

## Midterm lessons from Tuesday elections

Youngkin gives GOP a post-Trump primer, while cultural issues poised for 2022, 2024

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Tuesday's gubernatorial elections were unmistakably a clear Republican triumph. The GOP swept statewide races in blueish Virginia and nearly upset New Jersey Democrat incumbent Gov. Phil Murphy.

Republican Gov.-elect Glenn Youngkin's decisive victory over former Democratic governor Terry McAuliffe was artful in how he did it while not ceding all of the oxygen in the room to Donald Trump. Youngkin accepted Trump's endorsement, but kept the former president at arm's length, passed on any joint appearances which will prompt much research among Republicans running in suburban districts.



While congressional Democrats formed the classic circular firing squad and wallowed in its vast social spending agenda that drew comparisons to FDR's New Deal and LBJ's Great Society, Republicans concentrated on inflation, rising gas and grocery prices, crime rates and parental involvement in school boards and exploited President Biden's premature "mission accomplished" on the pandemic in July that unraveled by the COVID spike in August and September. Never mind that the spike was fueled by a recalcitrant pool of largely Repub-

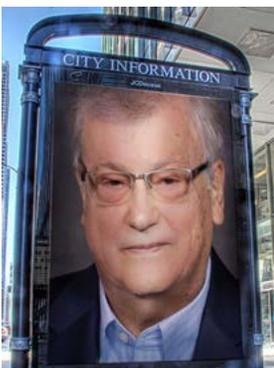
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## Progressive Dem disaster

By **MARK SOUDER**

FORT WAYNE – Tuesday, November 2, 2021 was a vote in very blue states (i.e. non-competitive for Republicans) and the bluest of blue cities (e.g. New York, Boston, Minneapolis). The marquee races for the national media were for governor of Virginia and New Jersey.

In 2020, Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump in Virginia by 450,000 votes. In 2021, Republican candidate Glenn Youngkin won by around 65,000 votes. In New Jersey in 2020, Trump lost to Biden by 725,000 votes. In 2021, the race for governor was pulled out by incumbent Democrat Phil Murphy by a miniscule margin out of 2.35 million voters.



**“James Madison. The Constitution is very clear that elections are to be governed at the state level. The only role of the federal government was to open and count the votes that were sent to the states.”**

- Mike Pence, on who convinced him to count Electoral College votes on Jan. 6



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**Jack E. Howey**  
 editor emeritus  
 1926-2019



Virginia has gone from red to purple to darker blue. Supposed Democrat base voters are increasing every year; Republican base voter numbers are declining. Virginia was on the verge of becoming a Democrat base state. New Jersey was also becoming more Democrat. Republicans were losing congressional seats and largely irrelevant in statewide elections.



If these two stories were the only ones from election night, it would be tempting to just look at the over-arching trends of no Trump and the continuing muddled disaster of the Biden presidency and say it was a referendum on boring Republican candidates minus Trump who rode a wave of anti-Biden. But there were, in fact, other stories as well.

**Progressive Democrat domination of congressional news**

Biden, Pelosi and Schumer look like they spend most days trying to accommodate the extreme left policies of a fraction of their party. This is probably how it looked to those not involved in 1995-96 when the freshman class of Republicans, of which I was a part, enabled the Republicans to win control Congress for the first time in 40 years.

Here are a couple of differences: 1.) Our ideas in general represented the majority of the country as well as the Republicans especially when combined with 2.) We compromised. Frankly, Bill Clinton was smart enough that he actually accepted some key parts including welfare reform and an actual balanced budget (though very briefly). We got a quarter of a loaf. Held the House in 1996, and got some more. Same in 1998. Then in 2000, Bush won and we got more.

The progressives are not in line with their own party majority.

They seem to be out to prove that everything we Republicans have said for years – liberals are just fronting for socialists – is absolutely true. If the Democrat-controlled Congress passes even the latest version of its massive spending proposal, igniting inflation, they face a potentially disastrous 2022 off-year election. They had a bad night; they may have a nightmare coming

unless they backtrack rapidly from catering to the progressives.

**Progressive domination of news in major cities**

New York, Boston and Minneapolis are not even typical of the political diversity of most cities. They are way to the left. But even in NYC, after a brutal primary, the mayor-elect Eric Adams is a former police captain who had been blasted as too establishment.

In Boston, Michelle Wu won easily over a fellow progressive, becoming the first female mayor in Boston history. Boston is Boston.

Minneapolis, where George Taylor was murdered by a policeman, was ground zero for riots and the defund the police movement. There was a ballot initiative generally considered a proxy for "defunding the police." (It was actually more complicated but was essentially a proxy for the movement's goal of changing the ways police departments function.) Progressives in Minneapolis, led by former congressman and now Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison and current Minneapolis congresswoman, Gang of Five member Ilhan Omar, supported it.

Minneapolis voters soundly rejected the proposal. Austin, Texas – the most liberal city in Texas – had wanted to defund its police. The backlash resulted in a referendum to significantly add policemen, but it

was soundly defeated. The city's core liberals are still trying to sort out what they favor.

But the political impact goes far beyond just the debates in already overwhelmingly Democrat big city cores. Everybody else is watching the debate as well. The cities may be divided, but the smaller cities, suburbs and rural areas have watched the progressive dominated cities' crime rates go up. Businesses are watching as well. The progressive movement is helping turn independents and moderately liberal Democrats into Republicans outside the city core.

### The education factor

In Virginia, Democrat candidate McAuliffe gave the Republicans a quote that will keep on giving for a long, long time. He said: "I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach." There will be plenty of time to discuss the nuances for the next three years but it was a great gift to the Republicans that is symbolic of Democrat governing arrogance. Politics is about symbols, like it or not.

### Election fraud

The biggest single factor, generally true in non-presidential elections, is that Republicans turned out to vote in higher numbers than Democrats. That is not news except that supposedly Republicans felt that the process was corrupt, that voting machines were rigged, that it was impossible to win. And that was talking about states with Republicans in charge like Georgia and Arizona. However, Republicans turned out to vote – in Democrat-controlled, blue states – as if the whole election fraud claims were just some sort of a political gimmick. Interesting.

### Virginia's New Lt. Gov. Winsome Sears

Virginia also elected a new Republican lieutenant governor. Winsome Sears is an African-American. She and her win may become more and more significant in the future. Furthermore, one poll that identified voter segments (many shall follow) showed that Republican Youngkin actually won the Hispanic vote narrowly. It is admittedly not



huge in Virginia but still it's an estimated 5% segment. Another warning sign to Democrats that conservative issues have some serious traction among minority voters.

### The Trump factor

And speaking of symbols, the question for Democrats is now their greatest fear: What if Donald Trump actually stays comparatively silent? Maybe they would have been better off if Trump were on Twitter and other social media. The numbers are indisputable; he wasn't invited in to campaign (Pence was), Youngkin was a supporter of and friend to Senator Ted Cruz (but did not stress that either). Youngkin ran as a bland, somewhat inconsistent, business Republican with no record of governing. He capitalized on issues that the liberals made toxic to swing voters. He was a "safe" vote.

Trump, amazingly and to his credit, stayed comparatively silent. The Democrats did not. They tried to make 2021 a re-run of 2020. They tried to make Youngkin another Trump Jr. It failed so badly that near the end they had to pull the attempt. Voters are not stupid; they could see that Youngkin was not Trump. In fact, many Republicans (if not most), voted for Donald Trump because they didn't want Biden and the progressive Democrats to run the country. This once again confirms that view.

Instead of hurting the Republican, the anti-Trump ads turned out Republicans. Trump voters do in fact exist. Youngkin, however, didn't have to work to hold and activate Trump voters. The Democrats solved that Republican delicate dance by attacking Trump.

Hopefully, going forward, elections can be about issues and what candidates will do about them. If this happens, Republicans will generally prevail. ❖

### Souder is a former Republican congressman from Northeastern Indiana

## 2022 and 2024, from page 1

lican voters refusing the vaccine. This nation is exhausted by the pandemic and now the gathering inflation and empty store shelves are sapping its morale.

As FiveThirtyEight's Geoffrey Skelley noted, "Performing well in the suburbs, where Trump struggled, is key to unlocking Virginia, and Youngkin made serious inroads in those parts of the state. Youngkin did significantly better than Trump among white women with 'some college or less,' per the exit polls; he carried that group 75% to 25%, greatly improving on Trump's 56-44% performance with

them."

GOP consultant Mike Murphy (the one from Los Angeles) explained, "Lots to look at in Virginia but the biggest story is return of the suburbs to GOP. Youngkin's 'friendly Dad tone' worked as did hiding from Trump poison in general. Also the hard lesson (yet again, will they ever learn?) for the D's is the party's woke obsession is a big dud."

