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How to make progress in the next four years

BY JEFF VONKAENEL / jeffv@newsreview.com

The election is over. The results are in. And the outcome is painfully clear. Our country remains deeply divided.

Joe Biden received 81 million votes, but Donald Trump received 74 million votes. In a time when a president needs a clear mandate to create change, Biden and the Democrats do not have it. The Senate is currently in Republican hands, the Democrats barely have a majority in the House and the Supreme Court is controlled by right-wing zealots.

So what to do?

I am a very liberal Democrat. I support increasing taxes on the rich, making serious environmental changes to reduce climate change, enforcing antitrust regulations, breaking up the tech companies, reforming the criminal justice system, recognizing systemic racism, reducing our defense budget, legislating gun control and giving women control over their reproductive choices.

This election did not give either side a mandate for their policy positions. Rather, if we want to accomplish anything in the next four years, we need to find common ground with people who have a radically different vision of America and who clearly felt betrayed by a political and social system they believe is indifferent and even hostile to their interests. If we want our country to come together, then we need to find those issues that are both important and that can be supported by a majority on both sides of the political divide.

Here are a few such issues:

Raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. This was supported by 60% of Florida voters, who also backed Trump.

Pass legislation to prevent drug companies

from charging more in America than they charge overseas. The Democrats must overcome their fear of Big Pharma.

Repeal tax breaks for the rich and hedge fund operators. The vast majority of Americans support increasing the taxes on the rich. So let's do it. With the money this will raise, we can support infrastructure and green energy projects that will create blue-collar jobs.

The left needs to revise our political priorities away from issues that increase polarization and look for issues where we can get majority support.

We need to build coalitions. We need to listen to and understand the issues of the disenfranchised people who voted for Trump.

White voters without a college degree favored Trump over Biden by 35 percentage points, according to exit polls. This election should be a wake-up call for the left, encouraging us to find common ground with these angry Trump voters.

If we can't do that, we'll face another four years of divisiveness and stalemates. I don't think either our country, or my stomach lining, can take another four years of polarization.

Without Trump, many of his 74 million voters will be looking for the party that is looking out for the little guy, that believes the system is rigged against the working class, that isn't controlled by corporate interests.

I don't think they are looking for the party of Sen. Mitch McConnell. It can be, and should be, the Democratic Party. □

Jeff vonKaenel is the president, CEO and majority owner of the News & Review newspapers in Sacramento, Chico and Reno