



# P E R S P E C T I V E S

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## **A Reason for Hope** *On Conscience and Integrity*

In the political swamp that has ensnared our democratic republic a glimmer of something we haven't seen for almost six years is on the horizon: the emergence of a fissure in the Republican party, which has lately been in the grips of Mr. Trump's remarkably single-handed control as it morphed into the Cult of Trump. Finally, over 160 present and former leaders of the Republican party have said "Enough!"

It is remarkable that it didn't come sooner, in either the first or second impeachment trial, or even in a thoughtful critique of Trump's more outlandish antics and pronouncements. Still, it is cause for celebration is that it is finally emerging, and we are seeing the beginning stages of the Republican Party looking for an "off ramp" from the Cult highway in order to become, once again, the "Grand Old Party." It may be too little, and it may be too late, but at least the conversation has begun.

In our two-party political system, which this column has vigorously argued in the past should become a multiparty political system, a small band of far-right revolutionaries has hijacked the national agenda. They've accomplished this by sabotaging the primary chances of respectable candidates with questionable candidates who constantly up-the-ante with rhetoric that encourages the misogynistic, racist, anti-Semitic, authoritarian, neo-Nazi fringe in order to garner primary victories.

In a multiparty society, those primaries would matter much less since any candidate that far from the mainstream would attract, at most, the fringy-est thirty percent of radical right-wing voters who hold those views. The seventy percent remaining would find a candidate of their choosing amongst a variety of options. A multiparty democracy would end the incessant warfare of that radical fringe attempting to "take down" the opposition party, and a return to active primary discussions over which national policies should be pursued.

Alas, we have a system so rigged to favor a two-party system that we'll have to console ourselves with this speculation: can the Republican Party abandon its status as "the Party of no", return to its historically conservative roots, and become a force within a positive national debate? The answer, at last, just might be "yes."

The "hope" now emerging stems from the radical action of the National Republican Committee ("RNC") taking the patently absurd, devoid of any meaningful purpose, action to censure Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger for their participation, as Congresspeople, on the Select Committee to Investigate the January Sixth attack on the United States Capitol. Forget the fact that Cheney voted 93 percent of the time with Trump and that Kinzinger has a similarly conservative background, because this censure was not about any conservative principle. It was a naked power move by Trump Cultists to purge the Party of anyone who does not explicitly swear allegiance to Trump and his "Big Lie". As one RNC member, Sam Eliopoulos, a Cheyenne businessman and Republican running for a seat in the Wyoming State House, told the New York Times in explaining the take-down of Liz Cheney, "She speaks about her conscience, but you weren't elected to do what you think is right..."

More outrageous than even that is the depiction of the investigation into the January sixth insurrection as the equivalent of a Democratic party-led witch hunt persecuting innocent citizens doing their civic duty. Here are the frightening words that the RNC used as their lever to convict the two Republican members of Congress and deny them all party donations going forward:

“Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger crossed a line. They chose to join Nancy Pelosi in a Democrat-led persecution of ordinary citizens who engaged in legitimate political discourse that had nothing to do with violence at the Capitol (emphasis supplied).”

What???? “Legitimate political discourse”???

Here’s what Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell had to say on February 9th in response to the RNC action:

“We all were here. We saw what happened. It was a violent insurrection for the purpose of trying to prevent the peaceful transfer of power after a legitimately certified election from one administration to the next (emphasis supplied).”

What a contrast in positions! McConnell, who deftly orchestrated Trump’s acquittal in both Impeachment Trials, has finally seen the handwriting on the wall. He must break formally with Trump in the party if he wants to save his party, and his chances to regain the Majority Leader title. Although I would have preferred that he acted far sooner to corral the Trump Cult, better late than never.

Within four days, we heard from those 160 former and current Republican officials endorsing McConnell’s position. This is the first “push back” the party has given Trump since he glided down that golden escalator and pushed every traditional Republican candidate off the stage through bluster, bullying and showmanship.

And the breaks are still coming. On February fourth, former Vice President Pence, a Trump “toady” if ever there was one, declared that Trump “was wrong” (a sentiment he had never before in his life expressed, even after Trump inspired insurrectionists sought him out for hanging) about Pence’s ability to throw the election to Trump.

Of course, Trump roared back by making a confession of guilt for what he instructed Pence to illegally do with this statement: “He could have overturned the Election!” That was the plan all along, from when it was first hatched in the summer of 2020!

Speculation that Pence is setting himself up to run against Trump in 2024 only makes his comments all the more interesting. Cheney, Kitzinger, McConnell, Pence and those 160 who have sided with them are finally saying that they are willing to risk Trump’s mafia-style-control over the primary process in order to take their party back.

Democrats, Independents, and traditional Republicans should all wish them well. For so long as we are chained to a two-party system, we absolutely require a vigorous debate where the traditional Republican voice, and its conscience once again, is actively engaged.

Here’s to hoping the majority of the Republicans re-discover their roots and historical mission and rebrand as “Independent Republicans—the party of Lincoln.”

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