There were two snippets of intriguing information that emerged on Tuesday. The first was an MSNBC video clip of a reporter asking a Youngkin supporter why he was voting for the Republican. The middle-aged man suggested critical race theory was a key factor. The reporter

# President Biden Job Approval

President Job Approval: Trump | Obama | Bush

Job Approval on Economy | Job Approval on Foreign Policy | Job Approval on Immigration | Direction of the Country

Polling Data					
Poll	Date	Sample	Approve	Disapprove	Spread
<b>RCP Average</b>	<b>10/18 - 11/2</b>	--	<b>43.0</b>	<b>51.1</b>	<b>-8.1</b>
Rasmussen Reports	10/31 - 11/2	1500 LV	44	55	-11
Economist/YouGov	10/30 - 11/2	1303 RV	44	51	-7
Politico/Morning Consult	10/30 - 11/1	1996 RV	45	51	-6
IBD/TIPP	10/27 - 10/29	1306 A	40	45	-5
Reuters/Ipsos	10/27 - 10/28	1005 A	44	51	-7
Harvard-Harris	10/26 - 10/28	1578 RV	43	51	-8
NBC News/Wall St. Jnl	10/23 - 10/26	820 RV	45	52	-7
The Hill/HarrisX	10/20 - 10/23	2727 RV	42	47	-5
Trafalgar Group (R)	10/19 - 10/21	1083 LV	39	58	-19
NPR/PBS/Marist	10/18 - 10/22	1032 RV	44	50	-6

noted that Virginia school curriculum didn't teach CRT and asked the man for what his perception of the issue was. He begged off, not knowing any details.

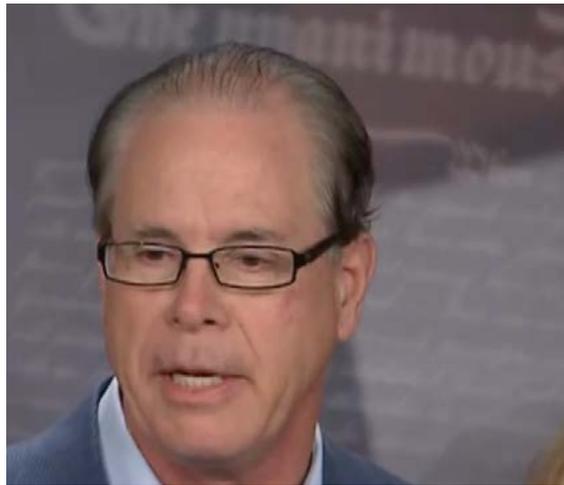
Veteran analyst Jeff Greenfield writing in Politico observed: "The state has been stirred by a wave of local unrest, with protests at school board after school board, a very local version of a big national argument stirred up by right-wing media and grassroots groups. And that suggests the real lesson for Republicans on Tuesday. One of their most powerful political assets is alive and well; the power of cultural issues over policies."

Greenfield noted that Democrats have struggled with cultural issues for half a century: "Only when Bill Clinton directly repudiated his party's orthodoxy on crime and welfare did the political tide turn. It was Clinton who promised to 'end welfare as we know it.' And his 'blue wall' wasn't a passel of declining industrial states, but the ranks of uniformed cops who stood behind him as he pledged support for the death penalty. Clinton had a Rotary Club cliché for his strategy: 'Voters won't care how much you know unless they know how much you care.' Call it cynical, but what Clinton understood was a root reality of politics: 'Culture trumps policy.'"

Lis Smith, who was communication director for Pete Buttigieg's 2020 Democratic presidential campaign, observed, "I don't think that CRT as interpreted by some in the media is the same as CRT as interpreted by voters. The communications disconnect is a problem."

Ball State Prof. Michael Hicks explained on Wednesday, "A competent political party would try to

change the subject tomorrow, with a unanimous House vote to pass a bipartisan infrastructure bill. We just don't have competent parties anymore."



The Cook Political Report's David Wasserman added, "Tonight's results are consistent with a political environment in which Republicans would comfortably take back both the House and Senate in 2022."

This is why Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita, who is preparing for a 2024 U.S. Senate or gubernatorial race has embraced the CRT issue, while filing an array of multi-state challenges to Biden's vaccine, education and abortion policies. It's why U.S. Sen. Mike Braun

had a press availability challenging Biden's vaccine testing mandate on Wednesday. "Remember when we were trying to help through the CARES Act we were trying to save employee jobs. Now the way this place works we've lowered that threshold to one hundred. Axios did a poll recently, 'What do you think if you're forced to take the vaccine, and if you don't, you're fired.' Fourteen percent, meaning two-thirds of Democrats, think that's a bad idea. This could be the biggest wallop of the whole journey."

It's why after General Assembly Republicans and Gov. Eric Holcomb sought to remove "politics" by creating an unelected cabinet education post in 2017, the party is now moving toward creating partisan school board races.

Former Republican superintendent of public instruction Jennifer McCormick said on an Indiana Democrat Small Town tour earlier this week, "The school board controversy that's brought up is being organized nationally,

not in Indiana. We don't teach CRT in K-12, but Indiana Republicans want that rhetoric to continue. It's made-up disruption."

"It's showing that we're not just gonna win it back in 2022. We're gonna win it back by a long shot," said U.S. Rep. Jim Banks, who heads the Republican Study Committee. "The more the Democrats hug that radical socialist agenda and go out of their way to endorse anti-Americanism, Critical Race Theory, and some of the more radical cultural issues, the more voters are gonna vote Republican a year from now. We're gonna win back the majority in 2022 in the House, the Senate is all of the sudden in play. I think we're gonna win back the White House in 2024," he said.

**The second snippet** came in an NPR/PBS/Marist poll on Monday with implications for both 2022 and 2024 cycles. Many in President Biden's own party don't want him to run again in 2024; just 36% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents thought they would have a better chance in 2024 with an 81-year-old Biden on the ballot as opposed to someone else.

Gallup put Biden's approval rating at 42%, which is lower than any other modern first-year president's at a similar point in time, with the key exception of Donald Trump (whose approval averaged 37% in fall 2017). FiveThirtyEight and Real Clear Politics's polling composite has Biden's approval at 43%.

Democrats faced the 2021 elections hoping that policy would deliver Election Day dividends. Instead, the Biden infrastructure bill was consumed by the drama surrounding Sens. Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema supporting a \$1.75 trillion spending package (down from an earlier \$6 trillion).

While the Dow closed on Monday above 36,000 for the first time ever, an NBC Meet The Press poll released Sunday revealed Republicans held a 13% to 28% advantage on the issues of border security, inflation, crime, national security, the economy and "getting things done."

Republican pollster Frank Luntz observed on Wednesday, "If prices keep rising and shortages continue to worsen, things will get even worse for the Democratic Party. On the issues that matter, Republicans now have a clear advantage. The question is whether Democrats learn any lessons from tonight and apply them in 2022. I'm doubtful."

Luntz added, "Republicans are continuing to do better in blue-collar communities. This is their roadmap to victory: Win the suburbs narrowly; win rural communities by 2:1; win 45% in blue-collar communities. That's how Trump won in 2016 and how Republicans won in 1994 and 2010. A winning strategy for Republicans is to attract more voters instead of insisting that the system is 'rigged and their votes won't be counted.'"

The Biden White House believes that the end of the pandemic as we know it, passage of the infrastructure package, the child tax credit, and the Senate coming to a deal on prescription drug prices will usher in a new era

of prosperity, prompting voters over the next two election cycles to vote their pocketbooks.

## Openings for Democrats

Republicans might want to keep the champagne iced down for the next year. While Democrats have been ham-handed on handling the social agenda, events and trends could be heading their way:

- The pandemic appears to be winding down. This has the potential of removing a huge psychological millstone.

- If the Dow continues to rise (remember, this was President Trump's constant measuring stick), this could reduce headwinds facing Democrats.

- The House Jan. 6 select committee and media reports like HBO's documentary on the U.S. Capitol insurrection will continue to haunt the GOP. That's why House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Republican Study Committee Chairman Banks have tried to block the release of call logs and subpoenas of Trump's inner circle. That's why Donald Trump is seeking to prevent former aides from testifying despite subpoenas.

- While Trump has held a significant segment of the Republican Party in his pocket, the facts are he still polls at historically low levels, even below where President Biden is now. If Republicans nominate Trump for a third time after he failed to win the popular vote twice, they will be playing with this historic fire.

- Trump is still focused on the rearview mirror. He is obsessed with the "stolen" 2020 election, while many Republicans are hoping, wishing, (praying) that he moves on and concentrates on the Biden record.

- Republican focus on the Biden record would be wise, but the president may not be on the ballot in 2024. President Biden won't say so, because he'd be a beleaguered lame duck immediately, but the notion of an 81-year-old president seeking reelection after his 2020 "basement campaign" risks returning the White House to Republicans. But Trump will be 78 years old in 2024. If the notion of transitioning to a new generation of leadership between now and the winter of 2024 becomes vogue, that could impact both major parties.

