

Title:

Eternal Vigilance To Protect Democracy WC 860

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Summary:

Thomas Jefferson said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of democracy," but besides preserving our democracy we are also in a never-ending struggle to create and expand our rights. While our founding fathers called for freedom and democracy, our people had to struggle to enfranchise poor whites, to end slavery and to allow former slaves and women the right to vote. Liberties and entitlements that were never considered in the early days of our republic were later enshrined into ...

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Article Body:

Thomas Jefferson said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of democracy," but besides preserving our democracy we are also in a never-ending struggle to create and expand our rights. While our founding fathers called for freedom and democracy, our people had to struggle to enfranchise poor whites, to end slavery and to allow former slaves and women the right to vote. Liberties and entitlements that were never considered in the early days of our republic were later enshrined into our laws, including social security retirement and disability, unemployment insurance, the right of workers to join trade unions and minorities to obtain an equal education.

We can consider our nation in constant evolution and struggle between opposing groups. Even before severing our colonial bonds with England, those wanting independence and those wanting to remain a colony fought each other, the French forces aligning themselves with the former and the British leading the latter. With the achievement of Independence, the struggle didn't end. The nation's foundation rested on the enslavement of millions while three-fifths of their number were counted for election purposes so that the southern states could have greater control of the government. Some leaders in the former colonies would not agree to joining the United States of America until the Bill of Rights was ratified and added to the Constitution, guaranteeing freedom of speech, assembly, religion, the right to a trial and other crucial rights.

While we describe our nation as a Democracy, with the majority ruling, the 2,000

election saw the candidate with fewer votes becoming president because of our Electoral College. In the contested Florida recount, the Supreme Court, overrode the Florida State Court in a 5 to 4 decision regarding the recount of contested ballots. Is it a mere coincidence that the highest court in our land had a majority of its members appointed by Republicans? The Electoral College is not a college but rather the means by which states, rather than all voters, determine the states' choice for a presidential candidate. That vestige of an earlier struggle, when politicians were distrustful of our citizen voters, has become enshrined in our twenty-first presidential election process.

Yet another factor influencing elections is the enormous amount of money that candidates must raise in order to run for office. These funds come disproportionately from corporations and the wealthy. During the last several elections, oil, pharmaceutical, health care and other major companies have been major contributors to candidates. Is it no wonder that our tax and other policies favor these interests? There are about 65 lobbyists for every member of Congress (to get the total, multiply by 100 Senators and 453 Representatives); is anyone naive enough to believe that elected officials of both parties are not influenced by the funds they depend upon to be elected rather than the voices of many of their constituents?

Another threat to democracy is more direct. In one documented situation in 1933, in the crisis of the Economic Depression (in which one out of four workers were unemployed), J.P. Morgan, Firestone Company and other corporate executives approached General Smedley Butler, a renown general, and offered him money to overthrow the legally elected President Roosevelt. The honorable general was not tempted to become an American dictator and potential Hitler; rather he revealed the plot to the President and testified against those threatening to undermine our government. Yet no one was indicted. One does not have to be a conspiracy believer to wonder whether there were other such unsuccessful attempts that were never exposed or if they are being hatched today.

Our nation's founders established three separate branches of government--Executive, Legislative and Judicial--as a system of checks and balances to preserve our democratic rights. A recently introduced threat to this separation is presidential "signing statements." Started under President Reagon, they were used infrequently by subsequent presidents until the current President Bush. When he signs a bill, such as the one outlawing torture--overwhelmingly approved in the Senate--he states that he has the right not to honor the law if he believes otherwise. He has made over 800 such statements in which he can overrule the independence of Congress' lawmaking ability at his whim.

Besides being a student of American history, I have also written a psychological

thriller, "Hobgoblins," which describes how a group of greedy financiers secretly support a presidential candidate who plans to double-cross them and become a modern-day Hitler. While fiction, it has an historical basis and cannot be discounted as sheer fantasy. Opposing the business moguls and presidential candidate are a psychologist who once treated the candidate, a muckraking journalist and a third person who is the source of the hobgoblin nightmares that pursue both the presidential candidate and the psychologist.