



Former Gov. Martin O'Malley: "I think a lot of Americans, uncharacteristically, have come to fear the future. They've come to the conclusion that tomorrow is going to be worse than today for themselves, their children and their grandchildren."

Last spring, Martin O'Malley leapt upon a makeshift platform like an uncaged lion outside the Woodlawn headquarters of the Social Security Administration, grabbed a microphone and sounded again like a candidate on the stump.

"The truth is that we are all in this together," said O'Malley, former Social Security commissioner, Maryland governor and mayor of Baltimore, to more than 1,000 people protesting potential Trump administration cuts to SSA. "We need each other, and we need to help each other. The strength of our country is not the wealth we amass nor the size of our army but the care and compassion we demonstrate for one another."

*I*more recently caught up with O'Malley, 62, who lives in Baltimore, to talk about his views on the current national political landscape.

What are you up to these days?

I'm doing town halls with members of Congress all over the country — Arizona, Kansas City, New York, Iowa, Nebraska, and I'm also appearing on talk shows, Rachel Maddow and others. All because of the attack on Social Security by the Trump administration.

They have torn into this public institution with such viciousness and destructive speed that I truly believe, for the first time in the 90-year history of Social Security, they've put benefits at risk for the 73 million people who are in active status. I'm doing all I can to let people know, so they can rise up before the Trump administration breaks Social Security.

What do you think the administration wants to do to Social Security?

They've eliminated 30 to 40 percent of the staff at Social Security, including people who understand how the legacy systems are held together to get 73 million people their Social Security checks on time.

Social Security is the most effective and efficient insurance company in the world, operating on less than one percent overhead to benefits paid. Social Security is also the largest domestic program in the United States. Nobody else in government has \$2.6 trillion in a surplus reserve.

What the administration is doing to Social Security is intended to turn the public against this long-trusted agency. They're telling a bunch of big lies. One of them is the 'waste and inefficiency lie.' Another is the 'bankruptcy lie' — illegal immigrants bankrupting Social Security. But so-called undocumented people are prohibited from receiving anything from the program, even though they pay in \$26 billion a year to all the rest of us.

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And the 'dead people lie': The zombie apocalypse of 150-year-olds and 300-year-olds receiving Social Security. They're doing this so they can get away with robbing Social Security. They want the \$2.6 trillion in the surplus reserve of the trust fund.

They talk about privatization. Privatization would be a very bad thing with people of this ilk. They think they and their friends can make some money privatizing it. In my experience, privatization usually results in somebody making a lot of money for worse service.

What do you feel is happening in our country?

I think a lot of Americans, uncharacteristically, have come to fear the future. They've come

to the conclusion that tomorrow is going to be worse than today for themselves, their children and their grandchildren. And in this atmosphere of fear, fascism flourishes. The political appeal of every fascist or authoritarian leader is fear. It is the atmosphere in which the appeal takes root and it's the means to hold onto power.

Because of this fear of the future, people think only a strong man can prevent America from getting worse. Part of what they define as 'worse' is a more diverse nation. They believe in the scapegoating of others, in this case Black and Brown people.

Donald Trump, for the first time in American history, sent the Marines in the homeland against American citizens. He's having masked police kidnap people on our streets and ship them off in the dead of night. He's blatantly violating acts Congress put in place, for example at the IRS and Social Security, that prevent our personal data from being used as a means for authoritarian crackdown.

This is way beyond the norms of anything the American republic has stood for. We as a country have to figure out whether this government of, by and for the people is going to survive or not.

I'm doing all I can to act, to inform, to speak out and not go silent because silence is the ally of an authoritarian ruler. We must voice our opposition to things that are just so contrary to the values of the republic.

What do you feel the Democratic Party needs to do at this time?

Donald Trump is a man with total contempt for law, regulation or American traditions. With a compliant Supreme Court usually looking the other way, he's trying to bully his way to a gerrymandered advantage. And it's possible that after the midterm elections, any lawsuits where the election results are disputed will go to the Supreme Court. And they side with Trump.

What do we do? Alexander Hamilton said we must withstand 'the temporary delusion.' He said there will come a time in the republic's future when we are governed by a person of avarice and deceit. When that time comes, we must hold tight to our public institutions and withstand the temporary delusion.

That means we must have electoral strategies, be prepared for litigation, register more people than the Republicans. In addition, we must return always to, 'How does this impact you, your family at the kitchen table, your grandparents, your kids?' It's not only about the

price of things. It's also about things like vaccines, the new threat we might have from measles and other illness we thought were eradicated before a total goofball [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.] took over Health and Human Services.

Other things the Democratic Party must do is recruit great candidates to file in every district. Not just candidates for Congress but also for school boards and local offices. Do a better job of rapid response across social media channels, reach people where they're at with trusted messengers and voices.

And we must get back to the hard work of registering voters. Take Rep. Andy Harris [R-Maryland]. He's the leader of the Freedom Caucus that's actively dismantling our government. He voted to cut Social Security by almost half a billion dollars. Yet on the other side of his mouth, he drives over the Bay Bridge and tells people he'd never touch Social Security. He should not be reelected. Yet there are people all over the Eastern Shore, Harford County, Cecil County and parts of Baltimore County who could vote and would likely vote Democratic, and yet there is no apparatus to motivate them or get them to the polls.

What do you feel should be the role of the U.S. regarding the Israel-Palestinian conflict?

The greatest power of the United States is not our military, is not our economy or our diplomatic power. America's greatest power is the fourth power — the power of our ideals. Our belief in the dignity of every human being.

Our belief in the common good we all share not just as Americans but as people who inhabit this little blue marble of life hurtling through space. The power we demonstrate as a force for humanity in the world.

But when we have a president who threatens to scrape Gaza clean and turn it into a large 'Mediterranean Mar-a-Lago,' we diminish our power as a country. I pray that when the United States recovers her true self, she will play a role for peace and healing among all the peoples of the Middle East, including, of course, Israelis and the Palestinians.