- If Biden doesn't run, then who? Vice President Kamala Harris is perceived as weak at this point. Transportation Sec. Pete Buttigieg will get a second look, though his taking family leave while the supply chain issue exploded during that time frame will resurface. Tuesday night may have provided both parties with national caliber leadership. For Republicans, Glenn Youngkin seemed to thread the needle between Trumpism and social issues that galvanized the GOP base. Democrats have New York City Mayor-elect Eric Adams (who could dent the GOP's defund-the-police social issue) and Boston Mayor-elect Michelle Wu as potential new blood that could reinstate the Barack Obama coalition. ❖

# Dems want to talk policy while GOP revs up culture wars

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

TRAFALGAR – In a harvested cornfield near here, there was a 10- by 10-foot section of the crop still standing. There was a sign posted nearby, declaring this a “Joe Biden corn maze.” The implication being that President Biden is senile and controlled by his deep state handlers.

This is a typical public demonstration in rural Indiana, where pandemic masking is disdained and school board meetings are the new political frontier. While Indiana Democrats unveiled their “Small Town Tour,” designed, as future candidate Melanie Wright said in Cicero, to show that Democrats don’t “have horns coming from our heads,” what they face in addition to steep, uphill legislative and congressional maps is a renewed culture war.

State Sen. Fady Qaddoura, D-Indianapolis, added at Cicero, “More than \$250 million in broadband and \$100 million for mental health programs were delivered to Indiana because of the American Rescue Plan, including our rural communities. Democrats are sick and tired of the culture wars. The Republicans share this with the Hoosiers because they only care about the next election.”

The super minority party may want to talk policy, but Hoosier Republicans are girding for more culture wars. Look no further than Attorney General Todd Rokita’s taxpayer financed “Rokita Review” newsletter sent out on All Saints Day.

The “Review” noted that Rokita led an 18-state amicus brief supporting the Texas law, which prohibits providers from performing abortions once they can detect a fetal heartbeat. Rokita is also “leading a 17-state effort to deter the Biden administration from threatening parents who express their views to school officials on issues regarding their children’s education.” Rokita stated “his concerns in an Oct. 18 letter to President Joe Biden and U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland. On Oct. 4, the

U.S. Department of Justice issued a memorandum decrying a “disturbing spike in harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence against school administrators, board members, teachers, and staff.”

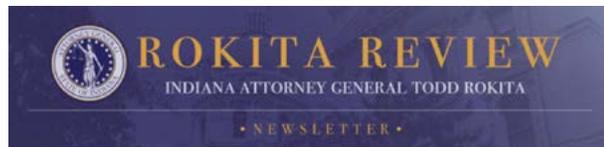
And Rokita called on Biden to “reconsider and immediately reverse his plan to force many private-sector companies to require workers to either get COVID-19 vaccinations, submit to weekly testing or potentially lose their jobs.” In a multi-state letter to President Biden, Rokita and 23 other attorneys general explain that the Biden administration’s “disastrous and counterproductive” plan amounts to an illegal use of the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Speaking in Lafayette on Tuesday, Rokita told WLFI-TV, “The Department of Justice saying they are going to monitor that trying to intimidate them from speaking is absolutely wrong. That’s why I led a 17-state coalition of attorneys general pushing Merrick Garland and Joe Biden and everyone else back saying, ‘Stay in your lane, guys, you’re overreaching enough on so many issues you are not going to do it here.’”

On Wednesday, U.S. Sen. Mike Braun denounced President Biden’s vaccine mandate, describing it as a coming “wallop” on small businesses.

“Public schools and farmers are the heartbeat of rural communities and the backbone of Indiana itself, and Democrats are set to hold real conversations about how we are delivering solutions to the most-pressing problems facing Hoosier families in Indiana’s small towns,” said Indiana Democratic Chairman Mike Schmuhl at an event in North Vernon. “Democrats have delivered since Day One of Joe Biden’s presidency, and we are ready to fan out across the state to share with families how policies like the American Rescue Plan have fully funded Indiana’s public schools and expanded broadband internet access. Democrats are creating a better future for Hoosier families in rural America, while the other side appears to prioritize only extreme partisanship and division, a contrast we’ll campaign on into the 2022 elections.”

According to the La-Grange News-Sun, former congresswoman Jill Long Thompson said she believes the county is at a crossroads right now and federal programs like the American Rescue Plan have already played an important role in bringing new investment



**Attorney General Todd Rokita’s taxpayer financed “Rokita Review” newsletter (top) while former superintendent Jennifer McCormick appears at a Democrat Small Town tour event.**

in rural America. "To be our strongest, we have to invest both in our people, and our infrastructure," she said. "We have the largest economy in the world and the most productive workforce in the world. And rural communities are essential to our economic and social wellbeing."

Long Thompson added that the work being done in rural communities across the county affects nearly everyone in the county. "We're going to be spending \$250 million in broadband in rural communities. In order to survive as farmers, the need for broadband is essential," Sen. Shelli Yoder said. "That investment is going to help our farmers and members of the Ag community survive."

At Cicero, Jennifer McCormick appeared. "About 80% of poverty falls in rural areas. That's directly tied to the Indiana Republican Party's record on education. That's the situation Indiana is in. It's a perfect storm from a decade of poor policy," McCormick said (Hamilton County Reporter). "It's not a good idea to make school board races partisan. But Republicans are making it a 'priority bill'. It's up to us to tell our neighbors about what's going on at the Statehouse."

## U.S. Senate

### McDermott campaign announces 2 hires

Hammond Mayor Tom McDermott's Democratic U.S. Senate campaign hired two staffers: Arielle Brandy as its director of voter engagement and Joseph Shepard as rural outreach director. "Arielle's experience with several campaigns including Pete for America most recently has made her a very sought after staffer. "We are so excited to have Arielle on board with our campaign," said McDermott. "Arielle brings the energy we will need to get out the vote in 2022 and her organizing skills will ensure my name is on the ballot next year."

## Congress

### NRCC targets Rep. Mrvan

The party organization that works to elect Republicans to the U.S. House has added U.S. Rep. Frank J. Mrvan, D-Highland, to the list of 70 Democratic congressmen it's targeting for defeat in 2022 (Carden, [NWI Times](#)). U.S. Rep. Tom Emmer, R-Minn., chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, said the Republican electoral victories Tuesday in Virginia, along with polls showing Republican chances to retake the House are improving, spurred the NRCC to expand its original list of 57 targeted candidates. "In a cycle like this, no Democrat is safe," Emmer said. "Voters are rejecting Democrat policies that have caused massive price increas-



es, opened our borders, and spurred a nationwide crime wave." Mrvan is the only Indiana Democrat being targeted by the NRCC. Republicans consider Mrvan to potentially be vulnerable because Mrvan won last year with only 56% of the vote, compared to the 65% of district voters who supported former U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Gary, in 2018. In addition, records show Democrat Joe Biden only won Mrvan's 1st Congressional District by an 8.8% margin over Republican Donald Trump in 2020, a drop from the 12.6% margin Democrat Hillary Clinton had over Trump in 2016 – suggesting Northwest Indiana may be trending Republican. So far, two Republicans have filed to run in the May 2022 primary election: Jennifer-Ruth Green, of Crown Point, an Air Force Reserve member and chief information officer for the Indiana Air National Guard; and Tom Madden of Valparaiso.

## Statewides

### Auditor: Klutz seeks reelection

Auditor of State Tera Klutz announced her bid for reelection Tuesday surrounded by supporters at an event in Indianapolis. Klutz, the first CPA to hold the position of auditor, is seeking her second full term and will be on the ballot in November 2022. "I'm excited to launch our campaign for another term in the auditor's office. We've had great success modernizing and streamlining the office to better serve Hoosiers, but there is still more work to be done. I'm asking Hoosiers to trust our team with another four years and let us keep delivering the results taxpayers have come to expect from our team," Klutz said. Delegates to the 2022 Indiana Republican Convention will vote on the nominee for auditor, with the winner being on the ballot for the General Election in November. In 2018, Klutz was unanimously nominated and cruised to a 15-point victory in the general election that November.

### Hill eyes future campaign

Indiana's embattled former attorney general Curtis Hill says he's considering a future run for political office (Indiana Public Media). But, speaking at an event in Noblesville about race, education and COVID restrictions, Hill declined to specify a particular race he is eyeing. "I've been firmly implanted in the concept of public service since I was a prosecuting attorney from years before," Hill said. "So, I anticipate continuing that process." Hill continued he would "consider something down the road at the right time." The former AG's term ended last year when he was defeated in the Republican primary by the state's current Attorney General Todd Rokita.

