

EDITORIAL

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 Columnist
 Lakeland Ledger
 USA TODAY NETWORK

GOP got burned by their own scorched-earth policies

I realize I've got a fixation. Even the smallest elections get me riled up and flashing around the internet like a rabid racoon, hunting numbers and dragging out things like retention elections (they mattered this time, but look at them when they do not).

And I've got company, too. Tuesday night I was joined online by two former students—one a mad operative for the GOP and the other a graduate student in political science—and a newspaper friend (or three) equally wired into every moment of the races, and all with the same tight gaze on the candidates' vote scores as they flipped in front of us.

Armed for fortitude with coffee and snacks, hundreds of miles away, we argued every race, every county, in some cases down to precincts, red-eyed—calculators humming and arguing "cause."

We're in the middle of a government shutdown—nothing is moving. SNAP payments are delayed if not canceled for millions (in every 8) Americans, meaning—for some—no food on the table at all. The threat of health insurance costs going up by as much as \$1,000 per month is now becoming real.

The economy at large is sagging, there are armed troops patrolling major American cities, ICE raids are a constant, we're blowing boats out of the water from the Gulf to the Pacific with little or no intelligence as to what they may contain, where they are going, or what becomes of them (or their crews) after we blow them up.

As employment slumps, there is a gigantic golden "ballroom" going on over the ruins of the East Wing of the White House. A more "let them eat cake" moment is difficult to imagine.

And the list goes on. It was not difficult to predict that this would be a pretty much terrible night for the party in power.

And it was. In dramatic proportions. Virginia, once in the gripping glow of a well-financed and resurgent GOP, went blue in counties that had not seen Democratic support for eons. New Jersey, under threat of becoming a "swing state," produced a Democrat under barely competitive circumstances.

For me, one of the biggest opportunities for the GOP—taking control of the Supreme Court in Pennsylvania—went so haywire that the Democrats dominated places like the coal-mining center in deeped Washington, Pennsylvania (spotted by my former student, Andrew Thompson, who is in graduate school in PA).

And of course the Democrats easily ruled in California and New York City (where the locals turned out, in numbers not seen for two decades, for a self-proclaimed "Democratic Socialist" who ran on strong-arm control and free food).

The numbers have yet to be analyzed at my end, but my gut feeling (backed by the numbers I have seen) is that Democrats turned out in record numbers, while Republicans simply sat on the couch—probably gazing vacantly at their projected health insurance bills. The real question concerns the whereabouts of all those independents who put Trump over the line in 2024. Best stayed home or voted "D."

What does the future hold for the Congressional GOP? My hope is that this is the wakeup call they've needed since January—self-preservation may rule the day. Anything that looks like this thing, hurtling down on them in 2026, will leave them in a feeble minority in both House and Senate, with no say in much of anything, no matter how much gerrymandering they are able to do between times.

The first thing they need to do is to extend the subsidies for medical insurance, open up government, refully in a bipartisan way) to jump-start the economy. Take control over tariffs back from the executive, derail his foreign adventurism (which now extends to Nigeria) and send a firm "stand down" message to their witless leader.

R. Bruce Anderson is the Dr. Sarah D. and L. Kirk McKay Jr. Endowed Chair in American History, Government, and Civics and Miller Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Florida Southern College in Lakeland. He is also a columnist for The Ledger and political consultant and on-air commentator for WLKF Radio.

Write to us

All letters are subject to editing for clarity, length, taste and libel. Letters should be signed and contain the writer's full name, address and telephone number. Letters should be kept to 200 words.
Mail: Voice of the People, PO Box 408, Lakeland, FL 33802
Email: voice@theledger.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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As the federal shutdown hits day 36, costing \$6 billion weekly, furloughing 2 million workers and risking civil chaos from unpaid SNAP alongside plane crashes from understaffed air traffic controllers, Polk County's families need a bipartisan fix.

As a pro-life advocate, I've seen government's power when it cuts waste. I propose a "Middleman Elimination Act": slash health insurance and student loan profiteers, funding care and college directly like Polk's HealthCare Plan for uninsured low-income residents and our grandparents' near-free universities. Ditch pharmacy benefit managers' rebates via direct grants modeled on Polk's preventive care, saving \$100 billion yearly on drugs—"free" healthcare that spares taxpayers by curbing ER overuse by 20%.

