

Childhood Vaccinations Don't Quit on the GOP Still Mostly Effective

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am in my mid-50s and in good health (I don't take any medications). I rarely get sick with colds or flu. I have been vaccinated with all the common vaccinations for our childhood. With all the immigrants coming into our country, I am wondering if any have been given childhood vaccinations in their countries. I fear that chickenpox, measles, etc., could re-enter this country. If so, do our childhood vaccinations still protect us from these diseases? Should seniors be re-vaccinated or is that harmful at our age? -- C.S.



ANSWER: Legal immigrants into the U.S. are required to have all vaccinations as recommended by the Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices.

Undocumented immigrants are more difficult to study, but what data there is suggests that vaccination rates are roughly the same in the countries of origin of many undocumented immigrants as in the United States. In fact, several Central American countries have higher vaccination rates than the U.S. currently.

Analysis of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases have suggested that most of these outbreaks have come from visitors (Americans or foreign visitors) from countries with high levels of ongoing transmission who spread the disease to others during their infectious period. Because there are some communities where there are enough unvaccinated people due to medical reasons, personal choice or ineffective vaccination to allow spread of the disease, there continues to be ongoing infection in the U.S. This is especially true of measles.

People born before 1957 are generally considered to be immune to measles, and the vast majority have had chickenpox. People born between 1963 and 1967 (that might be you) are at risk for having had ineffective measles vaccination, and those at risk should check their immunization status and may need revaccination, especially those in an area near an outbreak.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I read your recent column on vaginal estrogen. Based on plants such as soy, bioidentical hormones are a safe solution for older people that provide sexual rejuvenation. You should spread the word! -- P.F.

ANSWER: I appreciate your passion, but there are several problems with your statement.

First, the bioidentical female hormone in humans is estradiol, which is available only by a prescription. It remains my choice for women who need hormone replacement, such as women with severe symptoms of menopause (replacement is given by mouth or patch), or for women with atrophic vaginitis (given vaginally, by cream, tablets or ring). It is certainly the most natural option.

Second, phytoestrogens (the soy-based hormones, such as isoflavones and lignans) have chemical structures similar to estradiol, but absolutely are not bioidentical. They have both estrogen and anti-estrogen properties. They may slightly reduce breast cancer risk, probably have no effect on endometrial cancer risk and probably do not increase clotting risk. However, for women with a history of breast cancer, many oncologists recommend against soy protein due to its estrogen activity. Some hematologists warn against these in people with history of abnormal blood clots.

The effect of phytoestrogens on sexual function has been studied, and a 2018 review showed that soy "had no promising effect" on sexual function. Of course, some women will have better effects than others.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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After losing a national election, it's natural that a political party goes through a period of soul-searching and internal turmoil.

The Republican Party, though, has taken it to another level.

President Donald Trump brought most of the GOP along for the ride during his conspiracy-fueled attempt to overturn the election.

His loyalists have been scouring the landscape searching for Republicans to censure or primary for insufficient loyalty to him.

The most famous Republican House freshman mused not too long ago about a space laser starting the 2018 California wildfires.

And Trump has maintained his hold on the party seemingly effortlessly.

This dismaying chapter has led to declarations that the party is doomed or calls to split it up.

A former chair of the Washington state GOP wrote in an op-ed in The Seattle Times urging, as the headline put it, "Let's form a new Republican Party." This prompted a Chris Cillizza item at CNN headlined, "Should Republicans disband the GOP?"

There's been a spate of articles by erstwhile Republicans announcing they are done with the party.

Jonathan Last wrote a piece in The New Republic titled: "The Republican Party is dead. It is the Trump cult now." Washington Post columnist Kathleen Parker declared, "The party isn't doomed; it's dead."

This seems a mite premature about a party that represents roughly half the country and is on the cusp of a majority in the House, tied 50-50 in the Senate, and in control of the governorships in 27 states and both the governorship and state legislature in 22 of those.

If we are going to consider this geographically diverse collection of officeholders -- whose careers in many instances pre-date Trump and will outlast him -- a mere personality cult, the word "cult" has lost its meaning.

The fortunes of our political parties ebb and flow and their iterations change over time, but they are deeply embedded institutions of our public life.

As Dan McLaughlin, my colleague at National Review, points out, the Republican Party has, since its inception, been a fusion of a classic liberal wing with a more populist, elemental conservatism.

What's different about Trump is that he represents the ascendance of the populist wing after it had long been in a subordinate position in the party. Even he, though, retained key traditional policy priorities of the GOP, from tax cuts and judges to religious liberty and abortion.

That said, the party does need to get beyond Trump, who is a three-time loser now -- in the 2018 midterms, in his 2020 reelection campaign, and in the Georgia special elections. In electoral terms, "all the winning" stopped circa November 2016.

