blocks-trump-plan-pause-federal-aid-spend-rcna189706>

¹¹ <https://bsky.app/profile/calltoactivism.bsky.social/post/3lgtxz5efrs2s>

¹² <https://www.wbez.org/springfield/2025/01/31/jb-pritzker-jan-6-blocked-state-jobs-illinois-trump>

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<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/usa-id-labor-director-pushed-fighting-back-removal-career-leadership-rcna190132> and <https://bsky.app/profile/marisakabas.bsky.social/post/3lgysrrklb22l>

stand firm in my commitment to ensuring that HCPS remains a safe, welcoming place for all.”¹⁴

January 31

The Anglican Catholic Church (ACC) revoked the license of one of their (former) priests after he did a Nazi salute to conclude his speech at an anti-choice summit. And the ACC leadership added in their statement on the matter: “Furthermore, we understand that this is not just an administrative matter. The Holocaust was an episode of unspeakable horror, enacted by a regime of evil men. We condemn Nazi ideology and anti-Semitism in all its forms. And we believe that those who mimic the Nazi salute, even as a joke or an attempt to troll their opponents, trivialize the horror of the Holocaust and diminish the sacrifice of those who fought against its perpetrators. Such actions are harmful, divisive, and contrary to the tenets of Christian charity.”¹⁵

It was reported that the acting FBI director, Brian Driscoll, declined to turn over a list of the thousands of FBI agents who worked on January 6 insurrection cases. Republican loyalists want the names: “top Trump administration officials have made it clear that they want at least some of the FBI agents who pursued Jan. 6 cases to be fired, just as multiple DOJ prosecutors involved with the Jan. 6 prosecutions were fired.”¹⁶ Legally, such firings require cause and due process where agents could, should they choose, contest the firings. James E. Dennehy, in charge of the FBI’s New York Field Office, emailed FBI agents to say they should “dig in.” The *New York Times* characterized his email as “defiant.” On the few FBI leaders who have been forced out without cause, the Times reported that: “The Society of Former Special Agents of the F.B.I., which represents thousands of retirees, called the forced resignations ‘illegal actions’ that violated civil service laws and the due process rights of employees.”¹⁷

¹⁴ <https://bsky.app/profile/sleeparks.bsky.social/post/3lgqy4d2alk2f>

¹⁵ <https://www.anglican catholic.org.uk/2025/01/31/a-statement-on-calvin-robinson/>

¹⁶

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/senior-fbi-official-forcefully-resisted-trump-administrati on-firings-rcna190301?>

¹⁷

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/02/us/politics/fbi-new-york-email-trump.html?smtyp=cur&smid=bsky-nyt imes>

David A. Lebryk, a longtime official in the US Treasury Department, refused to provide non-government, pro-Trump individuals (Musk et al) illegal access to the Federal government payments systems. He instead announced his retirement. The system is central to the functioning of the US government and is run by civil servants, not politicians or their partisan hacks: “Typically only a small number of career officials control Treasury’s payment systems. Run by the Bureau of the Fiscal Service, the sensitive systems control the flow of more than \$6 trillion annually to households, businesses and more nationwide. Tens, if not hundreds, of millions of people across the country rely on the systems, which are responsible for distributing Social Security and Medicare benefits, salaries for federal personnel, payments to government contractors and grant recipients, and tax refunds, among tens of thousands of other functions.”¹⁸

Judge John J. McConnell Jr. ordered that Trump agents may not “pause, freeze, impede, block, cancel, or terminate” money already allocated by Congress. The order applies to the 22 states and DC that had sued the US government.¹⁹

“On the same day that a white supremacy aligned university club encouraged students to report their classmates to ICE, hundreds of Arizona State University Sun Devils responded by marching in support of their undocumented classmates. Crowds of students waving Mexican flags and posters with supportive messages, including ‘Education not deportation’ and ‘Stand with ASU Dreamers.’”²⁰

February 1

Two officials at the the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) refused to provide non-government, pro-Trump individuals (Musk et al) illegal access to USAID security systems, personnel files, and classified information.²¹

