**Political circus**

S Qaisar Shareef

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In early November a handful of states, among them Virginia and New Jersey, conducted elections for governor and other key positions. Both these states had been reliably in the hands of the Democratic Party for the past several election cycles.

However, in these elections the governorship of Virginia switched to the Republican Party in a surprising result, and in New Jersey the incumbent Democratic governor barely squeaked through. These results have caused much soul searching within the Democratic Party. After all, it was less than a year ago that Joe Biden won in these states with wide margins.

These results reflect a high level of frustration among the electorate. The political system seems to be unable to deliver on any of the urgent needs of the populace. While the spread of the coronavirus has been largely contained through rapid rollout of vaccinations, other important matters remain stuck in political squabbling in Washington.

Specific examples include a large spending bill of $1.2 trillion to start to fix the deteriorating physical infrastructure in the country. Thousands of miles of roads, and thousands of bridges are in urgent need of repair. This bill represents a rare example where Democrats and Republicans had agreed to move forward. Yet, until recently, not much has happened on this.

Alongside this is the much-needed programme to help with ‘social infrastructure’, labelled the Build Back Better plan. This is part of Biden's ambitious agenda to help middle and lower-income households with healthcare, education, housing, as well as climate related matters. This is a $1.75 trillion dollar plan that is mired in arguments between progressive and moderate wings within the Democratic Party. The so-called moderate wing does not want any tax increases on the wealthy to pay for these plans – while others are not willing to take steps to move away from polluting coal.

The net result of all this has been a feeling among the electorate that the Democrats, despite holding the White House and both Chambers of Commerce, are unable to deliver. Memories are short; people forget the infrastructure problems have been talked about for decades without any progress. Former president Trump celebrated his now famous ‘infrastructure week’ several times with zero progress.

Setbacks in the recent elections have finally lit a fire under the Democrats. The physical infrastructure bill was approved with bipartisan support on November 5, and the Build Back Better plan has also started to move, though final passage is not yet guaranteed. If passed, it will be the most ambitious poverty reduction plan since the days of Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s and 1940s.

Republicans are already smelling blood. Not one of them is expected to vote for this plan. Instead, they are busy revving up opposition to this legislation by labeling it “socialism”. To them, programmes such as parental leave, or support to low-income households for education are a threat to the American way of life, as they see it.

The electorate is confused, not knowing whom and what to believe. While neither party is above making political hay when they see an opportunity, in recent years Republicans have been far superior in managing their attack messages. And there is nothing Republicans like better than a culture war to fire up their conservative base. In this election cycle it was the history curriculum in schools that was made controversial in regard to teaching about historical racism in America.

Even blatant lies such as ‘the 2020 election was stolen by Biden’, have gained wide currency among the right wing. About two-thirds of all Republicans believe Biden was not legitimately elected. Now we are bracing ourselves for the ‘socialism’ onslaught that will be unleashed, if and when the Build Back Better plan is enacted. After all, it has taken nearly 15 years before Republicans gave up on trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act enacted by Obama, which brought health insurance to over 20 million people who previously lacked it.

So, the political circus in the US continues. But in the process if a few programmes that benefit millions get enacted, the country's infrastructure is uplifted, and poverty is reduced then it may all be worth it, whether those who work so hard to get it done get credit for it or not.

The writer is a freelance contributor based in Washington DC.

Website: www.sqshareef.com/blogs