



COMMENTARY

The age of cowards

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📷 UK President Eli Capilouto, left, shakes hands with Sen. Lindsey Tichenor, ahead of an interim committee meeting, Sept. 17, 2024. (Kentucky Lantern photo by McKenna Horsley)

We are living in the age of cowards, and it started even before Donald Trump sealed his reelection.

September marks one year since I had the misfortune of witnessing University of Kentucky President Eli Capilouto and other top

university presidents get their heads handed to them in an [Interim Joint Committee on Education](#). Their task over two long hours? To placate, to ensure our GOP supermajority in Frankfort that any whiff of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) had already been stripped from university governance and class syllabi.

Near the end of the meeting, I checked my phone to see that Ricky L. Jones – a professor from the University of Louisville who was also in the audience – had posted on his social media, “The McCarthyite Committee has now called the Presidents of Eastern Kentucky, Western Kentucky, and Murray State to all testify at once. They’re being handled like the B-Team. On another note, ONE of the THREE Black legislators just returned to the room.”

Jones was right. From the sneering arrogance of Sen. Lindsey Tichenor, one of the main interrogators, to the timidity of the university presidents in the spotlight, everything about that meeting felt un-American and disgusting. And it was equally crushing to see many of our elected officials up there on panel, who surely know better, barely push back.

Where, I wondered, was their courage? Where were our leaders?

The issues of missing courage and absent leadership have grown exponentially worse since President Donald Trump took office, again, in January.

From Washington D.C. to Kentucky, the sycophantic stranglehold this one man has on the leaders we deem most powerful has been shocking to see.

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Where are the officials – in Kentucky and all over the country – that we elected to Congress to represent OUR interests? By all reports, most of them are in absentia, avoiding constituent town halls back home like vampires in sunlight while cheering on the president from behind the safe space of their social media feeds.

As men like Daniel Cameron, Nate Morris and Andy Barr fight harder for the Trump endorsement than they do for the votes of Kentuckians, we should consider whom exactly they intend on serving if awarded a six-year U.S. Senate term – the 4.5 million citizens they represent or the tyrant in the Oval Office who can, with a tweet, destroy their careers?

Do our representatives work for us or for the president?

We get the answer to that question every day.

Congress was sent home early for their summer break to avoid dealing with potential shockwaves in the Epstein files. The Federal Emergency Management Agency [suspended staff](#) who dared to criticize the president over what they deemed dangerous cuts. The president [fired](#) the head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics hours after a weaker-than-expected jobs report because the numbers did not adhere to the fantasy he's peddling to Americans that jobs are on the rise because of his immigration crackdown. He has shaken down some of this nation's most lauded universities claiming, without proof, that they have been ["infested with radicalism."](#)

The president now [claims](#), in opposition to statistics, there is a violent crime emergency in our nation's capital to justify deployment and federalization of National Guard troops from a number of red states to Washington D.C. and has threatened to do the same in other Democratic-led cities, even at the refusal of those states' governors.

The last time I was in Washington D.C., I met up with friends from the U.S. Army War College who worked at the Pentagon. We took a nighttime boat ride on the Potomac so they could show me the monuments lit up from the water; we grabbed beers at a pub in Georgetown; we peeked inside the office of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs who was, that minute, arriving outside via black SUV motorcade so we had to be quick.

I would not make that trip to Washington D.C. today. In a lifetime of U.S. and international travel, I've learned that a basic rule of thumb is that it is unsafe to be in any city occupied by armed military. The president, in his unhinged marketing blitz to make himself look like a strongman, has made local law enforcement look like ninnyes and effectively warned tourists (and the money they spend) to stay away.

And yet, he remains unchallenged by anyone who could stop him.



Sen. Robby Mills chimed in on X to support Trump's stand against mail-in voting.

stand with President Trump...it's time to end mail-in voting! I am not referring to absentee voting, which KY has and is controled [sic] and secured through an electronic portal. I am referring to the states that mail every registered voter a ballot and allows for ballot harvesting. This must end!"

Kentucky does not have mail-in voting.

I am unaware of any plans by our secretary of state to introduce mail-in voting.

So why is Mills so publicly het up ("This must end!") about something that is not happening here and falls completely outside the purview of his office?

Because Mills knows what all those in power know: Publicly fawning and praising and sucking up to the current occupant of the Oval Office every chance they get (see how Cameron, Morris and Barr are behaving in their Senate runs) will either keep them in power or get them there.

In a testament to today's rampant toadyism, even Republicans in leadership at the Kentucky legislature are quick to tout any Trump talking point in order to grab his gaze.

State Sen. Robby Mills – former candidate for lieutenant governor and current Senate majority caucus chair – recently [posted](#) a Trump video about mail-in ballots and wrote, in part, "I

The story of Kentucky's university presidents being hauled to Frankfort for a humiliating spanking last September was an advance-notice reality check. That meeting did feel McCarthyite, and yet we all treated it as normal. It was one of many signs to come that – whether it be a university president making big money or a lawmaker in state or federal government – we are witnessing abject cowardice in our leaders on a daily, sometimes hourly, basis.

It is like watching all of the dominoes loudly fall and wondering who is going to do the work to, one by one, stand them upright again.

Everyone keeps asking: Where are the Democrats? What are the Democrats doing? What is their plan, their platform, their social media game plan, etc...?

We are wasting time, and we are asking all the wrong questions.

In this age of categorical, across the board, capitulation and cowardice – as a 78 year-old man, wearing a red hat in the Oval Office, denigrates the free press while exercising his stranglehold on everyone from billionaires to business executives to lawmakers to military leaders to university presidents – we are a population desperate for those with real courage, real convictions and real voices to reveal themselves. No matter their political party.

How much longer will we have to wait?

How much of who we are as Americans will be irreparably destroyed before we rebuild?

Where in the hell are our leaders?



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