

We are Losing Our Democracy

By: Paul Arieti

Noble laurate economist Joseph Stiglitz has stated: “the only sustainable prosperity is shared prosperity; we pay a high price for inequality in terms of a divided society undermining democracy.” Inequality of wealth prosperity over the past several decades has increased significantly. A prime example is that the top 10% of households hold about 70% of the nation’s wealth while the bottom 50% hold only 2.5%. Another example is the number of billionaires increasing from less than 100 in the early 1990’s to over 1000 today! While the redistribution of wealth to the top slowed somewhat during the Biden administration, it has reaccelerated during Trump’s second term with reductions such as those in healthcare and food assistance programs affecting the bottom half. The unequal sharing of wealth and prosperity is a prime driver of the increasing divisions and the weakening of our democracy in our country.

Along with the risk of personal wealth inequality threatening democracy is the threat of increasing national financial instability. The national debt just passed \$38 trillion with an ongoing annual deficit close to \$2 trillion. Economists have estimated that approximately half of the current debt is due to the Regan, George W Bush and Trump tax cuts which mostly benefit the wealthy and corporations. Our annual interest payment on that debt is now over \$1 trillion. The national debt continues to rise out of control and debt payments alone are consuming an increasing share of our annual expenditures.

Further loss of our democracy is happening on several levels. While increasing wealth inequality and national financial weakness continue to threaten our democracy, the current administration is adding to the erosion of democracy by forcibly sending into our cities inadequately trained armed government agents to remove immigrants. Wearing masks, combat gear and carrying machine guns they are arresting, in many cases, hardworking members of our communities who are trying to improve their lives. Many of the victims are citizens or have a legal right to be here. Many including children have been snatched from their homes, cars, and workplaces and then shipped to foreign countries or incarcerated in remote prisons without due process. Over the past several decades, including Trump’s first term, immigrant removals and returns to their native countries occurred at significant rates (400 to 500 thousand per year except during the Covid years) without the draconian tactics and with due process. The current administration’s actions are clearly undemocratic.

The financial policies and police-state actions of the Trump administration are seriously undermining our democracy. We must continue to resist and push back on these undemocratic actions and follow the lead of many protesting throughout this country. As the brave folks in Minneapolis demonstrate everyday “democracy is not a spectator sport.”