

Golden Column: Democrats can only go so far bashing Trump

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For months, the American people have been besieged by predictions of a blue wave, a powerful and widespread cascade of Democratic election victories this fall that will shift the balance of Congressional power and end the misguided policies of the Trump Administration.

The strategy of party leaders so far, though, threatens to reduce the wave to a ripple.

The Democratic leadership has decided that policy and vision don't matter — candidates will succeed running as the anti-Trump.

The vote-for-me-because-I'm-not-him approach has been tried before and, without positive message or credible policy agenda, rarely succeeds.

Last July, at a much-ballyhooed retreat in Virginia, party leaders unveiled its platform — “A Better Deal” - chock full of noble language to appeal to the disenfranchised

voters who abandoned the party in 2016, ending Hillary Clinton's dream of becoming the nation's first female president.

The ink was barely dry on the document — the title of which was mockingly compared to that of a national pizza chain —when the party scrapped it and returned to its comfort zone — bashing Trump.

As Trump lurched from one misstep to another, it seemed the Democrats had found their strategic sweet spot. His favorability versus disapproval poll standing fell to as much as 20 points underwater.

Democrats felt so confident they united in opposition to the President's tax reform/tax cut legislation, characterizing it as a giveaway to the rich and powerful while penalizing the middle class and the poor.

Then, the bottom fell out; the tax cut accomplished what Trump predicted it would.

More than 200 companies — including some of the nation's largest — announced employee bonuses, an immediate increase in pay above the minimum wage, greater contributions to pension funds, expansion plans and increased hiring.

Hundreds of billions of dollars held overseas were re-patriated, returned to the United States and taxed into the billions.

Economic growth rose to 3 percent amid predictions it could reach 5 percent, wages grew more than 2 percent, unemployment fell to 4.1 percent, job creation exceeded 200,000 a month, consumer confidence rose, and the stock market broke records daily, the sell off at the beginning of the month notwithstanding.

More telling, though, was the increase in take home pay for 90 percent of American workers as a result of the law's tax bracket re-adjustments.

Democrats watched in disbelief as Trump's favorability soared and the gap in generic Democrat versus Republican surveys tumbled from as much as 17 percent to as little as a statistically insignificant 2 percent.

Democrats had boxed themselves in. It jettisoned “A Better Deal” in favor of “Dump Trump” and the blue wave it confidently predicted began to ebb.

The party was stuck with its anti-tax cut rhetoric, including a remarkably condescending comment by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi that a \$1,000 bonus was “crumbs.” (Nothing like insulting the intelligence of the working class whose support you’re attempting to regain.)

Never, ever, though, underestimate the President’s propensity for outrage and controversy, either by word or deed.

His first year was more notable for chaos and upheaval than for significant accomplishment. The candidate who conducted the most unorthodox campaign in modern political history was equally as unorthodox as President.

The White House became a revolving door as staff members resigned or were pushed out. Trumpcriticized members of

his Cabinet and his party’s leadership on Capitol Hill. Respected academics and students of government openly questioned whether he possessed the temperament and intellect to serve in office.

Taking to Twitter every morning to fling accusations and insults at the news media, foreign leaders and anyone else he considered the least bit impertinent added to the daily cringe-worthy episodes.

The tax cut changed all that and Trump emerged a hero.

But, the dark cloud hanging over his administration remains unbroken — the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into allegations that Trump campaign operatives collaborated with Russian agents to influence the election outcome and whether anyone attempted to obstruct the inquiry.

Should Mueller’s conclusions reach deep into the White House and ensnare high level staffers or if it touches personal and professional friends of the President, it won’t matter how many new jobs are created or how many records the stock market breaks.

A scandal of that magnitude could bring down the presidency. The blue wave — like a hurricane swirling over the warm waters of the Atlantic —will gain power and swamp Republicans.

It’s the Democrats’ best hope and the Republicans’ worst nightmare.

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