

America has never seen a party less caring than 21st-century Republicans

We pay our elected officials to take care of our communities and our planet. Since Trump took office, the GOP has set out only to destroy



In 2013, Paul Ryan said: 'We're not going to give up on destroying the healthcare system for the American people.' Photograph: Win McNamee/Getty Images

Last week I was taking an Uber (I know, I'm sorry, it was a necessity) across an unfamiliar town when the driver, whom I'll call Randy, started telling me about this cool dude named Jesus. Randy's big opener, earlier in the ride, was to gesture at a homeless man panhandling by the side of the road and say: "Isn't it terrible?"

"Yeah," I agreed, though I was unsure whether he was referring to homelessness as a blight or a form of state violence. "I can't believe my tax money pays for the president's golf vacations while people are freezing to death on the street. It's robbery."

"True that," he said, to my relief. "I hope this crazy country gets itself figured out before things get worse."

"Me too," I said. "I would really like to keep living."

"Yeah?" Randy pounced. "How would you like to live ... forever?"

Unfortunately, his offer had the opposite of its intended effect, as I immediately and permanently died. An undeterred Randy proceeded to explain to my corpse that Christmas isn't real and the Bible predicted that the earth was round, which was proof that the Bible was science fact. This went on for the next 20 minutes, during which Randy got lost twice as he was apparently proselytising too hard to look at the GPS. It was less a rideshare and more a low-grade kidnapping for which I was being charged. To his credit, though, it did feel like eternity.

But if there's anything 21st-century American life has prepared me for, it's an old man taking possession of my body and incompetently steering it in directions I don't want to go, while ignoring my boundaries and lecturing me on the one right way to live. At least Randy cared about that homeless guy, though, which is more than I can say for the Republican party.

I've been thinking a lot about the notion of "care" lately. Care can be florid and romantic or bureaucratic and dry; it is maintenance and stewardship and only sometimes love. You can take care of something without personally caring about it, which is precisely what we pay our elected officials to do: take care of our communities and our planet, whether or not you share our priorities and fears and weaknesses and religions and sexual orientations and gender identities and skin colours. We put ourselves and our money in your hands. Take care.

I don't know that America has ever seen a political party so divested of care. Since Trump took office, **Republicans** have proposed legislation to destroy unions, the healthcare system, the education system and the *Environmental Protection Agency*; to defund the reproductive health charity *Planned Parenthood* and restrict abortion; to stifle public protest and decimate arts funding; to increase the risk of violence against trans people and roll back anti-discrimination laws; and to funnel more and more wealth from the poorest to the richest. Every executive order and piece of *GOP* legislation is destructive, aimed at dismantling something else, never creating anything new, never in the service of improving the care of the nation.

Contemporary American conservatism is not a political philosophy so much as the roiling negative space around Barack Obama's legacy. Can you imagine being that insecure? Can you imagine not wanting children to have healthcare because you're embarrassed a black guy was your boss? It would be sad if it wasn't so dangerous.

That void at the heart of the party, that loss of any tether to humanity, is breeding anxiety on both sides of the political divide. According to the *Atlantic*, Florida Republican Tom Rooney **recently turned on his cohort with surprising lucidity**:

"I've been in this job eight years and I'm racking my brain to think of one thing our party has done that's been something positive, that's been something other than stopping something else from happening. We need to start having victories as a party. And if we can't, then it's hard to justify why we should be back here."

Vindictive obstructionism, it seems, is not particularly nourishing for the soul.

In the wake of the Republican party's **luscious, succulent failure to obliterate the Affordable Care Act** (Obamacare) and replace it with catastrophic nationwide poverty and death, an **old video of a Paul Ryan** gaffe went viral.

"We're not going to give up," Ryan assures his audience, "on destroying the healthcare system for the American people."

The clip is from 2013, not 2017, and obviously Ryan did not mean to say into a microphone that he wants to destroy the healthcare system. But here's the thing. I talk into a microphone in front of people all the time, and not once have I ever accidentally said: "*Hitler was pretty cool*" when what I meant to say was: "*Throw all Nazis into the sea*". Even if we acknowledge that such a slip of the tongue is technically possible (if not likely), we don't actually need to wonder about what Ryan secretly believes. Gaffe or no, we already know he wants to destroy the healthcare system for the American people, because he tried to pass legislation that would destroy the healthcare system for the American people. And because destruction, not life, is the foundation of Ryan's party.

Listen to people, and political parties, when they tell you who they are. Don't trust those who get lost when they're claiming to show you The Way. Zero stars.