Earlier this month, millions of Americans watched the long-awaited congressional testimony of former FBI director James Comey. Much of what he said under oath directly contradicted President Donald Trump’s statements about their prior conversations and implied that there may be additional evidence of wrongdoing.
The congressional and special prosecutor’s investigations of alleged collusion with Russia are still in an early stage. We do not know yet whether Trump told the truth or whether there is evidence of wrongdoing by the president or members of his campaign team and administration. We simply aren’t in a position now to assess whether the president has broken the law or justified talk of impeachment.

Nevertheless, there are some assessments that now can and must be rendered. For example, we should be appalled by the efforts of Republicans — including Texas Sens. Ted Cruz and John Cornyn and many in the Texas Republican delegation to Congress — to defend the president in a kneejerk and partisan manner.

Consider the facts.

Prior to, during and following Comey’s testimony, many Republican senators endeavored to cast doubt upon — and even impugn — Comey’s character and integrity. While both Republicans and Democrats legitimately questioned Comey’s handling of the Clinton email and Russian meddling in the 2016 election investigations, and although the former FBI director may have made mistakes, one would be hard pressed to prove that Comey has a record of not telling the truth and being anything less than honest.

Republicans, I submit, recently may have stooped even lower in their deferential treatment of the President.

I was taken aback, for instance, when last week their defense of Trump’s behavior was reduced to the claim that he is inexperienced, doesn’t know the rules of governing and as an outsider is new to Washington protocol. What does such a claim suggest?

At minimum it indicates that there are those willing to support a president who is not competent to serve as chief executive of the nation, hasn’t yet learned how to govern, shows no signs of a willingness to learn, continues to communicate incessantly and irresponsibly via Twitter, fails to be accountable and remorseful for his words and deeds — and thus is incapable of ethically and professionally discharging the duties of his office.

The argument from ignorance defense is not only incredible but ironic. Let us not forget that a year ago Trump boasted that he knew the system better than anyone else and thus only he could change it.

But even if we accept the partisan defense of Trump, how can anyone support, tolerate and acquiesce to a leader with a well-known record of lying? To be clear, this is not just a charge of occasional lying. There are those who have studied carefully Trump’s discourse, advancing a persuasive case that Trump’s past record — including his dealings as a businessman — documents a pattern of habitual lying. During the primaries, it will be recalled, even Ted Cruz called him a pathological liar.
My hope is that at least for the time being, until additional evidence is accrued and official investigations run their course, we should not become mired in debates about whether laws were broken or impeachable acts committed. Instead, our focus should be squarely on the ethical issue of how willing our nation is to tolerate and excuse the lying of the president.

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