

Electing to improve people's lives

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Last year, U.S. Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-N.J.) authored an amendment to repeal the Affordable Care Act and allow insurers to raise premiums for people with pre-existing health conditions. Last week, MacArthur lost his seat to Andy Kim, who campaigned on expanding access to healthcare. Kathy Hoffman, a speech therapist and union member in a suburban Phoenix school district, was so appalled by Betsy DeVos' inability to answer basic policy questions during her confirmation hearing that Hoffman ran to become Arizona's superintendent of public instruction. Last week, she prevailed over a former Republican congressman who is a leader in the charter school movement.

President Trump made the midterm elections a referendum on himself, using fear and lies in rally after rally to mobilize his base. Meanwhile, Democrats made a different choice, running hopeful campaigns focused on making life better for people—protecting Americans with pre-existing conditions; strengthening public schools; addressing gun violence; taking on student and medical debt and the opioid crisis; raising wages; securing Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security; and fixing roads, bridges and water systems. The midterms pitted fear against problem solving, and this time, problem solving won out.

Such extensive Democratic victories in U.S. House of Representatives, gubernatorial and statehouse races were not a foregone conclusion. The economy is strong by many measures, although most Americans have not seen the benefits of it in their wages. And Republican gerrymandering has created scores of congressional districts and statehouse seats designed to give the GOP an impenetrable lock.

But the American people sent a clear message. They voted for a check and balance on President Trump by taking control of the House from the GOP, which has served as a rubber stamp for Trump. And they rejected Trump's politics of fear, division and lies, voting for decency over cruelty, fairness over prejudice, and democracy over demagoguery.

These elections demonstrated a realignment in the electorate. Nearly 4 million more young voters (ages 18-29) cast ballots in the 2018 midterm elections than in the last midterms, and nearly all of that increase in turnout went to Democratic candidates. Democrats also carried majorities of women, well-educated voters, Independents and minority voters. A surge of suburban voters chose Democrats. And voters age 45 and older essentially split between Republicans and Democrats,

a shift that Republican pollster Frank Luntz called "historically and catastrophically low for the GOP."

Voters flipped governor's seats in Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico and Wisconsin. In these states, the outgoing Republican governors had defunded and undermined public schools and universities, stripped workers' and labor rights, and doled out corporate tax breaks that precipi-

newly elected officeholders reflect America's wonderful tapestry: More than 100 women were elected to the House of Representatives and 12 will serve in the Senate. And there were lots of "firsts"—the first Native American and Muslim women were elected to Congress, Maine and South Dakota elected their first female governors, Arizona and Tennessee elected their first women to the Senate, Connecticut and Massachusetts

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tated steep cutbacks in essential public services. The incoming governors, on the other hand, have detailed plans to reverse the damage, prioritize public education, and revitalize the infrastructure and services the people of their states need.

Voters responded to a decade of disinvestment in public education and the Trump administration's assault on public education and students, including student borrowers, by overwhelmingly choosing to invest in public schools and stand with educators. Arizona voters defeated a voucher initiative. And voters in at least a dozen states voted to raise their own property taxes to invest additional dollars for public education and colleges, including teacher pay.

More than 300 AFT members ran for office this year, and more than 60 percent of them won. And in another rebuke to Trump's attack on diversity,

sent their first black women to the House, and Colorado elected its first openly gay governor.

While voters chose candidates who want to problem solve and make life better for people, our work is far from over. Let's be real—winning is meaningless unless it translates to actual change in people's lives.

Democrats will need partners to pass meaningful change. In order to get that done, the new majority in the House will need allies in the Senate, whose GOP leader is unmatched in the dark arts of obstructing political opponents to the point of paralysis. That means our advocacy remains hugely important—to press for the results people need, to demand checks and balances on an increasingly autocratic president, and to stand up against hatred and divisiveness. And if the people see results, or they see who is impeding those results, this election may usher in even greater changes.



Weingarten (right) with AFT member and Michigan Gov.-elect Gretchen Whitmer.

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