

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# REFLECTING ON MIDTERM VOTE AND THINKING ABOUT 2024

It was a sound heard coast to coast following Tuesday's midterms: a collective sigh of relief that the election was crazy-free, for the most part, with little violence and few claims of voter fraud.

It was a victory for civility and the democratic process. Overall turnout easily surpassed other recent midterms (but for 2018); according to The Washington Post, some states saw a record number of ballots cast — especially where contests were expected to be close.

For many, the outcome was a surprise. Historically, the party in power loses a significant number of congressional and state seats in the first midterm after taking the presidency. While the vote count continues, that doesn't seem to be the case this time around.

Voters, it seems, have had enough of election deniers. Most of the Republicans who wouldn't commit to honoring the 2020 presidential election results going forward (or openly said they would not) lost their races.

Even still, 210 election deniers

*did* win. And I can't imagine they will sit quietly on the sidelines when 2024 rolls around.

So, while the pundits continue to analyze what went right or wrong on Tuesday, I'm thinking about the path forward to 2024 — and how we can make the next election even better than this one.

It starts with getting more people engaged in the political process and excited about voting. While turnout last week was good, from a historical perspective, more than 129 million eligible Americans (53.8 percent of the electorate) didn't participate. It would be easy enough to point to new and restrictive voting laws, enacted last year in 19 states, but 25 other states passed laws expanding access.

Improvement begins with self-reflection. And so, both of our political parties need to take time for introspection, looking at the outcome of races — up and down ballot — and then committing to choose nominees who are qualified, competent to govern and represent a majority of their voters.

That will mean recruiting and investing in candidates who look like the electorate: more women, more people of color, more millennials and Gen Z-ers, and more individuals who identify as LGBTQ.

Tuesday had its bright spots, to be sure: Now, all 50 states in the U.S. have elected to send a woman to Congress. A record number of women — 12 — won races for governor. And in Florida, Democrat Maxwell Frost was elected to serve as the first Gen Z member of Congress, winning by 19 percentage points.

Tuesday's youth turnout was the second highest in three decades, but only 27 percent. Still, Time magazine has proclaimed it was Gen Z that held off the expected "red wave." Youth voters were sparked to action by threats to their rights, like abortion access. They overwhelmingly supported candidates who listened to and shared their concerns.

The companion to a more engaged electorate is a more informed electorate. That was another of Tuesday's bright

spots: ticket-splitting. Katie Glueck and Ruth Igielnik of The New York Times described ticket-splitters as a "small but consequential force" that is resisting polarization and prioritizing candidate quality over partisan identity.

These voters, they wrote, are sending a sharp message: that there are consequences for promoting people who are well outside the political mainstream.

And while it's a little early to be making a Christmas wish, our electoral process would be much stronger if gerrymandering went away. It's become a favorite tool of both Democrats and Republicans.

Every 10 years, state and local governments draw new voting boundaries based on census data, to ensure that districts are equally populated, representative and in compliance with laws such as the Voting Rights Act.

But sometimes, the redistricting process is gerrymandered to manufacture election outcomes, guaranteeing wins even in years when the map-

drawing party is out of favor.

Of course, that's the point. Michigan's gerrymandering was considered so egregious that the state appointed a nonpartisan panel of 13 citizens to redraw their map.

It was challenged in the courts by the state's Republicans, but on Monday, their appeal was dismissed. On Tuesday, a record 4.5 million Michiganders turned out to vote.

Rigged maps make elections less competitive. When that happens, even more Americans feel like their votes don't matter. A better approach than gaming the system is turning out a larger and more informed electorate.

We can't let election fatigue get in the way of starting this work right now.

Our democracy and our country will be better for it.

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## EL CAJON

### City's share of sales tax \$12M yearly

FROM B1

cent tax end in 2029 is "not an option," said City Manager Graham Mitchell. The measure brings in around \$12 million a year, a sizable chunk of the \$92 million budget.

Officials have long said losing the tax completely could lead to dramatic layoffs.

