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The Trumpist Agenda Going Forward

By Matt A. Mayer

While Donald Trump appears to have lost the 2020 presidential election, Trump's agenda of populism focused on the working class and putting America first won, well, bigly. Contrary to the Democrats' claim that Joe Biden's razor-thin win gave them a mandate, the only mandate America's voters gave this year is that they want more Trumpism. To wit, the swing of roughly the same number of voters in a handful of states by which Trump won in 2016 is the gap of Biden's win. Going forward, Republicans must focus on maintaining that sentiment and fight off attempts by NeverTrumpers and Establishment Republicans to throw Trumpism out with Trump.

Here are the key policies Republicans should fight for over the next four years:

Taxes

The Trump tax reforms certainly jump-started the economy by spurring businesses to invest and grow. Any attempts to repeal that tax reform should be fought. The focus on additional tax reform going forward should be on working-class voters and rewarding businesses who hire Americans and bring their operations back home. One way to do that would be to give tax credits for new domestic hires and all expenses related to reshoring. Republicans also need to focus future tax reforms on medium and small businesses who create most of the new jobs and worry less about big corporations who routinely fund Democrats. Republicans also should fight any effort to bail out blue states and reinstitute the deduction for state and local taxes.

Regulations

One of the under-appreciated victories of the Trump administration was its deregulatory efforts. Whether it was repealing regulations outright or significantly reducing the number and impact of new regulations, getting the Obama administration's heavy regulatory burden off the backs of businesses and farmers was critical to the pre-pandemic economic recovery. Should Biden become president, his efforts will come via executive orders, which should be legally contested as aggressively as possible. Any and all efforts to slow the Biden administration re-regulation of the economy should be made.

Trade

Even Biden acknowledged that the US-Canada-Mexico Agreement was better than Nafta. Trump's tough approach on China was producing results both here and globally. Republicans must understand that Democrats will do everything they can to win back the working-class voters they lost to Trump when he took the mantle of fair trade from them.

Republicans should resist the urge to return to the doctrinaire trade policies that resulted in the hollowing out of the Rust Belt. Of course, no tariffs are better than tariffs, but Republicans need to realize that tariffs in the short term may be what are needed to get the other side to the table to achieve a tariff-free environment. Trump's instincts were right and Republicans shouldn't be too quick to ditch his approach.

Energy and the environment

There is no greater contrast between Republicans and Democrats than on the issue of fracking and energy independence. Many Democrats believe the Green New Deal is far more important than the economic vitality that keeps tens of millions of Americans employed and paying less for their energy costs. Republicans, led by governors, should fight all efforts to kill fracking via regulation or otherwise and double down on their commitment to natural gas as the alternative to coal. Moreover, America's energy independence truly is a national security issue as it keeps our entanglements in the Middle East to a minimum and undercuts Vladimir Putin's petrostate ambitions. Republicans also should continue to promote the fact that America's land, water and air have never been cleaner and continue to push for environmental improvements where the known benefits outweigh the costs. The Paris Climate Agreement will never pass as a treaty so Biden's reentry into it is little more than global virtue signaling, as China and India continue spewing pollution to their hearts' content.

Labor

The Democrats have a powerful weapon to use to lure back blue-collar union workers who voted for Trump twice. With their proposed legislation to outlaw right-to-work nationally, Democrats can force Republicans to oppose a core issue for unions and their members. By passing it in the House and forcing a Republican-controlled Senate to kill it, Big Labor will reassert its claim that the Democratic party is the true defender of their interests. Given that the 27 states that are right-to-work states have [dominated private sector job growth](#) for 30 years by [nearly 2.5 times](#), Republicans can't fold on this issue. Nonetheless, Republicans should call a truce on future efforts and focus on what Trumpism did for their wages and jobs — better trade deals, fought China and Europe, fewer cheap labor illegal immigrants and fracking, fracking, fracking.

