

After Georgia debacle, Democrats prepare further shift to the right

By Patrick Martin
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Twin defeats in special elections for House seats in Georgia and South Carolina have touched off a paroxysm of second-guessing and recriminations within the Democratic Party and in those organizations which exist to provide advice and political cover for the Democrats.

Despite spending nearly \$40 million on his campaign, Democrat Jon Ossoff lost the runoff election for the Sixth Congressional District in Georgia to Republican Karen Handel, who had trailed badly in the first round of voting held in April. Ossoff's total vote, 124,893, means that the Democratic Party spent a staggering \$320 per vote, but still lost.

Democrat Archie Purnell lost in South Carolina's Fifth Congressional District by about the same margin, in percentage terms, but much more cheaply. With just over 42,000 votes in a low-turnout election, the Purnell campaign spent about \$30 per vote.

The Democrats lost all four of the contested elections held in districts where the incumbent Republican representative resigned to take a position in Trump's cabinets: the Fourth Congressional District in Kansas, the at-large seat representing the state of Montana, as well as the Georgia and South Carolina seats.

It was reportedly a factor in the selection of Mike Pompeo to head the CIA, Ryan Zinke to run the Department of the Interior, Tom Price as Secretary of Health and Human Services and Mick Mulvaney as budget director that each held a seat where a Republican would be heavily favored to win an election to fill the vacancy.

Nonetheless, the failure of any of the candidates to win—two of them aligned with Bernie Sanders, in Kansas and Montana, and two aligned with the party establishment, Ossoff and Purnell—has deepened the political crisis of the Democratic Party, which suffered

a staggering defeat last November, losing the White House and both houses of Congress.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi is under the most immediate pressure, with critics citing the widespread use of her name and image as a bogeyman to spur Republican voters to the polls, particularly in Georgia, but also in Montana and the other two states.

The small number of House Democrats who opposed Pelosi's reelection as leader of the Democratic caucus, headed by Tim Ryan of Ohio, who ran against her, renewed their calls for a change in party leadership. Aside from the geriatric character of the House Democratic leadership—Pelosi is 77, Democratic whip Steny Hoyer is 78, and deputy whip James Clyburn is 76—they cited incessant Republican demonization of Pelosi as the personification of Democratic Party liberalism.

These Democrats essentially criticize Pelosi from the right. They oppose her, not because she is a multi-millionaire who has raised more than half a billion dollars for the Democratic Party from the super-rich, particularly in Silicon Valley, Wall Street and Hollywood, but because of she has been identified (falsely) by Republicans with the defense of gay rights and women's rights, since she represents a congressional district that includes the entire city of San Francisco.

Ryan and his supporters advocate downplaying identity politics, long the staple of the national Democratic Party, not in order to make a class appeal to working people, but in order to shift to the right on issues like abortion, gay marriage and anti-discrimination protections for minorities.

As for the Pelosi-Hoyer leadership, they also advocated a shift to the right, in terms of the selection of candidates to challenge the Republicans in the 2018

midterm elections.

A document issued by Ben Lujan, chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, sought to put the best possible face on the four defeats in four elections, noting the sizeable swing to the Democrats in percentage terms, although the actual number of people voting for the Democrats plunged in three of the four districts.

Lujan called for stepped-up recruiting of non-traditional candidates, “local leaders, veterans, business owners, women, job-creators, and health professionals. Let’s take the time to find people who fit their districts, have compelling stories, and work hard to earn support from voters.”

The language is remarkable. In any congressional district in the United States, almost without exception, working people comprise the vast majority of the population. But the Democratic Party is committing itself to seeking out “job creators”—i.e., wealthy capitalists, as well as business owners and doctors—in other words, candidates drawn from the top one percent, the most privileged layers in society.

This is a longstanding process in both capitalist parties, where the “average” congressman, Democrat or Republican, is a millionaire, separated by a wall of privilege from the vast majority of their constituents, who are in a daily struggle to survive economically.

This social gulf pervades the corporate-controlled media as well. A *New York Times* analysis of the aftermath of the Georgia special election observed, “Part of the Democrats’ challenge now is that the jobless rate is low, and many of the districts they are targeting are a lot like the Georgia seat: thriving suburbs filled with voters who have only watched their portfolios grow since Mr. Trump took office.”

The Democrats can’t craft a compelling economic message, according to the *Times*, because the economy is booming and the people have never had it so good. What a declaration of complacency and social blindness!

By the most current estimates, the wealthiest 10 percent of Americans own 89 percent of all corporate equities. These include, of course, the leading personnel of the Democratic and Republican parties, as well as the *New York Times* and other “elite” media outlets. But even in a relatively affluent area like the Sixth Congressional District of Georgia, those who

have “watched their portfolios grow” are only a small minority.

It is this wealthiest 10 percent, however, who are the political universe as far as the corporate media and the electoral activities of both the Democratic and Republican parties are concerned. Neither capitalist party offers any program to deal with the social concerns of the vast majority of the American population, the working people, over jobs, declining living standards, deteriorating schools and other public infrastructure, and mounting attacks on democratic rights.

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