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Midterms 2014: High anxiety and low turnout



PW Editorial

No doubt these midterm elections will be parsed and opined on for weeks and months to come. Democrats faced a bleak day-after with the Republican takeover of the Senate and resounding GOP victories on the state level in even traditional Democratic strongholds of Illinois, Maryland and Massachusetts. There are a few silver linings, but mainly it is a large stormy electoral cloud that hovers overhead.

Americans have been subjected to a constant media barrage - and not just from the usual far-right news sources - about Washington's inability to get anything done and President Obama's supposed weakness and ineffectiveness. As a result, voters this time blamed the Democrats even though the Republicans have been the obstructionists on Capitol Hill. A 24/7 drumbeat of media hype on a range of real problems from ISIS to ebola to Ukraine, Central American child refugees to Secret Service and Veteran Affairs scandals, contributed to a feeling of pessimism and cynicism, and distracted from the Republicans' reactionary, anti-working-family agenda.

Fueled by big money and media influence, Republicans were able to effectively project an overarching anti-Obama narrative. The Republicans also got smarter. They moderated their message,

sidelining tea party extremists. They fielded a more diverse field of candidates, including women, African American, Latino, gay and younger Republicans. With Koch brothers' bucks they invested in their ground game and built a more sophisticated get-out-the-vote operation.

The Democratic strategy to distance themselves from the president also meant giving the GOP free reign in the narrative, and allowing it to be repeated in the media over and over again, seems

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self defeating. Moreover, much of the anti-Obama narrative is based on racist appeals and virulent anti-government ideology, and that largely went unchecked.

The Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling was a game changer in favor of Big Money. Tied to the

People are complicated and so are their ideas about politics and the economy.

Big Money is the attack on voter rights. Gerrymandering, voter ID laws, disenfranchising ex-felons, weak campaign finance laws, gutting the Voting Rights Act and GOP-run states' stricter voter registration laws are just a few of the pillars that hold up a massive disenfranchisement structure.

People are complicated and so are their ideas about politics and the economy. On one hand, voters in Arkansas, South Dakota, Alaska, Nebraska and Illinois said overwhelmingly they want an increase in the minimum wage – a supposed Democratic issue – but voted for Republicans some of whom supported an increase. Economy matters. Seven out of 10 voters said the economy is not so good or poor and 8 out of 10 worried about the direction of the economy.

It's an obvious argument but one that bears repeating: turnout matters. Democrats faced election battles in many states that Republican Mitt Romney won in 2012, and midterm elections are notorious for lower turnout among Democratic constituency groups. Combine this with voter

suppression schemes and corporate cash supporting right-wing agendas, and no wonder people get discouraged from going to the polls. A major overhaul of the U.S. electoral system is badly needed.

What's next? Labor, civil rights, environmental and other social and political movements will have to take stock and come up with new ways to build more united and bigger coalitions. The Keystone XL pipeline/curbing climate change/creating clean energy jobs, class and racial inequality in wealth, education and life opportunities, the Trans Pacific Partnership trade pact, immigration and democratic rights, militarism of foreign policy and the wars in Syria and Iraq are some of the immediate challenges.



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Trumka: Voters said they were “desperate” for new economic life

By Kenneth Quinnell

These opinions were expressed at the ballot box when voters had the chance to vote directly on the issues.

The defining narrative of this election was confirmation, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Americans are desperate for a new economic life,” said AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka on Wednesday. After a disappointing election night, Trumka held a press conference to discuss the election and release the results of a poll conducted by Hart Research Associates that looked into the story behind the headlines. He said voters made it clear they want an economy that works for everyone.

The poll found that voters heavily support working family issues. Voters overwhelmingly support most of the issues that the labor federation has championed in recent years: 75 percent support increased funding for public schools, 73 percent favor taxing American corporations on profits they make overseas, 62 percent support raising the federal minimum wage and 61 percent support increasing Social Security benefits. Meanwhile, only 27 percent support raising the

Social Security retirement age and only 18percent support raising the Medicare eligibility age.

These opinions were expressed at the ballot box when voters had the chance to vote directly on the issues and not through the filter of candidates and billions of campaign dollars, Trumka noted. Minimum wage increases passed by large margins in Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, Nebraska and South Dakota. Four ballot initiatives supporting paid sick days passed.

He also said that the AFL-CIO was building upon that public support for working family issues by pushing forward with a long-term, year-round mobilization structure that won't stop with elections. The labor federation also will continue its outreach to like-minded organizations to build coalitions to press the interests of working people in the lame-duck session, with a particular focus on raising wages, immigration reform and making sure that international trade deals work for working families.

New York Working Families Party pulls through difficult election night

By David Mirtz



In New York, the gubernatorial vote determines a political party's ballot status and position. On election day, the progressive Working Families Party garnered 120,000 votes, well over the 50,000 required to maintain ballot status - although it slipped from fourth to fifth position behind the Green Party, which rode a wave of anti-Cuomo sentiment and got 175,000 votes.

Some feared that the WFP would lose ballot status after endorsing Cuomo in a controversial political deal, soon after which Cuomo set up his own 'third' party -- the Women's Equality Party -- which many saw as a direct challenge to the WFP. The Women's Equality Party delivered 50,900 votes for Cuomo, so it now has ballot status as well. Governor Cuomo received a total of 1,942,700 votes, as against Republican Rob Astorino's 1,453,634.

