

It's Time for the GOP To Shake Off Last Week's Election Losses and Tweak Its Playbook

By Conrad Black

President Trump's enemies, beleaguered and gasping after an entire year of endless defeats at his hands and predictions of disaster that did not occur, are now jumping around like Elon Musk at a 2024 Trump election rally. From the New Republic through the New York Times to MSNBC, they resemble nothing so much as a collegiate sports team high-fiving, throwing their equipment in the air, and doing somersaults after a winning score.



Their famine for even a crumb of the taste of victory is understandable, but unless the president has lost his well-demonstrated capacity for political survival, their triumphalist ululations are

premature. Two blue states and ultra-blue New York City voted blue. In Virginia, the Republican candidate, Winsome Earle-Spears, was an admirable and capable officeholder but not a skillful campaigner.

With a large number of Virginia Democrats employed by the federal government in the midst of a government shutdown, the

lopsided Democratic victory hardly constitutes a broad rejection of the administration. The election of an attorney general who once advocated in an email the death of his opponent and his opponent's children, is not a flattering reflection on the judgment of Virginia voters. Neither is anything else they've done, apart from the election of Governor Glen Youngkin and Lieutenant Governor Earle- Spears, since the piping days of the original Senator John Warner, (the one who was once married to Elizabeth Taylor).

More worrisome from the Republican standpoint was New Jersey and the much larger-than-expected victory of the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Mikey Sherrill, over the Republican Jack Ciaterelli, who came 10 points closer to outgoing Governor Phil Murphy four years ago. Ms. Sherrill, a graduate of the United States Naval Academy and former Navy pilot, former assistant United States attorney, and a graduate of the London School of Economics and the American University in Cairo with a diploma in Arabic, is an unusually impressive candidate.

Ms. Sherrill is much more likely to be the authentic face of the future of the Democrats than the completely infeasible mountebank, New York's mayor-elect, Zohran Mamdani, who got 50.3 percent of the vote in the 65-percent Democratic City of New York, running against a disgraced and deposed Democratic former governor.

It is a cliché to point out that a large number of New York City Jews are so thoroughly secularized they prefer to think of themselves as having no religion than to bear the sometimes onerous burden of being bound hand-and-foot to every initiative of the State of Israel. They perversely demonstrate this by voting for a candidate who opposes the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state while running for an American municipal office that gives him no leverage whatsoever on Middle Eastern issues.

Those who impute to the mayor-elect a cunning political careerist strategy that could lead him on a quick march to the White House are just punch-drunk anti-Trumpers. Mr. Mamdani will disappoint his followers and confirm the animosity of the half of New Yorkers who voted for candidates almost as unacceptable, but for different reasons, as Mr. Mamdani.

With that said, the president should recognize that it is time to change his tune and some of his methods. The country does not want to hear any more denunciations of President Biden – not because it disagrees with them, but because that is why they voted for Mr. Trump, and they don't need to be reminded of it.

The country does not approve of ICE simply going through random workplaces and expelling from the country anyone who entered illegally, even if many years ago and after thoroughly assimilating and being gainfully employed and raising a family in the United States. The appearance is increasingly of rounding up those who are the easiest to find as they have the least to conceal, while dangerous criminals and chronic welfare cases evade the ICE dragnet.

The administration has to recalibrate this policy to assure that it regains the support of the large section of the Hispanic community that voted for it last year and the majority of Americans who oppose illegal immigration but are prepared to be generous to those who have been exemplary contributors to American life for many years. The common law concept of acquired rights has not died and must not be ignored.

It is time to make the point that approximately \$350 billion has been deducted by tariff income from the federal budget and national trade deficits at no cost to the taxpayers and only very marginal cost to American consumers, but also that this program is being wrapped up with comprehensive agreements with other major trading countries.

Communist China and Canada are the principal outstanding states. The country will support a strong line with China that has picked America's pocket, but rightly disapproves of the bullying of Canada, a fair trading country and absolutely reliable ally. (The author is a Canadian-U.K. dual citizen.)

The president should consider returning to the once effective practice of directly addressing the country in nonpartisan policy speeches. This started with President Roosevelt's famous fireside chats and was continued successfully through such famous events as President Eisenhower's statement on sending an army unit to carry out the Supreme Court's desegregation order in Little Rock, Arkansas; President Johnson's statements on civil rights; and President Nixon's invocation of the "silent majority" in support of his plan to de-escalate American involvement in the Vietnam War. (His approval rating gained 20 points as a result of that speech.)

Mr. Trump had an unsuccessful test of this method in his first term because he delivered his message live and while suffering from a head cold. If he pre-taped non-partisan policy explanations, he would attract wider support for his policies and de-escalate to some extent the extreme partisanship that now taints public discourse.

The administration should shake off last week's off-year elections and tweak its playbook. This has been a very successful presidential term so far and should not be compromised by tactical mistakes.

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