Part of the reason the council rushed to put the increase on this year's ballot was to give them more opportunities to reintroduce the proposal if it failed. There will be three more national elections this decade, in 2024, 2026 and 2028. Mitchell said he needed to review more voting data to decide whether to ask again for an increase or just request an extension of the current tax.

The proposal also exposed a rift among Republicans.

While the El Cajon City Council is conservative, current and former GOP leaders in the region opposed the measure.

"Voters wisely rejected a higher cost of living," said Carl DeMaio, head of the political action committee Reform California. DeMaio helped send texts, buy digital ads and send mailers to push back against what he called the "arrogance of the local political establishment."

The tax couldn't be counted on to reduce homelessness because leaders weren't legally bound by their own spending plan, DeMaio and Tony Krvaric, former chairman of county Republicans, argued in public documents, and the local party urged residents to vote "no."

County statistics show the city almost evenly split between registered Republicans and Democrats, and the measure was also opposed by Arnie Levine, the Democratic nominee for mayor.

The council is still under pressure to address people living on the street.

In a July survey of hundreds of residents, only about a fifth said El Cajon was on the "right track" while about a third said the city was on the "wrong track." The latter group cited homelessness and poverty as top concerns.

The same report found nearly 70 percent were open to higher taxes if it improved public safety.

Officials said they weren't sure whether the poll missed the mark or other factors changed the environment.

Gas prices surged again in September. Inflation continues to rise, and recession worries are ever present.

"The biggest concern I heard from citizens was, 'This is the wrong time,'" said Councilmember Phil Ortiz. "I get that."

In neighboring San Diego, voters seemed similarly skeptical of imposing fees for trash pickup.

Even amid more economic stability, a tax hike can be a hard sell. Lemon Grove rejected its own sales tax proposal in early 2020.

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ANA RAMIREZ U-T

Barbara-Lee Edwards said after so many years working long hours, she's enjoying the free time she'd been missing.

## CHANGE • Some parts of brain haven't recovered

FROM B1

then she vomited from the severe pain.

After an ambulance ride to Scripps Memorial Hospital Encinitas — which was overflowing at the time with COVID-19 patients — she underwent a brain scan that showed a significant amount of blood in her brain. She was later rushed to Scripps Memorial La Jolla's intensive care unit where she would spend 10 days coming back from the abyss.

Edwards had suffered a subarachnoid hemorrhage, or a burst vein in her brain. She later learned that most people who suffered an injury as severe as hers don't survive. Yet while she did pull through, the hemorrhage left lasting damage. Edwards said she has struggled for a long time with word-finding in conversations. Her eyes became very sensitive to light and her ears to loud sounds. She has suffered enduring flulike and fatigue symptoms and she has had serious trouble sleeping.

"The doctors described my brain injury as like living the rest of your life with a concussion," she said.

Doctors told Edwards that she could expect to see some recovery over a two- to three-year period, and there have been improvements. But after undergoing some recent cognitive exams, Edwards said her doctors found that the part of the brain that allows her to multitask — particularly in high-stress situations like a live TV broadcast — has not recovered. Edwards said her husband has also noticed that she tends to have a "gray time" in the mid-afternoons where her brain gets a little foggy.

Although she said the TV station has been "very kind" about inviting her to come back in some capacity, she wouldn't want to return until she is ready, both physically and emotionally.

"There's something about exposing what's wrong with me that I'm not sure about," she said. "Maybe I could just go on the air and talk about my experience of navigating the world with a brain injury and just show people the reality of that. And maybe I could just laugh about it and go on."

Edwards grew up in the small coastal town of White Rock in the Vancouver region of British Columbia. Her mother was a nurse and her dad was a trial lawyer. Like her father, Edwards was involved in high school theater, but she also had a passion for journalism. It was while she was in college, studying for a degree in English, that she started volunteering at White Rock's Shaw Cable station and got her first taste of broadcasting as the unpaid host of some TV interview shows. She knew by age 20 that she'd found her dream job.

