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The Fraudulent Meaning of Elections **by James Bovard**

Politicians strive to make Americans view elections as sacrosanct. Challenges to election results are portrayed as heresies that threaten to destroy the entire republic. After the 2004 presidential election, many Democrats went on the warpath over alleged voter fraud and manipulation in Ohio and elsewhere. The Constitution requires Congress to certify the Electoral College voters for each state before a president is officially elected. A handful of Democratic members of Congress formally challenged the seating of the Ohio electors when Congress reconvened in early January 2005. Though the debate in the House of Representatives lasted barely two hours, many Republicans feared that raising the topic had derailed the nation and the march of history.

Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-Ohio) explained the purpose of the Democratic challenge:

This objection does not have at its root the hope or even the hint of overturning the victory of the President; but ... we as a body must conduct a formal and legitimate debate about election irregularities. I raise this objection to debate the process and protect the integrity of the true will of the people.

Tubbs Jones, like Republicans who made similar invocations that day, did not define “the true will of the people.” She deftly removed any doubts about the wisdom of the challenge: “While some have called our cause foolish, I can assure you that my parents, Mary and Andrew Tubbs, did not raise any fools.”

Many Democrats were wary of possible shenanigans from computerized systems. Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Cal.) complained that many states used “more sophisticated technology” for lottery tickets than for elections:

Incredibly even in those few jurisdictions that have moved to electronic voting ... we do not require a verifiable paper trail to protect against vote tampering. If an ATM machine can give each user a receipt that that user can rely upon, then a voting machine should also be able to give a receipt.

But while local and state governments around the nation had ample funds to pay for sports stadiums and foreign jaunts for governors and their aides, they claimed poverty when it came to validating voting.

Congressional responses

Republicans went ballistic at the challenge. Rep. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) declared, “This is not the time, ladies and gentlemen, to obstruct the will of the American people.” Rep. David Hobson (R-Ohio) bewailed that “this is, in all the years I have been in politics, one of the most base, outrageous acts to take place.”

Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), the House majority whip, declared, “We also need to understand that every time we attack the process, we cast that doubt on that fabric of democracy that is so important.” Blunt did not specify if the “fabric” was a cover sheet. He sought to put the entire government above questioning:

It is the greatest democracy in the history of the world and it is run by people who step forward and make a system work in ways that nobody would believe until they see it produce the result of what people want to have happen on Election Day.

And anyone who doubted the result was an enemy of democracy.

Rep. J.D. Hayworth (R-Ariz.) commented,

The problem we confront with this debate is that it serves to plant the insidious seeds of doubt in the electoral process. But to disrupt the Electoral College, to say in effect, hey, we just want to shine light on this problem, is not the proper use of the people’s time.

Invoking “the people’s time” implies that every moment that the congressmen were on the floor was sacred. But if the people’s time is so sacred, why did most House members leave town immediately after this vote and not return for almost two weeks? (These were the first of more than 15 weeks of paid vacation they were scheduled to receive in 2005.)

Similarly, Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio) declaimed,

This is nothing more or less than an attempt to sow doubt on the legitimacy of this President. It is an attempt to weaken President Bush, and it is unfortunate because we have much work to do in this House and in the Senate, putting this country on the right track.

Chabot's complaint implied that Congress was on the verge of fixing the nation's ills. The debate did not displace any substantive legislative work scheduled for that day. At the worst, it may have delayed members' arriving at donors' receptions or catching planes out of Washington after another grueling three-day work week.

Democrats who questioned the election results automatically became terrorist supporters or at least sympathizers. Rep. David Dreier (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Rules Committee, proclaimed,

We are in the midst of a global war on terrorism and the people who are leading that war on terrorism clearly have no confidence whatsoever in the process of self-determination. And that is why I think that this exercise which we are going through today clearly emboldens those who would, in fact, want to undermine the prospect of democracy.

Dreier did not specify how many thousands of people around the world would perish as a result of the Democratic maneuver. He warned,

It has been said that democracy still represents the best hope for mankind. Sowing seeds of doubt about a legitimately decided election threatens to unnecessarily dim that hope.

Merely questioning some procedures in one election could doom mankind to perpetual tyranny.

Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga.) lamented,

Political grandstanding during this vital Electoral College ballot count is shameful and reprehensible.... To raise an objection for which many speakers on the other side have said they will oppose only feeds unfounded discontent in the veracity of our great democracy.

Price did not explain how simply raising questions suddenly can make democracy dishonest. The election results must be above reproach not because there was no funny business but because no one should be permitted to question them.

The House majority leader, Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), who was recently indicted on multiple criminal charges, put the Democrats' motion in perspective:

It is an assault against the institutions of our representative democracy. It is a threat to the very ideals it ostensibly defends.... It is a crime against the dignity of American democracy, and that crime is not victimless.

DeLay declared that the Democrats' complaints "poison our democratic processes." (On the other hand, the three censures that DeLay received from the House Ethics Committee were a healthy tonic for popular government.)

People are supposed to believe that regardless of how many fabrications are told on the campaign trail, the election itself is sacrosanct — even though politicians and political appointees are ultimately in charge of counting the votes. Even though the co-chairman of the Bush reelection campaign in Ohio happened to be the same person in charge of vote counting in Ohio — Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell — any suspicion of wrongdoing was scurrilous.

What senior members of the House of Representatives saw as a grave threat to democracy and the future of humanity failed to hold the attention of the U.S. Senate. The Senate held no debate over the objection. Instead, a handful of senators stood up and made brief comments to the TV cameras and a largely empty floor. Twenty-five senators did not even bother voting on the challenge to the Ohio electors.

Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio) vindicated his home state:

As a Republican from Cleveland who has been reelected as a Republican from Cleveland, elected to Federal, State, county, and municipal offices, I am living proof Ohioans know how to count ballots and, more importantly, we count fairly.

Voinovich assumed that since it was well known, if not universally admitted, that he was beyond reproach, his election victories proved that all Ohio elections are impeccable.

Sen. Mitch McConnell, the second-ranking Republican in the Senate and a man renowned for aggressive fundraising practices, was the designated Wailer in the Senate. He denounced the Democrats:

They should not trample on the proud republican government our Founding Fathers bequeathed us. They should not mock the beautiful concept that sovereignty lies with the people, while our troops are fighting and dying to plant that concept in the soil of Iraq.

Such blather should not be dismissed as merely self-serving emissions. These comments go to the heart of how politicians think about government and their own power — and about citizens' duty to accept unquestioningly whatever election results the politicians proclaim. Citizens are supposed to believe in that magical moment of uplift that occurs when election

results are officially certified — expunging all the verbal flim-flams of the campaign itself. The Republicans' comments sounded as if there is a grave danger in letting people even start to think about how the whole process works — as if Republicans were terrified of any questions or challenges that would decrease people's submissiveness to the government.

The “debate” in Congress illustrated how elections are now about consecration, rather than representation. Elections have become something for rulers to shroud themselves in, rather than leashes used by the people. Politicians are obsessed with maintaining the imagined dignity of their class, not in resolving doubts about honest vote counting.

James Bovard is the author of [Attention Deficit Democracy](#) [2006] as well as [The Bush Betrayal](#) [2004], [Lost Rights](#) [1994] and [Terrorism and Tyranny: Trampling Freedom, Justice and Peace to Rid the World of Evil](#) (Palgrave-Macmillan, September 2003) and serves as a policy advisor for The Future of Freedom Foundation.

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