

True test comes the day after

A wise person once said that the true measure of character is not what happens when you win, but what you do when you lose.

For Virginia Democrats, the coming days and weeks will reveal their true mettle after Tuesday night's stunning defeat of former Gov. Terry R. McAuliffe, Delegate Hala S. Ayala and Attorney General Mark R. Herring in the contest for the state's top three offices and in races for a continued majority in the House of Delegates.

The watershed gains of 2017 and 2019 that led to Democratic control of the governorship and the statehouse for the first time in more than 20 years are now water under the bridge. Virginians woke up Nov. 3 to find that Republican Glenn A. Youngkin, Winsome E. Sears and Delegate Jason S. Miyares will be the next governor, lieutenant governor and attorney general, respectively, and that Republicans will hold a majority in the 100-member House of Delegates.

Make no mistake: When Mr. Youngkin, a Trump acolyte, took the stage shortly after 1 a.m. Wednesday to declare victory and said, "We will change the trajectory of this Commonwealth and we will start that transformation on Day 1," he was not kidding.

We may not recognize Virginia in the next few years with a Republican governor who has pledged to start shifting public dollars to charter schools; eliminate any COVID-19 vaccination and mask mandates; block any teaching of America's true racist history from the classroom, along with books by authors who make white children and their parents uncomfortable; protect police officers from prosecution; and dismantle abortion rights.

Despite being a political neophyte, Mr. Youngkin had the skill to keep poisonous former President Trump physically out of Virginia, even as he capitalized on Mr. Trump's many verbal endorsements and used racially tinged rhetoric to energize his base.

The big questions now: What will Mr. Trump expect in return for his support? And what will Gov.-elect Youngkin be prepared to deliver? We shudder to think how that will play out.

Certainly, this sudden political shift in Virginia has Democrats shaken and fearful. More than 1.3 million people who voted for Mr. McAuliffe are uncertain now about the future. The pundits, party echelon and commentators reinforce that apprehension by looking to tag who and what are responsible for such a miserable loss.

We believe, however, that this is neither the time for blame nor tears. Rather, what is needed now is a clear-eyed and honest evaluation of how Democrats lost this election and a game plan for how to proceed. Whether it is litigation to protect voting rights, women's rights and education from the coming GOP assaults, or isolation by the slim majority of Democrats who will still hold the power in the state Senate to block offensive pieces of legislation, we have got to be ready.

This is a time to be strategic, to use the best minds and the best methods to prepare for what is coming and to take action defensively and offensively to keep Virginia moving—even slowly—in an inclusive, progressive and positive direction.

This is where the real work begins, and the true people of character and leadership will rise to the top.

No dice

We are disappointed that Richmond voters did not approve the referendum for a casino within the city.

We believe Urban One and its leaders, Alfred C. Liggins III and Cathy Hughes, offered a solid plan and exciting vision with their proposed ONE Casino + Resort for Richmond's South Side.

Unfortunately, a majority of Richmond voters were not on board with the vision. And the effort to bring the privately funded development and jobs, along with financial benefit, to the city has been sidelined for now.

We hope Mr. Liggins and Mrs. Hughes will not give up on Richmond. We believe a casino may be in the cards in the future. And although the campaign was an expensive one, we hope Urban One will regroup and renew their efforts for a casino project — and get the green light from voters in the months ahead.

Brownie bites on South Side



Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

Déjà vu for 2022?

It was great to see former President Obama in Richmond campaigning with former governor and Democratic gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe on Oct. 23. He reminded me of a college pep rally cheerleader in some ways, encouraging people to get out and vote for Mr. McAuliffe and do it now since Virginia has early voting.



Julianne Malveaux

The cheerleader description is not meant to be disparaging. Except for the gray hair he joked about, President Obama appeared youthful and energized as he moved around the stage, voice booming. He also seemed wise as he talked about what is at stake in Virginia, nothing less than our democracy.

Virginia went blue in 2020, with President Biden carrying the state by 10 points. Since then, though, President Biden's approval ratings have plummeted. If Democrats lose governor's races in Virginia and New Jersey on Nov. 2, that may bode ill for 2022 congressional elections.

Democrats already hold a very narrow margin in the House of Representatives. Historical patterns suggest that the president's

party is likely to lose seats in midterm elections. If Democrats lose more than four seats, they lose control of the House. The 2022 electoral outcomes hinge on turnout, which is why redistricting is a matter of extreme concern and why the voter suppression measures Republicans are introducing in state after state may influence electoral outcomes. Voter turnout will

make the difference between whether Democrats can maintain majorities in the House and Senate, but Democratic enthusiasm, over the top in 2020, may be muted in 2022.

President Biden made big promises during the 2020 campaign. Among other things, he told Black voters that he had our backs. What can activists tell Black voters in 2022? Will people who yearn for economic security, better jobs and voting rights be satisfied if all President Biden and his team can say is "We tried"?

