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## COLUMNIST

# This is What Dignity Looks like – in the Face of a Howling Mob

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When House Republican leaders decided the time had come to expel Wyoming Congresswoman Liz Cheney from her post as party conference chair – the third highest ranking party position – they recognized the need to concoct a cover story to justify their

action and blunt the accusations that it was done at the behest of former president Donald Trump.

After hours of soul searching and deep thinking, they concluded Cheney was deficient in messaging skills, the ability and proficiency to articulate the Republican governing philosophy and approach to dealing with critical issues, foreign and domestic.

Her shortcomings, they argued, placed in jeopardy the party's effort to seize control of Congress in the 2022 midterm elections and removing her from her leadership position was the only cure.

It was a theory whipped up by Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Whip Steve Scalise, but it failed the authenticity test.

Cheney's voting record in her two terms in the House are solidly conservative Republican — 80 percent rating by Heritage Action; 78 percent by the American Conservative Union and 68 percent by the Club for Growth. More telling, she voted in support of Trump's position 92 percent of the time.

Her bona fides as a Republican promoting party ideals and ideology are close to impeccable.

With his selection of Elise Stefanik, a three term Congresswoman from upstate New York, as Cheney's replacement, McCarthy undercut his own argument.

Her Heritage Action rating is 48 percent; American Conservative Union, 44 percent and Club for Growth, 35 percent, the fourth worst among House Republicans. She voted in support of Trump 77 percent.

Her voting record — her "message" — was disregarded in favor of her vigorous defense of Trump during the impeachment proceedings and her buy in on his election fraud narrative.

Cheney's removal was a case of McCarthy, Scalise and others kneeling on the floor of Trump's penthouse at Mar-A-Lago and pledging to purge the heretic from Wyoming for the sin of rejecting Trump's insistence that the 2020 election was riddled with fraud on a grand scale and he would have secured a second term if not for a corrupt electoral system.

Trump demanded her punishment and banishment for refusing to accept his claim that the Jan. 6 assault on the U. S. Capitol was a case of a peaceful protest by Americans angry over a dishonest election.

That more than 60 legal challenges brought by Trump's campaign alleging voting improprieties and millions of ballots cast illegally were dismissed as without merit or substantiation was ignored as simply further proof of a corrupted system.

And, presumably, smashing windows and doors, battling with law enforcement, ransacking offices, damaging furniture and decorative items, stealing equipment and urinating on the carpet — activities captured on cellphone cameras and posted online by the intruders — were harmless hijinks that got out of control.

Millions of Americans watched aghast in real time as the building and its protective police presence were overrun by a howling mob of protestors — many armed, wearing cammo or body armor — intent on preventing Congress from certifying the election results and the victory of

Joe Biden.

For Cheney and nine of her House Republican colleagues, the assault was so horrific they supported impeaching Trump for inciting the riot.

In the months since, the outspoken Cheney has warned of the danger in becoming the cult of Trump and urged a return to traditional Republican values. It is time, she argues, to break with him, reassert itself as a party of ideas and vision and offer viable alternatives to the left-leaning policies pursued by the Biden Administration.

Trump, though, would have none of it. He was enraged by Cheney's repudiation of his narrative and made clear to McCarthy that he would not tolerate her continued presence in leadership.

Despite a virtual Everest of evidence to the contrary, Trump has clung tenaciously to his tale of widespread election day misconduct orchestrated by shadowy forces determined to drive him from office.

Trump couldn't be clearer: He controls the party, dictates its direction and decides which candidates will receive his blessing, money and support. McCarthy folded and opted to appease Trump by sacrificing a member of his leadership team.

As for Cheney's alleged shortcomings in "messaging," it seems McCarthy believes it's helpful to the party's cause to insist Trump was cheated out of the election and that a mob assault on the Capitol, sending members of Congress scurrying for safety under police protection, is a brilliant strategy that will resonate with the American people who will reward them with control of Congress.

Cheney fears a Trump-dominated party will be burdened by false allegations of election rigging and rationalizing the storming of the Capitol. Republican candidates will be badgered by the media and their Democratic opponents to respond, effectively drowning out efforts to frame the election as a referendum on the Biden Administration.

By imposing fealty to Trump as a litmus test to occupy a party leadership post, McCarthy has crossed the Rubicon; there's no turning back or defying Trump in the future. He's surrendered his role, ceding it to Trump out of fear the ex-president's dedicated base of support will turn against him.

With Democrats holding a wafer thin six-seat margin in the House, Republicans are within striking distance of regaining control, placing the speakership tantalizingly within McCarthy's grasp.

Falling short will be a stunning rebuke, end any thought of a Trump presidential candidacy in 2024, and a history-making strategic blunder by McCarthy. He should be aware also that in the event of an election day disaster, the blame and responsibility will fall on him. Appeasing Trump merely means absolving him of blame — the common theme running through the ex-president's entire political career.

Cheney walked away from the episode with her dignity intact and burnished. The same can't be said for McCarthy.

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