## General Assembly

### SD26: Wright may shift from 5th CD race

Former state Rep. Melanie Wright, who announced on Facebook earlier this month that she is run-

ning for Indiana's 5th Congressional District, told IndyStar she's considering running for state Senate District 26 instead. That district was opened up after lawmakers drew Sen. Mike Gaskill, R-Pendleton, into District 25 with Anderson Democrat Sen. Tim Lanane, D-Anderson.

**SD46 (current): Grooms resigns seat**

State Sen. Ron Grooms had already announced he wouldn't seek reelection in 2022, but the Jeffersonville Republican has decided to end his term a year early, in a move that appears to be opening the door for Kevin Boehnlein to take a seat in the Senate. Grooms will step down from his District 46 seat on Nov. 2 (Suddeath, News & Tribune). Boehnlein told Howey Politics Indiana he will be a candidate in that caucus, while Floyd County Commissioner Shawn Carruthers questioned the caucus process. "It's been an incredible privilege serving the people of Senate District 46 for the last 10-plus years," Grooms said in a statement issued



Thursday morning. "I've had the distinct honor to work with a number of outstanding legislators who have worked tirelessly to move Indiana forward. Although I will miss the Statehouse, I look forward to pursuing new opportunities, spending more time with family, playing a bit more golf and relaxing with a good book. I leave knowing that I did my job and made a difference in my community."

**Moon seeks SD46 caucus; challenge Clere**

Already planning to run for the District 72 state House seat, Floyd County Republican Charlie Moon confirmed Friday that he will also seek a caucus appointment to serve the remainder of State Sen. Ron Grooms' term (Howey Politics Indiana). Grooms' announced Friday he would resign on Nov. 2, setting up a Nov. 15 caucus. Floyd County businessman Kevin Boehnlein had announced for SD46 before it moved north to Indianapolis in redistricting. Upon Thursday's announcement of Grooms' early retirement, Boehnlein confirmed he will seek the caucus appointment to fill the vacancy. Floyd County Commissioner Shawn Carruthers said he will not enter the caucus and, like Moon, questioned the timing of Grooms' retirement. "Voters are rightfully suspicious of political favors and maneuvers like this and many see these caucuses as rigged," Carruthers said Thursday (News & Tribune). "I share their concerns about this approach and I won't be a candidate for the caucus election." Moon said Friday he remains committed to seeking the Republican nomination for the House District 72 seat, which is held by Rep. Ed Clere. He emphasized he's entering the Senate District 46 race because he believes there should be more than just one candidate, especially since Boehnlein was already endorsed by Grooms. "I have no special interests, no promises that have been

made. I'm doing it more out of a civic duty," Moon said. "Unfortunately, there appears to be a political game that's being played."

**SD46 (new): Councilor Jones announces**

Indianapolis City-County Councilor Kristin Jones filed paperwork to become a Democratic candidate for SD46. A longtime resident of West Indy, Jones was first elected to the council in 2019. Since taking office, and in her years of service in the community before her election, Jones has earned a reputation as an advocate of



working families, fair wages and improving the quality of life in the neighborhoods. "While the city is making great strides, and I am proud of the work we have done on the council, all too often we've been hamstrung by bad decisions that come from the Statehouse," said Jones. "That's why I am running. I want to take my on-the-ground experiences working in this community to the State Senate, where I can

be a voice for working families and common sense policies that benefit us all." A member of AFSCME Local 725 and wife of a union auto worker, Jones has strong ties to organized labor, including participating in the Indiana State AFL-CIO's "Path to Power" program. "We are so proud of Kristin," said Indiana State AFL-CIO President Brett Voorhies. "Not only is she a responsive and hard-working city-county councilor, she's also a strong and reliable advocate for all working people. We look forward to doing all we can to see her elected to the State Senate." Jones will officially kick off her campaign with an event at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 17 at the United Steelworkers Local 1999, 218 S. Addison St.

**HD45: Borders 'shocked' by Ellington**

State Rep. Bruce Borders isn't going down without a fight. Borders, the longtime Republican representative for HD45, ran unopposed in the 2020 general election. He'll have an unexpected primary challenger in 2022, fellow Republican Rep. Jeff Ellington (Legan, Indiana Public Media). "I was shocked about it, to be honest with you," Borders said over the phone from his insurance office in Jasonville. "I mean, he never approached me about it." Ellington announced last week he will be moving from his home south of Bloomington west to Bloomfield and intends to run to represent the 45th District. Borders said he dialed up Ellington a few days before the announcement to confirm the rumors he was hearing were true. "I just called him I said, 'Jeff, I've heard this (from other legislators).' And he was apprehensive about talking about it. And then he said, 'Yeah, we're looking at doing that,'"

Borders said. Ellington, who declined a phone interview in favor of answering emailed questions, said the move to Bloomfield had been planned since he bought an old mill there in 2018.

**HD54: Mills to seek Saunders' seat**

Republican Betsy Mills of rural Middletown has filed to establish an exploratory committee. The move comes after State Rep. Tom Saunders announced on Sept. 24 he will not seek reelection. "I am excited to join the



ranks of great leaders our region has sent to Indianapolis, and I am prepared to advocate for strong Republican values like limited government and economic opportunities in the cities, towns, and rural areas of our district," Mills said. "I'd like to sincerely thank Rep.

Saunders for his many decades of public service in Henry County and East Central Indiana," Mills said. "Tom has always fought hard for his constituents, and I hope to emulate him in that way." Mills currently serves as an at-large member of the Henry County Council. "My priorities for our district are straightforward; I want us to play to our strengths and continue to build in areas that will shine a light on our region," Mills said. Steve Thompson will manage Mills's campaign.

**HD62: Githens to seek Democrat nod**

Monroe County Commissioner Penny Githens announced she will run for the District 62 seat in the Indiana House of Representatives next year (Abshier, Indiana Public Media). The Monroe County Democratic party nominated Githens to fill a vacancy on the board of commissioners in 2019. She won reelection in 2020, and her term expires in 2024.



She said she will continue serving as a county commissioner while running for state office. "I realize that there are things I really care deeply about that I can't address as a county commissioner," Githens said. "Some of the things we try to address as county commissioners really should be addressed at a regional or state level." For example, Githens said a lot of unhoused people in Monroe County come from surrounding areas. A lot of them suffer from mental illness and substance abuse disorders. "We're not providing the kind of treatment that's necessary," Githens said. "And so, they end up either in our jails and prisons or on the street, and that doesn't seem like the humane way to treat people." Githens ran for HD60 in 2016 and 2018, losing both times to State Rep. Peggy Mayfield (R-Martinsville). She said the new Indiana legislative maps

that moved her out of that district motivated her to run for office again. "The numbers in the redrawn 62, the numbers are there," Githens said. "This is a seat that the Democrats could take back."

**HD71: Rep. Fleming to seek reelection**

State Rep. Rita Fleming will be running for reelection next year to represent District 71. Fleming, a Democrat, said she plans to continue initiatives she has been working on with the state, some that will impact health care, primarily focusing on children. She said she'll call it the "year of the child." "I'm going to have a lot of emphasis on the well-being of children and families," Fleming said (News & Tribune). Fleming first took her position in 2018, beating Republican Matt Owen for the House seat. She won again in 2020, running unopposed. Scott Hawkins, a Jeffersonville City Council member, is the only candidate to announce for the Republican primary. Fleming said one of her bills, which allows pharmacists to prescribe and dispense birth control after a careful interview and blood pressure check, has garnered a lot of interest and momentum. "To date I believe almost 30 states have adopted this bill, and it has actually been passed in several Republican-dominated legislatures. So, I think that this really has a good chance of getting attention this year and passing, and it truly will greatly impact the well-being of mothers and babies in our state," Fleming said.

**HD82: Miller announces third bid**

After losing twice for a state house seat, a Fort Wayne native is trying again (WANE-TV). Democrat Kyle Miller announced his bid for Indiana State Representative for District 82 at Deer Park Irish Pub in front of a crowd of supporters. He previously ran twice in 2018 and 2020 but narrowly lost to Republican Martin Carbaugh. After the most recent redistricting, he and Carbaugh will now be in different districts. "I think that it largely comes down to making sure families have what they need to thrive. Whether that's paid family and medical leave, whether that's driving down the cost of prescription healthcare or driving down the cost of childcare. Families just want to know that they're going to be protected and able to thrive in our community, and I think those are the things that were pushing in this campaign," Miller said.

