

OUR CULTURE OF COMFORTABLENESS

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What happened in Butler, Pennsylvania is emblematic of our culture of comfortableness. We are a nation that lacks accountability for misconduct and incompetence, the net result of which is a growing pattern of serious social problems. It is institutionally ubiquitous.

It is this culture that accounts for the failure of the Secret Service to protect former president Donald Trump. A very relaxed environment in the Secret Service accounts for what happened. Consider the following.

- In March 2017, a 26-year-old man, Jonathan Tuan-Anh Tran, jumped the fence at the White House while carrying a dangerous weapon; he had two cans of Mace. Astonishingly, he was allowed to walk around for 15 minutes before he was apprehended by two Secret Service agents. While they were fired, a week later Tran was released. The following year he was found carrying a knife while attempting to illegally enter the office of Rep. Devin Nunes.
- In 2022, Arian Taherzadeh, 40, and Haider Ali, 35, duped four Secret Service officials by posing as officers and employees of the federal government. They obtained paraphernalia, handguns and assault rifles used by federal law enforcement agencies. These were not ordinary members of the Secret Service: one was on detail for the first lady; another was a uniformed

division officer in the White House; a third was on detail for Vice President Kamala Harris; and the fourth was assigned to the presidential protection detail. None was fired—they were merely suspended.

- In April 2024, a female Secret Service special agent assigned to cover the vice president jumped on her boss and began beating him. The agent, Michelle Herczeg, who had a history of aberrant behavior, chest-bumped and shoved her superior, then tackled him and punched him while still having her gun in her holster. Fellow agents wrestled her gun away, cuffed her and removed her from the premises. When questioned about this, Anthony Guglielmi, chief communications officer for the Secret Service, called the incident a “medical matter.” The offending agent was not fired—she was simply removed from Harris’ detail.

These are just a few examples that we know of in recent times.

Regarding the last incident, Rep. James Comer, who chairs the House Oversight and Accountability Committee, argues that the Secret Service, under the tutelage of its former director, Kimberly Cheatle, has become so concerned about the diversity, equity and inclusion agenda that it has lost sight of its primary mission, namely providing the highest standards of security. Shameless as ever, Cheatle refused to resign, waiting to be forced out for her incompetence. She should have been fired on the spot.

Lowering standards is a prescription for failure. It is not just the Secret Service that has become too comfortable in their work. Here are a few examples.

It is important for parents to be friendly with their children, but it is a monumental mistake to be their friend. When that happens, parents lose their mantle of authority. It is not easy to discipline someone who sees you as his equal, making accountability almost impossible.

Brooks Brothers makes excellent men's dress shirts. They also have what they call "Friday Shirts." They are described as a "comfortable alternative to our signature dress shirts." This complements the "dress down Friday" phenomenon that was created many years ago. This set a tone in the workplace: employees can get comfortable on Fridays. When this becomes part of their psyche, they are less likely to bust their chops.

From kindergarten to graduate school, student expectations have been lowered for decades, the result being a decline in academic excellence. The one ensures the other.

Calls to "defund the police," and going easy on street crime, has led to a demoralization of the police, a shrinking of their ranks, and a crime wave that is out of control. In New York City, it is not uncommon to see cops standing around doing nothing—they have been told to stand down. They have become quite comfortable in their new environs.

We remove cats and dogs who cannot fend for themselves and place them in shelters. Men and women who cannot fend for themselves are left to rot on the sidewalks, and pleas to remove them are met with demands to protect their "liberty." No one is held accountable.

Baseball players who jog the bases, instead of sprinting, are rarely disciplined. They have become accustomed to their comfortable condition.

Let's not forget Catholic children who attend Mass wearing their soccer uniforms. Parents who insist on proper dress are met with resistance by their children, so most accede to their wishes instead of holding the line.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with getting comfortable, especially after working hard all day at school or at work. But when comfortableness becomes the hallmark of our culture, misconduct and incompetence reign supreme.

We have become so nonchalant about wrongdoing that it is a wonder that matters haven't deteriorated further. The reaction to the attempted assassination of Donald Trump was a disgrace. It sadly reflects who we have become. Time to reboot.