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September 22, 2016: An Open Letter to Fred Barnes

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Title: An Open Letter to Fred Barnes

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9/22/2016—Fred Barnes asks the question, why aren't there any anti-Hillary Dems in the September 5, 2016 Weekly Standard. His point is basically that Republicans are willing to police their own, but Democrats are not. Thus, the outpouring of anti-Trump Republicans and nothing comparable on the Democratic side.

A few points. First, both Democrats and Republican rank and file are about equally dissatisfied with their candidates. According to a Fox poll on September 15, "Eighty percent of Republicans back Trump, and 81 percent of Democrats support Clinton." These are pretty low numbers for a Presidential candidate at this stage of a race. Especially among young voters, dissatisfaction with Secretary Clinton translates into support of third party candidates. So Barnes' premise is wrong about the rank and file.

Second, some of the column confuses policy and character. Most Democrats do not agree that the Clinton foreign policy was "disastrous" as the column puts it. That is just a disagreement, about the Iran nuclear agreement, for example. It's a tough world and a lot has gone wrong. But, the last eight years have contained fewer major mistakes than the previous eight.

Third, not everyone agrees that the Clinton problems are that serious, especially compared to comparable issues with Donald Trump. The Clinton foundation peddled influence, clearly. But nobody got anything. As Paul Krugman put it yesterday, the Trump Foundation engaged in more or less open bribery. Clinton's email scandal shows her as secretive, but not dishonest. The continuing refusal of Trump to release his tax records undoubtedly means he has something to hide—if only how little money he makes and has.

But Barnes is right about Party leadership. Leading Democrats do not talk publically about Clinton's serious personal lapses. The reason for this is obvious—they do not want to do anything to help Donald Trump. The question is, why this lockstep response at the top? This kind of unity is unusual among Democratic Party leadership. It is much more normal for Republicans. So, why the reversal this year?

This gets to the heart of the matter. Speaking for myself—not a Party leader, of course, but an outspoken person. Barnes does not understand who I think Trump is and what a Trump victory would mean. I am not certain that after eight years of Donald Trump, there would be another Presidential election. It took Mussolini around three years before he began to dismantle the democratic structure of pre-war Italy. Unlike Clinton and all the major Republican candidates this year, and unlike President Bush, whom I loathed, I have to worry with Trump about whether he believes in, or understands, constitutional checks and balances.

Barnes surely believes that President Obama rules unconstitutionally by decree. But what does Obama do when a court orders him to stop doing something? He stops. Barnes must be positive that a President Trump would also obey court orders. But I don't have his confidence and I am not willing to take that chance.

Do you think, compared to the possible end of constitutional government in the United States, I

care about Clinton lapses? I don't deny them. I discount them. If Clinton were running against Rubio, I would have to think about them. But with Trump, there is the potential for real harm of the kind that has not been threatened since the 1930's.

Now, I may be wrong about Donald Trump. But let Barnes convince me of that, rather than wondering why more Dems are not anti-Hillary.