

The Delray Democrat

Republicans Are the Real Extremists¹

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The Republican claim that Democrats are extremists who cannot be trusted is yet another in the endless litany of lies in the Republican arsenal. It is not only palpably false but stands truth on its head—for the Republicans are the real extremists who cannot be trusted to govern.

Republicans claim that “Democrats are coming for your guns,” but there’s nothing extreme about requiring background checks or giving the government 10 days instead of 3 to run the check, as provided by two Democratic bills that passed the House last year. What *is* extreme is *opposing* such sensible legislation, even though it is supported by most Americans.

Equally extreme and dangerous is the Republican approach to healthcare, perhaps best expressed in the meme “*Republicans are coming for your lives.*” Republicans tried but failed to kill Obamacare, which has provided insurance for tens of millions of previously uninsured Americans, saving tens of thousands of lives in the process. Had Republicans succeeded, millions of Americans would have lost their insurance, and insurance companies would have again been allowed to refuse coverage to people with pre-existing conditions. Together this would have caused tens of thousands of premature, preventable deaths.

Fortunately that’s not the only example of Republicans failing to impose their extreme and dangerous agenda. They failed after George W. Bush was reelected and claimed a “mandate” to privatize Social Security. They failed when Americans rejected Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan and their dangerous proposal to turn Medicare into a voucher system. But they have succeeded spectacularly here in Florida.

In its 2021-22 session, our Republican legislature was again busy passing unpopular, unnecessary, and unconstitutional laws, but for the ninth year in a row it refused to expand Medicaid to cover 800,000 eligible but uninsured Floridians. Because of their failure to expand Medicaid, at virtually no cost to the State, literally [thousands](#) of Floridians have died prematurely and unnecessarily.

Defunding Florida

Republicans seek to portray Democrats as extremists who will “defund the police,” but police budgets are actually going up, not down, regardless of whether Democrats or Republican control the purse strings.

On the other hand, Ron DeSantis defunded out-of-work Floridians in the middle of a pandemic by terminating their federal unemployment benefits. Marco Rubio and Rick Scott sought to “defund Florida” when they voted against both the American Rescue Plan Act and the bipartisan infrastructure bill. They turned down the [\\$10 billion](#) provided to Florida schools by the former as

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well as the [\\$19.1 billion](#) to Florida infrastructure provided by the latter because they work for Donald Trump and not the people of Florida. Fortunately, Democrats—and even some Republicans—chose differently.

Republicans Whitewash Insurrectionists While Banning Constitutionally Protected Speech

Black Lives Matter protests are hornbook examples of constitutionally protected speech. Over 90% of them were [peaceful](#), and claims to the contrary as well as other hysterical Republican messaging have been [debunked](#) by the Anti-Defamation League.

Republicans pushed a different, and false narrative, backed by Fox News and its deliberate distortions, digitally altered images, use of [old and unrelated footage](#), and outright lies that were quietly corrected when challenged.

This disinformation blitz almost certainly saved several Republican seats in the U.S. Senate. In Florida, Republicans used it to justify **H.R. 1**, a draconian law that allows the police to arrest and the courts to convict *anyone* taking part in a political protest where there is violence, *even if they have nothing to do with the violence*. Last September, Chief Judge Mark Walker granted a preliminary injunction barring enforcement of the law on the ground that it is unconstitutionally vague and overbroad.

In stark contrast to those who participated in the overwhelmingly peaceful BLM protests were the thugs who rampaged through our Capitol on January 6, 2021, seeking to overturn an election that Joe Biden had won both fairly and irrefutably.

Even Republicans were horrified when the murderous mob threatened the lives of Republicans as well as Democrats. Kevin McCarthy reportedly called Trump and engaged in an expletive-laced shouting match, begging that Trump call off his thugs. Once the threat had passed, however, his fear of the miscreant responsible for the riot outweighed his commitment to our country and our democracy.

Indeed, with the exception of Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger, there is not a single Republican who has agreed to serve on the House panel investigating the worst attack on the Capitol since the War of 1812.

While Cheney and Kinzinger chose to honor their oaths to “defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic,” their fellow Republicans vilified and censured them. Channeling both George Orwell and Lewis Carroll, the Republican Party sought to reframe an attempted putsch as “legitimate political discourse.”

