

Broken Government: How Republican Rule Destroyed the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches

John W. Dean

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John Dean, once legal counsel to President Richard Nixon, has become an outspoken critic of the Bush administration and Republican rule. *Broken Government* is the third volume in his trilogy examining the impact of 30 years of Republicans in power (the other volumes are *Worse than Watergate* and *Conservatives Without Conscience*).

There is something about reading a book written by a former Republican, friend of Barry Goldwater, and member of the Nixon Administration during Watergate that concludes, "People should not vote for any Republican because they're dangerous, dishonest, and self-serving" (p. 201). Dean argues that Republicans have broken our government by authoritarian and arbitrary abuses of the processes central to effective governance. He says that processes are vitally important although as citizens we are often woefully ignorant of what those processes are, and our national media ignore process because they believe we will find such information boring.

Dean examines each branch of government separately, beginning with the legislature. His examination of Congress includes these subdivisions: "Step One: Rule by Cabal," "Step Two: Work as Little as Possible—and Screw Up What Little You Do," and "Step Three: Let the President Do Whatever He Wants." Dean discusses the total absence of congressional oversight during the Bush administration, the lack of fiscal responsibility, and the disappearance of any hint of civility and cooperation. He does see hope with the return of Democrats to a majority because they have refused to continue with the secrecy and contempt for cooperation. They are demanding oversight, but they won't exclude the Republicans from hearings, hold votes at 3 am, or change a bill after it has been passed by Congress before it is sent to the President.

Dean takes particular aim at the damage George Bush and Dick Cheney have done to the executive branch, saying that "the presidency cannot withstand another president and vice-president of this ilk" (p. 72). Dean condemns their secrecy, their sweeping claims of privilege, their abuse of signing statements, and overall incompetence, citing study after study that support the conclusion that Bush is the worst president ever. Bush entered the presidency ignorant of the processes of federal government and little interest in learning. Behind the scenes Dick Cheney has been operating, pushing for more and more centralized power in the presidency and showing contempt for Constitutional checks and balances. Dean adds an appendix that directly challenges the "unitary executive theory" and "inherent powers" advocated by John C. Yoo, the neoconservative law theorist cited frequently by the Bush Administration. Dean takes great pleasure in taking apart Yoo's arguments, discussing his "lack of intellectual honesty" (p. 229) and "interpretation of the Constitution bordering on fraud" (p. 227).

The toughest section to read is the section on the courts because the damage done by Republicans has such long-term effects. They have stacked the federal courts with partisan judges starting back in the days of Richard Nixon. Between Bush father and son, the Supreme Court has been saddled with the likes of Clarence Thomas (who had NO problem lying to the Senate during his confirmation hearings), John Roberts, and Samuel Alito. The implications of these federal appointments touch not only reproductive rights, but civil rights, gun control, regulation of big business, and campaign financing. Another Republican presidency with additional judicial appointments would have implications lasting for decades.

I have found John Dean's commentaries, articles, and books (I also recommend *Conservatives Without Conscience*) thoughtful and carefully argued. He is passionate about the rule of law and making sure our government stays on its "Constitutional Foundation."

Laura Monroe