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The GOP Tax Bill and the Midterm Elections

By STEVEN FALCO
STAFF WRITER

Last January 3, an overjoyed Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell took their seats in the new 115th Congress hoping to undo President Obama's legacy and establish a conservative one of their own. The next months, however, did not live up to their expectations. Despite their surprise victory in the 2016 elections, which gave them the presidency and allowed them to maintain control of both houses of Congress, the Republicans found themselves divided, consumed by unsuccessful attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and unable to pass any major legislation. This has all changed in recent weeks, with a new tax bill likely to become law. On Friday night, the Senate passed its version of tax reform by a slim 51-49 margin. Since the House passed its bill in mid-November, President Trump will be able to sign it into law once the two houses resolve the differences between their bills.

The most important aspects of the GOP's tax plan, common to both the House and Senate bills, are a large permanent reduction in the corporate tax rate (from 35 to 20 percent) and a more modest temporary across-the-board cut in income taxes. In addition, the Senate bill repeals the individual mandate fine in the Affordable Care Act, and both have changes involving other taxes and deductions. The Republicans claim the bill will stimulate the economy and help the middle class. They also argue that the economic growth the tax cuts generate will prevent them from increasing deficits. Critics accuse conservatives of irresponsibly raising the debt, endangering social services and future generations, to help businesses and the wealthy. The plan will cut taxes for most people in the middle class, and independent analyses do indicate that it will bolster economic growth somewhat -- but much less than the GOP claims. According to the *Washington Post*: "The

Senate GOP tax plan would cause faster economic growth -- about 0.8 percent more over the next decade, the [congressional Joint Committee on Taxation's analysis] found. But that amount of growth only covers about a third of the cost, far short of what is needed to have revenue-neutral tax reform."

In addition to transforming the tax code more profoundly than any law in decades, the Republicans' efforts here may

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prove crucial to them politically. The midterm elections next November will present an incredible opportunity for the GOP generally and for Trump in particular. In the Senate, ten Democratic senators are up for reelection in states Trump won, five in states he won by at least 19 points. By contrast, only one Republican, Dean Heller of Nevada, is running in a state that voted for Hillary Clinton. Since they already have a sizable majority in the House, the 2018 elections could thus give the Republicans more solid control of Congress, making it easier for them to push through their desired policies. Plus, Senators Jeff Flake and Bob Corker, two of Trump's biggest critics within his own party, are retiring, leaving open the possibility that Trump allies will claim those seats. On the other hand, if the midterms go well for the Democrats, they would weaken the GOP majorities, and perhaps even claim the House, making it even harder than it has been for the Republicans to get anything done. Trump and the rest of his party hope their first major legislative accomplishment will counter voters' doubts about their ability to govern effectively. They are also gambling on its success, and counting on Americans to attribute a stronger economy to its passage. In all likelihood, the tax bill will allow the Republicans to end 2017 with a big policy victory under their belts. Now it's up to them to sell it to the people in 2018.

White Privilege on College Campuses

By JULIA DUPUIS
STAFF WRITER

Conversations about race and racism on college campuses have prompted debates about political correctness, free speech, and white privilege. Do students of color face a more challenging academic environment? Does navigating these spaces put them at a disadvantage?

Many students of color have to endure institutional racism, but they also must engage in academic environments that have historically and culturally favored white students. Particularly at predominantly white schools like Hamilton, students must weather the cumulative effects of living in an academic culture characterized by white dominance.

Much of the strain in race relations on college campuses doesn't come from deliberate racist actions, but rather from a combination of institutional biases, "stereotype threat," a sense of isolation, and day-to-day microaggressions. These subtle acts of racism are exacerbated on the college campuses where most students of color find themselves overwhelmingly outnumbered by their white peers.

While these environments are complex

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and don't speak for the reality of every student, there's a theme underlying the unconscious pressure in higher education: College is demanding too much from students of color.

Resiliency is glorified as integral to success for minority students. There have been countless examples of what some refer to as "poverty porn," in which news articles praise students from underprivileged backgrounds—typically students of color and often undocumented students — for working through their disadvantages and overcoming financial struggle. While it's important to share those stories, these students are often used as prime examples of how all hardship can be overcome by hard work and resilience.

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This attitude is indicative of a deeper issue. It implies that students of color must make impossible sacrifices and push themselves to the limit in order to achieve the same level of education as their white peers. It allows white people the comfort of feeling as though their privilege is earned—as if people of color could overcome their disadvantages if only they worked hard enough.

Ultimately, it places undue pressure on students of color to escape the constant threat of perceived intellectual inferiority. Thriving academically is especially challenging when students of color feel pressured to outshine their peers in the classroom in order to disprove the notion that they do not deserve to be there.

Uncomfortable campus climates, as well as the extra psychological energy that's required to manage the strain of systemic and everyday racism, can take a severe toll on the mental health of minority students.

