

Special elections give GOP pause

SEBASTIAN, Fla. — Was Florida whispering? Was Wisconsin shouting?

Suddenly these two questions, rooted in states that Donald Trump carried only five months ago, are at the forefront of American political discussion and calculation.

As Trump presses forward with tariffs like a 21st-century incarnation of Reed Smoot and Willis Hawley, and as Elon Musk continues marching though the federal bureaucracy like William Tecumseh Sherman in his Civil War rampage through the South to the sea, the political license the two men took for granted now looks far more fragile.



DAVID M. SHRIBMAN

The tentativeness in public support for broad tariffs, and the growing suspicion of DOGE cost-cutting initiatives, manifested in three early April elections that, in ordinary times, might have seemed like the no-see-ums that are active during dawn and dusk in this state at this time of the year: hardly noticeable. Not since 1969 has a special congressional election represented a substantial rebuff to a sitting president.

But in recent days, political scientists have come to realize what entomologists have known for decades: Biting midges, as no-see-ums are sometimes called, can sting. Now, Team Trump is reaching for the political equivalents of hydrocortisone cream or calamine lotion to soothe the pain of two congressional races they won and one state Supreme Court race they lost.

The two victories in special Florida elections merely returned Republicans to House seats they won in November. But the Wisconsin Supreme Court contest confirmed a 4-3 liberal majority in an election that Musk, who poured \$20 million into the race even as he undermined his own credibility, suggested might “decide the future of America and Western Civilization.”

The results in Florida sent GOP state Sen. Randy Fine into the House seat vacated when Michael Waltz became Trump’s national security adviser, and Jimmy Patronis, Florida’s chief financial officer, into the opening created when Matt Gaetz resigned his House seat, only to have his nomination as Trump’s attorney general withdrawn following allegations of drug use and sexual misconduct. Both new lawmakers’ margins of victory were half as large as their predecessors’.

The twin congressional special elections, conducted in Florida’s midcoast and western panhandle, raised serious questions about the popularity of the administration’s early policies and GOP prospects in next year’s midterm congressional elections.

The results suggest the possibility of significant seepage in the 2026 contests, when Trump will not be on the ballot. The Democrats gained 41 seats in the 2018 midterms, when Trump was in the White House but wasn’t running himself. Those results returned the Democrats to control of the House, a result they hope to repeat next year.

In the coastal Florida district, located between St. Augustine and Daytona Beach, a third of the registered voters receive Social Security benefits; Democrats, who have profited from fears about the stability of the income supplement for older Americans since the 1982 midterms, have revived the issue as Musk has sent his DOGE warriors into the Social Security Administration.

Spencer Goidel, an Auburn University political scientist, said the Democrats had succeeded in overperforming in deeply conservative districts, primarily by appealing to the college-educated voters who once were reliable elements of the Republican political coalition but who, in recent years, have migrated to the Democratic Party.

“Democrats have a long way to go, but they should feel better about the world right now,” said Thomas A. Devine, a Democratic political strategist. “These races tell us people are upset about what is happening in Washington — and they tell us that Americans are worried about these disbursements of money that threaten democratic government and our institutions. People are repulsed by it.”

Both parties poured enormous amounts of money into the three campaigns.

Total spending in the Wisconsin court race may hit \$100 million, making it the costliest judicial race in history. Democrats raised 10 times as much money as the GOP candidate in a losing cause in the coastal Florida race. Musk gave \$1 million checks to two Wisconsin voters, offered those signing petitions and providing their contact information \$100 each; and presented voters with \$20 if they were photographed holding a picture of Waukesha County Judge Brad Schimel, a former Republican attorney general who ran as a Trump surrogate but was defeated by Dane County Judge Susan Crawford, a former chief counsel to a Democratic governor.

Republicans sought to minimize the damage in the three elections. “Any reprieve from the hangmen, no matter how brief, is always welcome, and that’s what the Democrats have,” Alex Castellanos, a GOP strategist who had close ties to establishment Republicans such as George W. Bush and Mitt Romney, said in an interview. “They still don’t have any idea how to govern, they don’t have a vision, they don’t have leaders, they don’t have protagonists for the movie much less a script. The leader of the Democrats is Donald Trump, because all the Democrats are today is a brake pedal on his car. Cars need brake pedals, but that doesn’t mean they trust them to take them where they need to go.”

Even with the optimism that the Democrats feel after the Tuesday results, the party remains convulsed in debate about its path forward and worried about its future.

Just before the balloting began in Florida and Wisconsin, Gov. Gavin Newsom of California, speaking on “Real Time With Bill Maher,” characterized the Democratic party’s brand as “toxic,” saying, “This is an existential moment, and our unity against Trump is not increasing our trust, it’s not helping the Democratic brand.”

Castellanos is correct in arguing that the Democrats are virtually leaderless, with the party’s standard being held high principally by Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who caucuses with the Democrats but describes himself as a democratic socialist, and by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York. Sanders has an 85% score in the most recent Americans for Democratic Action ratings, considered a measure of political liberalism, and Ocasio-Cortez scored 100%.

And while Ocasio-Cortez minimizes the friction between left-leaning Democrats like herself and more moderate party members, that is the axis on which the debate revolves. The Democratic candidates who performed well Tuesday were moderates. But it was Sanders, who twice ran for president, who brought his “Fighting Oligarchy” campaign to the Florida district that was the political base of Gov. Ron DeSantis.

DAVID M. SHRIBMAN is the former executive editor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.



