

Bill Kaplan: Constitutional Republicans versus insurrectionists

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In 2022, Wyoming GOP Congresswoman Liz Cheney (born in Wisconsin) told America: “I wish it were not true that Donald Trump abused his supporters’ trust. But he did.” True for the many Obama-to-Trump voters in Wisconsin. Cheney went further, denouncing GOP leaders “who made themselves willing hostages to this dangerous and irrational man.” She advised Republicans that they would “have to choose,” because they “cannot both be loyal to Donald Trump and loyal to the Constitution.”

Some Wisconsin constitutional Republicans have also stepped forward. Former Wisconsin Congressman Reid Ribble and state Senator Kathy Bernier wrote a hard-hitting op-ed for the MJS: “While much has been discussed about the Republican presidential debate in Milwaukee on August 23, one fact should not be up for debate. The winner of Wisconsin’s 10 electoral votes in 2020 was President Joe Biden.” They called on all GOP presidential candidates to “acknowledge” this.

It’s not the first time that Ribble and Bernier have courageously stood up to election deniers. In 2021, Ribble joined many other Republicans, including former Wisconsin Congressman Tom Petri, in “A Call for American Renewal.” Some participants said: “The Jan. 6 insurrection was a wake-up call for many who had remained loyal to the party, even while harboring concerns about its direction.” These patriots denounced “fear-mongering, conspiracism and falsehoods” Bernier, who led the state Senate Elections Committee, denounced the so-called investigation by former state Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman into supposed election fraud: “This is a charade These made-up things that people do to jazz up the base (are) just despicable” Profiles in courage.

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Petri also acted with honor and integrity in a remarkable 2022 op-ed for the MJS with former Wisconsin Democratic Congressman Dave Obey: “What we observed come to a head on January 6, 2021, was something we had never seen before ...; an effort directed by the sitting president, residing in the White House, to overturn the lawfully certified vote of the American people in the 2020 presidential election. An effort which, among other things, involved assembling a mob in Washington, D.C., and stirring them up to attack the Capitol as our Congress was receiving the results of the presidential election as certified by the governments of our 50 states.”

Ribble, Bernier and Petri are constitutional Republicans who stand tall unlike GOP insurrectionists such as Wisconsin GOP Congressmen Scott Fitzgerald, Tom Tiffany, Derrick Van Orden and Senator Ron Johnson. Fitzgerald and Tiffany wrongly voted to reject the Electoral College votes from Arizona and Pennsylvania. “They would have voted to reject the will of voters in Wisconsin as well, they said later, but they weren’t given the chance” (MJS). Worse, Van Orden, present at the January 6 assault, has never come clean about his presence and involvement. Finally, Johnson has been up to his eyeballs in seditious election denialism. The January 6 indictment of Trump underscores Johnson’s tawdry role in the fake electors scheme.

Lincoln would have been proud of constitutional Republicans and appalled by GOP insurrectionists.

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