

# How to fix what's wrong with the Republican Party

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During his 1796 Farewell Address, President George Washington said: “However [political parties] may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the Power of the People and to usurp for themselves the reins of Government; destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion.”

Washington knew what he was talking about. The Republican Party has become infected by such “cunning, ambitious and unprincipled men” who have done their very best to “subvert the power of the people.” Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, is not running for re-election to the Senate because of this infection. House Republican Conference Chair Liz Cheney is under attack from her fellow caucus members because of this infection. Our fellow Americans stormed the halls of the U.S. Capitol because of this infection.

But once seized by infection, the GOP must want to get better; and therein lies the rub.

Like so many Republicans, I’m sick and tired of talking about saving a party that shows few signs of wanting redemption, which makes it increasingly hard to hold on to the tattered remnants of a once-proud party. Indeed, since the insurrection more than 30,000 Republican voters have dropped their affiliation with the GOP, with many echoing the words of former Secretary of State Colin Powell, “I can no longer call myself a fellow Republican.”

Despite my own pessimisms about the Grand Old Party, I believe its salvation can still be found in our guiding principles, which do not include putting kids in cages, spewing lies and conspiracies and fermenting deadly insurrections. For those Republicans who remain behind, it’s time to refocus on what it means to be a Republican. While former President Donald Trump spent four years trying to reshape as much of the Republican Party into his image as possible and, failing that, setting the rest on fire, I agree with Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., who said, “There is a real split for the future of the party, and that epic battle has commenced.” Bring it on!

Americans are exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually. But are we too exhausted to address our wounds and unify behind our shared beliefs? To truly unify, we must first be honest about what our nation is going through. Minds may be fogged over by the magnitude of current events, but we need to dig deep and not just fight for America, but define what it stands for and what it stands against.

My fellow Republicans must stop playing stupid.

First, we must be honest: Republicans are standing in the way. How do we begin to embrace a shared truth if 72 percent of Republicans think the presidential election was illegitimate? Even as we attack the “Deep Lie” of a stolen election, Republican members of the House and Senate continue to spread its nasty seeds among the American people. The only person who tried to steal an election was Donald J. Trump. He incited an insurrection, infused it with the vilest vinegar of poisonous lies and then pumped it into the bloodstream of his followers. Perhaps worse, Republican officials in Congress who swore an oath to uphold the Constitution supported it, excused it and did the same. And they’re still excusing it.

Second, my fellow Republicans must stop playing stupid. Stop acting like you don’t know what Trump and his supporters in Congress and across the country did and continue to do. The insurrectionists were asked to come to Washington by Trump, encouraged to violence by Trump and supported by Trump in a seditious conspiracy that left seven Americans dead in its wake. Meanwhile, there is growing concern that some Republicans in Congress aided and abetted the insurrection. If proven, they all need to be held accountable.

Even as the House of Representatives has impeached Trump for the second time and the Senate is now faced with a clarifying moment of truth and accountability, are Republicans prepared to hold Donald Trump accountable? The fact that Trump is no longer in office is no excuse to avoid your constitutional responsibility. At the very least, he should never be allowed to run for office again.

Joe Biden will be a successful president — if we allow him to be. He is offering all of us an invaluable gift: unity. We need it to address the Covid-19 pandemic and economic stagnation for mainstream Americans, as well as to disinfect, cleanse and apply salve on our racial wounds. But we must address all the wounds to the body politic, not just those visibly hemorrhaging the lifeblood of our democratic republic.

Ultimately, the truth of this fight is grounded in one simple question that has nothing to do with a partisan debate on issues. The very survival of our democracy is directly and solely contingent on our collective answer: Do we still believe in America? It’s on us to understand and answer exactly what that question is asking.

We Republicans cannot heal ourselves or the wounds we’ve caused this great nation while clinging on to Donald Trump. So let us unite under our shared principles — without him. Let us reclaim our credibility — without him. Let us affirm our sources of inspiration and leadership as a party not of Trump but of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, Mitt Romney and Liz Cheney, and of men and women who still give a damn about the one thing that matters: America.

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