Letters to the Editor

Renewed enthusiasm for observance of Easter season is encouraged

To the Editor:

I would like to encourage a renewed enthusiasm amongst believers for the devotional observance of Good Friday and Easter.

These observances are especially important in today’s secularized environment. Good Friday and Easter have past, present and future significance.

Past significance includes the deliverance of the nation of Israel from Egypt. This biblical drama reflects shadows and types that pointed toward Christ and the believer’s deliverance from their sinfulness and Satan’s dominion.

Israel was enslaved in Egypt. God delivered them from this slavery.

One event in this drama involved killing a Passover lamb and painting their doorposts with the blood of the lamb. The angel of death passed over the Israelite homes, sparing the Israelite firstborns, while executing judgment upon the Egyptian firstborns.

The Israelite firstborns were spared due to their faith as evidenced by their obedience.

Subsequently, Pharaoh was forced to deliver the Israelites from bondage.

Annually, this event was commemorated in the Passover meal.

God led the Israelites into a land of their own. Upon the first harvest, the Israelite priest waved a sheaf of the barley harvest as an offering before the LORD on the first Sunday after Passover. The Israelites understood this annual observance (Feast of Firstfruits) as acknowledgement of God’s abundant provision to be reflected in the upcoming harvest.

These observances foreshadowed the death of Jesus on the Cross as a substitutionary atonement for the sins of believers, and his resurrection on the third day (Sunday). His crucifixion occurred alongside the slaughter of the lambs in preparation for Passover observance.

The present significance of Good Friday and Easter applies to those who place their faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice as sufficient for the forgiveness of their sins.

Due to the Fall in the Garden of Eden, all mankind is separated from God by virtue of their descent from Adam. Adam’s sin is ratified by individual men through their own sinfulness as well.

God is the source of all life, physical and spiritual. Separation from God equates to spiritual death.

The man in Adam is spiritually dead, condemned and characterized by unrighteousness. He needs to experience a spiritual resurrection. This occurs upon faith and repentance.

The believer places his faith in Christ and his death on the cross as a substitutionary atonement for his sins. He experiences a new birth through his union with Christ. Spiritual life is imparted to him.

This new birth is reflected in a fundamental change in orientation toward God and a hatred of his sin.

In Christ, he is spiritually alive, justified, and characterized by righteousness.

The future significance of Good Friday and Easter relates to the new creation, including the bodily resurrection of believers.

Christ’s bodily resurrection is the inauguration of the new creation.

Upon his return, believers experience the resurrection and glorification of their physical bodies, which will be glorified like his own.

This resurrection is certain due to their identification and union with Christ. Christ’s life is their life, and Christ’s resurrection is their resurrection.

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The News Sun
102 N. Main St.
P.O. Box 39
Kendallville, IN 46755
Email: cernsberger@kpcmedia.com

The Star
118 W. 9th St.
Auburn, IN 46706
Email: jones@kpcmedia.com

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Angola, IN 46703
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Additionally, the believer will be reunited with family and friends who died in the faith.

The creation itself will experience a transformation, too. Evil, suffering and death will not have a place.

In light of these reasons, I encourage Christians to observe Good Friday and Easter with renewed enthusiasm.

I realize some refrain from observance for various reasons. I have held similar beliefs in the past.

Letters to the editor are not a suitable forum to address their concerns due to word count restrictions.

For a detailed version of this letter including Scripture references and related resources, see my blog at christiannewsjunkie.com.

Robert Sparkman
Rome City

Good state leadership is appreciated

To the Editor:

Saturday, April 5, local lawmakers attended the Third House Forum in Auburn to discuss ongoing legislation at the statehouse. Rep. Ben Smaltz, Sen. Tyler Johnson, and Sen. Sue Glick each came to update constituents about on their own proposed legislation, legislation moving through the statehouse, and answer questions and concerns from the people they represent.

What happened at this forum showcased what a difference good leadership can make when the political landscape is uneasy. If you have seen any of the surrounding forums and town hall style events from around the state and nation right now, you may have noticed the chaos at some of these events. Many of these events have turned into very little substance discussions, yelling at neighbors, or canceled altogether because of the challenge they represent. Despite this, each of the legislators mentioned above made time to do the job they signed up for.

One of the topics discussed by constituents was issues with cutting property tax proposals going too far and questions about how that will impact localities, while other attendees were concerned the the proposed cuts were not going far enough. What a perfect example the role of legislator often consists of in the current era, where the middle ground on certain issues can often be a difficult path to navigate. When extreme opinions more often get the attention (for better and for worse), it can not be overlooked that our leaders here do the difficult task of trying to be decent. By that I mean showing up to do the challenging task of listening to all sides of an issue and effectively communicating the “why” of the decisions made. Being knowledgeable of the entirety of bills proposed because each one can impact someone you represent and may be their most important issue. Considering the thoughts of people who agree with you is easy, but also doing it when a constituent is upset with you can be uncomfortable. That is the role and what should be expected of our leaders.

I am proud to have Rep. Smaltz, Sen. Johnson, and Sen. Glick speak and represent the area. Showing up, being knowledgeable, and effectively communicating to all parties is what I have grown accustomed to over the years because of the leadership from these legislators. It does not take 100% agreement for every proposed policy to see the character and effort required to be decent that these leaders showcase. We must continue to expect this in DeKalb County, but not lose sight of the fact that we must also appreciate this from our legislators, as it is apparent not every community is represented in this manner.

Austin Macy
DeKalb County Young Republican president
Auburn

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