

# There's no Republican civil war

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By **Hugh Hewitt** November 2 at 3:14 PM

There is no GOP civil war. Tuesday's terrible attack and Monday's indictments knocked the meme of such a conflict off the front pages, but it will return. When it does, recall that it just isn't true.

There's a loud, persistent group of Trump critics who apparently never learned the concept of "sunk costs," and there's former Trump strategist Stephen K. Bannon, who knows that there's profit and power to be found in exploiting the anger of the Never Trumpers and the anti-Never Trumpers. But this doesn't amount to a civil war, only a series of skirmishes on the fringes of the party and among its chattering Manhattan-Beltway class estranged from President Trump.

The Never Trump movement has become a long-running version of "Saturday Night Live's" "More Cowbell" skit. It seems every column, editorial, television appearance, panel participation and probably every trip to Safeway must include a Never Trumper's own version of Cato the Elder's "Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam" — "Furthermore, I consider that Carthage must be destroyed." Admiring lookers-on then respond via tweet or Facebook post: "Well done! But it could use more cowbell." And so more cowbell we get.

This More Cowbell Caucus takes a dim view of those of us willing to applaud Trump when he does something right, either directly or through his Cabinet and allies on Capitol Hill. Meanwhile, the real political battles at home and genuine conflicts abroad proceed, an afterthought to those for whom denouncing Trump is now every bit the daily obligation as matins is for a monk.

Sorry to disappoint, but that doesn't add up to a Republican civil war. Four data points have set off this chorus on the imaginary intra-party conflict: two speeches and two retirements. That and Bannon's dislike of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), which is unfathomable except as a grudge. McConnell is easily the most effective GOP Senate leader of my adult life, and the likely confirmation this week of four more circuit court judges underscores that conclusion.

The flimsily constructed "civil war" narrative is built out of discrete episodes that have in common only the calendar.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) let fly a full-throated, hardly veiled attack on Trump, and its proximity to former president George W. Bush's address on civility dragged the latter into the same category, though there are reasons to believe that W was aiming

not just at Trump but also at the More Cowbell Caucus and Democrats. “Everybody tone it down,” the most gracious of former presidents seemed to be saying.

Retirement announcements from Sens. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) and Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) added two more “civil war” talking points. Both came with Trump denunciations stapled on, which diverted from the undeniable facts in both cases. First, Flake was going to lose to Kelli Ward in a GOP primary next year, not just because of his Never Trump status but also because of the massive miscalculation of the 2013 Gang of Eight’s immigration “reform,” an enormous bust in the Grand Canyon State. Second, Corker was a disappointed office-seeker also imperiled by a potential 2018 primary triggered by his almost off-the-cuff August sideswipe of the president.

As for Bannon, his critique of the Beltway GOP is sincere and grounded in a distrust of global elites that is long-standing and shared by a lot of Republicans and Democrats alike. But Bannon’s “war” is a pretty lonely one, and don’t expect many more defectors from either the House or Senate GOP caucuses. The GOP wants to keep confirming Trump’s judicial nominees, wants to be in the driver’s seat of the calendar and will refuse self-destructive windmill-tilting in primary battles.

So, a civil war, or a quintet of episodes stitched together by the mainstream media’s self-interested narrative-makers? “This is nothing!” Dustin Hoffman’s Hollywood producer Stanley Motss declares again and again in 1997’s “Wag the Dog.” And, indeed, while the GOP has seen better days, this is nothing like the rupture of 1964, when New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller was booed at the GOP convention in San Francisco’s Cow Palace, much less 1880, when the pro-Ulysses S. Grant “Stalwarts” and the pro-James Blaine “Half-Breeds” were in a frenzy. And this is nothing, too, compared with the Democrats in Chicago in 1968, just as the upheavals of today hardly compare to that horrible year, or to the Watergate scandal years after, much less to a century earlier, when eradicating the evil of slavery required a butcher’s bill of more than 600,000 dead.

Ignore those clanging cowbells. Because the GOP is likely to hang on to both Flake’s and Corker’s Senate seats, it is actually in better shape today than it was two weeks ago. Those four federal circuit judges expected to be confirmed this week will affect the United States for decades. More than 80 percent of GOP voters approve of Trump. The president has many critics who, like me, will ding a decision here or there and wish he’d knock off the tweeting completely. But the solid majority of Republicans prefer winning some and losing some to always losing. The GOP regulars know that the way forward is by adding seats, not throwing them away.

And all the cowbells in Manhattan and inside the Beltway won’t change that.

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