**HD93: Turner won't challenge Rep. Jacob**

Conservative community leader Robert Turner has announced that he is dropping out of the HD93 race, citing family health reasons for his exit. Turner had planned to challenge State Rep. John Jacob. Former legislator and Marion County Republican chair Cindy Kirchhofer is considering a challenge to Rep. Jacob. "After prayerful consideration and lengthy, meaningful discussions with my family, I have determined that leaving the race at this time is the right move due to private family-health issues that have recently arisen," said Turner. ❖

# Who can fix our supply chain issues?

By **MICHAEL HICKS**

MUNCIE – Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg received a great deal of criticism lately for taking pa-



ternity leave. It is a time of snarled port traffic, understocked grocery shelves and growing worry about supply chains. I think these critiques are in bad faith and unworthy of an intellectually confident political movement. But, that's where we are now.

Congress could spend serious effort to ease logistics problems in any number of ways; the private sector is already at work. Outside of complaints about Mr. Buttigieg, Congress

has been silent on the matter. Let me make three points.

First, parental leave policies are nothing new for the federal government. These policies, which apply to both parents for childbirth and adoption, intend to reduce workplace disparities arising from the absence of women during and after childbirth. The evidence remains mixed; still, it is federal policy. If a cabinet secretary were to skip his parental leave, it would signal further down the chain that family matters are not important. One may disagree with Mr. Buttigieg on issues of policy, but his leadership has been exemplary. Moreover, if the nation's best-known same-sex couple were to ignore their parental leave, it would be dereliction of duty. Leaders set the example; otherwise this policy would have no teeth and no chance of affecting workplace disparities.

Secondly, the executive branch is mostly powerless to address issues of clogged ports, full trains or too few truck drivers, outside of issuing a constitutionally dubious emergency order to suspend industry rules. We should be thankful that the executive branch does not possess this sort of power – or at least that's what conservatives used to believe.

**As the legislative branch,** Congress could do much to ease shipping backlogs. They could repeal the Jones Act, which prevents multiple port calls by non-U.S. flagged ships and keeps most international shipping from our internal waterways. The Jones Act is a prime causal factor in limiting the number of U.S. ports and which types of shipping can access smaller ports across the country. It is legislation that creates artificial shortages.

The Jones Act results in fewer ports of entry and more power to the International Longshoreman Association, resulting in antiquated U.S. port technology. Today, American seaports are the most technologically backward and least-automated ports in the developed world. It will take us years to catch up to China because the lack of competition allows the ILA to effectively set automation

policies. A GOP Congress could have fixed this while Mr. Trump was in office, and a Democratic Congress can fix it now.

Congress could tackle logistics issues by (1) investing in truck platooning and rest facilities that would ease congestion in major cities, or (2) adjusting driver sleep requirements to allow truckers to time their routes to avoid heavy congestion points while increasing total sleep on a trip, or (3) changing the age restrictions for interstate commercial driver's licenses, or (4) allowing Mexican trucking firms to deliver goods into the U.S.

**All of these could've been** done by the GOP when President Trump had majorities in both houses, and they could be done by the Democrats today. None of this requires the secretary of transportation to be present; he is in the executive branch of government.

Thirdly, the private markets, not the Department of Transportation, will remedy supply chain problems. I'm just old enough to remember a bold and intellectually rigorous political movement whose members took every chance they could to remind us of the power of the private sector. Those folks are mostly gone, so I'll spirit those ideas back onto this page.

The most obvious example lies in labor markets for truck drivers. Inflation-adjusted wages for truck drivers is now below that of the late 1990s. There is not now, nor has there ever been, a truck driver shortage. Rather, we just needed this pandemic to remind folks that that labor markets have both a demand and supply side. The false claims of a trucker shortage were so loud that many states fully subsidize CDL training. Indiana even added a K-12 career pathway for truckers that started in sixth grade, which should embarrass every Hoosier. Do not be fooled by help wanted ads promising high wages; actual wages in the occupation lag well behind the advertised wage.

The rail industry slashed its workforce over the past decade, eliminating nearly one in three jobs since the early 2010s. Employment and wages for railroad workers are beneath the 2015 levels. So, despite record rail shipments, the industry has a smaller wage bill before accounting for inflation. Wages in this industry have crept upwards by 1.1% per year. Any labor market problems in this industry are to be found in the HR departments, not the trains. These examples make it look like the private sector caused the supply chain problems, but it did not. In fact, the private sector is handling this entire issue well, given the somnolence of Congress. Domestic manufacturing GDP hit a new inflation-adjusted record this year. Second Quarter 2021 was the single highest quarter of manufacturing GDP production in U.S. history.

**At the same time,** imports of goods are at an all-time, inflation-adjusted record level. Americans are buying more domestically produced goods and importing more from overseas than at any time in history. The empty shelves seem to be due less to the supply of trucks, rail and shipping, and more to our growing demand for goods.

❖

# How do I handle reader hate mail?

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – I’m often asked about hate mail. Do I get much? And, if so, what do I do about it? Apparently, a lot of folks assume that a political columnist gets a lot of angry criticism, especially these days.



True. Although, since I don’t get into social media wars, source of so much vituperation, the volume of denunciations is no higher than in decades past. It comes of course in e-mail now, not in an envelope that used to signal at times the tone of the message before the letter was opened. An address in crayon was a tip about content.

One envelope contained ashes. The writer explained that the smoky content was the burned remnants of my column. There’s

big difference between just an expression of disagreement, which is fine, and what reflects actual hate, the stuff of vicious bigotry and advocacy of violence.

While I get some rather nasty stuff, most of what crosses the line to hate mail doesn’t come from any area readers but from afar. That’s when a column lands on a website of some group displeased with what I wrote. Like a militia group. My comments about gun violence once were posted on an NRA site. I quickly received over a hundred replies and an apology from an NRA official for the obscenity and suggestions. Not all the replies were outrageous. There’s room for disagreement even about gun violence.

What do I do about nasty mail? Nothing. I don’t respond to angry denunciations. Why further infuriate someone who really isn’t interested in an intelligent dialogue? Why try to persuade someone that you aren’t, as described, a ....ing moron, a communist conspirator or a liar specializing in fake news?

Do I ever send at least a “same to you, fella” reply? No. Why make someone already upset, perhaps with real stability problems, even more upset? Nor do I send that classic response: “I thought you should know that someone sent this ridiculous tirade over your signature.”

**Couple of times, when** I knew the disgruntled writer, I did respond briefly: “Interesting. But not very.”

Do I have hurt feelings or get upset by the language? No. I’ve heard all that language. I was in the Army. Also, sometimes there is humor in the rebuke. One insult was so poorly constructed that it literally constituted praise. I do feel bad when someone who doesn’t understand satire takes every word literally and misunderstands the meaning.

A favorite example: Back when Lou Holtz was coach of Notre Dame, I sought to poke fun satirically at spoiled Notre Dame fans denouncing Lou’s coaching ability after the Irish lost to Miami to end a 23-game winning streak. I wrote, in satire, that Holtz should be fired. A 23-1 record? A 95.8 winning percentage? “Well, that’s not good enough. What if he stays in a rut and loses one game every two years? Disgraceful. Who wants to be called a loser every other year?”

**You would think every** reader would catch on when I cited “the sound program he inherited from Jerry Faust.” An irate reader wrote to the editor. She was particularly displeased with the reference to what Holtz inherited from Faust. She concluded: “Jack Colwell is really a total idiot.” Idiot? Maybe. But total? I object. ❖

**Colwell is a columnist for the South Bend Tribune.**

# Climate changes everything

By MORTON J. MARCUS

INDIANAPOLIS – You probably noticed the Earth, including Indiana, is experiencing climate change. Warmer temperatures, earlier Springs, shorter Winters, historic storms are nothing new, but they impose expensive stress on households, businesses, and governments.

Builders, developers, insurers, regulators, financiers are reassessing the risks they face, the opportunities they have. Those reassessments are developing in progressive states like California and Connecticut as well as in troubled Florida and Texas.

What’s being done in Indiana? Are building codes being changed in your community? What needs to be done by farmers, small business owners, schools, utilities, cities and homeowners? Will your friendly roofer guarantee a lower

insurance cost because of the products and methods used on your home?

How do we divide responsibility, authority and financing among public and private agencies? Certainly, some will refuse to participate if government mandates are involved. They might, however, accept government funding to anticipate or repair the damages caused by floods, fires and other ravages of nature.

**These questions arise** because Indiana’s “stability” may be a handicap. According to the Census Bureau, nationally 27% of housing structures were built before 1960. In Indiana that figure is 32%, the 16th highest in



U.S. The states of New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts had 49% or more of their housing built before 1960.

**Does this mean 19% of** the nation's housing built in this 21st century are less at risk than older structures? Are new homes in Nevada, Utah and Arizona better able to protect their residents than those built in earlier times? Population growth is closely associated with newer housing. It is not surprising Hamilton County has 45% of its housing built 2000 and later. Each of four other suburban Indianapolis counties had more than 25% of their housing built in this century.

Elsewhere are Indiana counties with slow-growing or declining populations. Randolph and Cass counties led these struggling locales with 50% or more of their housing units built prior to 1960. Statewide, 32% of Indiana's housing were built before 1960. How well prepared are those homes for climate change?

