

## **Living Room Talk #17 Where to Be, GOP?**

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Welcome to Living Room Talk, my short blog of breaking issues and events—stuff that might be on your mind.

Tonight's topic is the Republican Party and the fight for its soul.

Were you hoping, just for a couple of days there, that Republicans had finally burst out of their Trump trance? You know, when some of their Senators said they'd vote to convict on his impeachment by the House for inciting rioters to attack the Capitol? When even McConnell said Trump had gone too far? When it seemed that more than a few Republicans saw that dumping Trump might give their Party a shot at resurrection and re-invention.

Didn't last long, did it.

The backtracking began when it became clear that Trump's powerful political base and its agents in the Congress would abide no criticisms of Trump and that the electoral consequences for anyone who dared would be severe.

So McConnell went silent and then voted against impeachment while House Minority Leader McCarthy flew to Florida to kiss the ring. The brave 15 Republican Congresspeople and Senators who'd voted for impeachment came under vicious attack from Trump loyalists who shared information widely about who they were and where they lived.

If reactions to January 6 were supposed to be the opening battle for the soul of the Republican Party, it was over almost before it started. Trump won. He will not be convicted by the Senate and his ability to bully insufficiently loyal acolytes seems undiminished—for the moment.

But the craven capitulation by Congressional leaders is just the first battle. The war for the heart and soul of the Republican Party continues, not just in the capital but across the land, between those who want a return to the center-right corporatist party the GOP used to be, and those willing to turn their Party into the political engine of one despicable, uncontrollable fascist and his grievances—and the votes for Republicans he can energize.

I look at all this and a naïve part of me wonders how Republicans can even be having this debate. How could any sensible, patriotic person of any party want to see this narcissistic unprincipled—and now treasonous—liar remain in public life? Yet the Republicans *are* having this debate and the outcome is very much in doubt. Donald Trump and the nativist, racist populism he represents remain a very powerful force—one perfectly capable of returning to power.

What in the world is Trump's hold on the people who won't move away from him?

For many Republican elected officials and wannabes the motivations are pretty clear. Trump still controls a massive base of diehard believers. Without the powers of the presidency and without his rallies and Tweets, that base may diminish in size and fervor, But the politicians now riding the Trump tiger are not about to wait until that happens. Their votes and actions over the last three weeks make it clear they're willing to undermine the Constitution to save their jobs.

But what about the rest of the country?

For sure, many of the 74 million people who voted for Trump last November did so because of his court appointments, his tax cuts and his assault on government regulation. These people would have voted for any Republican.

But I'm talking about the 25 to 30 million people that form Trump's base. Why do so many of them remain so unshakably committed, at least for the moment, to such a warped man who's just shown himself willing, for the sake of his own ego, to destroy the entire American experiment in democracy?

Well, Trump is not the first populist demagogue America has seen but he's certainly the most successful. Not even Joe McCarthy had Trump's charisma, con-man bravado, command of the media and total lack of principles needed to build the passionate allegiance of enough core supporters willing to lap up his macho, revanchist shtick, his racist and white supremacist calls to arms and his attacks on their perceived enemies. Trump never needed to express any cohesive ideology beyond self; he just needed to feed on people's fear and hate and tell them he'd fix it all.

Trump didn't invent that fear and hate. He manipulated it on his path to power. "You will not replace us" was the call from the racist anti-Semitic thugs in Charlottesville and beyond. It was a call of rage and pain in recognition of the fact that America is rapidly becoming a minority white nation. Many white males fear that that means losing their jobs, their dignity, their very ways of life.. Throughout history people die for leaders who confirm their core beliefs and fears. Trump understood that from the beginning and played the politics of it to perfection.

But, why not let the Republicans just wallow in the pit they've dug for themselves? Don't the Democrats win either way? Either Trump goes or, if

he stays, Trumpistas follow the Tea Party's example and nominate unelectable extremists in general elections.

I urge you not to think this way. The Republican fight for control of their Party involves all of us.

If the Republican Party is increasingly captured by Trump thugs, it becomes even more ideologically extreme; scornful of compromise; unmoved by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition. That makes it that much more difficult to solve the country's problems.

And don't forget that Trump and his followers are more than willing to use violence to get what they want, a point made clear in a Department of Homeland Security warned issued last Wednesday. The Great Experiment that is the United States of America cannot survive when one faction of the population uses political violence as a means of holding power.

So, if you want this Great Experiment to go on, what can you do?

You can name and shame the cowardly, self-serving politicians who think keeping their jobs is more important than all of us living in a democracy.

Be prepared to fight like hell in 2022 and 2024 to defeat Trump-backed candidates. 2020 proved that our electoral process still works. Elections are still the best opportunity for this nation to defeat Trumpism.

Speak out against the myths and lies of fringe groups, domestic terrorists and demagogues, from your home town to the capital, and insist that that your elected officials do the same.

Support law enforcement in tracking and arresting political criminals, including white supremacists and domestic terrorists. Tell them to throw the book at anyone involved in attacking the Capitol on January 6.

Call out the lies in fake news and insist that media organizations and Internet service providers be responsible for content, and that their algorithms not increase the spread of toxic messages.

If an impeachment conviction fails in the Senate—and it looks like it will—petition your state’s attorney-general to file criminal charges against Trump.. The more Trump fades from public view, the more his influence *will* dispel. As noted in a recent *Washington Post* piece: enraged crowds in Arab capitals melted away when Saddam Hussein was defeated in the Persian Gulf war. Mass demonstrations in Pakistan in support of Osama bin Laden ended when he was driven into hiding after Sept. 11. To blunt the extremists, Donald Trump’s veneer of invincibility must similarly be crushed. Cut off the head of the snake.

*The* most effective way to diminish Trump’s base is to solve problems that feed their fear. President Biden is moving fast on the economy, making moves to deliver immediate funds to people whose jobs have been destroyed by the pandemic. This administration is aiming for new jobs in infrastructure that the country desperately needs, and new jobs in a much-needed change-over to renewable energy sources. Biden’s finally putting in place the national planning that’s been missing in vaccine production and delivery; another job-creating move that will also save a lot of lives.

Biden has two years to demonstrate the power of government to do good things that serve all of us, including Trump supporters. If he doesn’t change life in these United States before the 2022 elections, he may not have the votes he needs in Congress to get more good work done.

Now, and for the two critical years ahead, keep **encouraging** the President and your legislators. They need to know you've got their backs. We can't just vote, then ignore them until the next election. Call, email, write—not just when they annoy you but also when they make the right moves. They've got a democracy to save, an economy to revive, a planet to protect. And so do we. It's All Hands On Deck time.

That's it for now.

Thanks for watching.

Please share this message widely.

God bless America

