

# The Washington Post

## On the matter of political science and the Claremont Institute

A sticky subject for the American Political Science Association

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September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021

The American Political Science Association's (APSA) annual meeting will begin in earnest Thursday. After last year's all-virtual conference, this year will actually have an in-person component consisting of fully vaccinated political scientists. APSA tells me that there will be 2,500 in-person and 3,000 virtual attendees. I will be one of the folks in person in Seattle.

You know political scientists who will not be participating in this year's APSA meeting? Those affiliated with the Claremont Institute. Claremont has sponsored its own APSA panels for decades. Claremont is hardly unique in this: Organizations ranging from the Cato Institute to the Council on Foreign Relations have also sponsored panels. One way Claremont stands out is that it has consistently sponsored the most panels per year of any affiliated organization.

Another way Claremont stands out is the way it has been the poster child for the devolution of conservative thought into simple-minded racism, immature oppositional thinking and reactionary authoritarianism. In the past decade, Claremont has invited controversial speakers such as torture memo author John Yoo. This year, Claremont had scheduled coup-plotter John Eastman to appear on two panels. Lest you think that is hyperbole, I would encourage you to read what Eastman wanted Vice President Mike Pence to do on Jan. 6 and find more accurate words to use. Eastman is also a member of the Claremont Institute's board of directors and the director of its Center for Constitutional Jurisprudence. This is in keeping with Claremont's overt support for the attempted putsch.

Eastman and everyone else at Claremont are not going to be presenting at APSA anymore. What happened?

Eastman's presence led to a petition organized by political scientist Dave Karpf arguing that "Eastman has violated our discipline's professional ethics by participating in the dangerous attempt to overturn the institution of electoral democracy in the United States," and "[APSA's] statement of strong condemnation on January 11th must apply to the Claremont Institute if it is to apply to anyone at all." The petition attracted more than 250 signatures. Some political scientists tweeted support, while others endorsed the idea in their blog posts. There were political scientists, however, who expressed some qualms about the idea of canceling Claremont's panels at this late date, no matter how egregious Eastman's views are.

The problem sorted itself out, or so it seemed. APSA tweeted on Saturday that after Claremont's panels had been moved from in-person to virtual, the institute decided to cancel all its panels. I asked APSA's executive director, Steven Smith, what happened, and he confirmed that APSA moved the panels from in-person to virtual because of concerns about protests and unrest. In 2011 and 2017, Claremont panels featuring Yoo attracted protesters, including from locals who were not registered to attend the conference. This time around, APSA officials were attentive to social media and receiving emails and voice mails from APSA members irate at Eastman presenting. APSA officials feared a similar situation occurring during a pandemic would be even messier.

It is safe to say that Claremont was not happy about APSA's decision. Their spokesperson emailed me a statement blasting "APSA leadership's gutless response to calls for it to cancel Claremont's panels because some APSA members do not agree with the views of some of our panelists."

This is normally the moment in the column when I opine what the best way to handle this would have been. In this instance, however, I must confess to queasiness all around.

Claremont deciding to have Eastman speak is, frankly, antithetical to the mission of political science. Do not take my word for it, take Samuel Huntington's. In his APSA presidential address more than 30 years ago, he stated: "The connection between democracy and political science has been a close and continuing one. ... Where democracy is strong, political science is strong; where democracy is weak, political science is weak." Make no mistake, whatever it was in the past, the 2021 version of the Claremont Institute explicitly wants to weaken democracy.

On the other hand, I am unsure the specter of protest alone justifies APSA's choice here. True, Claremont could have gone through with their panels, so long as they were virtual. But this gambit feels very much like assenting to a heckler's veto. That does not strengthen democracy either.

The theme of APSA this year is "promoting pluralism." Neither the Claremont Institute nor the American Political Science Association seems to have done that with their

recent choices. One must hope that both institutions make better decisions in the future.