

Miller & Martin Mornings Event Examines the Election of 2024 Offering Insights for Moving Toward a More Responsible and Effective Presidency

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The Miller & Martin law firm hosted its Miller & Martin Mornings breakfast program on October 9, 2024, for more than 100 local business and legal executives. As part of the ongoing Miller & Martin Mornings series, which aims to provide insights on topics that keep business leaders up at night, the Director and CEO of the [Miller Center of Public Affairs](#), William J. Antholis, presented [The Election of 2024: Toward a More Responsible and Effective Presidency](#). The presentation offered the Miller Center's insights on the modern Presidency, with an eye towards how Presidential elections might better capture the consensus of the country, how Presidential transitions might unfold more smoothly, and how the President and Congress might work together more effectively. Based on research conducted by the Miller Center, with the assistance of an array of former White House affiliates, Antholis laid out the challenges of the modern Presidency, and offered three key takeaways about the shifting Presidential dynamic and the implications for the American public.

1. **The relationship between Congress and the Executive Branch is inefficient and ineffective.**

According to Antholis, over time, the Presidency has become more both powerful and more prone to failure. Examining this reality, Antholis and his team have conducted hours of research interviews with White House affiliates from both political parties. This research points to at least two areas for improvement — the interplay between a new President and members of Congress, and the inclination of a new President to exercise executive action within the first 100 days to circumvent the legislative process. As an example of the difficult interplay between a new President and Congress, Antholis noted that the pace of confirmations to Presidential appointments has significantly decreased since 2001, hampering the effective operation of government. Regarding the use of executive action, Antholis noted that the Biden administration is second only to the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration in use of Executive Orders in the first 100 days, signifying the quick deployment Executive Branch power in lieu of working through the legislative process. Early days of a new Presidency often are marked by the President undoing and counter-acting the prior President's executive orders; with operative public policy swinging wildly as a result. Antholis posits that these two behavioral shifts demonstrate a long-term rift in the balance of power between these two branches.

2. **Presidential party transitions are increasingly incohesive and turbulent.**

Antholis also commented on the importance of a smooth and coherent transition of power in the Executive Branch as being critical to the first days of any Presidency. As Antholis noted, when a new administration takes over, it must move quickly into a hiring process for a vast number of Director and Deputy-Director level appointments throughout government. For a Presidential transition to be effective (even when the political party holding the office is not changing), each candidate must begin planning for that transition (particularly the identification and vetting of senior officials) months before the election even occurs. Moreover, as noted above, the pace of appointing senior officials is critical to a functioning Executive Branch. If the officials put up for primary positions are not confirmed within the earliest days of a Presidency, then an acting official will put into place temporarily. This acting official is often someone with less experience and less trust and currency with the President and his/her closest advisors. This can leave policy implementation and government functioning with gaps in experience and with barriers to working together productively. This particularly exposes a President to missteps or even challenges from foreign adversaries in the critical period of the early days of a new administration.

3. **Bringing civility and order back to government is going to take the cooperation of the President, its administration, and the American people.**

Given the current height of emotions surrounding politics, the ideal of a more responsible and effective Presidency might sound unrealistic, but Antholis proposed that it is achievable. Currently, the Miller Center is providing research on reforms that would amplify the capacity of a President to act as a unifier for the nation and would encourage those within an administration to bridge competing interests. Additionally, through education and the encouragement of civil discourse, Antholis and his colleagues are assisting those in government and the American people more broadly to hold their Presidents accountable to effective governance.

With time and patience, progress is possible

Antholis and his team at the Miller Center believe that with consistent work and research, the Presidency can be shaped towards an executive branch that is accountable to good governance, qualified, effectively functioning with the legislative branch, and ultimately more of a unifying force in our governance system than has most recently seemed to be the case. This shift towards a more unified country begins with open dialogue within government, education based on research, and the willingness of the American people to engage in civil discussion. With these values at the forefront, the Miller Center seeks to positively impact the understanding and operation of the modern

Presidency.

About the Speaker

[William J. Antholis](#) serves as Director and CEO of the Miller Center. Before coming to the Miller Center, Antholis' professional roles included serving as managing director at The Brookings Institution; as an International Affairs Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations; and on the White House National Security Council and National Economic Council, as well as at the State Department. He earned his PhD from Yale University in politics, and his undergraduate degree with honors from the University of Virginia in government and foreign affairs.

About the Miller Center of Public Affairs

The [Miller Center](#) is a nonpartisan affiliate of the University of Virginia that specializes in presidential scholarship, public policy, and political history. The center injects its scholarship and recommendations inside Washington, DC directly to the nation's leaders. Founded in 1975 through the philanthropy of Burkett Miller, a 1914 graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law and former Miller & Martin partner, the center fosters civil and intellectual dialogue among diverse scholars, politicians, journalists, and citizens. The Miller Center believes that opposing positions can both have merit and that investigating questions of fact and discussing questions of opinion can lead to enlightened and beneficial communication and public policy.