These numbers must be viewed in the context of the low turnout, which was only 30 percent of the electorate, six percent lower than in 2010.

WFP's New York State Director Bill Lipton said "even as voter turnout was down significantly, and even as Democratic performance lagged overall, [the] WFP's share of the overall vote for governor yesterday looks like it matched or exceeded our number from 2010. And our share of the vote in the

other two statewide races [for Comptroller and Attorney General] increased significantly compared to four years ago."

The big winner of the night seemed to be the GOP, which regained majority control of the State Senate, raising questions about the possibility of moving a progressive agenda forward. But after 16 years on the NY political scene, the WFP, besides helping elect progressive politicians to office, has built a track record of groundbreaking legislative victories, on issues from campaign finance reform to raising the minimum wage, reforming racist drug laws and paid sick leave. WFP was an early fighter to "tax the rich," and led a campaign which resulted in NY state enacting such a law in 2009.

Lipton expressed optimism and readiness to continue the fight, saying, "There's no way around it, losing the Senate is a tough blow for all of us hoping to see a progressive agenda enacted in Albany next year. But politics is about more than just elections, and New York progressives aren't about to run and hide for the next four years. The only place we're going is back to Albany, to fight tooth and nail to win on the big issues we care about and to continue to give working families a voice in a system dominated by big corporations and billionaires."

We're going back to Albany to fight tooth and nail to win the big issues we care about.

The fog that blinded the electorate

By Rick Nagin

Deeper explanations of this election reveal that the electorate does not yet recognize that right wing extremism is the enemy. Republicans, not the Democrats, have blocked programs to create jobs and raise wages. They have shifted the tax burden to working people, slashed funds for education and health care, assaulted the right to vote, rights of women, equality for gay people, immigration reform and defense of humanity from climate catastrophe.

Why were the people not able to perceive the danger from the right? The right unleashed unprecedented resources to roll out a fog of racism that terrified, blinded and paralyzed the Democrats.

The demonization of President Obama has been building for years in the world of right wing hate talk radio and Fox News. Racism is at the core of right wing ideology. Attacks on "government," Social Security, Medicare, public education, the minimum wage, public employee unions are directed at people of color. The right hopes to ride to victory in 2016 by convincing the white majority that democratic rights and institutions exist primarily to serve minority populations at their expense.

Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Boehner have made clear their war on President Obama would continue unabated. All progressives, labor and all its grassroots allies must expose these divisive tactics and build a united movement to defeat right-wing extremism.

Campaña por la acción ejecutiva

Por AFL-CIO

El Presidente Richard Trumka de la AFL-CIO se reunió con varios líderes de otras organizaciones durante la primera semana de noviembre, para exigirle al Presidente Obama que realice una acción ejecutiva para que los inmigrantes que calificarían bajo el proyecto migratorio del Senado se puedan quedar en este país y disfrutar de los derechos y protecciones laborales que tienen todos los otros trabajadores.

A continuación parte del discurso que el Presidente Trumka ofreció a los medios de comunicación:

"El presidente debe ejercer una acción ejecutiva para apoyar los derechos de los inmigrantes. Pero también tiene que hacerlo para apoyar los derechos de todos nosotros.

En nuestro país viven en la sombra casi 12 millones de personas, de las cuales ocho millones de trabajadores tienen dificultad para mantener a sus familias debido a que viven sin la protección de la ley. Esto no está bien. Este problema no sólo pone en riesgo a los inmigrantes, sino también a todos los trabajadores al reducir los estándares que nos protegen a todos.

Desde la primavera de 2013, la AFL-CIO ha estado pidiendo a la Casa Blanca, que pare todas las deportaciones innecesarias porque sabemos que somos más fuertes cuando todos los trabajadores están juntos. Como ya sabemos la acción ejecutiva migratoria está conectada a nuestra misión de que todo el trabajo sea trabajo digno.

Ahora reanudamos nuestro llamado para que la rama ejecutiva del gobierno como mínimo provea autorización de trabajo para todos aquellos que

calificarían para una vía la ciudadanía, si es que los republicanos de la Cámara Baja hubieran permitido un voto por el proyecto de ley bipartidista que fue aprobado por el Senado. El presidente, al realizar su anuncio por la acción ejecutiva, debe incluir las protecciones laborales que tanto se necesitan. Y sabemos que ahora no es el momento para expandir los programas de trabajadores temporales que rebajan los salarios y crean una fuerza laboral captiva.

Ya se conoce que el presidente tiene la autoridad legal para terminar esta crisis y otorgar un alivio temporal a una vasta clase de trabajadores. De igual manera también es conocido que nuestro sistema de ejecución policial de la ley de inmigración va en contra de la visión estadounidense y los valores familiares de unidad familiar, trabajo duro y la justicia.

La manera como el presidente implemente las leyes de inmigración será una gran parte de su legado. El trabajo del presidente es el de implementar las leyes eficazmente, y la crisis de las deportaciones demuestra que nuestro sistema de control policial de inmigración es disfuncional. Los extremistas republicanos se han rehusado a arreglarlo cuando se ha tenido la oportunidad. Ahora es cuando el presidente debe actuar.