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HHEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Kipp, Biddle lead discussion on future of democracy

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3 TEXT BODY:

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4 A lecture and discussion, "How Did We Get Here?

5 Democracy in Peril," led by retired history teachers Nick Biddle

6 and Tim Kipp, takes place Thursday, Dec. 4, at 6 p.m. at 118

7 Elliot Gallery.

8 According to a news release, this lecture explores what

9 Kipp and Biddle call "an authoritarian coup began during the first

10 Trump term and has matured significantly since 2016. Not since

11 the Civil War has the United States confronted such a crisis of

12 democracy. This is not an unconstitutional assault; it's an anti-  
13 constitutional assault."

14 The historic and contemporary causes of what they call  
15 "a slow-motion coup" will be examined, as well as key aspects of  
16 the past and current circumstances that have led to and continue  
17 to exacerbate the current crisis.

18 "How has the oldest democratic republic in the world  
19 become so vulnerable to powerful antidemocratic forces? As a  
20 nation we have withstood devastating wars and depressions, all  
21 the while retaining the fundamental principles and structures of  
22 our government. While never a perfect system, there has always  
23 been enough freedom for citizens to fight for the expansion of  
24 democracy. Are we now experiencing the demise [of] a country  
25 that has struggled over the past 250 years to make a 'more perfect  
26 union?'"

27 Biddle will start with the Founders' ideas of a democracy  
28 and a republic. Then he will trace critical points in the evolution  
29 of the nation's governing system up to this day. The focus will be  
30 on the power and influence of corporations on the political  
31 process. With attention to "corporate personhood," Biddle will  
32 explain how economic elites have shaped our politics and  
33 underscore how democracy is being fundamentally undermined.  
34 While extolling the virtues of democracy, he says these elites  
35 "actually strive to disenfranchise citizens with an unprecedented  
36 consolidation of wealth and inequality that ultimately leads to the  
37 disintegration of democracy."

38 Kipp will explore historic and current flaws in our system  
39 that he says "enables autocrats, demagogues, and sycophants to  
40 willingly demolish representative government. While there have  
41 always been these types in our history, never have they wielded  
42 so much political power."

43 Today, Kipp says "the principles and structure of the  
44 constitution are called into question and under vital threat. The  
45 separation of powers and checks and balances within the three  
46 branches of government are in jeopardy of extinction. As more

47 power flows to the executive, there is an abdication of  
48 responsibility by the other branches."

49 In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson  
50 described the "long train of abuses" by King George III that led to  
51 the American Revolution. Today, Kipp says, another long train of  
52 abuses threatens us and "we are now confronted with the  
53 struggle of our lifetime and with the existential obligation to  
54 respond to defend and expand our democracy."

55 This event is co-sponsored by Indivisible Brattleboro, the  
56 Windham County Progressive Party, and Democracy Forum.

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