What should President Biden do to reunify the USA?

Summary

In the USA political system there is conflict between the role of the President and the role of the House of Representatives. This has led to political gridlock and a loss of confidence in the system by a significant proportion of the population.

To resolve this problem President Biden should raise the role of President above politics and should allow the House of Representatives to govern the USA. The House of Representatives should appoint someone to a new role which is equivalent to the Prime Minister in other democracies. This new role will take over the current functions of the President's Chief of Staff.

What's the problem?

The USA system of democracy does not work well. This has led to a loss of confidence by a significant proportion of the population.

Evidence?

- The USA is listed as a "Flawed Democracy" in the Democracy Index [1].
- Presidents are unable to deliver key election policies e.g. President Obama's healthcare and President Trump's wall.
- One of President Trump's election messages was that the system was broken and he would "drain the swamp". This resonated with the population.
- Riots in the Capitol.

What's the cause of the problem?

Two organisations are independently elected at different times to run the USA, the President and the House of Representatives. They both make campaign promises to get elected and they often stop each other from delivering. The public knows this and may even elect people expecting that their most extreme polices will get blocked.

Government system that we recommend they migrate to?

In the proposed system the President is a figurehead and does not set policy. The government is led by a person who is identified by the House of Representatives.

Purposes of the role of the President in the new system?

- Ceremonial Head of State.
- Head of the armed forces.
- Responsible for making sure that democracy is working.

Purposes of the House of Representatives in the new system?

- Identify the person who will lead the government.
- Challenge and approve government policy.
- Remove and replace the head of government if they lose confidence.

What are the first steps in moving towards the proposed system?

The current role of the President's Chief of Staff will change to being more like what is called a Prime Minister in other countries. To achieve this President Biden should:-

1. Ask the House of Representatives to identify the person who will be his Chief of Staff, and allow that Chief of Staff to carry out policies approved by the House of Representatives;
2. Commit to continuing that arrangement after the mid-term elections no matter who controls the House of Representatives;
3. Commit to making this legally enforced if he or his successor is elected for a 2nd term.

Benefits of the proposed system?

- Removes the political gridlock.
- Raises the President (and head of the armed forces) above politics.
- Allows debate in the House of Representatives between the leader of the government and a leader of the opposition.
- Allows an opposition party in the House of Representatives to develop people into shadow roles so that the next government is always ready to go.
- Means that politicians are more likely to be able to deliver on their campaign promises, makes campaign promises more realistic; increases confidence in government.
- Reflects other parliamentary democracies that are higher than the USA in the Democracy Index.

Objections to the proposed system?

- People may believe that higher priorities are gun control or health care reform. However the reason those issues are so contentious in the USA is that many people do not trust the government. The first step in resolving those issues is for the government to regain the trust of the population.
- People may fear that a lot of un-gridlocked power is being given to one person. However the power of the head of government in the proposed system is no more than a President has in the current system if his or her party controls Congress.
- The population might not believe in the new system and might elect an extremist at the mid-terms. To mitigate this risk at the mid-terms elections President Biden should not take sides. He should tell the population that this is the election of the government and he will not stop an elected government from delivering its campaign promises.
- There is a lot of pent-up frustration in the USA voter population. It may take many years and several Presidential cycles for relative calm to return to politics. However for the voters to learn quickly President Biden should not oppose the campaign policies of the elected head of government even if he does not agree with them.

Does President Biden have a mandate to move to the proposed system?

Yes. He said he will unify the country; he can appoint whoever he wants as Chief of Staff; and our proposed plan is that this is not made permanent until after the next Presidential election.

What changes does this mean for the Senate?

We don't believe that this requires much change from the Senate

Do we think that the House of Representatives election system should be changed? (One third of Representatives elected every 2 years for a 6 year term)

No. The current system reduces the amplitude of the political cycle in which post-election government behaviour is different to pre-election government behaviour.

Why was the system set up this way?

The original intention was to force politicians to compromise. However it is not effective and the evidence for the current problem is listed above.

References

[1] https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/

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