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Republican Madness



Photograph Source: The White House – Public Domain

“’Tis the times’ plague, when madmen lead the blind.”

– Gloucester in *King Lear*, Act IV, Scene 1

If Senate Republicans who slavishly follow Donald Trump obstruct Joe Biden’s legislative agenda the way they did with President Barack Obama’s and nothing gets done to help their base in these worst of times, they may be digging their grave.

Remember: Trump lost the election in part because he ignored the pandemic.

These are caustic times, and not only because of the superspreading COVID and an economy sinking because of it. It’s also what lies beneath, like a circling shark: the repeated onslaught of lies by Trump and his far-right Republican allies that the president won the election.

The upshot of the intended delegitimization of Biden's victory, of Trump not conceding his overwhelming defeat by seven million votes, is that it will be more difficult for the new president to pull the country together.

Compounding this is the unknown: How cooperative will the powerful Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, be with Biden, a former longtime colleague in the upper chamber?

That's, of course, assuming one or more of the two GOP Georgia senators win their Jan. 5 runoff elections against Democrats, thus retaining a bare Republican majority and keeping McConnell in power. If the Republicans lose and there's a 50-50 Senate split, the Democrats get to choose a majority leader because their vice president can break a tie vote.

But if the GOP again wins the Senate and continues its minority rule, McConnell's unwillingness for months to craft a bigger virus relief bill may indicate his intentions toward Biden. The measly \$908 billion legislation now being negotiated won't go very far. The Democrats wanted more than \$2 trillion.

If the 74 million people who voted for Trump refuse to recognize Biden as president and a Republican-led Senate supported by those millions will block progress toward correcting the maliciousness of the past four years and moving the country forward, how will anything substantial get done? Executive orders only can go so far.

"The Senate is broken," Sen. Tom Udall, D-New Mexico, said in his farewell speech on the Senate floor Tuesday. He's retiring after 12 years. "It's not working for the American people."

Trump and his minions likely will make life miserable for Biden & Co. They will do everything to denigrate the Democratic administration and mount court challenges in the courts against rollbacks of Trump era deregulation and squash every initiative on major issues such as climate change, immigration, infrastructure and racial injustice.

"The single most confounding thing about the Trump era is that we still do not understand why more than 70 million Americans voted for Donald Trump, and why there remains a smaller core of fanatical supporters who will believe anything he says – most recently that he won the election but that it is being stolen through voter fraud," wrote Will Wilkenson, vice president of the Niskanen Center.

To have voted for him in 2016 perhaps is understandable in light of how so many disaffected people weren't getting help from Democratic governments, major political and economic errors. But vote for him again after four years of chaos, rowing back major environmental safeguards, repeated lying, swiping little immigrant kids from their parents, spewing hatred and racism, praising Nazis, dumping allies and warming to dictators whom Trump hoped to emulate and abandoning battlefield allies like the Kurds to favor a Turkish strongman? C'mon.

And the Republicans call the Democrats radicals.

“If Trump is eventually removed from the Oval Office, the study of revenge and immortal hate, not sober self-criticism, will be the response in Trumpworld,” wrote *Irish Times* columnist Fintan O’Toole in the Dec. 3 edition of *The New York Review of Books*. “There will be no chastening, just a further injection of resentment and conspiracy-mongering.”

“One half of a two-party system has passed over into a post-democratic state,” he wrote in a blistering condemnation of the Trump-Republican era. “This reality has to be recognized.”

O’Toole gave no quarter, writing that “the Republicans did not sleep through all of this” – the convulsions of the Trump years. “They saw it all and let it happen. . . There was no revulsion among the party base. The faithful not only witnessed his behavior, they heard Trump say, repeatedly, that he would not accept the result of the vote.

“They embraced that authoritarianism with renewed enthusiasm. The assault on democracy now has a genuine, highly engaged, democratic movement behind it.”

Further, O’Toole wrote that “Biden’s entire political persona has been shaping itself” to heal the wounds inflicted during the past four years.

“But it cannot be,” he wrote. “Trump will not allow it, and the whole structure of permanent minority rule that he has brought to the fore works against it. Biden must continue to fight Trump and . . . he must dismantle that structure, piece by piece.”

Geoffrey Kabaservice, the Niskanen Center’s director of political studies, recently outlined a brief history of Republican conservatism for *The Washington Post* to put into perspective where we are today with Trump and his allies.

He’s severely critical of the incumbent, noting that he latched onto the GOP’s tea party’s birtherism, the racist theory that Obama was a foreign Muslim who was not eligible to be president. That phony conspiracy launched Trump’s political career.

“The tea party still exists – except now it’s called Make America Great Again,” Kabaservice quoted Trump as telling reporter Tim Alberta.

“Trump’s permanent revolution has no fixed principles other than smashing a nebulous ‘deep state,’ forcing all institutions of society to bend to its will, and waging a never-ending war against Democrats, independents and non-Trump Republicans,” Kabaservice wrote.

“It has become a perpetual grievance machine unwilling (and unable) to address those grievances through governance or the legislative process. And in refusing to accept Trump’s defeat, the conservative movement increasingly insists that the rule of law, truth and democracy are what the revolution says they are.”

Kabaservice, who has a doctorate in history from Yale, wrote the Republicans have to present more than grievances because GOP donors want payback in return for their investments. And “especially the non-college-educated, working class citizens who make up much of the Republican base need the government’s help with their problems.”

If attention is not paid to Republican constituents, he wrote, “the party’s long-term viability may be in doubt if a strategy of mindless, implacable obstruction endangers the stability and prosperity of the country, causing too many voters to consider it an existential threat.”

From the point of view of the 81 million people who voted for Biden, Trump and his Pied Piper Republican party are already an existential threat. The radical conservatives turned America into a nearly unrecognizable “shithole” country.

And King Lear? All of that ranting and raving for naught. He didn’t make it through to the end. The price of madness?

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