For college, add bankruptcy legislation to deter excesses, making lobbyists back off. It's not "forgiveness" but self-defense, like Dr. John Lott's "more guns, less crime"—more discharge options curb defaults, saving \$25 billion in bailouts. Cut servers' \$10 billion to \$120 billion fees, fund like K-12 or Germany's model, slashing tuition hikes (439% since 1982) and saving \$50 billion/decade.

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 Gordon Watts, Plant City

Join the discussion

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'Democratic shutdown'? False

Republicans control the White House, the Senate, the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court. Obviously, they control the government.

And yet Scott Franklin misrepresents this as a "Democratic Shutdown," even though Democrats do not have the votes to shut it down or re-open it. We elected Trump, DeSantis and Franklin and this is what we get—lies, distortions and misdirected blame.

Quit lying, Franklin, and start trying to figure out how to do your job.
 Richard Scanlon, Winter Haven

Blaming whom for food shortages?

Congressman Scott Franklin blames the Democrats and not the Trump Administration and Republican sycophants for food shortages and other problems here in Florida, without a word about the mass run-up and expulsion of those workers who harvest the food. (From farm production to food insurance and lost GDP, the Democrats' shutdown is costing Floridians, Nov. 2)

There is little reason to accept the word of a politician who voted to strip food and other support for tens of millions of needy Americans while giving trillions of dollars in tax breaks to the ultra wealthy. We voters will remember this on election day.
 Richard Sutherland, Winter Haven



With Florida ranking 50th in average teacher pay, educators are being forced to choose between doing what they love and providing for their families. GETTY IMAGES

Public schools are a promise worth keeping

Your Turn
 Southwest and Central Florida educator union presidents
 Guest columnists

Every day, educators at public schools welcome each child with open doors and open arms because we believe every child deserves access to a free, high-quality education. To accept every child is an unbound by our constitution.

That promise is at the heart of our work. It's what drives us to show up to fight for the future of all our students.

But today, that promise is broken. Keeping that promise would mean ensuring every classroom has a highly qualified, well-prepared educator. It would mean every school would be fully staffed with paraprofessionals, food service workers, custodians, bus drivers, school nurses, mental health specialists and every other professional who makes learning possible.

Classrooms would be equipped with the resources and tools students need to succeed. And educators devote all their attention to students, instead of struggling to juggle multiple jobs.

In that version of Florida, every child would be free to learn, every educator free to teach, and every community lifted by thriving public schools.

Instead, our public schools are underfunded and weighed down by political agendas that put profits over people. Districts are being forced to cut positions and cram more kids into overcrowded classrooms. With Florida ranking 50th in average teacher pay, educators are being forced to choose between doing what they love and providing for their families. And it's our students who pay the price—through a critical teacher and staff shortage, lagging SAT scores, shrinking programs and services and widening gaps in opportunity.

When public schools suffer, we all suffer. They are the backbone of our neighborhoods, our economy, and our future. If even one child is denied the essen-

tials they need to thrive, Florida's promise is broken, and Florida's future is placed at risk.

But there's hope: We can do better. Because when Floridians come together and stand up for our kids, we win.

Last year, voters from all political backgrounds overwhelmingly approved local funding referenda to strengthen their neighborhood public schools. When like AP, IB, and dual enrollment, families, students and educators pushed back and won, forcing legislators to abandon their plans. Time and again, our communities have shown that when we harness our collective promise, we can put kids ahead of politics and protect the promise of public education.

Public schools aren't just buildings. They're where our children's dreams take root, where families find a helping hand, and where communities come together. Protecting our children and their public schools isn't a partisan issue—it's a basic principle on which we can all stand united.

The future of our state depends on the choices we make today. Our students, educators, and community need us to raise our voices so that every child—no matter where they started—can reach their full potential.

Because when public schools thrive, every child shines bright.

So, we ask: Will you stand with us as a partner in transforming and elevating public education in Florida?

This letter was co-signed by educator union presidents representing teachers and education staff from professional members across parts of Southwest and Central Florida: Heather Thompson, Charlotte County Support Personnel Association; Jerry Mead, DeSoto County Educators Association; Tammy Humphries, Glades County Teachers Association; Richard "RJ" DeHighlands County Education Association; Jean Federico, Manatee Education Association; Pat Barber, Polk Education Association; Stephanie Yocum, association of Lee County.

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