With an aging population, Americans and Hoosiers

alike have to consider the portion of that population living in older houses with the stress of climate change. We have one-quarter of Indiana's housing occupied by a householder 65 and older.

Combine that with the nearly one-third of Hoosier housing built before 1960 and we get approximately a quarter-million Indiana housing units occupied by Hoosiers who may not be able to afford or manage the changes required by climate change.

**We think of ourselves** as living in a stable environment despite having so many homes about the same age as their residents, homes built before 1960 for a population born before 1960. Isn't there something we should be doing? ❖

**Mr. Marcus is an economist. Reach him at [mortonjmarcus@yahoo.com](mailto:mortonjmarcus@yahoo.com).**

## School board acrimony is no laughing matter

By **KELLY HAWES**  
CNHI State Bureau

ANDERSON – A recent Saturday Night Live skit features cast member Heidi Gardner portraying an unhappy parent at a school board meeting. "I'm so mad I'm literally shaking right now," she says. "Forget COVID. The real threat is critical race theory being taught in our schools. My question is: What is it, and why am I mad about it?"



For school boards across the country, such encounters are no laughing matter.

National Public Radio reported on an episode in the Poway Unified School District in San Diego County, California. Because of the pandemic, the public has

been barred from attending meetings in person, but that hasn't kept people from turning out. For the August meeting, angry parents were pounding on the windows, and in September, some actually managed to get in.

**Board members quickly** adjourned the meeting, but the protesters didn't immediately leave. "So we are the people," one man said. "So we can go ahead and replace the board. Let's take a vote. Who's willing to become the president?" Another man stepped up, and the protesters immediately elected him president. The man posted a video to Instagram later that evening.

"The board vacated their seats tonight," he said. "So we then brought in a constitutionalist, and we held a quorum and we voted in a new board. You are looking at

the new president of the Poway Unified School District, apparently."

The video continues at a local restaurant where those who have declared themselves the new school board announce that they have voted to remove critical race theory from the curriculum and to stop requiring students to wear masks.

To their disappointment, the school district fails to recognize their authority.

Similar protests have disrupted school board meetings from coast to coast. They've objected to mask requirements and vaccine mandates. They've complained about sex education classes and, of course, they've railed against critical race theory.

**This fight has taken center** stage in the Virginia governor's race where Republican Glenn Youngkin and Democrat Terry McAuliffe found themselves in a dead heat heading into Tuesday's election. Youngkin has been running an ad featuring a conservative activist who says her son suffered nightmares after reading Toni Morrison's book "Beloved" in his AP English class. McAuliffe in his previous term as governor twice vetoed a bill that would have allowed parents to seek substitutes for materials they found objectionable.

McAuliffe defended his position during a debate. "I'm not going to let parents come into schools and actually take books out and make their own decision," he said, before adding, "I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach."

Youngkin seized the moment. "If you had any doubt – any doubt whatsoever – about Terry McAuliffe's principles," Youngkin said at a subsequent campaign appearance, "he laid them bare last week when he said, he said parents do not have a right to be involved in their kid's education."

McAuliffe's campaign has been handing out copies of Morrison's book, calling Youngkin's focus on the is-

sue “racist.” Youngkin, meanwhile, promises he’ll ban the teaching of critical race theory on his first day in office. He fails to mention, of course, that the concept isn’t actually taught in Virginia public schools.

**The emergence** of angry parents across the country is no accident. A number of conservative organizations have been adding fuel to the fire. That NPR report notes that the Manhattan Institute published, “Woke

Schooling: A Toolkit for Concerned Parents,” in June. The guide includes a revelation about critical race theory. “It’s important to note,” it says, “that whether CRT is currently in your school system is mostly irrelevant to the purpose of this document.”

The point is that parents are irate. And that’s no joke. ❖

## We need a sense of urgency on environment

By **LEE HAMILTON**

BLOOMINGTON – “Time is not on our side.” That was the secretary-general of the U.N.’s World Meteorological Organization, Petteri Taalas, speaking early in October about a new report on the globe’s looming water crisis. Climate change, the WMO warns, is producing more flooding, more drought, and other water-related catastrophes. Population growth is creating water scarcity. We’re losing



the water the earth stores, most notably in Antarctica and Greenland but also in areas that have traditionally supplied fresh water.

Though water problems are especially acute in places like North Africa and Central Asia, the U.S. is hardly immune. A two-decades-old drought in the West has been historically severe this year, stoking wildfires, forcing water cut-

backs, and hurting farmers and ranchers from California to the Dakotas. In the East, flooding from Hurricane Ida killed dozens of people, while torrential rains and flash flooding have caused more deaths and untold damage in Tennessee, North Carolina, and, most recently, Alabama.

The U.N. report argues that concerted governmental action is urgently needed. The world is behind on water management efforts, it warns, while early-warning systems and making water polices and planning part of an overall climate-policy approach will be vital.

The problem, of course, is that water isn’t our only challenge. In fact, there’s a long list.

**Policies that continue** to encourage fossil-fuel exploration and extraction, for instance, simply exacerbate the climate change that underlies many of the world’s worst problems. Toxins from heavy metals, plastics, and other pollutants continue to ruin our air, water, and soil, creating immense public health problems in this country and elsewhere. Our oceans increasingly suffer from the longstanding human habit of dumping our waste there. And even when we don’t do it deliberately, our carbon emissions are acidifying ocean waters, killing coral reefs

and other animal and plant life. Entire habitats – not to mention individual species of plants and animals – are becoming extinct, sometimes before we even know they exist.

Meanwhile, when was the last time you heard a serious debate in Congress about environmental policy – of any sort? The U.S. is hardly alone in this, but we can only control our own public policy and hope to influence others’ – and for the most part, environmental issues have taken a back seat in recent decades to other pressing concerns. But as the WMO report makes clear, the earth isn’t inclined to wait for us. Which suggests that environmental policy on Capitol Hill and in the White House needs to be moved to the front burner.

What will it take? Clearly, it requires strong leadership both at home and abroad. This is because changing course is both politically and fiscally intimidating.

**In the western U.S.**, balancing farming/ranching interests, the needs of the vast majority of the population that lives in cities, the rights of traditional Native American users, the requirements of salmon and other fish, and the health of the surrounding environment has been contentious for over a century. And that was without severe drought. We’re at or about to reach a point, though, where it’s impossible to help one constituency without hurting another. That’s a situation no politician likes to confront – especially because Americans have long gotten used to the idea that drinkable water and water for irrigation will always be available.

In fact, pretty much every environmental challenge we face will demand hard choices. The risk of flooding is already reshaping settlement patterns and drawing focused attention from the insurance industry. The public health problems caused by vehicle emissions and heavy industry could be conveniently ignored as long as they mostly affected politically powerless communities, but as those places become more assertive, political leaders are being forced to take notice. And after a year of disasters like this past one, climate change is commanding a new seriousness in places that have been hit hard by its effects – while it remains uncertain whether the powerful industries and entrenched policies that most contribute to its course can be budged.

But Taalas’s words – “Time is not on our side” – strip the problem to its essence. In the halls of power, both here and elsewhere, finding ways to address our many environmental crises needs top priority. ❖

# What GOP's Virginia sweep means for 2022

By **KYLE KONDIK**  
and **J. MILES COLEMAN**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. – There were a lot of electoral questions that the Virginia gubernatorial race was well-positioned to help answer. Could Republicans make up ground in the suburbs with Donald Trump no longer in the White House? Would Republican voters turn out in force with Trump gone? Could Democrats fall even further in heavily white, rural/small town areas? Was the history that suggested holding the White House is a burden for the presidential party in Virginia still operative?

Unfortunately for Democrats, and fortunately for Republicans, the answers to all of these questions were a resounding “yes.”

As the Crystal Ball projected on Monday, Glenn Youngkin (R) won the Virginia gubernatorial race last night, defeating former Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe. Youngkin's win was part of a larger GOP sweep, as fellow Republicans Winsome Sears and Jason Miyares captured the lieutenant governor and attorney general posts, respectively.

It also appears, as of this writing, that Republicans have taken the majority in the state House of Delegates, claiming at least 51 of the chamber's 100 seats. Democrats hold a narrow majority in the state Senate – given the overall tenor of the night, they were lucky that the upper chamber wasn't up this cycle.

Needless to say, this is a horrible result for Democrats, and for the White House. Youngkin's 2-point victory (based on the results as of Wednesday morning) represented an 11-point shift in the GOP's favor from 4 years ago, when now-Gov. Ralph Northam (D) won by almost 9 points. Going back a bit further to 2013, McAuliffe won by 2.5 points that year – last night's result was a near-mirror image of that. Map 1 compares McAuliffe's showing 8 years ago to his result last night.

