

Bill Kaplan: The moral collapse of the GOP

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The Grand Old Party has collapsed morally at all levels. Despite Biden's defeating Trump in a landslide, 51% to 47%, a 7 million vote victory and an Electoral College sweep of 306 to 232, Trump never conceded. All Wisconsin GOP gubernatorial candidates either pretend that the 2020 presidential election is unsettled or flat-out lie that Democrats stole the election.

Worse, Trump and his cronies tried to block Biden's taking office by any means, including violence. It was Trump who "set out to steal the election for real. ... He was pushing his Republican allies in Congress to disrupt the counting of votes, pressuring local officials to undo results on the state level, trying to get an assist from the Supreme Court, and demanding his vice president use power he didn't really have" (Betrayal by Jonathan Karl).

Trump also schemed unsuccessfully to have the U.S. military "rerun" the election in swing states such as Wisconsin (Biden won by almost 21,000 votes). Finally, Trump encouraged a violent mob to assemble and assault the U.S. Capitol to try and stop the ceremonial presentation of the Electoral College vote. A failed coup d'état. However, the madness continues.

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Wisconsin GOP Assembly Speaker Vos authorized a so-called investigation of the 2020 Wisconsin presidential election results by hapless Michael Gableman. Increasingly, the Wisconsin GOP is home to conspiracy nuts, anti-Semites and White supremacists. But not all state Republicans support this lunge towards insanity and

racism. Retiring state Senator Kathleen Bernier courageously denounced Gableman's lies and nonsense. And, former state Senator Dale Schultz has been raising the alarm for years. He refused to vote for Trump.

I recalled Schultz's courage and integrity upon the recent death of my friend, Illinois GOP Representative John Porter (1980 - 2001). He was everything that the GOP has abandoned. Like Schultz he was a giant who believed in governing - compromise, negotiation and respect for the opposition. Both fiscal conservatives who believed in a safety net, supported environmental protection, championed civil rights and much more.

I met Porter through my wife, a physician. He used his position on the House Appropriations Committee to double funding for the National Institutes of Health. Porter believed in medical and scientific research - facts. His leadership was recognized by his election to the National Academy of Medicine.

I vividly remember our first conversation. He admired Wisconsin and the UW System. Porter wanted to know all about Wisconsin. We talked about progressive GOP Governors Bob La Follette, James Davidson, Francis McGovern and the pathbreaking reforms of 1911. Porter was a listener, but far more accomplished than most. Nonetheless, he was always civil, moderate in tone and tolerant. A class act. He was appalled by the dark direction of the GOP and Trump's election. I remember his wisdom that Trump and a GOP-led Congress would not wear well on voters.

As the GOP collapsed morally, Porter became a Democrat, proudly supporting Biden. We have lost a statesman and wonderful person, an honorary Wisconsinite. Condolences to his wife Amy and family.

- Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.