

SunSentinel OPINION

Steve Bousquet
Opinion Editor

Julie Anderson
Editor-in-Chief

BLOOMBERG OPINION EDITORIAL

Democrats' Florida drubbing is a cautionary tale

As much as Democrats might want to exult over midterm-election results — one of the better recent outcomes for the party in power — they can't ignore the drubbing they took in Florida, a longtime purple-colored battleground that has now turned solid red. Without a prompt assessment of what went wrong, the party risks losing the country's third most populous state for the foreseeable future.

For the first time since the 19th century, no Democrat will hold statewide office in Florida come next year. Not only did Gov. Ron DeSantis and Sen. Marco Rubio handily win reelection, both trounced their opponents in Miami-Dade, the state's most populous county, with 2.7 million people, more than two-thirds of whom are Hispanic. In doing so, they underlined an awkward trend: Democrats' brand with Latino voters is collapsing in Florida — and shows worrisome signs nationwide.

In narrowly losing Florida to Donald Trump in 2016, Hillary Clinton won Miami-Dade by nearly 30 percentage points. Four years later, Joe Biden's margin there dropped to some 7 points. How did DeSantis and Rubio rack up double-digit wins in the county?

For one thing, Republicans undertook voter-registration drives focused on naturalized citizens from countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela — groups particularly receptive to the charge that Democratic policies amounted to "socialism." A postmortem of the 2020 election by Equis Research zeroed in on why that accusation tends to stick: "While the socialism attack rings various bells, the through-line among those concerned is a worry over people becoming 'lazy and dependent on government' by those who highly value 'hard work.'"

The analysis added that many Latinos defected to Trump in 2020 due to his "focus on reopening the economy" during



Gov. Ron DeSantis celebrates at an Election Night party in Tampa on Nov. 8 after winning his race for reelection. FILE

the COVID-19 outbreak. In a similar way, DeSantis' drive to keep schools and businesses open — despite criticism in the national media — became a key part of his Spanish-language advertising. Some 64% of the state's Hispanics approved of his handling of the pandemic.

Even DeSantis' most egregious stunt — sending a plane full of Venezuelan

migrants to Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts — drew solid Latino support. That should be a reminder for Democrats that Hispanics aren't a monolith and immigration isn't their defining issue. In fact, one recent survey found immigration ranked ninth among Latinos' concerns, trailing behind the economy, education, violent crime and so on.

Democrats might be tempted to ascribe their setback to Florida's unique demographics. But there's growing evidence that the problem extends beyond the Sunshine State. Although the party successfully flipped one majority-Latino South Texas district, Republicans captured a neighboring one that had been represented by Democrats for more than a century. Even as Democrats carried majority-Latino districts in California, there were notable swings in the direction of the GOP. Redistricting has certainly affected various House races this year, but it doesn't fully explain what appears to be a national rightward shift for Latinos of about 10 percentage points between 2018 and 2022.

In trying to reverse these trends, Democrats need to stop taking Latinos for granted and start focusing on what they actually care about. A good example is the au courant term "Latinx," which is ubiquitous among party professionals but which only 3% of Hispanics adopt for themselves. Indeed, some 40% are bothered or offended by the term. Such pandering too often takes the place of actual policies. Democrats must learn to speak to Latinos' real concerns — inflation, schools, crime, housing — and the solutions the party is offering.

Florida didn't go from purple to stark red solely because Democrats went astray with Latinos. Among other things, Republicans benefited from an influx of GOP voters from other states, a huge registration drive, and a significant spending advantage. But such efforts only highlight the relative complacency of the Democrats. Unless they're prepared to write off one of the biggest prizes on the Electoral College map, they'd better get to work.

This editorial originally appeared in Bloomberg Opinion.

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

Special counsels don't need to be so special

When the new Congress convenes in January, the House Republican caucus will be in the majority. They have stated with unambiguous relish that they intend to investigate Attorney General Merrick Garland and the Department of Justice (DOJ) for all manner of perceived sins, including politicizing the department's work. They will attack the DOJ using every available weapon. The Republican caucus wants to derail DOJ's investigations of Donald Trump and to force a prosecution of Hunter Biden (ignoring the ongoing investigation into Hunter Biden's activities being led by a Trump appointed U.S. Attorney in the District of Delaware).

With the specter of potential political hit jobs cloaked as congressional oversight, Garland's recent appointment of Jack Smith as special counsel to handle the ongoing federal investigations of Donald Trump has as much to do with the Republican House majority as it does Donald Trump's declaration of his candidacy for the presidency. The appointment provides Garland with a succinct response to his House interrogators. Even if the move is tactical on some level, naming Smith as a special counsel is, on balance, a good decision.

Smith is a career prosecutor. Smith has worked for almost three decades in the state system, at the federal level (including service as the chief of the public integrity section in the Criminal Division), and at the War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague. His resume reflects a highly developed skill set for investigating and prosecuting sensitive matters. However, Smith's lack of any defense experience needs to be addressed in the staffing of his team.

He should have the benefit of someone who can push back against what can become the career prosecutor's habit of seeing a jail cell in every Rorschach ink blot.

