

Is this the beginning of the end for Trumpism or the Republican Party? (788 words)

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Oral exam practice

This worksheet and the article are written in American English.

Background information

GOP (= Grand Old Party)

The Republican Party

The Capitol and Capitol Hill

The building where the US Congress meets. It is situated in the neighborhood of Washington D.C. called Capitol Hill.

The RNC and the attack on the Capitol (January 6, 2021)

The article deals with a Republican National Committee (RNC) meeting in February 2022 that looked back on an event which took place over a year ago, the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. A mob of several thousand Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in order to disrupt the joint session of the Congress and prevent Biden from being proclaimed president because they shared Trump's view that the election had been unlawfully stolen from him.

For several hours, Trump supporters occupied the Capitol building, which symbolizes American democracy. Lawmakers had to be evacuated or were forced to hide while Trump's supporters attacked police officers, wreaked havoc, and damaged and stole property. Several people were killed in the process; several police officers committed suicide in the aftermath. For many hours, then President Trump neither sent the National Guard to put down the insurrection nor asked his supporters to withdraw.

A special committee consisting of 13 members of the US Congress was formed in July 2021 in order to investigate the circumstances of the attack on the Capitol, which is considered to be an act of domestic terrorism. To this day, the committee is very actively interviewing witnesses and studying documents concerning the attack. Senators Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger are the only Republicans on this committee.

For more information:

- theconversation.com/pro-trump-rioters-storm-u-s-capitol-as-his-election-tantrum-leads-to-violence-149142
- january6th.house.gov/about
- www.reuters.com/world/us/officer-who-responded-us-capitol-attack-is-third-die-by-suicide-2021-08-02/

Assignments

Task 1 – Comprehension

Present the main points of what happened at the RNC meeting and how some politicians reacted some days later.

Task 2 – Comprehension

Point out what your answers to task 1 show about the current state of the Republican Party.

Task 3 – Comprehension and analysis

The author Jill Lawrence mentions and quotes Governor Mark Sanford several times. Explain how mentioning Sanford helps the author to make her point.

Task 4 – Analysis

Analyze how the beginning and the end of the article serve to underline the author's view of the Republican Party.

Task 5 – Evaluation

This exercise can be done by pairs of students in a joint exam or by one student who can choose a cartoon.

Cartoon 1

Partner A, describe and analyze the cartoon in the following link. Present your analysis to partner B.

- www.cartoonistgroup.com/cartoon/Signe+Wilkinson%27s+Editorial+Cartoons/2021-02-03/187216
- Cartoon by Signe Wilkinson, published by The Cartoonist Group on Feb. 3, 2021.

Cartoon 2

Partner B, describe and analyze the cartoon in the following link. Present your analysis to partner A.

- www.seattletimes.com/opinion/rnc-on-a-short-leash/
- Cartoon "RNC on a short leash" by David Horsey, published by *The Seattle Times* on Feb. 14, 2022.

Together, decide which cartoon you think matches the article best.

Answer key

Assignments

Task 1: Sample points

At the Republican National Committee (RNC) meeting

- The attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021 were discussed. (para. 1)
- The RNC did not accept the generally accepted view that the violent attack on the Capitol were an insurrection or even a domestic terrorist attack. (para. 1)
- The RNC formally played the insurrection down and rebranded it as “legitimate political discourse”, thus making the attack appear acceptable, denying the truth about the events. (para. 1)
- Republican lawmakers Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger were censured by the RNC at meeting because they went against the party line. The only two Republicans who investigate the insurrection (see background information) were punished for working against Trump and the view that the attacks were “legitimate.” (paras. 1, 4)

Politicians’ reactions

- Trump congratulated the RNC on condemning Cheney and Kinzinger. (para. 6)
- On the following Monday, over 140 Republican leaders denounced the RNC for: 1) censuring Cheney and Kinzinger; and 2) “condoning conspiracies, lies, and violent insurrection.” (para. 4).
- Sen. Mark Sanford pointed out that the RNC reversed the truth with its decision (para. 5).
- The group of Republicans who disagree with the RNC’s stance is vast and diverse and includes former politicians, moderates, conservatives, and political strategists. (paras. 1, 2, 4)
- Even people who used to be pro-Trump have now turned against him. (para. 4)
- Several well-known Republicans are named as opposing the RNC: Mark Sanford (South Carolina), Christie Todd Whitman (New Jersey), William Weld (Massachusetts), Mitch McConnell (Senate GOP Leader), Mitt Romney (2012 presidential nominee) (paras. 4, 6)