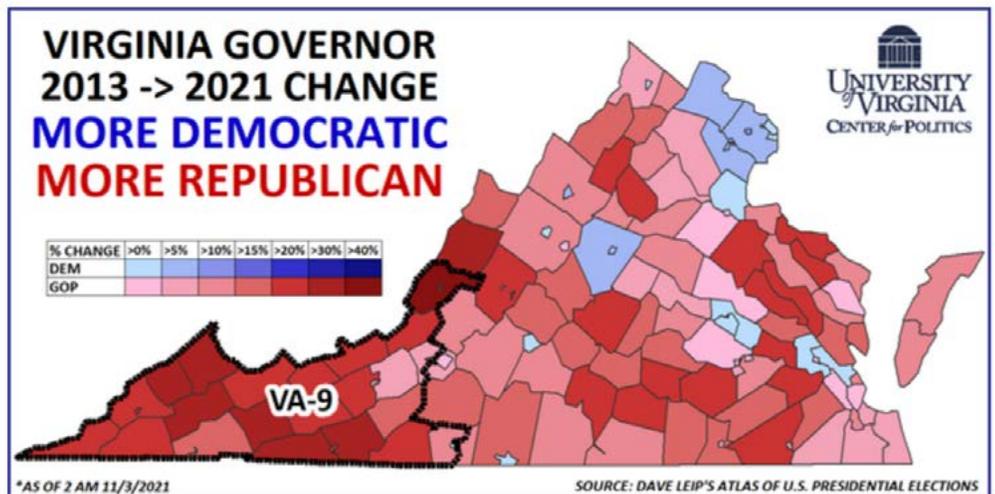
**An engaged GOP base** delivered Republicans even bigger landslides than usual in rural central and western Virginia. In 2013, McAuliffe lost the 9th Congressional District, in the southwestern corner of the state, by about 30 percentage points. Last night, as almost every county in VA-9 saw double-digit redshifts, McAuliffe's deficit there fell to about 50 points. Just north of VA-9, there

was evidence that Youngkin energized Republicans in the Shenandoah Valley, a traditional GOP bastion.

Youngkin's gains were not just limited to whites in Appalachia. In Southside Virginia, some heavily Black counties saw their Democratic lean erode – Sussex County, which is majority-Black by composition, supported McAuliffe by 18 points in 2013 but came close to flipping.

**While McAuliffe did make** gains in many large suburban localities compared to 2013, his margins there were still relatively unimpressive, at least by Trump-era standards. Loudoun County, a large suburban county that the Youngkin campaign targeted, swung 6 percentage points to McAuliffe – however, compared to Northam's 2017 showing, he still lost ground in almost every precinct.

Going into the election, the conventional wisdom seemed to be that lower turnout would benefit Youngkin. In 2014, Republicans nearly upset Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA) in a low turnout midterm. The higher the turnout, the more “presidential” (read pro-Democratic) it seemed the electorate would become. But high turnout did not prove a hindrance to Youngkin: There were at least 3.3 million votes cast, by far the biggest Virginia guber-



natorial turnout ever (higher even than the high-turnout blowout Democratic victory 4 years ago).

More broadly, Youngkin was in the right place at the right time – he was the GOP nominee in a GOP-leaning environment. But he also seemed to outmaneuver McAuliffe on issues such as education and taxes.

While there were many factors that fell into place for Republicans, to us, it is hard to ignore old-fashioned “fundamentals.” Since August, Biden's national standing has weakened. That decline, combined with the usual headwinds the president's party faces in off-year elections, helped fuel Youngkin's 12-point net improvement over Trump's 10-point loss in Virginia last year. As we have noted before, this type of shift is not out of the ordinary for Virginia gubernatorial races. Gov. Phil Murphy's (D-NJ)

surprisingly close race in the lower-profile and still-uncalled New Jersey gubernatorial contest also indicates that the poor Democratic environment was a main driver of the party's poor 2021 Election Night.

With that in mind, let's look ahead:

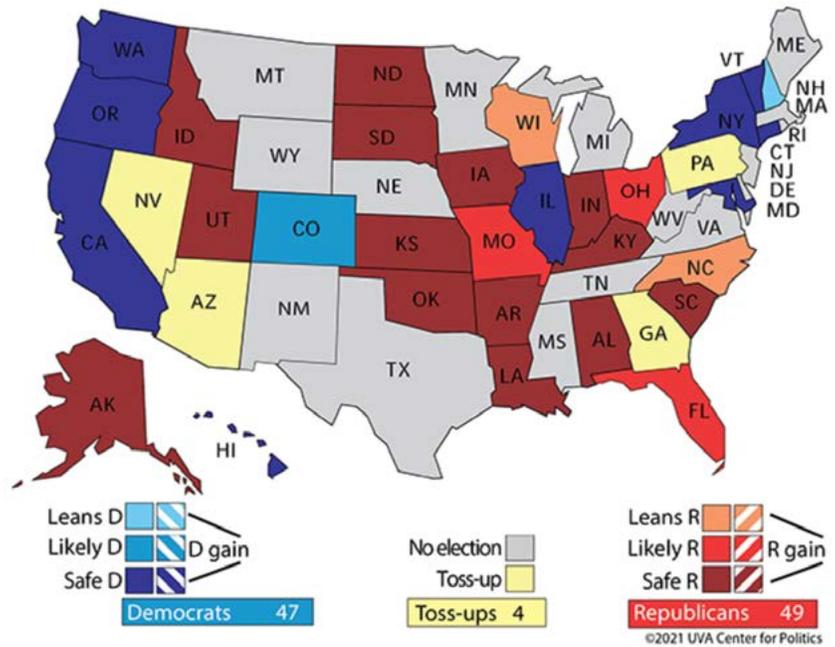
**Our Senate rating changes:** Look, we know the midterm is still a year away. There are plenty of things that might change. Biden could find ways to improve his approval rating. Some of the problems that appear to be hurting Democrats right now – gas prices, inflation, supply-chain problems, DC infighting, COVID-19, and more – could subside over the next year. Other issues may become paramount: McAuliffe struggled to make abortion an issue in Virginia, but the Supreme Court gutting *Roe vs. Wade* next year would make abortion a much bigger deal next year, which could give Democrats a potent electoral issue. Trump may be a more important figure, taking some of the focus off of Biden and reminding some suburban voters why they soured on the GOP.

However, with all those caveats out of the way, it must be said: If Biden's approval rating is in the low-to-mid 40s next year, as it is now, everything we know about political trends and history suggests that the Democrats' tiny majorities in the House and Senate are at major risk of becoming minorities.

So it's a good time to reevaluate our assessment of the Senate. Given the usual presidential party midterm drag, and the poor environment, our ratings are just too bullish on Democrats. So we are downgrading Sens. Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) from Leans Democratic to Toss-up. While we have not been particularly impressed with Republican candidate recruiting in these races – former NFL star and Trump favorite Herschel Walker seems like a particularly risky choice in Georgia, assuming he wins the nomination -- these moves are almost entirely about the environment. Moreover, even if Republicans don't end up running strong candidates in these races, all three states are markedly less blue than Virginia.

"Toss-up" doesn't mean we think these Democratic senators will necessarily lose – it just means we don't think the environment suggests they do not deserve to be considered even modest favorites anymore. We will dig into these races in more detail in future issues of the Crystal Ball, but we thought now was a good time to make these changes, given what Tuesday night's results suggested about the broader political mood. Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) retains a Leans Democratic designation in New

Map 1: Crystal Ball Senate ratings



Hampshire, but we will move her race to Toss-up when and if Gov. Chris Sununu (R-NH) launches his long-rumored challenge against her.

We are also moving Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) from Safe Democratic to Likely Democratic. He could potentially be vulnerable if 2022 turns into a GOP mega-wave.