Republican intransigence and the rigidity of Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona have resulted in alterations to President Biden's ambitious Build Back Better legislation. The free community college proposal already has been withdrawn. Will voters

be left with enough to motivate them to vote in 2022?

President Obama came into office in 2009 with lots of legislative ideas. He pushed the Affordable Care Act hard and it passed, expanding health care opportunities for tens of millions of our citizens. But he advocated for that legislation during a recession when many people were more eager for jobs than for health care. The two go together, but jobs are a priority in the middle of a recession. The result? Flawed Republican messaging, combined with general electoral malaise, turned a Democratic Congress into a Republican one.

President Obama spent the next two years fighting folks who promised to make him a one-term president. He got much less done than he might have, and Republicans set the stage by their opposition for the victory of the 45th president.

That former president would love to make a comeback, and although Republicans know better, many are rallying around him. Will the 2022 elections set the stage for a recidivist comeback?

Our nation seems hopelessly divided. Republicans are increasingly extremists and Democrats are both apathetic and estranged. Progressive Democrats have allowed the great to get in the way of the good, insisting on

things that have no possibility of passing in the Senate, tanking legislation before it is even introduced.

Progressives aren't entirely wrong to insist on a higher minimum wage, expanded health care, child tax credits and economic relief. Still, politics is the art of compromise. How do we compromise on our fundamental rights, like our voting rights? Bravo to President Biden for backing off his embrace of the filibuster, but have his comments—and not actions—been too little, too late?

If the electorate is not motivated by these first months of the Biden administration, will they be inclined to vote in 2022? If they aren't, we are dealing with 2010 déjà vu. And if that déjà vu returns the former grafter and morally bankrupt president to office, the entire nation will suffer.

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GOP blocking this generation's Voting Rights Act

Across the country, Republican state legislators have been busy imposing new voting restrictions and devising corrupt redistricting schemes to give their party more power than they could win under a fair system. Republicans in the U.S. Senate protected that wrongdoing again in October by using filibuster rules to stop federal voting rights legislation from coming up for debate.



Ben Jealous

This is political obstruction of justice, and President Biden and Senate Democrats must not allow it to stand.

One day before Senate Republicans made it clear that they have no interest in protecting the right to vote or a healthy democracy, 25 religious and civil rights leaders and voting rights activists were arrested in front of the White House. Hundreds more joined us in solidarity as we marched, sang, prayed and demanded stronger leadership from President Biden.

We know that President Biden is a supporter of voting rights. His stirring speech at the National Constitution Center called voting rights the test of our time and brought moral clarity to our cause.

Now we need presidential action that matches the urgency of President Biden's words and the urgency of our time.

In the eight years since the U.S. Supreme Court gutted the federal Voting Rights Act, doz-

ens of states have erected new barriers that target voters who are Black, brown, female and young. A flurry of new laws was introduced this year after record voter turnout contributed to the defeat of President Trump and the loss of Republican control in the Senate.

The new wave of voter suppression is a direct response to

last year's expansive voter participation. These laws do more than undermine democracy. They defile it. Rather than celebrating efforts to broaden citizen participation, they seek to squelch it. Rather than expand the franchise, they seek to narrow it.

The Freedom to Vote Act would reverse many of the new anti-voter laws. It would expand access to voting by mail and early voting, make voter registration automatic and make Election Day a federal holiday. Together, these measures will increase access to voting for working people, Black and brown voters, women and people with disabilities. The bill also will end abusive partisan redistricting and help stop billionaires from buying our elections.

All 50 Senate Democrats support the Freedom to Vote Act, as does Vice President Kamala Harris, our nation's first woman vice president, who is prepared to cast the 51st vote. But Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell has demanded that his colleagues keep that vote from happening. They are preventing

the will of the people from being realized.

With voter suppression and partisan redistricting threatening next year's elections, we don't have time to wait. The Freedom to Vote Act must become law now.

President Biden must use all his personal influence and the power of his office to protect voting rights. He must publicly call on Senate Democrats not to let Republicans resort to the tactics of Jim Crow and succeed in blocking voting rights protections for our generation.

Those of us who have gathered at the White House are keenly aware of the generations of activists who put their bodies on the line to secure and expand the right to vote, including suffragists who faced beatings for having the audacity to demand the right to vote for women, and activists who risked and sometimes gave their lives to protect Black Americans' right to vote. And we know the essential role that presidential leadership has played in overcoming resistance to voting rights.

This is a time for the "good trouble" that the great John Lewis called for at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. We will be back at the White House throughout the fall, in greater numbers, to demand that President Biden do what it takes to get voting rights legislation onto his desk and signed into law this year.

The writer, a former national president and chief executive officer of the NAACP, serves as president of People for the American Way.

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