Task 2: Sample points

- The Republican Party is so deeply divided that the different views its members have are impossible to bridge (paras. 1, 2).
- On the one hand, there are Trump supporters who continue to hold fast to his lies (such as that he won Arizona and that the election was stolen, para. 10, 11) and support playing down and rebranding the attack on the Capitol (para. 1). On the other hand, there are an increasing number of conservatives, including McConnell, Sanford, and Fox News host Brian Kilmeade, who want to move on and for people to accept the truth about Trump’s 2020 defeat and the insurrection at the Capitol. (paras. 2, 7, 8, 11, 12)
- The author states that the schism is so deep that the party can hardly continue to exist. She draws a historical parallel to the 19th century when the party nearly split up over ending slavery, which underlines how serious the rift in the party is. (paras. 1, 2)

Task 3: Sample points

The author clearly condemns the road the GOP has taken. In this context, mentioning Governor Sanford helps the author make her point because he ...

- ... is a prominent example of a Republican who disagrees with the RNC publicly condemning two Republican lawmakers who are investigating the attack on the Capitol (Cheney and Kinzinger) (para. 5).
- ... is one of the few Republican politicians who points out very clearly that the GOP leadership is twisting the truth with their interpretation of the insurrectionist attack on the Capitol as a "legitimate political discourse." (paras. 4, 5)
- ... draws a parallel between Trump's party and dystopian literature and films by comparing the way the GOP distorts reality and truth (see previous point about the attack) to bad science fiction films and George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* where leaders define what the truth is in order to suppress people. (para 5)
- ... supports the author's point of view when he says that the Republican Party is destroying itself ("self-igniting", para. 10).
- ... addresses the problem of Trump and misinformation, worrying that Trump will run, lose, and claim again that the election was stolen, leading to more Americans believing that "elections are no longer real." (para. 10)
- ... sees voter rejection of the Republican Party as the only way to escape "Trump cultism." (para. 10)
- ... is a politician who personally understands the absurdity of the extent to which the GOP has surrendered to Trump and lost sight of truth, reason, humility, and consistency, among other things. Elected in 2013, 2014, and 2016, Sanford had a successful run in politics despite having an extramarital affair, which voters usually view as a poor reflection of moral integrity. However, he lost the 2018 GOP primary election because he dared oppose Donald Trump. The irony is that he was elected despite cheating on his wife, but his career couldn't survive his decision not to follow Trump. (para. 8)

Task 4: Sample points

- With the title and her first sentence, Lawrence states that the RNC meeting will live in infamy and will probably be remembered in history as the beginning of the end for either the GOP or Trumpism (headline, para. 1)
- In the paragraph 10, she refers to "Trump cultism," thus equating the belief that his followers have in him to a religious cult that is directed towards a single figure.
- She mentions the RNC's "stunning obtuseness" in order to point out that the RNC is being impressively and willfully stupid. This suggests that there is no way out of the web of lies and denial created by Trump, but the author argues that this behavior may actually provoke a "tipping point" at which more and more Republicans will be fed up with Trump and his followers. (para. 11)
- Fox News is usually very pro-Trump, so quoting a Fox News host talking about Trump's lies underlines the author's own position. The final word "Amen," which usually ends a prayer or a sermon, expresses both the author's exasperation and her hope and impatience to see a change happen. It also evokes her reference to "Trump cultism." (paras. 11, 12)

Task 5: Sample points

Cartoon A

- The elephant has symbolized the Republican Party since the late 19th century. The given cartoon shows a large elephant whose back is covered with a cloth on which the words "G.O.P. TRUMP" are written. Because the elephant is split down the middle, the cloth looks like it says "GO TRUMP." A large number of Republican politicians are riding on the elephant. The split shows that the G.O.P. and Trump's followers are now different entities going in different directions.
- The left-hand side shows a smaller number of people, men and women, sitting on the elephant, they are looking left where the front part of the elephant is heading. These people have turned their backs on Donald Trump and are looking for new perspectives. One person wearing glasses fell when the elephant split and is now clinging to the elephant's back and looking worryingly to the right towards the people on the other side.
- The right part of the elephant that carries the Trump followers does not have a head, but its feet have been turned around and show that it is heading in the opposite direction. A female figure is leading the elephant half, but on the back of the elephant, there are only men. They all look to the right, perhaps alluding to the Trump followers' far-right tendencies. Women in general seem to have abandoned Trump, except for one. The woman on foot is brandishing a rifle, alluding to the right to bear arms guaranteed by the Second Amendment of the US Constitution and cherished by conservative Americans. The rifle, the mock-military style headdress, which resembles a cooking pot, and the fact that she pulls the elephant's tail to keep it in motion make her a leading figure that is grotesque at the same time.
- According to this cartoon, the two parts of the Republican Party have been torn apart for good and are aiming in different directions and at different policies. Although the split was recent, they have already lost sight of each other. The cartoon suggests that the number of Trump-followers in the Republican Party is larger than the number of people who have taken a critical stance of the former president and his views.

