



President's Message on Threat to Democracy

January 7, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

The past few days in Washington have been among the most disturbing in our lifetimes, and arguably in American political history. What we witnessed on January 6th – with horror and sadness – was an attack on the most precious institutions that symbolize our form of government and constituted an assault on democracy itself.

This is beyond politics. After refusing to concede that he had lost the election, President Trump sparked an insurrection, inciting a mob to storm the US Capitol. We have long believed that Trump is a dangerous leader, as evidenced by his encouraging right-wing extremists in Charlottesville, Portland, and Kenosha, and his behavior this week makes this apparent to all. The combination of his publicly evident psychopathology and the power of the office he holds constitutes a clear and present danger to the health and well-being of the nation and its people. We support his immediate removal from office, by resignation, impeachment or invoking the 25th Amendment to the Constitution.

While neither of these routes may be feasible given the currently polarized state of government, we are deeply concerned about his potential to do further damage to our country and to democracy in the final days of his Administration. Words and behavior always have meaning, and they matter, especially because of the influencing potential of the President of the United States. Psychoanalysts understand the impact of words on individual and group psychology as reflecting the power of transference to authority, and there are few leaders with more authority than the President.

Clearly many Americans have supported Trump, in part because of his uncanny ability to appeal to their long-standing feelings of anger, exclusion, humiliation and victimization, even if his success in doing so was hollow, self-serving, and entirely lacking in true empathy. Trump's supporters identify with him, consciously or unconsciously because he has given voice to grievances that he has promised to solve, but he has done so with lies, deceptions and false promises.

His attempt to undermine the cornerstone of democracy – free and fair elections – is the last straw. Trump must go because he threatens the core values of civil society, and we would be indulging in our own denial to expect him to behave any better between now and the inauguration of President Biden, when a smooth transition of power should be a given.

Psychoanalysts study character in our patients, in public figures, and in ourselves. No one is perfect, but some flaws in character – like those of the despot or dictator - are too profound to ignore. History is replete with tragic examples of demagogues who have done irreparable damage to civilization when their power has gone unchecked. We are at such a moment now.

There is reason for hope. Trump will soon be out of office, and the incoming Biden Administration shows promise for returning competence, civility and sound judgment – good character – to the White House. The transformative Senate election in Georgia will limit the gridlock in Washington. The new vaccines starting to be distributed represent a major turning point in our struggle to overcome the COVID pandemic. And the overlapping crises around racism, climate, income inequality and the pandemic have prompted soul-searching and introspection about what really matters to us as a society. Out of chaos and tragedy can come an opportunity to reimagine society. The Trump menace is the most immediate concern, and we call on our political leaders to act with alacrity so that we can address the other critical challenges together.

Respectfully,

Bill Glover, President
Kerry Sulkowicz, President-elect