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A Failed Impeachment and the 2020 Election

By MONTANA SPRAGUE
STAFF WRITER

As the 2020 election approaches, the recently announced impeachment inquiry has sparked new commentary and speculation on both sides. With the feasibility of ousting the President unclear, it seems likely that we will be pulled into a drawn-out spectacle around impeachment. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has received criticism from within her party for describing impeachment as impractical and favoring a win at the ballot box, despite believing that Trump should be impeached. At this point, it

states to run the risk of angering their constituents, many of whom are far more politically centrist than the fact they have a Democratic representative or senator would suggest. A Quinnipiac University poll released on September 30 found that 47 percent of Americans still oppose impeachment and removal, although 57 percent of Americans disapprove or at least don't approve of Trump's results as president according to RealClearPolitics. Trump's approval rating has been a much lower 43

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seems unlikely that Trump would be found guilty in a Senate trial and forced from office, since 67 votes are required, but there are only 47 Democrats (when counting two independents who consistently vote with Democrats) in the Senate. It appears unlikely that enough Republicans would cross the aisle and vote to convict the President. If we assume that to be true, the potential outfall from a failed impeachment has the ability to drastically affect the 2020 election in one of several ways.

The initial and perhaps most obvious result would be further damage to the president's reputation—which frankly does not matter, since many of his critics believe he should have been impeached from the day he was elected and since those who support him will continue to do so (they have made it clear that no amount of investigation into claims against Trump would affect their vote for his re-election). Beyond damage to his reputation, some have theorized that an impeachment would force junior Democrats from "purple"

percent, according to RealClearPolitics. This means there's a segment of the voter population that, despite not supporting Trump or his policies, still disagrees with his removal from office. In the 2018 congressional election, more freshman Democrats were elected than the country has seen in over 40 years, and with some of these younger politicians hailing from states with a large percentage of conservatives who voted for Trump, their support of the impeachment inquiry could signal to many constituents that their elected officials aren't representing or fulfilling the opinions and desires of the public. This would feed right into Trump's rhetorical claims that the impeachment process is a coup designed by Democrats who don't see a way to beat him in the 2020 election.

Regardless of the outcome of an impeachment drive, its ripples will surely affect politics for years to come, and the possible unintended consequences have the potential to shift the course of American history.

Democratic Theory at the AHI

By DR. DAVID FRISK
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Hamilton College, believe it or not, isn't the only institution of higher education in Clinton—which at one time was nicknamed Schooltown, and for more reasons than the college. An important part of the Alexander Hamilton Institute's activity is little-known on the Hill: classes that are open to the public.

How does democracy work best, and what do its great principles mean? Our current continuing education course at the AHI, "Majority Rule and Equality: The Challenges of Democracy in American History," covers these questions. About 50 people from nearby communities attend, and comparable numbers have enrolled in our other recent classes on "Liberty: The History of an Idea," government and science, the career and principles of Abraham Lincoln, the Roosevelt and Reagan presidencies, process and strategies of presidential elections, the

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culture and politics of the 1960s, and the roots of America's "red/blue" divide.

For an instructor, designing a class is one especially interesting part of teaching. Certainly it's always interesting for me. There are so many possible sources to choose from. Next, within those books or articles, there tend to be many different discussions worth selecting as part of our necessarily limited number of assigned pages. Which are most central or valuable? There's also the lesser but still significant task of organizing the syllabus. For this class, I came up with six themes: Majority Rule, Equality and Participation, Political

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Diversity and Conflict, Accountability, Self-Interest and Public Virtue, and Democracy and Leadership. All to be read about, lectured about, discussed in just thirteen weeks plus an introductory session.

Each of these terms obviously calls for rigorous attempts at definition. “Majority” is perhaps the easiest to define, but even that isn’t necessarily simple. The meaning of “Rule” is more difficult, since in any genuinely democratic context, we mean something other than raw power. And the meaning of “Equality” is likely even more complicated. The readings are chosen for their informational value plus their ability to help us better understand the meanings and implications of the course’s topics. We’re also thinking—without making rigid assumptions or reaching firm conclusions—about how both “Challenges” cited in the course title are affected by the course’s several themes. I noted on the first evening that the word “Challenges” is meant as a gentler word for “problems”—adding that problems aren’t necessarily bad, since the word can simply mean alternatives that we must weigh. (As the wise political commentator James Burnham used to remind colleagues at his magazine, *National Review*: “If there’s no alternative, there’s no problem.”) Then too, so many modifiers can be attached to the term “Democracy.” As one of our readings notes, there are or have been, among other types: “ancient democracy,” “Christian democracy” as in certain nations’ Christian Democratic parties, “competitive elite democracy,” “deliberative democracy,” “direct democracy,” “industrial democracy,” “liberal democracy,” “participatory democracy,” “people’s democracy” (i.e., communism), “pluralist democracy,” “representative democracy,” and “social democracy.” Some of these types are mutually exclusive. And many are not.

