



## Beltway Upheaval

**Ken Gorman**

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*Beltway Upheaval, while fiction, is politically insightful and even educational.*

Ken Gorman's *Beltway Upheaval* is a story full of intrigue and insight that follows the unraveling of Washington, DC, in a fictional America that is not as outlandish as it at first may seem.

Several months after President Herbert Atkinsen resigns from office—only a few weeks after his inauguration—due to an emotional breakdown after the death of his wife, the new president, George Granger, must deal with his own political turmoil.

His controversial executive order, meant to deter an economic collapse, leaves him labeled a fascist and criminal. The order, titled “Restoring Fiscal Stability and Responsibility,” makes enormous cuts to the education department, the EPA, the IRS, and all cabinet departments except defense, as well as putting all non-active-duty veterans’ medical needs under a voucher system.

In the wake of the order, Granger faces a Supreme Court trial, media onslaught, and the harsh judgment of not only his peers but the citizens he has sworn to protect. Furthermore, the secrets he has been keeping in order to protect President Atkinsen—and himself—are slowly coming to light.

The prologue and first several chapters of the book read more like an expository newspaper article than a novel. This narrative distance at first makes it difficult to become absorbed in the story; however, the characters’ motivations and fears are easily discernible through the descriptions of their actions.

The latter half of the book moves at a swift, engaging pace. Plot points, twists, and turns are driven by the political ambitions of the players. Gorman handles the large cast—including Vice President Joan Mulligan, the White House staff, and numerous representatives and judges—with grace.

Gorman has obviously done his research. Executive orders, taxation policies, and Supreme Court processes are all accurately conveyed and easy to understand, although the description of the Electoral College in the prologue is a bit confusing.

Scenes set in the courtroom are especially informative. Comparisons to political history are where Gorman’s knowledge is truly on display: researching President Reagan’s 1986 tax reform helps VP Mulligan develop a plan for President Granger’s executive order, and an outline of the consequences of previous presidential resignations and impeachments serves as a guide for Atkinsen’s and Granger’s abandonment of the office.

Occasional grammatical errors are noticeable. “Republican,” “Democrat,” and “Senate” are inconsistently capitalized, and some punctuation is missing. A cleaner writing style and more dramatic voice would better do justice to the interesting story line.

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AIMEE JODOIN (July 14, 2017)

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