**Lucky Joe Biden**

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Given the Biden administration’s blunders and stumbles, last week’s column wondered if President Joe Biden’s approval ratings actually should be much lower. But last Tuesday’s election in which Democrats got mugged may mark a turning point and redound to the president’s fortune-an unintended stroke of luck. Why?

The Democratic party was split by the uncivil war between Progressives and Moderates with the Black Caucus in between. Because a majority of Americans are centre or centre-right, Progressive policies such as “defunding police,” expanding social spending, removing Abraham Lincoln’s name from schools and imposing “critical race theory” (that no one seems able to define sensibly) on educational curricula ultimately generated a strong backlash. Americans are sensible. Some or many of these so-called “woke” ideas are not.

On Tuesday the voters reacted. That trouncing forced Democrats to consider that on the current course, 2022 and 2024 would be electoral routs. The worst fear was that Donald Trump could be re-elected with large majorities in both Houses of Congress, a nightmarish prospect keeping many Democrats (and former Republicans) awake at night.

The result: political survival trumped Progressive ideology-at least for the moment. With sufficient Republican votes to compensate for six Democrats voting against the Infrastructure Bill, it finally passed the House and was signed by the president. After winning this vote, Biden’s popularity will immediately rise. The critical question is if the spectre of an electoral wipeout will continue to coalesce Democrats around a more centrist message repressing the more extreme leftist aspirations. Or will this be a temporary and isolated victory?

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This vote also gives greater credibility to Senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema who represent centrist views. While some Democrats viewed both as obstacles to the President’s agenda, Biden was lucky to have their persistence in restraining the far left. Now, what can Biden do to build on this success and extend his lucky streak?

Here are three ideas. First, Biden must redouble the effort to end the pandemic. That means pushing vaccinations through mandates where applicable and an even more robust PR campaign so that at least 75% of Americans get their shots. The arrival of a pill, when approved by the FDA, may be a further piece of luck. Pills are more tolerable than jabs and can be taken at home. People are less resistant to them.

Further, Biden must remind Americans that even if Covid is substantially eliminated here, that is not true for much of the world. New variants can arise. Hence, greater efforts must go to the global challenge of overcoming Covid beyond America’s borders so it does not return here.

Second, the Infrastructure law must be implemented effectively and efficiently. So far, the plans and mechanisms to assure a speedy and smooth implementation do not seem to be in place yet. While appointing an infrastructure Czar may not be appropriate, the White House cannot rely on the states or good fortune to make this happen. Oversight is vital.

Third, the White House must move towards the centre, focusing on the president’s agenda that directly addresses what concerns Americans most and not those of narrow interest groups or the more extreme left-wing. The State of the Union early next year is the ideal opportunity to present this revised agenda.

At the same time, the Biden administration must reverse the increasingly adversarial relations with China and Russia. Regarding China, cooling the rhetoric about a possible Chinese takeover of Taiwan would help. One way is to compare the best estimates of the size of a military force likely required for seizing Taiwan with China’s current capacity. That would reveal a large gap.

Biden should also remove some of the tariffs with China not to placate Beijing but for the more important reason that US citizens are unnecessarily bearing the burden of the higher costs of this trade war without any benefit. Republicans will charge that this as accommodation, an allegation that will be rebutted by the net positive impact on American wallets by ending this tariff war.

With Russia, it appears cyber attacks are diminishing. Whether this is because of action by Vladimir Putin or US intelligence agencies is unclear. However, restoring a broader military to military dialogue is the first step. And the president would be wise to pare back on criticism over the non-show of Putin and Xi Jingping at the Glasgow COP-26 conference and seek how both countries can be encouraged to take more aggressive stands to halt climate change.

Luck is on Biden’s side. But for how long?

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