

Policies or Principles?

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The January 6th Congressional hearings have provided us with an important new way to look at politics. We have long been fixated on the policies that true believers in each party support, a fixation that makes government difficult, if not impossible.

Since Newt Gingrich, House Speaker in 1995-99, declared that Democrats were the enemy, not their colleagues and competitors in governing, we have morphed into a divided country. Gone are the days that Congressmen and Senators could work jointly across the aisle to accomplish some legislation that could benefit the country. To make matters worse, the winning party has a narrow majority in the Senate, which is exploited by a Senate Rule (arbitrary), the filibuster, requiring 60 votes to pass a measure, not the 51 of simple majority.

It has been 50 years since another criminal president, Richard Nixon, attempted to tamper with an election, and he was driven from office by his own party and minority Democrats. Our recent criminal president, Donald J. Trump, went even further by tampering with our most sacred democratic institution, free and fair elections, democracy itself.

The Democratic majority in Congress impeached him twice, but the Senate with a slim majority of Democrats was only able to secure ten Republicans to join them in removing him permanently from public office. They would have needed a two-third majority for such an important action.

Trump shamelessly refused to accept defeat, claiming that the election was fraudulent, and that he had really won. His devoted followers believed this big lie, despite all evidence to the contrary. His inner circle told him he had lost the election and that the accusation of fraud was a lie. He took his complaint to numerous law courts around the country and lost in each one.

He then resorted to violence, stirring up his angry followers and enlisting the help of armed militia thugs to stage a coup, designed to prevent the orderly process of succession. On January 6, 2021, the date in which votes from all the states would be opened and the winner of the election officially confirmed, the Trump mobs attacked Congress, threatening the lives of Vice President Pence and all Democratic legislators they hoped to find. This was to be a lynching.

No thanks to President Trump, who watched gleefully at the White House, the mob almost succeeded while he did nothing. Vice President Mike Pence stepped in and called the National Guard and other help, refused relentless pressure from Trump to send the votes back to the states, and remained in seclusion until order was restored and then led the process of opening the votes and recognizing the election of Joe Biden.

Pence was an embarrassment as Vice President, obediently serving Trump's every outrage. A pious man, he nonetheless overlooked Trump's admission on tape that he liked to grab women's private parts because "I am a star, and they let me." Pence never criticized Trump's stream of lies, boasts, outrages, and failures as president. We do not know how Pence felt privately, but his public performance was sad.

The January 6 Committee has provided the country with a brilliant commentary of the events that led up to the January 6 Insurgency. Despite the decision of the Republicans in Congress not to cooperate, two of them did: Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger, who decided that principles were more important than politics.

Witnesses, documents, and videos unfolded the trajectory of this nightmare. Most of the witnesses, officials in Trump's circle, Trump's children, his lawyers, and distinguished conservative judges, all testified. They were Republicans whose policies would be anathema to me, yet as men and women of principle, they served democracy.

Mike Pence was a hero for one day. Although he has not testified himself, his team testified to the endless pressure, shouting, nagging, and Trump's threats, demanding that he violate the constitution and overturn the election. Mobs bellowed to lynch Pence, but he stood firm and carried out his duties. He has not shown the same courage since then.

Conservative policies can be debated, but honorable principles cannot be. Democracy cannot survive without it.

682 words

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