**A bodyguard of truth and fact trumps lies**

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No matter one’s opinion of Donald Trump, it is unarguable that the former president’s monumental use of lies, distortions, misstatements and other misinformation was unprecedented historically exceeding that of all his predecessors. The Trump years made mockery of truth and fact. Of course, all presidents misrepresent fact and truth. George Washington never had a cherry tree. Woodrow Wilson denied the existence of the Spanish Flu. Franklin Roosevelt steered the nation into war without acknowledging his intentions.

According to the Washington Post, Trump’s deceit was recorded over 30,000 times during his presidency. A corollary was that civil, rational debate largely disappeared in a nation politically and emotionally divided 50/50 regardless of truth and fact. And accountability of elected officials, even to voters, is in short supply.

Clearly, the demise of truth and fact cannot be solely attributed to Trump. Democrats have done their share of rejecting both. The difference was scale. And Trump’s lies mattered more, ultimately provoking the January 6th crisis.

The Trump impeachment trial begins this week. House Democrats, rushing to exact (in their view well deserved) revenge on Trump quickly impeached him, picking up ten Republicans in support. Was Trump guilty of inciting and fomenting insurrection as charged? Former Senate Leader Mitch McConnell thought so.

If the storming of the Capitol took place a year ago and Trump were impeached for incitement on the grounds of calling for an attack on Democratic members of Congress, would the Senate have voted to convict? The central reason for the January 6th uprising was Trump’s continued lies that he won the election until it was stolen by Democrats. Yet, Trump and his attorneys argued that as “judgments,” these are protected under the First Amendment.

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Trump’s Attorney General William Barr declared that the election results were valid and Joe Biden was the winner. Hence, the former president was either purposely lying or incapable of accepting reality and thus unfit to hold office. However, that more than 3/4 of registered Republicans believed these falsehoods and about 45,000 followers came to Washington to invade Congress are facts far more troubling for the nation’s safety and security than the list of foreign and domestic terrorists and extremist groups.

The absence of truth and reality extended to the House of Representatives. Majorie Greene praised QAnon and embraced lunatic conspiracy theories such as staging the Parkland and other school shootings; the September 11th attack on the Pentagon; and the role of the Rothschild’s space based laser igniting fires in California. House Democrats moved to strip her of committee assignments. Only eleven Republicans agreed. The others claimed certain Democratic members likewise made disparaging and outrageous claims. Because Greene’s views were so dotty, a psychological evaluation should have been ordered to determine her mental suitability for office.

One danger of the Trump trial and the Greene debacle is that fact and truth cannot be translated into political action. Both “trials” circumvented truth and fact. That Trump was in part responsible for the January 6th insurrection and Greene actually threatened the lives of Democratic Representatives along with her other insane statements are irrefutable.

In the Senate, members have a “get out jail free” card by arguing that impeaching a past president is unconstitutional. No mention is made of this contingency in the Constitution. Republican Senators Mitt Romney and Ben Sasse pointedly acknowledged, Trump did incite the mob. That will have little effect on the verdict. And depriving a House member from committee assignments by the opposing party is not a healthy precedent. Worse was House Republican support for Greene’s conduct.

No accountability will be established in these two cases, a horrible outcome for democracy. How a Republic can function without accountability presents another mortal danger.

What can be done? Short of amending the oath of office to forsake outright lying and knowingly distorting truth and fact, the Ethics Committees in both Houses should be authorized to hold members accountable when the number or extent of falsehoods made becomes dangerous to good order. Ambiguities over truth, fact and opinion exist as well as what good order means. Misstatements are common. And such a process is subject to abuse.

During the 1918-1920 Spanish Flu pandemic, Americans were detained for writing or talking about the extent of the disease. Joe McCarthy ran wild, wrongly accusing scores of people of being Communists. Such excesses must be contained. Yet actions are vital to protect truth and fact, much as Churchill argued during World War II that truth must be protected by a bodyguard of lies.

The reverse is needed: Lies must be destroyed by a bodyguard of truth and fact.

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