Executive Orders

June 5, 2017 By Kate Ferguson

During the presidential campaign, Congresswoman Karen Bass (D–Calif.) launched a petition on Change.org to pressure the Republican Party to order a psychological evaluation of then-candidate Donald Trump. She suggested he might be suffering from a mental illness.

Now, as the rhetoric about nuclear strikes grows heated between the United States and North Korea, Trump's ability to lead as commander in chief has caused even more concern among people already nervous about the president's psychological fitness.

Researchers have found that several past presidents exhibited signs of mental illness while in office. Abraham Lincoln suffered from clinical depression, and Theodore Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson showed signs of bipolar disorder. In the mid-1990s, an idea from former President Jimmy Carter led to the formation of a group that proposed creating a standing medical commission to determine whether a POTUS was mentally competent and able to govern wisely.

Unfortunately, no such committee was organized. But in 2016, folks remembered Carter's suggestion when Trump's erratic behavior and comments on the campaign trail called his mental stability into question.

Currently, presidential candidates aren't required to release information about their physical or mental health. Some politicians do so voluntarily, but perhaps the time has come for this to change. Maybe we need some mechanism to require a mandatory evaluation of those who run for and hold the highest office in the country.

In the aftermath of Trump's election, some news programs discussed a section of the 25th Amendment that allows a sitting president, members of his or her cabinet, or Congress to transfer presidential responsibilities to the vice president until the president has recovered from a mental or physical illness. (For Congress to take this step, there must be what's termed "extraordinary circumstances.")

Ronald Reagan didn't specifically call on this amendment, but he briefly transferred power to his vice president, George Bush, during his treatment for colon cancer. (Interestingly, no one cited the amendment when suspicions arose that Reagan was suffering from the initial stages of Alzheimer's disease.) Later, when George W. Bush was president, he invoked the 25th Amendment twice to transfer power to his VP, Dick Cheney.

Does the existence of this amendment render legal steps for mental assessment of the president

unnecessary? If you think about it, the answer might be found in the fact that President Trump's counselors seem to have a difficult time persuading him to listen to sane, rational advice.

So, yes, let's talk about that medical commission—soon.ron

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