Advancing the Goals of the Insurrectionists “Not by Breaking Laws but By Making Them”

But the most extreme actions – and the greatest threat to our democracy and our Constitution – are the steps now being taken in Republican-controlled legislatures throughout the country to ensure that the next time a disappointed despot shouts “fraud,” he or she will have compliant political actors at the state level to throw the election to him. As The New York Times succinctly stated,

“Over the past year, Republican lawmakers in 41 states have been trying to advance the goals of the Jan. 6 rioters — not by breaking laws but by making them.”

Florida Republicans did their part , ramming through **SB 90**, a bill that the Brennan Center for Justice aptly dubbed “The Omnibus Voter Suppression Act.” The claim that a law is needed to combat “voter fraud” is the real fraud. It has repeatedly been [demonstrated](#) that voter fraud sufficient to affect elections is nonexistent.

Even the ultra-conservative Heritage Foundation has unwittingly admitted as much. Its online [database](#) trumpets “1,349 proven instances of voter fraud,” but the database covers more than 25 years, which amounts to roughly *one case per year per state*.

Florida SB 90 limits the availability of drop boxes, reduces the number of election cycles for which a Vote-by-Mail request is effective, and imposes new and onerous obligations on third party organizations that register voters. It places an undue burden on the ability of people of color to vote and is opposed by the supervisors of election in all 67 Florida counties. It is yet another example of Republican extremism and contempt for democracy.

The League of Women Voters, the NAACP, and other organizations and individuals are challenging the bill in court. Portions of the law are likely to be ruled unconstitutional, at least by the trial court, but it’s uncertain whether that ruling will occur in time to affect the November elections and, if it does, whether it will be reversed on appeal.

Republicans also passed a bill creating an “election police force,” despite the fact that DeSantis has bragged that “Florida ran perhaps the most transparent and efficient election in the nation in 2020.” The purpose for the law is to intimidate minority voters and depress minority turnout.

Florida Republicans Toss More Red Meat to Their Base with Another Spate of Unnecessary, Extreme, and Unconstitutional Bills

Another solution in search of a problem is the Orwellian “**Act Relating to Individual Freedom**,” which just passed both the Florida House and Senate on party-line votes. The culmination of two years of Republican-stoked hysteria about “Critical Race Theory,” which is not even being taught in Florida’s public schools, the law effectively prohibits the teaching of Black History.

It does so back-handedly by imposing the following proscription on educators: “A person should not be instructed that he or she must feel guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress for actions, in which he or she played no part, committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex.”

This prohibition *would not prevent students from experiencing “psychological distress,”* even in the unlikely event there were isolated instances of such indoctrination. Such “distress” would result from even the most objective, nonjudgmental, fact-based instruction about the experiences of Black Americans from the time their ancestors were kidnapped and brought here on slave ships.

The only students who would be unaffected are those completely bereft of humanity, and the only way to avoid distress in the remainder of students is to either completely avoid teaching Black History or teach a bowdlerized, “Gone with the Wind” version.

The “**Parental Rights in Education**” bill (a.k.a. the “Don’t Say Gay” bill) is another solution in search of a problem. The bill prohibits “teaching students in kindergarten through third grade about topics involving sexual orientation or gender identity,” *even though that is not occurring and is extremely unlikely ever to occur*. For older grades, the law imposes an unconstitutionally vague requirement that lessons be “age appropriate.”

Perhaps the most odious bill is the one that prohibits abortions after 15 weeks. A substantial majority of Floridians ([57%](#)) oppose the bill, which provides no exceptions for rape or incest. The bill apes the anti-abortion statute passed in Mississippi that’s currently under consideration by the U.S. Supreme Court. The bill is flagrantly unconstitutional under *Roe v. Wade* and its sequelae, but Republicans don’t care because they believe they have the votes to overrule *Roe*.

It boils down to Republicans pandering to the fears and amplifying the ignorance of people who are angry at a world changing too fast for them to adapt. Republicans provide them with a target for their anger, but do nothing to alleviate and more often exacerbate their problems.