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# Neglected problems lead to insurgency

By Tom Peek

For a democratic republic to survive, economic and political power must be widely shared among its citizens, and the mechanisms for doing that must be viewed by them as having some measure of integrity and fairness. For decades our leaders from both political parties failed to ensure those two essential conditions, so no one should have been surprised at Donald Trump's takeover of the Republican Party, or the subsequent violent insurgency that he exploited and encouraged to fuel his own ambitions — including trying to overturn Joe Biden's presidential election.

Nor should we have been surprised that Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' "peaceful political revolution" for radical economic and political reform nearly secured the Democratic Party nomination for president twice, in 2016 and 2020. He didn't succeed in the party, but his tough love reform narrative resonated with millions.

Simply put, the majority of Americans are not satisfied with the status quo — a fact documented yearly by Gallup and other polls since the early 2000s. The lack of strong leadership to address that discontent with constructive, fact-based reforms (like those advocated by Sanders) left much of the citizenry vulnerable to narratives built instead on ideology and disinformation.

Now we're deeply divided, and the Trump constituency — a confederation

of right-wing ideological groups and individuals, tacitly supported by a majority of congressional Republicans — is willing to upturn that status quo by any means possible, including violence.

U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies, finally disabused of any delusions about the dangers of that right-wing confederacy, have mobilized to root out key insurgents. But that's like building a wall of sandbags to stem a king tide that's battering our structures onshore without figuring out how to reduce or reverse that rising tide through public policies that will do that.

As much as Trump has exploited anger and frustration in the general public and encouraged racial, religious and gender-based scapegoating with the right-wing half of the country, he's not the core problem. Deeper ailments now threaten the republic itself, including U.S. socioeconomic stratification (now at the dismal level of Saudi Arabia's corrupt monarchy), decades of policy tokenism on racial and other discrimination, and a cadre of elected officials who are compromised — and often corrupted — by a campaign finance system that benefits the economically well-off and politically connected.

Nothing less than a restoration of

## ISLAND VOICES



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the American Dream — which studies show is now accessible only to those with advanced education — will begin to reverse that turbulent tide. And that means quickly reforming what Sanders called "the rigged economy and the corrupt campaign finance system," raising the minimum wage, bolstering labor unions, and restoring rural economies and their crumbling communities.

Real change on those fronts will also help weaken longstanding racial, religious and gender-based scapegoating, mak-

ing possible tough action to finally tackle discrimination.

The good news is that most of Hawaii's congressional delegation is progressive, so our state's representatives in Washington are positioned to inspire that needed deeper discussion by advocating the kinds of progressive reforms that could eventually restore the American Dream to something more than a myth and reverse the defiant tide threatening our republic.

But doing that will take more courage — and vision — than just impeaching and convicting Trump. Our leaders will have to rein in powerful economic interests, long coddled by both political parties, and insist that they step back and stand down.