Clockwise from top left: Matt Gaetz (OSV News/Reuters/Mike Blake); Kristi Noem (OSV News/Reuters/Marco Bello); Tulsi Gabbard (OSV News/Reuters/Jeenah Moon); Vivek Ramaswamy (Wikimedia Commons/Gage Skidmore); Elon Musk (OSV News/Reuters/Andrew Kelly); Robert Kennedy Jr. and Donald Trump (OSV News/Reuters/Carlos Barria); Pete Hegseth (OSV News/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)

by Michael Sean Winters

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Of course President-elect Donald Trump nominated now-former Rep. Matt Gaetz to be the nation's attorney general. Jeffrey Epstein isn't available.

It isn't easy trying to make sense of Trump's selections for the Cabinet and other important positions in his administration. But a kind of logic emerges as soon as you realize two things: Trump is someone who hires down and he thinks of politics as essentially performative.

So, why would anyone trust Gaetz with a position of responsibility, let alone nominate him to become the nation's chief law enforcement officer? If you are the first convicted felon to be elected president, as Trump is, it makes sense to hire a man who was investigated for having sex with underage girls. People are less likely to think the president is a scumbag if he is morally superior to the person standing next to him.

Fox News weekend host Pete Hegseth is slated to become the nation's secretary of defense. His rugged good looks made him a favorite on "Fox & Friends Weekend" and if you were doing a remake of "The Longest Day" or "Saving Private Ryan," Hegseth would be easy to cast. Alas, the job of defense secretary is a managerial position and the nominee has never managed a group of people, let alone an organization with almost 3 million employees!

Gov. Kristi Noem of South Dakota, known for engaging in a bunch of culture war issues, has been nominated to serve as the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. The department was created after 9/11 to protect the nation in the war on terrorism. Maybe Trump thought one war was like the other?

Trump also warned, repeatedly, that Haitian migrants were a threat to the nation's pets, a story that was completely bogus. Noem has admitted to shooting her dog Cricket. Again, maybe Trump got confused and thought Noem was protecting pets

from Haitians? Either way: Keep your pets far from the incoming Cabinet secretary.

When Trump nominated Noem and Hegseth, I was thinking of writing a parody. Then came the nominations that made me realize writing a parody would be redundant and, what is more, some of these picks are really dangerous.

When you learned Tulsi Gabbard had been nominated to be [director of national intelligence](#) didn't you wonder what intelligence our allies will now fail to share with us? She served on the [Armed Services Committee](#) for much of her time in Congress and did two terms on the Foreign Affairs Committee, but has no background in intelligence oversight.

The job to which Gabbard aspires requires collating and evaluating intelligence reports from the nation's different intelligence gathering agencies. Will Gabbard know how to spot weak evidence? Will she intuit when something is so dangerous the president must be informed? Or will she tailor her assessments so that she tells the president what he wants to hear? That is a recipe for danger.

Robert Kennedy Jr. has never met a conspiracy theory he didn't like. The pandemic spawned [many such theories](#), but Kennedy's [affinity for disinformation](#) predates COVID. Vaccines have downsides because everything good has a downside. That is human nature. Vaccines still save lives year in and year out and any attempt to restrict them will have dreadful consequences.

I am as suspicious of creeping scientism as anyone else: In our culture, people cloak non-scientific claims in the authority of science all the time, with negative, consequent distortions. Think of Charles Murray's [The Bell Curve](#) or virtually everything [Steven Pinker](#) has written. But I want to get every vaccine my doctor recommends. Besides, my complaints about scientism apply to Kennedy also: He likes to dress his nonsense in pseudo-scientific academic jargon, too.

Perhaps the most worrying nomination is that of Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy to lead a planned new [Department of Government Efficiency](#). There is no doubt Musk is a genius and Ramaswamy is really bright. But one of the conceits that predates Trumpism is the idea that we need a businessperson to clean up the government.

Running a business and running the government are vastly different tasks. The purpose of government is to serve the common good and that may require things that are inherently inefficient. Trump knows better than most Americans just how cumbersome our constitutional protections are when it comes to criminal justice! Enforcing the Bill of Rights is an exercise in the promotion of justice, not efficiency. A successful foreign policy might entail a host of inefficiencies if it is to succeed: Entrepreneurship is different from diplomacy.

Yes, the incoming Cabinet looks like a clown car. Yes, some appointments are more scary than others. Yes, there is a perverse hope that the inexperience of some of these nominees may result in their being ineffectual.

The American people voted to throw the establishment out and Trump is doing that. A lot of needed expertise and wisdom will get tossed out as well. Electoral politics is performative but the politics of governance requires more and different skills. With these nominations, you don't have to look very far down the tracks to see some trainwrecks ahead.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.