

# **HOW WE RESIST TRUMP AND HIS EXTREME AGENDA**

## **By Congressman Jerry Nadler**

Since Election Day, many people have asked me what they might do to support those of us in Congress who are ready and willing to stand up and fight the Trump agenda.

My answer starts with a fundamental belief that the 240-year-old institutions of our government, in particular, our systems of checks and balances, were, in part, created with the precise goal of averting tyranny. These institutions can only function properly, however, when our country's leaders work vigorously to ensure that they do, and when citizens remain fully engaged in the process. Now more than ever, with a President-elect who threatens to undermine and even delegitimize those institutions—and in doing so, to damage the very soul of our liberal democracy—I implore everyone to help our country help itself.

We cannot wait four years to vote Mr. Trump out of office, as members of the GOP Senate and House Majorities have already stated that they will facilitate the Trump agenda, even if they weren't supporters of his during the campaign.

So we must do everything we can to stop Trump and his extreme agenda now. We do this by:

1. Holding him accountable for the tenor and tactics of his campaign, as well as his past and ongoing deplorable personal, professional and political conduct;
2. Waging fierce battles against every regressive action he takes—from personnel appointments to his legislative program—in order to thwart or at least slow them down;
3. Exposing his Republican enablers in Congress, and voting them out of office in 2018, with the goal of taking back either the House or the Senate for Democratic control.

To achieve this, we must keep our eyes on two important goals: depressing Trump's public support and dividing the Congressional GOP from him and from each other.

To understand how the public might help those of us in Congress achieve this, it is first necessary to explain what procedural tools we have at our disposal to resist him legislatively.

The House of Representatives is set up to facilitate majority rule. This can't be sugarcoated: we have very few parliamentary tools available to us if the GOP Majority seeks to minimize the Minority's influence – and they will. We have a few minor floor procedures like “discharge petitions,” and, usually, one floor amendment (the “Motion to Recommit”), but even these require some Republican support, which will be very hard to cultivate in this environment. We will, of course, make the most of these and any other

possible procedural avenues we can identify. For example, many of the agenda items that Trump promised during his campaign will have to come under the tough and aggressive scrutiny of the House Judiciary Committee if they, in any way, violate the constitutional rights of citizens or overstep Presidential authority. As a senior Member of the Judiciary Committee, I will do everything I can to protect our civil rights and civil liberties. But people should not be under any illusion that this is an easy road or that it will materially slow down Trump's proposals.

That said, our main job as the Minority in the House will be to develop the best arguments possible against a given terrible Trump proposal, most usefully if such arguments divide the Republicans, show Trump as a fraud or self-dealer, and/or create situations where individual Republican members fear for their own seats. These kinds of "wedge" issues prepare the ground for opposition in the Senate.

The Senate Minority has a far greater ability to stop things than we do in the House. The Senate is an institution designed to give each individual member more influence and efficacy. Senators of both parties have great affection for this tradition. Senator Chuck Schumer, the incoming Minority Leader, has for the moment, the single strongest procedural tool to stymie Trump and the Republicans – the "filibuster." The filibuster allows any Senator to block any vote, unless and until there is "cloture" – a vote of at least 60 Senators voting to end the filibuster. The filibuster has a long history in the Senate, although, there is always the possibility that the Republicans will limit its application or even eliminate it.

So, in sum, while we Democrats in Congress have a few tools, we don't have a lot. To make matters even more disconcerting, Trump will be able to enact a good deal of his agenda through Executive Orders and through the filibuster-proof budget reconciliation process. That said, in this time of emergency, with the public's help, we must do everything we can to fight back.

So, what can you, as a member of the concerned public, do to help strengthen the hand of Congressional Democrats resisting Trump?

### **The first order of business must be to refuse to allow the normalization of Trump.**

While respecting the results of the election and the Office of the President, we cannot allow for the normalization of the hatred and bigotry that Trump used to stir fear and resentment, or of his behavior that is completely unbecoming the office he is about to occupy, like his sexually predatory actions or his cozying up to world leaders who reject our democratic form of government. We must never lend these things or his expressed contempt for democratic principles any legitimacy.

Whether or not he himself feels these hateful things almost doesn't matter, as he exploited them to come to power, and, in doing so empowered the most wicked tendencies in American society. Nor have we seen any evidence that this was all merely campaign strategy, or that he intends now to condemn these ideologies. His

appointments of Steve Bannon as White House Chief Strategist, and of Ken Blackwell and Kris Kobach to his transition team, suggest the complete opposite.

Donald Trump doesn't deserve the benefit of the doubt because he has not earned the benefit of the doubt. The burden is on Trump to change his stripes, though I, like many of you, am deeply doubtful that will ever happen. As such, there can be no normalization of him or his Administration.

Anti-normalization is the first key step to long-term eroding of Trump's support.

Individual citizens and concerned organizations can do much to ensure that we don't normalize. It is essential that the public speak loudly so that elected leaders—both Democrats and Republicans—as well as the media, do not get lulled into a false sense of business as usual. This is precisely what the Trump Administration is hoping for and will try to project daily. They will also accuse those of us in government who resist normalization as obstructers of the popular will of the people. So we must have sustained, loud voices at our backs.

The large-scale protests that have occurred across this country have been a critical first step in combatting normalization. They should certainly continue in the non-violent way they have been conducted thus far. They are already changing the tone of the media around the Steve Bannon appointment, for example.