**This leaves a Senate with 49 races** either not on the ballot or at least leaning to the Republicans, 47 not on the ballot or at least leaning to the Democrats, and 4

Senator	Old Rating	New Rating
Mark Kelly (D-AZ)	Leans Democratic	Toss-up
Michael Bennet (D-CO)	Safe Democratic	Likely Democratic
Raphael Warnock (D-GA)	Leans Democratic	Toss-up
C. Cortez Masto (D-NV)	Leans Democratic	Toss-up

Toss-ups: Democratic-held Arizona, Georgia, and Nevada, and Republican-held Pennsylvania. Splitting the Toss-ups would give the GOP a 51-49 edge. This reflects a close race for the Senate, but one that Republicans are better-positioned to win, particularly if the environment remains as poor for Democrats as it clearly is right now. ❖

**Charlie Sykes, Politico:** The Republican Party — populated with cranks, crooks, clowns, bigots and deranged conspiracy theorists — has spent five years alienating women, minorities and young voters. The party — and its entire leadership from the grassroots to Congress — remains in thrall to a disgraced, defeated, one-term president, who is reduced to issuing increasingly crazed screeds from his exile in Mar-a-Lago. Every day we learn more about Republican complicity in the events of Jan. 6 and their attempts to whitewash an attempted coup. The GOP is the party of Marjorie Taylor Greene, Lauren Boebert, Matt Gaetz and Louie Gohmert. Sane Republicans are heading for the exits, even as assaults on democratic norms have become a litmus test of loyalty. So, now, Democrats need to ask themselves this rather urgent question: Why can't we beat these guys? Tuesday night, Democrats lost the governorship of Virginia — a state Joe Biden won by 10 points — to a Donald Trump-endorsed candidate, who ran up massive margins in rural parts of the state and made inroads into the once reliably blue suburbs. There are obvious caveats and rationalizations available: Virginia has a long history of voting against the party in the White House in off-year elections; and Democrats did, in fact, beat Republicans in 2018 and 2020. They control both houses of Congress and the presidency. But even with Joe Biden's slumping poll numbers, Virginia should have been a firewall. As political guru Reuben Rodriguez (who nailed the 2020 results) noted, Virginia is a "Dem dream." It has the highest concentration of tuned-in highly educated white people in the country in northern Virginia. It has large African American centers in Richmond and "very diverse suburbs that are ground zero for Trump disgust." Why are Democrats facing the possibility of a Republican wave in 2022, and — even more ominous — the restoration of the Trump presidency in 2024? Why can't they beat these guys, even in a state as blue as Virginia? ❖



myth that vaping is safe. More correctly, e-cigarettes have the potential of being less toxic than combusted tobacco. They contain fewer numbers and amounts of carcinogens, toxins, and particulates compared to tobacco smoke since combustion liberates the highest levels of these compounds. Unfortunately, too many adolescent users still believe e-cigarettes are completely safe. Acute adverse cardiopulmonary effects are well documented. However, since there are no long-term studies on e-cigarettes yet, the risk of long-term adverse health effects including lung cancer is completely unknown. Although e-cigarettes have failed to be an effective tobacco cessation aid, there's reasonable potential of reducing harm in recalcitrant tobacco smokers who completely substitute vaping for regular cigarettes. However, switching to e-cigarettes commonly results in dual use with tobacco smoking. ❖

**David Frum, The Atlantic:** In Donald J. Trump's first term, the country was protected to some degree by his ignorance and ineptitude. He kept trying to do bad things, but it took him a while to figure out how the controls operated, where the kill-switches were located. By the time of his attempt to extort the Ukrainian president, in 2019, Trump had achieved a higher degree of mastery. But by then it was too late. Then the pandemic struck, and Trump bumped into a new wall of failure. In a second Trump presidency, however, the burglars will arrive already knowing how to bypass the alarms and disable the locks. He'll understand that it's not enough to install an ally as attorney general — he must control the secondary and tertiary ranks of the Justice Department too. He won't allow himself to be talked into another chief of staff with an independent sense of duty, such as John Kelly, who averted much harm from the middle of 2017 to the beginning of 2019. It'll be Mark Meadows types from day one to day last. And he'll bring with them a new generation of Republican officeholders whose top priority will be rearranging their states' election laws so that Republicans do not lose power even if they lose the vote. ❖

**Dr. Richard Feldman, Terre Haute Tribune:** Electronic-cigarette use is at epidemic proportions. Most concerning is the exponential increase among youth. Although there has been some recent decline in e-cigarette use among high school students, use increased by 135 percent between 2017 and 2019. Currently, nearly 20 percent of high school students partake in "vaping" with these electronic nicotine-delivery devices. Youth e-cigarette use is actually now higher than tobacco use. In 2019, 4.5 percent of adults used e-cigarettes regularly, and 37 percent of adult e-cigarette users also smoked traditional cigarettes. Regrettably, Indiana has one of the highest vaping rates in the nation. E-cigarette-devices commonly contain tobacco-derived nicotine with other ingredients in a liquid. With inhalation, the heated liquid "vaporizes" into a white aerosol resembling smoke. Since there is no combustion, there is no actual smoke. It's a

**Nate Feltman, IBJ:** The First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech. The amendment states in relevant part that "Congress shall make no law ... abridging freedom of speech." Of course, there are court-recognized limits to free speech, including defamation, incitement to imminent lawless action and solicitations to commit crimes. Today, on many college campuses, freedom of speech is under attack. Rather than invite vigorous debate on how we solve some of society's most challenging problems, many school administrators have been quick to bow to faculty and student voices that wish to silence opinions that do not conform to their own. While that might ease tensions in the short run, the underlying causes of inequality and racism are left unaddressed. The free exchange of ideas is vital to an open and free society. ❖

## Justice David stepping down

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana Supreme Court Justice Steven H. David, the longest-serving justice on the Hoosier high court, has announced that he will step down from the bench in fall 2022.

The Supreme Court announced David's retirement Wednesday

(IBJ). "Service to others has been my greatest honor," David said in a written statement. "I am humbled to have served. My journey has been nothing less than a dream come true." Gov. Eric J. Holcomb said, "Justice David's commitment to service combined with his passion for the rule of law have made an extraordinary impact not just on Hoosiers but our nation as a whole. Serving with distinction as a military judge, trial court judge and justice of the Indiana Supreme Court, his contributions go far beyond the bench."



## More charges in fentanyl death

EVANSVILLE (AP) — A mother, two grandparents and three other people have been charged following the death of a 3-year-old southwestern Indiana girl who ingested fentanyl. Arcinial Watt, Jazmynn Brown and Allison Smithler appeared Tuesday in court on murder, drug dealing and neglect of a child resulting in death charges, the Evansville Courier & Press reported. The girl's 20-year-old mother, Makaylee Opperman, and the girl's grandparents, Brandon and Amber Opperman, also were charged with neglect of a dependent resulting in death. Emergency responders found Kamari Opperman dead Oct. 27 in an Evansville home where police discovered thousands of fentanyl pills. Two other children, ages 2 and 4, were hospitalized with apparent opioid overdoses, authorities said.

## Braun leads anti-vax mandate effort

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Mike Braun, R-Ind., is leading what almost certainly will be a futile effort to halt Democratic President Joe Biden's plan requiring employees at large American businesses be protected against COVID-19 in the workplace (Carden, [NWI Times](#)). The first-term senator declared Wednesday he will seek to apply the Congressional Review Act to the forthcoming Occupational Safety and Health Administration standard directing all companies with at least 100 employees to ensure their workers either are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, or subject to weekly testing for the coronavirus. The rarely invoked procedure permits Congress to, in effect, rescind a federal regulation by adopting a "resolution of disapproval" by a majority vote in both the Senate and the House, which also must be signed by the president to cancel the rule. That's unlikely to happen because Democrats control both chambers of Congress. "Since the announcement of President Biden's vaccine and testing mandate in September, I have led the charge to strike down this vast overstep of authority by the federal government," Braun said. "Today, we are one step closer to protecting the liberties of millions of Americans in the private sector workforce under the Congressional Review Act."

## Teachers call in sick closing schools

ANDERSON — Anderson Community Schools were shut down Wednesday as 15 to 20% of the district's 500 teachers called out ([WRTV](#)). The school district was aware of call-outs on Tuesday but said they thought they had enough staff to safely accommodate students. A spokesperson with Anderson Community Schools says they had an influx of teachers call off Wednesday morning and didn't feel confident it would have enough

substitute teachers across the district to cover so it had to shut them all down.

## Commissioner arrested for theft

SPENCER — Owen County commissioner Dale Dubois was arrested and charged with official misconduct and theft for allegedly using county funds have a road repaired for his personal benefit ([Indiana Public Media](#)). A warrant was issued Tuesday for the 82-year-old Dubois, who turned himself in to the Owen County Jail. According to a press release, the Indiana State Police opened an investigation on Aug. 9 after requests from authorities about possible misconduct and conflict of interest by Dubois.

## Carson targets domestic terrorism

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers are focusing on domestic terrorism. "Racially motivated violent extremists present the most lethal domestic threat and are most likely to conduct mass casualty attacks," said Rep. Andre Carson (D-IN) ([WIBC](#)). "Domestic terrorism tears at the fabric of this country in ways that extend beyond the lives lost." Carson opened a House hearing and argued domestic terrorism "tears at the fabric" of the U.S.

## Commissioner won't run again

SOUTH BEND ([WNDU](#)) - He spent over a decade in local politics, but now St. Joseph County Commissioner Andy Kostielney said he is stepping away. He announced he will not be running for re-election in 2022. "The toughest decision I've ever made, but it's in my best interest health wise...I've been agonizing over this for a few months, but this really started two years ago when I was diagnosed with prostate cancer; very aggressive, very nasty and by the Grace of God I have been able to get through."