

An Assessment Of Government And Politics Six Months Into 2021 - A Democracy Health Check (by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

After nearly five months of a new Administration in Washington, D.C., it seems time to conduct an assessment of government and politics in this country. How have policies and priorities changed? How healthy are our public institutions and democracy in general?

After surviving four years of Donald Trump in the White House, the Biden Administration provides a refreshing change in priorities and behavior. Its first legislation, the major stimulus bill, pumps funds across the country for a range of activities related to recovering from the impacts of the pandemic. Most importantly, it puts money in the hands of struggling families who often faced job, losses, food insecurity, and the inability to pay for basics such as rent, utilities, and child care. Meanwhile, as the Chief Executive, President Biden has rescinded many of Trump's executive orders that hurt environmental protection, hindered addressing climate change, or promoted inhumane immigration policies.



The current priority of the Biden team is to pass a large infrastructure bill. Besides dollars to rebuild highways and bridges, it includes money for societal infrastructure needs such as child care. Also waiting in the wings for passage by the Senate are a comprehensive voting rights act, and a police reform bill.

This positive news, however, doesn't tell the whole story. It must be contrasted with some negative factors that still pose threats to well-functioning government and the democratic process. The Republican Party must currently be recognized as the biggest danger to our representative system of government.

For instance, the fifty Republican Senators in the U.S. Senate represent the major obstacle to the passage of the Biden legislative agenda. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has pledged to block all Administration bills, and with the assistance of the Senate filibuster process, he may be able to do just that. Last week, the filibuster was employed to kill the plan to establish a bipartisan commission to thoroughly examine the attack on the Capitol on January 6th.

The blockage of the January Commission represents an example of the Republican Party's dangerous anti-democratic course that includes fealty to the views of former President Donald Trump. Since Trump spoke to the marchers and promoted the January 6th march on the Capitol, Republicans seem hell bent on burying any revelations that expose Trump's and the GOP's ties to this violent insurrection.

The reason for the march on the Capitol was Trump's refusal to accept the fact that he legitimately lost the November election to Joe Biden. Trump has continued to promote "the big lie" that the election was stolen, and much of the Republican leadership pays lip service to it. Supporting the vocal non-acceptance of a legitimate Presidential election is harmful to democracy, and it is especially so when one of the two major political parties gives legitimacy to this misinformation. Polls indicate that a large majority of Republicans believe that Trump actually won in November.



Accepting "the big lie" legitimizes other anti-democratic actions taken by Republicans such as voter suppression laws. In state legislatures across the country, Republicans are drafting and passing laws that make it more difficult for African-Americans and other minorities to cast ballots. Several of these laws even go so far as to allow the state legislature to disallow an election with little or no evidence of voter fraud. This voter suppression movement requires grassroots citizen involvement to counter these efforts. In Ohio, for instance, Common Cause and other pro-democracy groups are rallying the public to oppose Bill 294, this state's version of voter suppression.

Finally, the Party of Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt has become the Party that caters to white supremacy groups that have a predilection for promoting hate and advocating violence. Some of the groups involved in the January 6th insurrection such as "the Proud Boys" fall into this category. While the Party purged Rep. Liz Cheney from her leadership post in the House for defending democracy rather than Donald Trump, it remains silent when Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene advocates her Q'anon beliefs.

Thus, this is no time for citizens who believe in democracy to become complacent. People need to get behind political and government reform efforts and the groups that support them such as Common Cause and the League of Women Voters. Although it is sometimes tempting to laugh off and not take seriously the crazy ideas and conspiracy theories that surface on social media and Fox News, the visual images of January 6th should warn us that there are people out there prepared to violently act in the pursuit of these beliefs. The election of Joe Biden was one positive step, but a lot of reforming needs to happen before our representative democracy is restored to health. So, stay well informed and active!