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Why does our government now give the majority to the minority?

Pat Perriello | Mar. 6, 2013 NCR Today

We had an election in November. The results were that President Barack Obama was re-elected without much difficulty. The Democrats also gained seats in both houses of Congress, increasing their Senate majority.

If I have stated these facts correctly, why is it that those who lost the election now appear to be in charge of governing the country?

An article in *Roll Call* [1] depicts what is currently going on in Congress following the imposition of the sequester. The House of Representatives is preparing a continuing resolution maintaining the sequester. It also modifies some of the defense cuts by providing flexibility in how cuts are to be imposed. The Republican majority in the House represents where the action is currently. Democrats seem to be at the mercy of what Republicans decide to do or not do.

Is this what our forefathers envisioned? We know of course that in a parliamentary system, the political party that wins governs the country. If we follow European politics, we know that whoever wins in Britain or in Italy is able to put their program into effect. The same is true in Israel and in every country that operates under a parliamentary system.

Our Constitution is different. It is predicated on a balance of power. In fact, the House of Representatives was designed to come closest to representing the will of the people. But does this mean that in our government, power is to be in the hands of the minority? What happened to the idea that the "majority rules"?

It seems we have managed to distort the intentions of our forefathers and have actually gone from a balanced government to a dysfunctional government. I feel confident this does not reflect the intent of the framers of our Constitution.

The lawmakers themselves are responsible for changing the operation of government. In the Senate, current rules regarding the filibuster enable one individual to prevent a nomination or a bill from going forward. A super majority of 60 votes is now required for any meaningful legislation to proceed. We no longer have the rule of the majority, but rather, rule by the minority.

In the House, we have gerrymandered districts created by both parties, which prevents real elections from taking place in all but a few congressional districts throughout the country. Also, there is now what is known as the Hastert Rule, which is being used to prevent legislation from being considered even though a majority of the members of the House would likely vote in favor of a particular bill. The speaker simply refuses to allow a bill to be considered if his party is opposed to the eventual outcome. This prevents a coalition of both parties from moving legislation forward. To his credit, Speaker John Boehner has dropped that restriction in a couple of cases.

So where does that leave us? Our Constitution has worked pretty well up until the Obama presidency. The checks and balances have prevented us from moving too far too fast in one direction or another as our

forefathers intended. When there were crises, members of both parties pulled together and crafted compromise legislation. Even in the waning days of the Bush administration, Democrats helped Republicans pass legislation to avert the worst of the financial collapse.

Almost since the day Obama took office, Republicans have made a pact to prevent meaningful legislative measures from being enacted. They are now taking the stance that they will not raise one more dime of taxes, even refusing to close loopholes that almost everyone agrees should be closed. They are proving that if you decide to simply stop participating in government, you can prevent anything from happening. Regardless of one's political persuasion, these developments can only be seen as inimical to a functioning democracy.

It is time for our government to undergo significant change so it can function once again. One possibility is to implement a parliamentary system so the victors can put their program in place. At least in that way, the public will be able to learn whether the program works or not. If it doesn't work, a new party and a new program can be put into office through a new election.

If such a change is too radical for our country at this time, then it is time to rewrite the rules of Congress to grease the wheels of this government so it can function again. The Senate had an opportunity to change its outdated filibuster rules at the beginning of the new Congress but failed. Changes also need to be made in the redistricting process to make elections more fair and competitive. Politicians aren't making these changes because they know the current rules benefit them whenever they are in the minority. Who will step up to the plate to enable our government to function again and stop lurching from crisis to crisis? After all, we are not even talking about real crises -- just manufactured ones.

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