Immigration

Despite being attacked mercilessly for being a xenophobe, Trump's emphasis on building the border wall, enforcing immigration laws, rounding up and deporting criminals and

limiting illegal immigration proved so popular he increased his share of Hispanic votes, including in two heavily-Hispanic counties in Texas on the border. As anyone with a basic understanding of how supply and demand work, it is first generation legal Hispanic Americans whose pay and jobs get undercut by cheap illegal labor. By constricting the latter, the former thrives. Republicans should never forget the lesson Trump taught them on how to tackle the immigration issue and increase Hispanic support.

Race

Again, despite being labeled a racist and misquoted a million times by the Democrats and their media mouthpieces, Trump increased his share of blacks and other minorities. In fact, Trump won a greater share of minorities than any Republican since 1960. If the 2020 election taught us anything it is that a growing number of minority voters reject identity politics and race-pandering. Republicans should continue their outreach efforts to minority communities and push legislation like Sen. Tim Scott's police reform bill. Keep in mind, before Trump passed criminal justice reform, it was center-right state-based think tanks led by the Texas Public Policy Foundation that passed [state criminal justice reform](#) across America over the last decade so, [as I wrote before](#), Republicans need to reassert their strong history and continued interest in civil rights.

The pandemic

Though it is hard to determine how much the Trump administration's response to the pandemic as portrayed falsely by the media hurt Trump's reelection, more needs to be done to tell the true story of what happened over the last 10 months. The reality is that Europe today is doing far worse than America, with more daily infections and total deaths. The apparently purposefully delayed news on the Pfizer vaccine is a critical piece of reframing the narrative, but the fuller story of what Mike Pence and his team did needs to be told.

Foreign policy and the Middle East

A Biden administration will seek to put the Davos crowd back in control of America's foreign policy and bring Iran back to the Iran Nuclear Agreement, which will undermine the vital strides made over the last few years. Trump's efforts strengthened Nato, began disentangling Europe from Chinese control and increased the pressure on Russia over the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Trump's peace deals in the Middle East also strengthened Israel's and Sunni positions vis-à-vis Iran and its terrorist proxies. Biden likes being feted by European leaders eager to return to America shouldering the burden of their defense so they can divert funds to their general social welfare programs. He will prioritize that over protecting American interests, so keeping a strong contrast by pushing America first policies will continue to pay dividends.

Federal courts

Let Mitch McConnell do whatever he thinks is best. He has earned that right. Period.

Decentralizing Washington

In 2020, Biden won 93 percent of the votes in Washington DC, which was the same percentage Hillary Clinton won in 2016. Based on a quick count, Biden won the Maryland and Virginia

counties surrounding DC with 75 percent of the vote this year. You do not have to believe in the existence of the 'Deep State' to know that no Republican president will ever successfully govern with an administration filled with civil servants who oppose him or her electorally in such a lopsided way. Spare me the speech about civil servants putting their personal beliefs aside. There is a reason Republican presidents find it so hard to implement their agendas. When I worked for George W. Bush, I personally experienced how civil servants undermine Republican administrations.

Republicans need to advocate for the decentralization of the federal government. Specifically, other than the Pentagon, Republicans should develop and promote a plan to move departments and agencies from DC to locations across America over a 10-year period of time. There simply is no reason all of the federal largesse should reside in one place and, frankly, from a national security perspective it makes sense to spread things out so that an attack can't decapitate all of the federal government in one hit. Perhaps putting federal departments in places like Kansas, Texas and Ohio will lessen the partisanship of federal workers.

As Ronald Reagan urged, Republicans should paint in bold colors not pale pastels. With the progressive takeover of the Democratic party and the election results clearly showing that America remains a center-right country, keeping the policy contrast clear between the parties is key to taking over the House in 2022 and the presidency in 2024. Trump showed that a bold agenda inspires Americans and expands the Republican tent. If Republicans want to win, they should heed that lesson.

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