



COLUMNIST

When the Dust Settles on Tuesday...

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When the dust settles and the smoke clears, it is widely accepted that Democrats will have absorbed a serious beatdown tomorrow, costing the party control of the House of Representatives and potentially the Senate.

While the blame game has already begun, at its most fundamental Democrats lost because of their utter and unconscionable failure to craft a sharply defined, coherent justification for the American people to entrust them and maintain the party in power.

The political environment has been clear for months — a seriously unpopular president, inflation at its highest level in decades, punishing cost of living increases, \$5 per gallon gasoline, essential commodity shortages (remember baby formula and toilet paper), a rise in violent crime and out of control illegal immigration.

It didn't require mounds of research, focus groups or polling. The daily newspaper would suffice.

The belated realization that continued control of Congress had slipped away and the goal had become one of cutting losses and surviving with at least some level of competitiveness was clearly in evidence in reliably blue New Jersey as Democrats called up the reserves to come to the aid of heretofore favored incumbents with money and high profile appearances by party icons.

Josh Gottheimer and Mikie Sherrill in the fifth and 11th Congressional districts respectively, for example, were shored up with additional eleventh hour funding despite their acknowledged strength.

Rep. Tom Malinowski in the Seventh District remains the most vulnerable while Rep. Andy Kim in the Third District is only slightly less so.

Republicans were relentless in playing on the national angst and succeeded in portraying Democrats as unable or unwilling to deal effectively with a deeply troubled nation.

Led by a president with historic low public approval standings, Democrats chose to ignore the increasingly desperate financial plight of huge swaths of the country and instead insisted that access to abortion services and climate change took precedence.

Inflation, the Administration claimed, was “transitory,” nothing to be seriously concerned about, despite the real world hardships experienced each time consumers pulled up to the gas pump or in the checkout line at the local supermarket.

An ABC/Washington Post poll, for instance, revealed 43 percent of Americans said they were in worse financial condition than they were two years ago and another 18 percent said their status hadn't improved.

Inexplicably, the president and the leading lights of his party decided the midterm election, rather than its historic role as a referendum on the party in power, was “a threat to democracy,” a largely substance free concept open to acceptance and interpretation in any fashion the listener desired.

It was designed apparently to remind voters that former President Donald Trump and his followers embodied the “threat” because they believed the 2020 presidential election was fraudulent and returning Republicans to power risked the country sliding into dictatorship, including controlling and overturning unfavorable future election outcomes.

The American people simply didn't buy it. Trump lost, all his legal challenges were dismissed as without any merit, Biden's election was certified and ratified and the continued whining of so-called “election deniers” has worn exceedingly thin.

Aside from his fervent unshakeable base, the American people have turned the page on Trump, weary of his blowhard behavior, nonsensical accusations, demonstrably false assertions and incredibly crude insulting behavior.

The “threat to democracy” warning was merely another in a series of bumper sticker sloganeering for which the Administration seems overly fond -- “Putin's price hike,” or “ultra MAGA,” or “semi-fascist” for instance -- characterizations which failed to cut very deeply or decisively with voters. Of significantly more compelling impact is the economic morass into which the country has fallen two years after Trump left office.

Along with “the border is secure,” and “the economy is stronger than it's ever been,” the Administration has demonstrated it is at best badly out of touch with the national mood or at worst guilty of a deliberate campaign of misrepresentation.

There is, to be sure, more than ample evidence to warrant pointing to the chaos and upheaval of the Trump presidency. His role in the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U. S. Capitol and his stubborn self-serving refusal to step in and bring it to an end was an unforgivable dereliction of duty for which he may yet pay a price, including criminal charges. Many of his followers already have, facing arrest, fines and jail terms, for instance, while prosecutions continue.

The anticipated outcome of the midterms, though, will be illustrative of the Democratic Party's tumble into a leftist ideology that is neither shared nor accepted by a majority of the country.

Biden's policies have contributed to the national discontent that will not disappear merely because the Administration denies it exists.

The abject failure of Democrats to take its case for continuing to guide the country to the voters is simply a manifestation of that denial.

Inflation is real; crime is real; personal financial distress is real. As is the personal pain and emotional burden they bring and which people believe Democrats have ignored.

If, as political and media figures insist, the election turned on messaging and which party was more effective in developing it, the outcome was a foregone conclusion.

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