

REPUBLICANS FACE A MOMENT OF TRUTH

Carl Golden, November 16, 2022



One of the most enduring justifications for a combat operation was uttered by an Army major in the war in Vietnam in 1968: “It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.”

In his increasingly bitter conflict with the Republican Party, former president Donald Trump has embraced it.

If left alone, he will surely destroy the party and, if left alone, he will never save it.

Whether recognizing it or not, the party leadership can seize the opportunity to shed a destructive egomaniac who grows more erratic as mounting blame is directed at him for the party's dismal showing in the midterm Congressional elections.

As is customary, Trump cast aside reality in favor of revisionist history, declaring victory, defending his endorsement of candidates chosen for their professed loyalty to him rather than a realistic chance of victory and, to the horror of many, announced he'll seek the party's presidential nomination in two years.

Republican national leadership faces a moment of truth in moving on from Trump. If found wanting or if fear and timidity lead to indecision, the party will quickly tumble back into the minority in Congress and the White House.

It's impossible to reason with Trump. He has displayed his stubbornness time and again as president and in his personal and business affairs. Appeals to logic or his better angels are futile - he rejects the former and possesses none of the latter. Look no further than his intensified crude rhetorical assaults on anyone he believes stands in his way.

Trump will do what Trump wants to do because his ego will not permit otherwise.

Pockets of criticism have sprung up since the midterm shortfalls, but those with the firmest grip on the party's levers of power have been silent or circumspect when discussing Trump's responsibility for the outcome and what steps should be taken to restore credibility and competitiveness in the 2024 election cycle.

While Trump has managed to cling to a dedicated base of support, for party leadership to bow to it would be a strategic blunder for the ages, a tacit admission that when push came to shove, top level party weakness triumphed over steely-eyed determination and political reality.

Caving in to Trump in the hope he'll change his style is a disastrous path to be trod only by those who believe his unsubstantiated assertions that the 2020 election was fraudulent. They've been captured by the ex-president's absurd utterances and embellishments.

It is crucial for the party leadership to escape the Trump shadow and convince Republicans who believe in thoughtful, insightful and responsive government led by a president with a precision moral compass there is no silver lining in the Trump cloud.

The questions swirling around President Biden concerning his intention to seek a second term have receded in the wake of what can only be described as a party and personal victory for him.

He's lost little of his executive power and been emboldened by running against the historical political grain and achieving one of the strongest midterm showings in recent history. News accounts of jubilation in the White House on election night speaks for itself.

Republicans likely will emerge with a bare majority in the House and the distinction of a victory that was more embarrassment than celebratory.

The Senate remains in Democratic hands 50-49 pending the outcome of next month's runoff election in Georgia. Even a loss there would result in continuing the 50-50 deadlock and with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tiebreaker, Democrats will retain control.

The Democratic Party can spend the coming weeks looking on as Republicans splinter along ideological lines, threatening the selection of California Congressman Kevin McCarthy as Speaker, and spilling over into the Senate where, as the winds of change gain strength, Republican leader Mitch McConnell faces demands for his replacement.

While Trump looks for guidance to the 1968 utterances of an Army officer, Republican leadership should respond by looking to the 17th Century and channel its inner English politician Oliver Cromwell who, in an address to Parliament, thundered his judgment: "Depart, I say, and let us be done with you. In the name of God, go!"

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