¹⁸

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/01/31/elon-musk-treasury-department-payment-systems/>

¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/31/us/trump-freeze-blocked.html> and

https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.rid.58912/gov.uscourts.rid.58912.50.0_4.pdf

²⁰ <https://azmirror.com/2025/01/31/student-protest-overwhelms-anti-immigrant-event-at-asu/>

²¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/02/02/politics/usaid-officials-leave-musk-doge/index.html>

A joint statement by Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the PLO, and the Arab League rejected the “expulsion, encouragement of transfer, or uprooting of Palestinians from their lands in any form and under any conditions or justifications.”²² Trump had recently called for expelling Palestinians from Gaza and moving them to Egypt and Jordan. In a phone call, he also urged Egypt’s president to accept his plan.

February 2

Protestors organized a “massive protest” in Los Angeles to oppose the Republican crackdown on immigrants and the Republican call for mass deportations.²³

At the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in Washington DC (which “manages the civil service of the federal government”), at least 50 protestors protested Musk’s administrative coup. He and his acolytes had sought access to government personnel records.²⁴

50,000 people participated in a call, “We Choose to Fight,” organized by Indivisible, WFP, Move On, and others.²⁵

February 3

“Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) said he would place a 'blanket hold' on all of President Trump’s State Department nominees ... until USAID again is allowed to operate normally and the administration ceases its ‘authoritarian behavior.’”²⁶

²² <https://bsky.app/profile/aronlund.bsky.social/post/3lh4mv7wdds2y>

²³

<https://ktla.com/news/local-news/massive-protest-against-trump-deportations-forms-near-downtown-l-a-la-pd-calls-it-non-permitted/>

²⁴ <https://bsky.app/profile/missmouse.bsky.social/post/3lh7yitp6wk2z;>

<https://dcmediagroup.us/2025/02/02/federal-workers-block-doors-of-admin-building-over-elon-musk-data-breach/>

²⁵ Social media.

²⁶

<https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/democratic-senator-says-he-will-block-trump-nominees-until-usaid-is-back-94f8699e>

Sen. Andy Kim (D-NJ) said he will would walk over to USAID and ask “what in God’s name is happening.”²⁷ He did so and held a press gaggle.²⁸

Rep. Don Beyer “will be going to USAID today with colleagues to shine a light on what is happening there.” Beyer was expected to be joined by Sen. Van Hollen, Rep. Raskin, Rep. Connolly, and Rep. Olszewski.²⁹

Members of Get Free protested outside the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).³⁰

In a letter, the “New York attorney general, Letitia James, has warned New York hospitals that complying with the White House’s executive order to end gender-affirming medical care for transgender youth could well violate state law.”³¹

No Specific Date

“The End of Term Web Archive captures and saves U.S. Government websites at the end of presidential administrations. The EOT has thus far preserved websites from administration changes in 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020 [and has now been working on 2024].”³²

Wikipedia includes an entry on “Criminal proceedings in the January 6 United States Capitol attack.”³³ It lists names of insurrectionists and their sentences.

²⁷ <https://bsky.app/profile/himself.bsky.social/post/3lhbunqa3ns22>

²⁸ <https://bsky.app/profile/charlotteclymer.bsky.social/post/3lhc3pmuojc2g>

²⁹ <https://bsky.app/profile/fritschner.bsky.social/post/3lhbqph7rjc2e>;
<https://bsky.app/profile/marisakabas.bsky.social/post/3lhbwzc5ius2v>;
<https://bsky.app/profile/fritschner.bsky.social/post/3lhc4oriya22j>’
<https://bsky.app/profile/fritschner.bsky.social/post/3lhc5mtfskk2j>

³⁰ <https://bsky.app/profile/getfree-mvmt.bsky.social/post/3lhbqr52bn22b>

³¹

https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/03/nyregion/ny-attorney-general-transgender-care.html?unlocked_article_code=1.uE4.HvjA.s2RsEbp65qxV

³² <https://eotarchive.org/>

³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criminal_proceedings_in_the_January_6_United_States_Capitol_attack;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cases_of_the_January_6_United_States_Capitol_attack