One of the lasting criticisms of the independent counsel statute that Congress allowed to expire in 1999 is that the independence bred a tunnel-like field of vision. Without competing interests of time and resources, the mandate to investigate morphed from a summit attempt into a long-distance trek around the base of the mountain.

The current situation demands timeliness to both the investigative work and any cases that spring forth from it. This is because Trump's candidacy and the 2024 election cycle add a theoretical end point to the enforcement efforts (de facto immunity for sitting presidents).



By
Michael
McAuliffe

We've been here before very recently. Robert Mueller seemed by profile to be a strong match to serve as the special counsel investigating Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and any Trump-related complicity. For a number of reasons, that early evaluation didn't prove correct. Critically, because Mueller was investigating a sitting president, he was prohibited by DOJ policy from making the one recommendation that's at the core of the special counsel function — to charge or not to charge a person of a crime. Mueller's efforts resulted in a good faith, but circular, path to nowhere, at least from a prosecutorial perspective.

With the Trump investigations, whether the DOJ can seek charges isn't really at issue. In fact, the publicly available information reveals sufficient evidence likely exists to charge Trump in the Mar-a-Lago matter with violations of the Espionage Act and obstruction of justice. The real crux of that matter is making the decision whether to charge as an exercise of prosecutorial discretion, not the technical hurdle of satisfying the burden of proof.

Importantly, Garland is not his predecessor. Unlike Bill Barr, Garland spent decades as a federal appellate judge. He is entirely familiar with the dynamic of relying on the work product of others (law clerks, lawyers, filings, and prior court opinions) to make decisions of consequence. And he doesn't require any schooling when it comes to process. His tenure has been marked by a purposeful distancing between the White House and the Justice Department.

While counterintuitive, it is critical that Garland retain the final authority in the Trump investigations. The work to develop evidence of federal criminal wrongdoing is vested in the executive branch. Any effort to avoid that duty is tantamount to abdication. The key is that such work must proceed without political pressure or interference from the White House. That proviso is not written into the Constitution, but it is a basic component of the credible enforcement of the law. Garland's special counsel appointment is a gesture recognizing that principle.

Michael McAuliffe is a former federal prosecutor. He also served as the elected state attorney for Palm Beach County. Currently, he is a practicing lawyer, an adjunct professor at William & Mary's Law School and a senior lecturing fellow at Duke University's School of Law.



"I WOULDN'T GO IN THERE RIGHT NOW. JUSTICE ALITO JUST HEARD THE SENATE IS PROTECTING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE. HE BIT CLEAN THROUGH THE GAVEL."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Elon Musk rewards Trump's bad behavior

I think Elon Musk is a genius, and there's no doubting his vision for space exploration and bringing to the economic market a great alternative to today's polluting cars. Now he's the leader of one of the biggest social media platforms.

I think his genius is in continuing to improve our lives through his numerous innovations and not go around showing off his political opinions. But he has rewarded former President Donald Trump's bad behavior by allowing him back on the Twitter platform he owns.

I have read about Henry Ford, one of America's industrialists, who helped make transportation affordable to most Americans. But we also remember his antisemitic rantings through his newspaper, which was the social platform of its day.

Ford wrote about how the Jews controlled the economy, and it was not good for his empire. People today still remember Ford's rhetoric.

My view is that Elon Musk should continue the things that have improved people's lives through inventions and technological improvements.

Jeffrey Dombeck, Boynton Beach

Alarming regularity

Mass shootings with multiple deaths now occur with alarming regularity.

In the last election cycle, Republicans stoked fear of violence, blaming Democrats. Democrats keep trying to pass reasonable gun control laws to curb access to weapons used in mass shootings. Republicans continue to block meaningful gun control.

Their solution to gun violence? I haven't heard one.

Jeffrey Light, Coconut Creek

A spot-on editorial

I have rarely agreed with the Sun Sentinel editorial page (or that of the old Fort Lauderdale News) for the past 50-some years, but your recent editorial on Daylight Saving Time was spot-on. We don't need it and don't want it. Let's stay with Eastern Standard Time all the time.

Bob Ungerer, Fort Lauderdale

Wrong side of time

Concerning your article on leaving the clocks at standard time, in true Sun Sentinel fashion you continue your pattern of being on the wrong side of issues, from horrible voting recommendations to anything else — yet I still subscribe.

I have discussed this issue many times over the years and have yet to hear a single person who shares your position. I'd love to see an opinion I can agree with, but I'll close with this: No one ever has said they love it when it's dark at 5:30 p.m.

Bob Sampson, Margate

Bullish on DST

I don't know where the Sun Sentinel got its information that trashed Daylight Saving Time. I graduated high school in 1951 and was fortunate to get a job as an apprentice electrician. My intent was to work full time and attend night school to earn a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

As luck would have it, I was assigned to a project to build and install recording watt-hour meters in western Pennsylvania. By the end of 1952 we had collected enough data to show the huge amounts of energy that would be saved by adapting Daylight Saving Time year-round. I did earn a degree in electrical engineering. Here we are in 2022 still waiting for the adoption of year-round Daylight Saving Time.

David Locke, Boca Raton

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