Many Americans disapprove of President Donald Trump’s Muslim immigration ban, his executive orders reversing environmental protection measures and tariff threats that could start a trade war.

Many other Americans, especially those voters who elected Trump, are pleased by those executive actions. They see a president who is keeping his campaign promises, and they certainly approve.

The things Trump did in his first week in office are the consequences people are referring to when they repeat the well-worn phrase, “Elections have consequences.”

No matter how divided Americans are over the consequences, there should be agreement that partisans on either side of those issues have a right to their beliefs and perhaps even that the arguments they make to support them deserve grudging respect.

No such agreement or respect is warranted, however, for something else that was evident in the first days of the Trump presidency—that the president lies.

That is not meant to be a provocative statement. It is a documented fact, and no American, Trump supporter or not, should tolerate it.

The eradication of truth as an imperative of the presidency is not an acceptable consequence of an American election.

The first words the new president wrote on his famed Twitter account after his inauguration were whoppers, even though the subject was so puny it should have been beneath presidential notice. In defiance of subway ridership data and photographic evidence, Trump declared that his inauguration crowd was the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration. When the National Park Service posted photos proving that claim wrong, Trump ordered the Park Service Twitter account shut down.
Other, more consequential, untruths followed, including his assertions that millions of people voted illegally in the presidential election and that the press invented his verbal attacks on the CIA and other intelligence services.

How can Trump’s White House staff and cabinet, members of Congress and the president’s devoted supporters across the country abide this? Since when is a president of the United States exempt from telling the truth?

It goes without saying that truth telling is a fundamental standard of ethical behavior for everyone. Classic stories involving a cherry tree and a nickel told about America’s two greatest presidents, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, may be quaint and probably apocryphal, but they nonetheless express the revered belief that our presidents—especially our presidents—are expected to be paragons of honesty.

Some Americans see something darker than the diminishment of the moral standing of the presidency in the untruthfulness. After presidential adviser Kellyanne Conway used the loony yet chilling term “alternate facts” to describe the presidential falsehoods, so many people bought copies of the George Orwell novel “1984” that the book moved to the top of the Amazon bestseller list.

The new appeal of the book, which was published in 1949, derives from its parallels with “alternative facts,” particularly the campaign by Orwell’s ironically named Ministry of Truth to deny reality. The main character describes a government that attempts to persuade citizens to “reject the evidence of your eyes and ears.” The novel describes a world in which hate and fear of foreigners are drummed up by propaganda and boatloads of refugees die at sea.

Another book surging in popularity in the “alternative facts” aftermath is “The Origin of Totalitarianism,” written by Hannah Arendt in 1951. Writing about the rise of Hitler and Stalin, Arendt observed, “Mass propaganda discovered that its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd.”

Readers who find these visions relevant to these times are taking a very dark view of the Trump
Consequences and truth

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...presidency. But even those who maintain a more optimistic outlook, including voters who chose Trump because they believed in his vision of America, would do well to follow the example of Winston Smith, the hero of “1984,” who vowed to defend “the obvious and true.”