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Why Has Congress Failed Americans?

by Joel S. Hirschhorn

The Founders of our nation and the Framers of our Constitution surely did not foresee the day when the public would have the least confidence in Congress - even less than for the presidency.

In fact, the public has a little less confidence in Congress than it has in HMOs. At 14 percent, the fraction of Americans with a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in Congress is the lowest in Gallup's history of this measure -- and the lowest of any of the 16 institutions tested in this year's Confidence in Institutions survey. The Supreme Court received 34 percent confidence and the awful presidency of George W. Bush received 25 percent -- nothing to be proud of.

The 2006 congressional elections show that switching power between the two major political parties is an act of utter futility. We have a bipartisan failure of Congress to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities and serve the public. In the end, Democrats may have a different style, but like Republicans are also corrupt, arrogant, and incompetent. Things have gotten so bad institutionally and culturally that we cannot vote our way out of a dysfunctional and destructive Congress as long as the two-party duopoly maintains its grip on our political system.

We no longer have a significant number of members of Congress that rise above partisan political priorities to put the good of the nation and the integrity of our Constitution first.

For our constitutional republic to really work Congress must have the courage and integrity to use its constitutional powers to safeguard Americans' freedom, security, health, safety and welfare. Even the most distracted and cynical Americans now see Congress has done next to nothing to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities.

Worst of all, Congress has allowed the Bush presidency to accumulate far more power than our Constitution permits. Even after years of arrogant disrespect by Bush and Cheney for our Constitution and Congress itself, Congress is too cowardly to do what they are supposed to do to maintain the structure of our federal government. It has not used the constitutional remedy of impeachment -- not to punish Bush -- but to preserve the constitutional limits on the presidency.

Add to this: the failure to protect the rule of law; the failure to control spending and reduce our debt; the failure to control our borders and protect our national sovereignty; the failure to stop the insane Iraq war; the failure to stop the many forms of corruption of Congress itself; the failure to restore public confidence in our elections; the failure to stop the excesses of globalization that is destroying our middle class; the failure to address rising economic inequality; the failure to fix our broken health care system; and so much more.

All this has resulted from repugnant runaway politics. Getting elected, grabbing power and enjoying the benefits of office trump governing. Hundreds of members of Congress -- in the House and Senate -- are mental midgets, embarrassing blowhards, chronic liars, outright crooks, corporate lackeys, and elderly buffoons. They are plutocracy protectors more than democracy defenders. And too many that think they should be president.

So what can the 86 percent of Americans without confidence in Congress do?

Put aside partisan views and stop re-electing members of Congress. Only a handful of incumbents deserve to be re-elected. A very few that never supported the Iraq war, do not use pork spending to reward their supporters, and have worked to impeach Bush, for example.

Now is the time to elect independents and third party candidates to Congress. When one objectively sees the utterly low quality of both Democratic and Republican members of Congress it becomes clear that even a random selection of ordinary Americans would probably do better. But we have thousands of independents and third party members with considerable civic and elective office experience that deserve the opportunity to

restore our representative democracy. How could we do any worse? Let's throw the bums out and give real change a chance.

We also need much greater public awareness that Congress for a very long time has failed to obey the part of Article V of our Constitution that gives us the right to a convention to propose amendments to the Constitution. Such an Article V Convention was created by the Framers as an alternative to Congress proposing amendments. They created this convention option – a temporary fourth branch of government giving us some direct democracy – in case Americans some day lost confidence in the federal government. That day has arrived!

Even Congressman Ron Paul, self-proclaimed champion of the Constitution, has not supported an Article V Convention.

There are many constitutional amendments that deserve public discussion, especially ones to make our government work the way our Constitution intended it to work. We need to strengthen our Constitution to prevent power-hungry presidents, useless Congresses, and Supreme Courts that create new public policy.

Moreover, the one and only requirement to have an Article V Convention specified has already been satisfied, because way more than two-thirds of state legislatures have requested such a convention. Learn more about this congressional disobedience of the Constitution at www.foavc.org, the website of the new national, nonpartisan group Friends of the Article V Convention.

Why has Congress failed Americans? Because Americans have allowed it to fail them. Now is the time for Americans to assert their sovereign constitutional power and take back their country. That means YOU !
