

Trump or Biden, some things don't change

After the never-ending partisan noise, some American consensus has survived



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From both sides of the nation's party duopoly, this new year brings a fork in a jarring road.

Partisan control of the presidency and Congress is supposed to determine the tilt of foreign and domestic policy. Government postures shift along with White House administrations and congressional majorities. The rhetoric and demographics of Democrats and Republicans differ dramatically.

Yet after four years of Donald Trump and three years of Joe Biden, the governmental impact of those differences has proved to be a lot narrower than one might expect from the never-ending partisan noise.

Elections do change our governance, but only within limits. Some American consensus does survive.

As president, Trump

promised to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan. That happened, but during the administration of his successor, Joe Biden. The operational chaos of the departure was controversial — but our getting out was a matter of consensus.

While in office, Trump signed a deep cut in the corporate tax rate, from 35% to 21%. Despite Democratic efforts to raise it back to 28%, Biden has fallen back to more modest policies to target corporate profits. The rate remains where the GOP left it.

Both administrations expanded the nation's deficits and debt, and also, the U.S. military budget. Trump criticized his predecessors as too indulgent of NATO and too harsh on Vladimir Putin's Russia. But his administration never carried out a strategic change of course.

Case in point: In November 2018, Trump's United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley blasted Russia's "outlaw actions" at an emergency Security



Donald Trump, left, and Joe Biden face off in their final presidential debate in October 2020 in Nashville, Tennessee.

Council, demanding release of Ukrainian ships and crew members who were seized by Russia.

"The United States continues to stand with the people of Ukraine against this Russian aggression," Haley said. And Trump endorsed those remarks despite repeated hints of alignment with President Vladimir Putin.

For his part, Biden has finally been moving to harden the southern border, where Democrats in power now acknowledge a crisis. The

president is waiving dozens of federal laws to allow the construction of more border barriers in South Texas. Immigration advocates have slammed Biden who said in 2020, "There will not be another foot of wall constructed in my administration."

There have been other matters of consensus all along. Trump in 2016 drew wide interest for supporting a massive infrastructure program that would fix America's physical plant, from roads to bridges to mass transit and flood con-

trol. His evocation of multi-trillion-dollar proposals made "infrastructure week" a running gag among Washington wags. But Trump never negotiated a plan when his party was in the congressional majority. Later, Biden got a massive program passed after negotiation, with significant bipartisan support.

Different presidents and different congressional classes confront different economies and crises. Not long ago, the COVID-19 pandemic scrambled conditions and priorities.

We are offered a unique comparison when a current and former president prepare for a rematch. We can see what they accomplished and what they didn't, whom they hired, and how those appointees performed. A frank look at the record could give us some idea what to expect from either party's candidates — even if neither Trump nor Biden make the ballot.

If nothing else, this first week of the year offers a good chance to get ready for a sober assessment of our choices.

■ COLUMNIST DAN JANISON'S opinions are his own.



A school bus displays an extended flashing stop sign.

drive safely and not put children and others at risk by passing a stopped school bus that has a stop sign engaged. Too often, people complain about traffic fines as if the government is only imposing penalties to enrich itself. What is really taking place is avoiding responsibility and shifting blame to others.

— ROBERT J. POLLACK, BELLMORE

The article begs a larger question. Legal challenges are being mounted, yet the real story is people who fail to take responsibility for their actions. The chief protagonist is litigating the failure to provide adequate proof of the infraction. This individual paid the fine but apparently never admitted to the offense.

It is time for people to be

held accountable for their actions. I would have preferred the person to have admitted the offense and pay the fine. After that, he can litigate all he wants.

The safety of our children is at stake.

— FRED RICCI, MINEOLA

Unless someone is driving with their eyes closed or busy texting or doing something else other than watching the road, it is pretty hard not to see a big yellow bus with flashing red lights.

— DICK CARDOZO, WESTBURY

LIPA hike adds more grief for residents

Supermarket prices have risen. Packages are shrinking. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority apparently raises prices on a whim because they want more money.

It should manage its money and employees better and leave us alone.

Now, the Long Island Power Authority claims to need more money ["LIPA: \$20 bill hike next year," News, Dec. 14].

They put the extra expense on the backs of the people. How much more can we take? Is there no end to utility misspending? It seems that those in power care mostly about themselves.

— BARBARA HANSEN, SMITHTOWN

Retirees' benefits must stay protected

Nassau County CSEA retirees worked their entire careers with the promise and expectation that their existing and earned benefits would be preserved once they retire ["Judge rules for CSEA retirees," Long Island, Dec. 20]. Any deviation resulting in a lapse in coverage, increase in

out-of-pocket expenses, or reduction in treatment options is an absolute betrayal and totally unfair. Especially for an aging population living on a fixed income.

The Retired Public Employees Association, which represents the interests of nearly 500,000 New York State and local government retirees and their beneficiaries, applauds the decision to put a temporary hold on the proposed health plan for Nassau County CSEA retirees. Breaking a promise with these people who kept our communities healthy and safe is unconscionable.

Local leaders should do the right thing. The benefits that these retirees have earned must be protected by restoring the benefits provided through the Empire Plan.

— EDWARD FARRELL, ALBANY

The writer is the Retired Public Employees Association executive director.