

**Marty Kaplan, Contributor**

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director

Blamer-In-Chief: The Art Of The Dodge

Trump is the consummate blame artist.

03/27/2017 08:04 pm ET | Updated Mar 27, 2017



AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

“I blame myself – it was my fault, and I take full responsibility for it,” said Donald Trump, not once, ever, in his entire life.

Here’s what else he didn’t say about the rout and ruin of repeal and replace: “I was clueless about health care policy. Instead of reading my briefing books or even my own bill, I played golf. I bullsh*tted my way through every meeting and phone call. And when it was explained to me that this dumpster fire of a bill would break my promise that everybody’s going to be taken care of much better than they are now, which was a huge applause line, by the way, I threw my own voters under the bus.”

In the wake of his Waterloo, instead of manning up, Trump blamed Democrats for not voting to strip health insurance from 24 million people, not voting to cut Medicaid by \$880 billion in order to cut taxes by \$883 billion and not voting to obliterate the signature legislative accomplishment of the Obama years. “Look,” he complained with crocodile bafflement to the “New York Times,” “we got no Democratic votes. We got none, zero.” Yet not once had Trump or Paul Ryan asked a single Democrat what it would take to get them to support a bill. “The good news,” Trump said, seeing the sunny side of the catastrophe he predicts is coming, is that the Democrats “now own Obamacare.” Don’t blame me – it’ll be their fault when it explodes, not mine.

Trump blamed Republicans, too. Friday morning, when the bill was still in play, he tweeted that if the Freedom Caucus stops his plan, they would be allowing Planned Parenthood to continue. Friday afternoon, amid the wreckage, Trump told the “Washington Post’s” Robert Costa that he was just an innocent bystander. “There are years of problems, great hatred and distrust” in the Republican Party, “and, you know, I came into the middle of it.”

White House aides, bravely speaking without attribution, blamed Ryan for snookering the rookie-in-chief into tackling Obamacare before tax reform. Trump himself told Costa, “I don’t blame Paul.” He repeated it: “I don’t blame Paul.” Then again: “I don’t blame Paul at all.” The laddie doth protest too much, methinks. By tweet time Saturday morning, clairvoyantly touting Jeanine Pirro’s Saturday night Fox News show, Trump had found a surrogate to stick the knife in Ryan without his fingerprints on it. “This is not on

President Trump,” Pirro said, avowing that “no one expected a businessman,” “a complete outsider,” to understand “the complicated ins and outs of Washington.” No, it’s on Ryan, she said. Ryan must step down.

Blame precedes politics. In Western civilization’s genesis story, Adam blamed Eve for tempting him, and he blamed God for Eve. But America’s genesis story contains a noble, if apocryphal, counter-narrative: When George Washington’s father asked him who chopped down the cherry tree, the future father of his country didn’t blame someone else – he copped to it. That’s the legacy Harry Truman claimed when put “The buck stops here” sign on his Oval Office desk.

But Trump is the consummate blame artist, a buck-passer on a sociopathic scale. He kicked off his campaign by blaming Mexico for sending us rapists and stealing our jobs. He blamed Hillary Clinton for founding the birther movement. He blamed Obama for founding ISIS. He blamed Obama’s Labor Department for publishing a “phony” unemployment rate. He blamed three million illegal voters for losing the popular vote. He blamed the botched raid on Yemen on U.S. generals. When U.S. District Judge James Robart ruled against his Muslim travel ban, he blamed Robart for future terrorism: “If something happens, blame him and court system.” He blamed “fake news” for treating Michael Flynn, “a wonderful man” whom he fired, “very, very unfairly.” He blamed Obama for wiretapping Trump Tower. He made his spokesman blame British intelligence for carrying that out. When GCHQ called that a crock, Trump played artful dodger: “All we did was quote... a very talented lawyer on Fox. And so you shouldn’t be talking to me, you should be talking to Fox.”

Obamacare is imperfect but fixable. But Trump wants to bomb it, not improve it. He wants to light the fuse, but to blame Democrats for exploding it. Trump could shore up the insurance exchanges that cover 10 million Americans by marketing them when enrollment opens again in November – but I bet he won’t. He could instruct government lawyers to appeal a lawsuit halting federal subsidies for co-payments and deductibles of low-income enrollees that House Republicans won last year – but I bet he won’t. On the other hand, he has the power to narrow the essential benefits Obamacare requires insurers to provide by, say, limiting prescription drug coverage and lowering the number of visits allowed for mental health treatment or physical therapy – and I bet he will.

Will Trump get away with it? He’s spent a lifetime banging his highchair and blaming the dog for his mess. No wonder he calls the free press fake news; no wonder he calls citizen activists paid protesters. You call someone who gets away with blaming others “unaccountable.” You know what the antonym of that is? Impeachable.

This is a crosspost of my column in the Jewish Journal, where you can reach me if you’d like at martyk@jewishjournal.com.