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Guest Comment

Viewpoint: D.C.-area business leaders call for common ground, not more conflict after Capitol riots

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Our country is at a turning point laid bare by the post-election events dominating the media coverage last week. The political violence following an election with historic turnout where voters and election officials navigated a pandemic, was stoked by politicians, but fed by a system of incentives in dire need of fixing. The country remains deeply divided and the underlying reasons go far beyond this year's election.



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Workers place security fencing around the U.S. Capitol after Trump supporters broke into the building Jan. 6.

We must address the upside-down incentives.

The stark divisions we see today are a byproduct of a system that pushes elected officials to cater to the most extreme elements of our politics, to people who demand political combat over compromise, leading to a debilitating and dysfunctional politics that has plagued our country for many years.

We are business leaders dedicated to making democracy work better. As Republicans, Democrats and Independents, we are Americans first, committed to nonpartisan efforts to make our democracy function to produce solutions in the common interest. We share a belief in putting the interests of country over party and the need to incent our elected leaders to bridge the partisan divide and work together to achieve pragmatic nonpartisan solutions to our pressing national problems.

Even a well-administered election leads to gridlock when the electoral system incentivizes political combat over cooperation. Even a great business would fail if we incentivized our employees to focus on disruptive internal competition over serving customers. Although our politics seem dominated by personalities, systems drive outcomes. We believe that politicians will put country over party when that is what our electoral system rewards.

In order to get politicians to work cooperatively, we must change the incentives.

Electoral realities like gerrymandered districts, closed primaries and winner-take-all voting reward extremes and incentivize elected leaders to prioritize conflict over cooperation. That survival instinct among politicians leads to the failure to find compromise on urgent national priorities like Covid relief funding and infrastructure renewal, and increasingly common government shutdowns that waste money, disrupt business and shake faith in our democracy.

We call upon leaders across parties to implement reforms that will redirect the incentives to promote cooperation over conflict, including nonpartisan redistricting, ranked choice voting (or instant run-off), and transparency in campaign finance.

One election does not fix the system. We still have a very divided America and need to break out of the “us against them” dynamics that poison our public debate and paralyze our government. It is time we all turn our attention to the work of realigning our political incentives so that our elected leaders are rewarded for finding common ground. As business leaders, we will continue to raise our voices to support reform and a democratic system that encourages politicians to cooperate and citizens to celebrate the strength of our American democracy.

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