

The president and his party have gone to war against America

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It's becoming hard to find the right words to describe what Republicans have become at this moment in history. We can call them reckless in their eagerness to undermine the functioning of government. We can call them heartless in their willingness to deprive Americans of aid in such a desperate time. We can call them unhinged in their embrace of deranged conspiracy theories.

But now the Republican Party is quite literally becoming the enemy of America.

Consider the lawsuit filed by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton asking the Supreme Court to essentially nullify the entire 2020 presidential election so it can be handed to President Trump, a suit about which Trump himself says, "This is the big one." It might have been just one more ridiculous publicity stunt by one of the many corrupt fools the GOP has managed to elect recently, but now, Republican attorneys general from 17 other states have filed a brief in support of the suit.

The suit claims that election results in Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin should be thrown out and the decision left to Republican-controlled legislatures in those states, presumably so they could simply appoint pro-Trump electors and make him the winner.

The entire premise of the suit is farcical. Republicans have not found evidence of fraud beyond ludicrous innuendo on the order of, "An election official gave one of our poll watchers a dirty look!," and the idea that one state could demand that the Supreme Court overturn the election results of another is absurd.

But that's just the beginning. The suit includes an "expert" statistical analysis purporting to show that there was "less than one in a quadrillion statistical improbability of Mr. Biden winning the popular vote" in the four states.

I won't go into the details except to say that Paxton's "expert" took a statistical test meant to tell you if two samples differ — for instance, did one population who got a vaccine have different outcomes than another similar population who got a placebo? — and used it to "prove" that Joe Biden did better in these states than Hillary Clinton, and therefore ... fraud!

In years to come, statistics instructors will use this lawsuit as a case study in how statistics can be misused and abused. It's as if I said, "My nephew claimed he broke his arm, but a real live doctor has informed me that in fact he broke his humerus, and that shows he's not my nephew at all!"

But the fact that Paxton is quite obviously an idiot doesn't for a moment mitigate the horror of what's happening here. This abomination of a lawsuit has the backing of the president, Republican state officials across the country, the conservative media and many Republicans in Congress, with some actively supporting it and others inviting Trump and his confederates to keep up the fight. ("Let's let the process play out," we keep hearing.)

We can contemplate their motivations — fear of their unhinged and potentially violent base is the primary one — but at the moment it doesn't really matter. What matters is that the Republican Party has all but declared war on the entire system of American democracy.

The foundation of that system is that the people vote, we count the votes, and the winner takes office. The GOP is now saying, "No. We win, no matter what. And if the people vote for a Democrat, then they must simply be overruled."

When we look back on this dreadful era in our politics, I believe we'll put this episode alongside Trump's impeachment, because they share this sequence of events: A corrupt, narcissistic president engages in appalling misdeeds, then demands that his party defend those misdeeds, which they do.

Now as in 2019 (yes, it was only last year), the facts were really not at issue. We all saw the transcript of Trump putting the screws to the Ukrainian president to smear Biden, and we heard lengthy testimony from career civil servants about how American foreign policy had been twisted to serve Trump's interests rather than those of the United States.

So Republicans faced a choice. They could have supported Trump's impeachment over this repugnant abuse of his office. They could have condemned what he did, but concluded that it didn't rise to a level requiring removal. Or they could defend and endorse Trump's appalling behavior.

With just a few exceptions, they chose the last course. Having already decided that it was just fine that Russia helped Trump get elected in the first place, they planted their flag on the idea that presidents should be able to use the power of the United States for their own personal political gain. Trump forced them to choose between him and their country, and they chose him.

Now they're doing it again. But this time it's even worse. Trump has enlisted the Republican Party in a sweeping attack on America itself — our entire system of government and elections, and the very idea that the people get to choose their leaders. And with just a few exceptions, the GOP has joined in that attack.

None of us knows for sure what the future of the Republican Party looks like. Perhaps it will reform itself. But in its present, it is nothing less than a cancer on our democracy. I'd say that every Republican should be ashamed, were it not so abundantly clear that almost none of them have any shame at all.