Students are already physically and emotionally exhausted from the many demands of higher education, but students of color are forced to bear the burden of another kind of adversity—one that provides a constant

reminder of their own race and the boundaries and restrictions that come with that label.

A common thread emerges from these campus controversies: Colleges are not doing enough to shield students of color from the effects of societal racism.

This kind of racism is deep, complex, and multifaceted. It manifests itself in ways that are both obvious and covert, individual and systemic. It can occur in isolated incidents, or it can be embedded into a larger structural form of oppression. And yet, that doesn't excuse white students and faculty on college campuses from taking some responsibility.

It seems easy to assume that Hamilton isn't a particularly racist school. Compared with some situations at other colleges and universities such as violent beatings, slurs, and the threat of lynchings, Hamilton seems like a relatively safe space for students of color. But clinging to the narrow idea that racism can be summed up by the 'n' word and physical assault erases the cultural context behind the concept of race and diminishes the experiences of color. Brushing off racism is remarkably easy when you don't have to live

with its terrifying reality each and every day.

Predominantly white colleges like Hamilton have a race problem. This problem is only aggravated by the desperate lengths to which white students will often go to pretend that racial discomfort does not exist. To disregard racial distinctions and the clear lack of minority students on campus is to disregard the voices, experiences, and perspectives of people of color.

Racism retains its foothold when white people reach a threshold in their racial sensitivity and go silent, instead of helping assume the responsibility for bringing cultural and racial awareness to the surface. Claiming ignorance or staying silent reflects an avoidance that will always drive white colleges to perpetuate a hostile climate for students of color while hiding behind the veil of liberal equity.

It is time that white people start talking about diversity as much as minorities are forced to. It is a luxury to not have to think or talk about these issues, but it's one we can no longer afford if we want to strive for an improved campus climate and society.

Mugabe Out, Authoritarianism to Stay in Zimbabwe

By ELZA HARB
STAFF WRITER

On November 19, almost a week after the Zimbabwean military seized control of the country's government, President Robert Mugabe resigned after 37 years in power. The world's oldest head of state fought to the last minute, resigning only on the day when the parliament began its impeachment proceedings. Soon after, the country erupted into celebration, its citizens filling the streets dancing in joy with high hopes for their nation's future.

Soon afterward, though, Zimbabweans, international actors, and observers alike all asked the critical question: Is democracy coming to Zimbabwe?

The answer depends on how Mugabe's successor chooses to proceed. For now, the country's history leaves many highly pessimistic.

After a violent revolution that removed a white minority regime from power at the end of the 1970s, Mugabe and his allies in the ZANU-PF party took power and have remained there until now. In recent weeks, recognizing his old age--over 90--the president cleared the path for Grace Mugabe, his much younger wife, to succeed him. Sometimes

known as "Gucci Grace" for her lavish taste in designer clothing, she transitioned from being a philanthropic president's wife to being a politician in her own right, in charge of the "Generation 40" faction of ZANU-PF. Earlier in November, Mugabe ousted his vice president and longtime ally Emmerson Mnangagwa in favor of his wife, which precipitated the military coup.

For now, even with the resignation of longtime President Mugabe, it seems that an authoritarian regime is likely to remain in place.

relinquish power once order and stability had been achieved. (In political science, this is called a "guardian coup.") After Mugabe's resignation, his recent vice president Mnangagwa took power. Mnangagwa is the leader of the Lacoste faction in ZANU-PF, which opposes Grace Mugabe.

Mnangagwa, also known as "the Crocodile" for his savviness and propensity for hardline tactics, is not a newcomer to the stage. He has been a Mugabe ally since the

The military seized power in the middle of last month, claiming their actions were not a coup and that they would

"War of Liberation," and has been accused of leading many of Mugabe's harshest policies, including election-rigging in 2008. Human rights organizations have also accused him of being involved in massacring tens of thousands of civilians in the 1980s. A State Department report in 2000 said he was widely feared in Zimbabwe, and that he could be an even more oppressive leader than Mugabe.

In fact, in Mnangagwa's first few days in power he has shown few or no signs of wanting to lead the country to democracy, despite some promises about bringing patriotic Zimbabweans together into a "new era of democracy." Many hoped that he would include opposition members, such as former finance minister Tendai Biti, in his new cabinet as a sign of compromise. Mnangagwa, however, has taken the opposite path. He has just announced the appointment of several controversial loyalists and military generals to the highest cabinet posts. Notably, he appointed the face of the coup, General Sibusiso Moyo, as his new foreign minister.

With the new cabinet appointments and Mnangagwa's strong ties to the Zimbabwean military, the idea that the military will "return to the barracks" and democracy will flourish in Zimbabwe seems far-fetched and overly idealistic. Zimbabwe will hold new elections in 2018, at which point some things may change or may not. For now, even with the resignation of longtime President Mugabe, it seems that an authoritarian regime is likely to remain in place.

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