

In my last column: "Too Much Democracy," the question was raised that we were designed to be a republic, not a democracy, and now do we have too much democracy? The danger facing the survival of our liberal democracy (rule of law, private property, government of honorable and competent representatives and office holders) is facing divisions we have not experienced since the 1930s and 1850s.

Our founding fathers assumed that those holding office would have limited tenure and that they would be honorable men. They knew, however, that not all people holding power have a good character. Power is a great temptation toward taking advantage and abusing one's office for private gain.

Balance of powers, distributing it among the administration, congress, and courts, was designed so that no branch of government had untrammelled power. But in the event that none of these institutions could constrain a lawless president, Congress could impeach and the Senate convict and remove him from office.

But today, we are facing a unique problem: a President whose character was never vetted by the party he represented; a Senate with a majority belonging to the President's party, unwilling to check a lawless President; and a decade-long effort by the Senate leader to pack the courts with judges amenable to the President. Every other check, such as the President's cabinet and the traditionally independent institutions such as Intelligence, Defense, State, and scientific services, have been hollowed out by rampant firing and replacement by unvetted temporary heads.

The only checks left are the press, House of Representatives, and we, the voters. This president attacks the press daily, spreads untruths and conspiracy theories that his "base" believe, and has refused to put a check on Russia helping him with the next election. He even speculates aloud that perhaps he should be allowed a third term, because he "suffered" so much by the impeachment process.

There are solutions to this threat, but they will take time and depend on his removal from office by the voters this year. For these remedies, we must return to the Founding Fathers and their wisdom.

\225 Do not assume that the "norms" of behavior that governed past presidents can constrain him or future demagogues. Enact laws that mandate release of financial holdings and medical and mental health records.

\225 Return to political parties the responsibility of vetting the character of candidates that they run for office. Make it a law.

\225 Hold primary elections on the same day nationwide, with provisions for absentee ballots two weeks before the election.

\225 Shorten the election process to two months and have the process funded by public taxes. Remove unlimited and dark money by using neutral boards to end gerrymandering and redraw districts.

\225 Enact a law that places tenure limits on Supreme Court justices, which will balance the court, limiting each president to nominate one justice per term. A period of 20 years is sufficient.

\225 Local judges and peace officers should not be elected by the general public. These specialists, like all comparable specialties, should be vetted by the institutions governing their discipline. Presidential appointments of department heads and judges should likewise be vetted by their appropriate disciplines.

\225 Finally, and perhaps most important, we all need to revisit what good character is: the good character of each citizen, business leader, and elected or nominated officials. Liars do not qualify as having good character. Cheaters should not qualify. Those soliciting money and help from illegal sources should not qualify either.

There will be pushback from many sides to prevent some of these recommendations. Those who want only judges of comparable ideology will not like a balanced court.

Media owners (largest newspapers, magazines, and radio-TV) will not make the enormous profits they have enjoyed by having a two-year election circus. However, they can do the right thing by providing forums to introduce and question candidates. CNN has been holding town hall forums for each candidate running for election. By having such a system, the voters will not be operating blind or be deluded by demagogues bleating "alternate truth."

Honesty, diligence, and responsible service can save us.

682 words.

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