

Living Room Talk #13 The Cowards in Congress

My name's John Graham and welcome to Living Room Talk, a short weekly video on current issues and events.

Tonight's topic: The Cowards in Congress. How a small cabal of Trump loyalists in Congress is trying to overturn the November election results, subvert the Constitution, and end democracy.

If you're new here, I'll tell you that I'm a lifelong adventurer, a former Foreign Service Officer, a writer, a speaker, a social and political activist, and for over three decades a leader of the Giraffe Heroes Project, a global movement that gets people to stick their necks out to solve tough public problems. More at johngraham.org

Now, The Cowards in Congress.

Every four years, on January 6, Congress meets to confirm the people's choice of the winner of the presidential election. This meeting has always been just a formality. It has never changed anything.

This year, however, a small group of die-hard Trump supporters in Congress, led by Senators Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz, and Representative Mo Brooks, have announced their intentions to object to Biden's win in the Electoral College, using an 1887 law to mount their challenge.

Under that law, Congress must formally vote either to deny their objection, leaving the power to elect a president to the people—or to accept it, which would take that power away from the people and give it to Congress, ending the balance of power so carefully crafted by the Founders. We would no longer be living in a democracy.

Relax.

Hawley, Cruz, Brooks and any allies they can enlist by Wednesday will not muster the majority needed to toss out the results of the election. Democrats hold the majority in the House and, in the Senate, too many Republicans have signaled that they will not support this attack on democracy.

At least this time.

But these objectors, in doing the unthinkable, are setting a very dangerous precedent, one any unprincipled loser can use to challenge every presidential election we'll ever have.

So what's behind these moves?

At a basic level, it's crass, unprincipled politics.

These Trump loyalists hope that their objection to the Biden victory, even though rejected by Congress, will help them retain the support of Trump and his rabidly loyal voting base in any primary electoral challenges they may themselves face in 2022 and 2024.

In saying they were with the Master to the end, they defang any primary challengers even more soaked in Trumpism than they are.

At a deeper and more dangerous level, however, this latest gambit by Trump bootlickers in Congress attempts to revive an anti-democracy theme that goes back to the beginning of the Republic, when presidential electors were limited to white male property owners. Constitutional changes have added women and Blacks (although Black voting rights have been subject to relentless suppression attempts.)

But the effort to keep power in wealthy, white, male hands has never stopped. Today's Republican Party, under Trump, has become just the latest move in this centuries-long effort.

The fact that this newest effort has gained as much support as it has demonstrates Trump's success in hardening the conspiracy-theory-fueled, right-wing base that's in his thrall, ginning up an increasingly paranoid strain of conservatism that will do whatever it can to cripple a Biden presidency.

The votes that will be taken in Congress on January 6 represent a challenge of personal courage and integrity that couldn't be more stark. Either you put your personal political future ahead of your country or—like the brave civil servants who testified against Trump at his impeachment trial—you put your country first.

In my own career as an American Foreign Service Officer, I had to make that choice when I was serving as Advisor to the Mayor of Hué, a city in the far north of what was then South Vietnam. I was there for 18 months, but it took only a few weeks to understand that America's effort in Vietnam was politically and militarily stupid. It had no chance of success because we were completely misreading the nature and history of the Vietnamese people, North and South.

I could see it all around me, including when I met clandestinely with representatives of the Viet Cong late at night in a monastery outside of town. I reported everything I was seeing and learning—but reality didn't fit the version of the war being reported to Washington by the American embassy in Saigon. So I found a back channel way to get the truth directly to policymakers at State, Defense and the CIA.

In return, I got a few back-channel messages of support, but US policies didn't budge. So when my tour ended in mid-1972, I lobbied hard back in Washington to get the message understood. Again without success.

So I became a whistle-blower, taking a pile of classified documents—most of them my own detailed analyses of how America was losing this war—and met with Ben Bradlee, the editor of the *Washington Post*. He heard me out, but when I pushed the thick envelope of papers across the table to him, he refused to take them, saying he didn't want to let me take the risk.

And there WAS a risk. I knew perfectly well that if the *Post* published those documents, it would end my career and maybe even land me in jail. I did it anyway, because it might save a lot of lives.

But the war dragged on for three more years, and thousands more deaths.

If I could have stopped them, it would have been the best trade imaginable--the loss of one guy's career to end a war? That's a damned good "deal."

Thinking of the Republican legislators who might well lose *their* jobs if they stand against Trump, if they protect this democracy, I say *Go for it!*

Personal ambition is absurdly trivial compared to the survival of government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

And out here, we the people need to demand a hell of a lot more courage and true patriotism of our legislators.

When January 6 comes around next Wednesday, **let us count the cowards** who put themselves above us and let them know that they aren't good enough to keep their jobs.

That's it for this living room talk. Except for this shameless self-promotion—there's more of that Vietnam story in *Sit Down Young Stranger*, my memoir you can get on Amazon.

Thanks for watching.

I hope you'll comment on what you've heard, like the post, and share it with friends.

And do come back next Sunday at 5PM Pacific for the next Living Room Talk.

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