Additional information on some figures shown in the cartoon:

- The man in the middle clinging to the elephant's back is probably Mitch McConnell, who also wears roundish glasses. McConnell's relationship to Trump is complicated. On the one hand, McConnell has said that Trump was responsible for the riot and attack on the Capitol on January 6. On the other hand, McConnell voted to acquit Trump during his second impeachment trial following the riot.

For more information about Mitch McConnell and his complicated relationship with Trump, see:

- www.businessinsider.com/trump-mitch-mcconnell-relationship-2022-1
- www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-mitch-mcconnell-relationship-rapidly-deteriorating-republicans-1648280
- The woman leading the right half of the elephant by the tail is probably Marjorie Taylor Greene, a congresswoman from Georgia who is a known ally of Trump. She is also a proponent of gun rights who has been known to spread conspiracy theories and other questionable content on social media. The military helmet is a pot on her head, which likely refers to her gaffe when she said that Nancy Pelosi had sent the "gaspacho police" to spy on members of Congress. She meant to say "Gestapo." She was, of course, mocked for this mistake.

For more information about Marjorie Taylor Greene, see:

- www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-aud-nw-marjorie-taylor-green-house-vote-20210204-tbfopkt6ijainlmzv5dowpxr54-story.html
- www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/11/marjorie-taylor-green-gazpacho-police-soup-nazi

Cartoon B

- On the left-hand side of the cartoon, there is a dog on a tight leash with a cloth around his abdomen showing that it represents the Republican National Committee (RNC) and the decisions made during the meeting. The dog looks like a mongrel, thus does not seem to belong to specific breed. It has crooked ears and is wild and aggressive as shown by the foam coming out of the mouth, the bulging, wide open eyes, and its efforts at yanking at the leash. This indicates that the dog has rabies (= Tollwut) and is therefore dangerous to people. The animal is trying to jump towards the left, away from the person holding its leash, stretching the leash as much as possible but unable to make the leaps and bounds it would like to make to get away. It is growling and barking out two names: (Liz) Cheney and (Adam) Kinzinger, the “renegades” who are fighting for the GOP not to lose its grip on truth and reality.
- The person on the right holding the leash clearly is Donald Trump, identifiable by his hair, his facial features, his signature (far-too-long) red tie, and his legendary tiny fingers. He is trying to pull the dog the other way, further to the right. The right side of the cartoon where Trump is positioned probably represents the political far right. He is hardly looking at the dog, showing little interest in its needs or wishes, just trying to keep it under control.
- According to the title and the image, Trump has the RNC on a short leash, meaning he has a strong influence on what the RNC does. In his speech bubble, he praises the “loyalty” of the dog, which refers to the RNC censoring Trump’s critics, Cheney and Kinzinger. Trump admits that the dog is “rabid” and therefore that the RNC is in an irrational and disturbed frame of mind, a sick animal that is dangerous to people. The cartoon expresses that you can only be in such a condition to stay loyal to Trump. For Trump, loyalty is everything. He is neither worried nor does he really care about the party’s troubling condition – loyalty is what matters to him.
- At the same time, Trump’s speech bubble reveals a lack of realism in his assessment of the situation. While he praises the dog’s loyalty, he ignores that the dog forcefully tries to move away from him. This portrayal of the RNC shows the rift in the Republican Party: There are party members who are violently trying to move away from him, but at the same time the RNC votes to condemn the two Trump critics. Expressing loyalty while showing the urge to escape are two impulses that cannot be reconciled and highlights the problematic state of the Republican Party. While the RNC is still on Trump’s leash, the cartoon also expresses Donald’s Trump denial of the dwindling support he has in a party that is disintegrating and that he is at risk of losing control over.

Suitability

- Cartoon A illustrates the rift between the two factions of the party and points out that they are irreconcilable. Different roads have been taken; the move apart has begun. This corresponds to the point the article makes that the party is blowing itself up (para. 9) and is deeply divided (para. 1). On the one hand, cartoon A also reinforces what Lawrence mentioned in the article: many Republicans want to move on from Trump (para. 2). On the other hand, the cartoon also shows that the number of politicians supporting Trump is still very large.

- In cartoon B, Trump and the entire Republican Party or RNC (represented by the dog) are still linked albeit not for long. The party is trying to break loose but at the same time Trump still has a lot of followers. Trump still has some degree of control over the party although he seems to be losing his grip on reality.
- Both cartoons depict the state the GOP is in and the fact that the party is under a lot of pressure. Cartoon A seems to be a bit closer to the opinion piece from USA today, which placed a great deal of emphasis on how divided the GOP is and how the two halves cannot co-exist.

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