It feels now as though the post-Trump GOP will never arrive, American politics moves quickly. Richard Nixon resigned in 1974, leaving the GOP in utter disarray -- and yet Reagan won a landslide six years later. The Tea Party sprang to life from nowhere in 2009 and had disappeared by 2016, subsumed into the Trump phenomenon.

There will inevitably be an overwhelming controversy in the Biden administration or a crisis that moves us beyond the politics of the Trump presidency and the immediate aftermath.

New issues will emerge, and there are plenty of talented, ambitious Republican politicians who think they are better suited to win a presidential election and serve as president than Donald Trump 2.0. The incentives are for them to slipstream behind Trump for now, but that won't always be true.

The temptation to splinter from the GOP might be alluring to elements of both the populists and the Republican traditionalists, but this a dead end.

The Republican Party is the only plausible electoral vehicle for any sort of right-of-center politics in America. It is worth fighting over, and it will be.

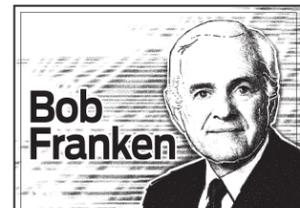
That struggle is sure to be toxic and unpredictable -- except for the fact that at the end of the day the Grand Old Party will still be standing.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.
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Negative Legacies

It's funny how legacies can work. Abraham Lincoln ended the practice of American slavery, inspiring Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal. Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Acts, one step on the road to Barack Obama being voted the first Black president of the United States.



But even at their most glorious, they can be creations of imperfect U.S. presidents. The same Lyndon Johnson who stood for civil rights was hounded out of office for lying about the Vietnam War. Richard Nixon, who lied about everything, left Watergate as a symbol of his amorally brutal political tactics. This culture then deteriorated to Newt Gingrich, whose calculated demagoguery set the stage 20 years or so later for Donald Trump.

While Trump is laying low as he fends off his second impeachment -- this time for inciting the Jan. 6 deadly attack on the U.S. Capitol building -- a disciple, Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., is taking the Trump legacy and degrading his most flagrant extremism to become a new moronic normal.

Even though he's the former president, Trump continues to intimidate Republicans -- with a few exceptions -- into disowning his very existence as a loser and rabble rouser. He also would have us ignore his cruel record, the daily drumbeat of hate and downright stupidity, in much the same way that the pandemic made us long for our relatively placid lives under his leadership before COVID.

But Greene makes Trump's extremism look positively sane. She has grabbed the spotlight from him with her own hate-filled bleating and given nuttiness a new psychotic meaning. Through her QAnon conspiracy spouting, her supporting the assassination of Democratic Party leaders, she has grown a following by gross offensiveness. In the process, she has taken the craven GOP leadership and forced them to straddle the barbed wire of politics, between minimal decency and selling their souls. All but 11 of them voted against stripping her of her new committee assignments. Most of the GOP caucus got their twaddles wagging when describing their outrage at what Greene unapologetically spews, but wouldn't dare vote against her.

Pardon the cliché, but that "big tent" of Republicanism now effectively stretches between Liz Cheney -- an ultraconservative with a dubious lineage -- and Mitch McConnell, who has dubious principles, all the way to the Proud Boys and Marjorie Taylor Greene. They are both proudly lunatic.

What's even crazier is that she is embraced by millions of Americans. The USA form of democracy is threatened by growing vigilante forces that are an attack on a jittery nation trying to fight two wars at the same time: the war against a rampaging coronavirus and domestic terrorism.

Neither battle is going well, partly due to the low morale of U.S. troops, meaning all U.S. citizens. Our past as a nation is catching up to us. By contrast, Joe Biden, the old warrior, is trying to stem the tide before we are drowned. He relies on sheer experience accumulated over many decades. The polls show that Americans like his style, but he is just a few weeks past his inauguration, still enjoying a honeymoon. Meanwhile, the opposition, the Republicans, are trying to untangle their fundamental factionalism that threatens to strangle them. So it lines up, currently as a steady hand of the Democrats, versus the chaos of the Republicans.

Ultimately, Donald Trump will be a passing fancy -- passing hideousness, really. For that matter, Marjorie Taylor Greene will be too. They will stop capturing our imaginations with their obscene gibberish and be replaced by someone who draws attention with his or her even more incoherent prattle.

It's highly probable, however, that they will drag us as a society even lower. It will be too late for Joe Biden, anyone, to rescue us from our downward spiral, particularly since the next to be politically famous can only be more infamous. If we don't change our ways as a country, his or her heritage can only add to a crumbling legacy.

Bob Franken is an Emmy Award-winning reporter who covered Washington for more than 20 years with CNN.

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