There are, of course, substantial conflicts between certain of our readings, as there would be conflicting readings in almost any good class in the social sciences. In an essay titled “Democracy and the Citizen: Community, Dignity, and the Crisis of Contemporary Politics in America,” Wilson Carey McWilliams says the practice of citizenship—of political participation reflecting certain public-spirited attitudes—is more central to democracy, more its “defining quality,” than is mere voting. “Common sense,” he maintains, “tells us that speaking and listening precede voting and give it form. Democracy is inseparable from democratic ways of framing and arguing for political choices. ... democracy depends on those things that affect our

ability to speak, hear, or be silent. ... my notion of democracy includes things not considered ‘political’ by most Americans.” In some contrast to McWilliams, Judith Shklar rejects Aristotle’s definition of democracy, which involved a time-consuming direct participation in ruling. She also questions the role of public-spiritedness or public virtue in the citizen’s political choices. For Shklar, voting as a simple “expression of personal interests and preferences” is just as legitimate, respectable, and democratic as more public-spirited or deliberative voting.

Conflicts or intellectually stimulating contrasts within a reading can be equally valuable. In an October 7 assignment on our syllabus, Robert Dahl, the late Yale political theorist, sketched an account of American political history wherein various changes since the Jacksonian era (including the prevalence of huge corporations and their undemocratic employment situations, a massive welfare-state bureaucracy, and a massive military establishment) have made true democracy increasingly difficult to actualize or maintain even though, over the same century-plus, more and more Americans were, rightly, included in the right to vote and the nation thus became far more democratic in that sense. Dahl’s essay, written more than 40 years ago, is titled: “On Removing Certain Impediments to Democracy in the United States.”

Taking all of these impediments to democracy “into account,” Dahl writes, “political theorists need to begin a serious and systematic reexamination of the constitutional system much beyond anything done up to now ... serious and systematic attention to possibilities that may initially seem unrealistic, such as abolishing the presidential veto; creating a collegial chief executive; institutionalizing adversary processes in policy decisions; establishing an office of advocacy to represent interests otherwise not adequately represented in or before Congress and the administrative agencies, including future generations; creating randomly selected citizens assemblies ... to analyze policy and make recommendations; creating a unicameral Congress; inaugurating proportional representation and a multiparty system in congressional elections; and many other possibilities.” Dahl’s openness and sympathy toward the possibility of radical changes to the U.S. constitution and political system, though, is immediately followed by abundant caution. “Unfortunately,” he adds, “designing a constitution is very far from an exact science. It is questionable whether the best political scientists, or for that matter citizens drawn from any source, have the knowledge and skills to excel the performance of the framers” of our existing constitution.

“Probably we do not even know how best to proceed toward the cultivation of the knowledge and skills of constitution making that we or our successors may one day be expected to provide.”

Then there’s equality. Democracy certainly requires equality in the sense of equal political rights. Does it also require more equality than that? It may. Yet as Giovanni Sartori notes in another reading, the laudable pursuit of more-than-political equality can become “a labyrinth” due to the word’s “Janus-like” or two-sided character and the “enormous oscillation” in its meaning. Equality is also inherently, not just circumstantially, difficult. “To have inequality, all that is demanded of us is to let things follow their course. But if we are to seek equality, we can never afford to relax. As Tawney wrote, echoing Rousseau: ‘While inequality is easy since it demands no more than to float with the current, equality is difficult for it involves swimming against it.’” A society “that seeks equality,” Sartori continues, “is a society that fights itself, that fights its inner laws of inertia ... Equality symbolizes and spurs man’s revolt against fate and chance, against fortuitous disparity, crystallized privilege, and unjust power. Equality is also, as we shall see, the most insatiable of all our ideals.”

How democracy was meant to and should work, especially in America, was the theme of a fascinating, often contrarian, always insistently independent political theorist named Willmoore Kendall, who taught at Yale (where he was a dissenting colleague of other political scientists, including Dahl) from the late 1940s into the early 1960s, at which point the administration “bought out” his tenure rights at his exasperated request. Teaching this particular AHI course is helping to sharpen my conceptual preparations for the biography of Kendall I am beginning to write—just as reading him would strengthen the conceptual grasp of any Government major. Kendall was often a disagreeable man, but many of the students thought he was great. He made them, and many readers, really think. He died too young of a heart attack in 1967, at his new academic home, the University of Dallas. Were Kendall alive today, I would be anxious about inviting him to address my AHI class, since he was that kind of guy—and that sharp a mind. But I would be even more interested in our hearing and talking with him.

David Frisk, Ph.D., is a resident fellow at the Alexander Hamilton Institute for the Study of Western Civilization. He is the author of If Not Us, Who? William Rusher, National Review, and the Conservative Movement (ISI Books, 2012).

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