The creative use of every basic organizing strategy to keep this up is what is now essential to fight normalization. Here are some ideas:

- Write letters to media editors every time you see an article or broadcast that utilizes a normalizing tone or doesn't make note of the extreme nature of Trump, his behavior and rhetoric, or his Administration's actions.
- Use the hashtag #NotNormal or #DontNormalize on your social media platforms.
- Contact your elected officials via petitions, letters, calls and social media to urge them to resist any action that would normalize the Administration and demand that they loudly condemn any Trump actions that are unbecoming our democracy.
- Reach out to your friends and family and encourage them to do the same.
- Support rhetorically and financially those organizations that are stepping up to fight normalization.

**Advocacy groups and everyday citizens must become a unified blocking force for Congressional Democrats who are fighting against Trump's extreme agenda.**

Congressional Democrats must, as discussed above, use all available means to resist and thwart Trump's agenda. But we need a tough and efficient fighting force standing behind

us. Concerned national organizations and individuals must band together immediately, in unprecedented and streamlined ways, putting aside slight ideological differences and competitions, and become committed to sharing resources in the interest of building an all-in force. It may very well require unorthodox advocacy strategies, like the creation of broader-than-normal coalitions based on each of Trump's individual proposals, wherein single issue groups may find themselves working on issues outside their normal wheelhouse to the extent their memberships allow, for the greater good.

Congressional leaders will be talking directly to the national advocacy groups about this, and how to link directly to our emerging organizational structure within Congress to fight.

So how precisely will we need individual people in this effort?

First, you should join and financially support the national advocacy groups working on issues you care about. Anti-hate groups, civil liberties groups, reproductive rights groups are all good places to start. As members and supporters, you should be encouraging those group's leaders to work in as collaborative a manner as possible to defeat each Trump proposal. Also, join social media groups that are inclined to resist Trump efforts. These groups are very efficient channels for national advocacy leaders to quickly mobilize large groups for actions on each of these issue campaigns.

Second, we must have loud issue activism from constituents in "swing" or "marginal" Democratic districts, supporting Democratic House and Senate members who are up for re-election in 2018 to encourage them to legislatively oppose Trump. Without vocal support for these electorally vulnerable members, we cannot expect them to take the necessary risks we need as we put forth our anti-Trump arguments in Congress.

Practically speaking, I would encourage people residing in safe Democratic districts to consider adopting a couple of key marginal Democratic districts to help organize within. That means working with your local house of worship or progressive group, in, say, New York City or Los Angeles, and building relationships with local houses of worship and advocacy groups in suburban areas near them. Suburban districts are always a good bet to find swing districts, but formal lists will soon be available from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee or elsewhere on the web.

**Congressional Republicans who are up for re-election need to understand that when they embrace Trump and/or his policy approach, they will pay heavily at the ballot box. If we can separate Congressional Republicans from Trump, we can stop parts of his agenda.**

We watched a number of establishment Republicans reject Trump and his campaign because they did not want to be aligned with him, his behavior or his associations. That was important, but it obviously was not enough.

It matters what GOP members of Congress do now. They have to be made to understand if they embrace Trump, they will pay politically.

Just like the suggestion in the previous section to adopt a swing or marginal Democratic district, individuals and groups in safe Democratic districts should also consider adopting a district with a vulnerable Republican member and help local activists there pressure that member to separate from Trump.

**Become as invested in the Midterm Elections as you were in the Presidential, as if your life depended on it.**

Even as we together will do everything in our power to resist Trump's agenda in the next two years, there is nothing that will stop him like returning control of one of the chambers—either the House or the Senate—to Democratic control. The country was deeply involved in the Presidential election, and now concerned citizens must become equally invested in the outcome of Midterms.

Unfortunately, the electoral maps for both the House and Senate Democrats do not look encouraging. But we must upend the conventional wisdom and nay-saying predictions by becoming much more involved in these elections to ensure stronger-than-ever Democratic turnout.

A divided Republican party is the best recipe for ensuring victory in the Midterm Elections, but that can only happen with a united and sharply focused Democratic party from top to bottom. Obviously, the key game *writ large* is to have good candidates with sufficient resources to challenge the Republicans in 2018. It is not enough to just protect marginal Democrats—which of course we must also do—we need significant electoral gains to end single party control of Congress and, subsequently, to defeat Donald Trump.

The main organizational entities for the Democrats in Congress are the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC.org) and the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee (DSCC.org). Sign up for their list-serves and get involved with the campaigns of your choosing as soon as possible.

**There is much to do and no time to lose because the soul of our country is on the line. We must be brave and stand up.**

This is just the beginning. Just as the #DumpBannon campaign has emerged and appears to be growing and changing the narrative on this appointment, there will be any number of campaigns like it to join in the coming days and months. Many local efforts will soon materialize organically and national advocacy groups are planning now for how they will conduct their issue advocacy campaigns moving forward. Congressional campaigns will be launching in short order. Keep your eyes on social media to connect with all of these, and we will also do our best to direct you to the most effective of these efforts in the coming days and months.

There are also large, national efforts underway to strategize around, not only Presidential election of 2020, but also the complex process of redistricting, which will hopefully produce more winnable Democratic districts in the future. And of course, there are also other things we should be doing individually, locally to care for our neighbors and others who may come under attack by the Trump agenda.

There will be so many ways to be involved. But whatever you do, get involved in some way right now, as we have no time to lose.

We must act quickly if we hope to really slow the advancement of the Trump agenda.

None of this will be easy. I've personally fought Trump many times, and he was a ruthless and dangerous man without the Presidency. Now that he has the reins of government, it's going to take tremendous courage and tremendous effort to stand up to him.

This is an unprecedented moment, and it requires a kind of bravery, discipline and focus which historical moments of this import call for. We have no choice – people's lives and the soul of our country is at stake. For our children and grandchildren, we must now stiffen our spines for this fight, because there is no time to waste and this is a fight we must not lose.