Her first paid job out of broadcasting school was at Channel 13 in Vancouver, where she worked the overnight desk, listening to scanners to gather news and write one-minute news reports, which she delivered every hour until sunrise in the empty TV studio. Over two years, she worked her way up to doing sports and weather reporting.

From there she moved to an affiliate station in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where she anchored her own news show. Two years later, she was recruited to the Canadian Television Network's news station in Winnipeg, where she an-

chored the 11 p.m. broadcasts and met Walz, who was working at the station as a news camera operator. They married and had the first of their two children, daughter Kristen Walz, who was 4 years old when they moved to Leucadia in 2001.

Edwards said she first heard about an opening at CBS News 8 in San Diego from an agent who was shopping her tapes around to TV stations in the U.S. She didn't make the cut for an in-person audition because she was in Canada. But she and her husband were so excited about the idea of living in sunny Southern California that she decided to give it one more shot. During a family vacation to Disneyland, she called News 8, told them she was in the area and asked if she could come in for an impromptu audition.

When the station agreed, she and her husband drove from the Anaheim theme park to a friend's house in Mission Viejo, where they dropped off their daughter and Edwards borrowed some clothes and shoes to wear. Walz drove and waited in the station's parking lot while she spent two hours auditioning with then-anchor Michael Tuck ("who couldn't have been nicer"). A week later she was offered the job.

During her two decades at CBS 8 News, Edwards anchored two to three evening newscasts a day. Career highlights included interviewing President Obama and doing a live broadcast with Anderson Cooper. She walked and reported live from the Susan G. Komen 3-Day walk in San Diego for 17 years, she did regular health and "pet friends" segments for years and she emceed the American Heart Association's Red Dress gala

luncheons many times.

By Edwards' side for most of those years was her co-anchor Carlo Cecchetto, who Edwards describes as her "little brother" who made every day on the news set fun. She also formed a close bond with Marcella Lee, who took over Edwards' anchor position last year, with Edwards' blessing.

Edwards worked such long hours during her many years at the station that this unexpected career break has given her more time to appreciate what she'd been missing. Before the brain injury, she said, she had a driven, Type A personality. Now she doesn't sweat the small stuff. "Now there are so many things that I just don't care about."

Edwards said one of her favorite pastimes these days is going to the dog park with her 8-year-old golden retriever, Charlotte. She and Walz, who's now a broker for Compass Real Estate, also recently returned from a long trip to Europe. She also relishes having more time to connect with their children. Kristen Walz, who's now 26, works in production at CBS News in New York with the goal of writing for television and film. And their son Brady Walz, 19, is a college student and a musician who plays in several local bands.

Edwards said she's been asked whether leaving CBS News 8 means that she will now move back to Canada. But she has put those rumors to rest.

"We're here because we love it. I don't ever want to leave," she said. "My son was born here and my daughter grew up here. This will always be our home."

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## PRIVACY

FROM B1

data collection and access. A report evaluating potential impacts and ways to mitigate any negative effects would also be created. The privacy commission would then review the report and make a recommendation to the City Council, who would ultimately permit an acquisition. If approved, the city manager would report at least once every two years how the technology had been used, any adverse impacts and the status of the data collected.

Residents and privacy activists who pushed for

oversight said the policy is a good start, but it doesn't go far enough. Some worry that vague language will lead to an ineffective policy with too many loopholes.

The rules grant the city manager or City Council power to waive elements of the policy "in the event of exigent circumstances or other circumstances that make compliance impossible or infeasible."

Advocate Nancy Reinford said the waiver built into the policy "renders it almost meaningless" because "that could cover anything at any time."

Madaffer said circumstances would include events like an earthquake or

if a drone captured footage of a crime in progress that was unrelated to the call it was deployed to.

Task force members and residents also felt strongly about the need to hire a chief privacy officer, akin to UC San Diego's campus privacy officer Pegah Parsi, whom the task force met with during their information-gathering sessions. Parsi manages privacy initiatives related to students and employees and offers guidance on state privacy laws.

Chula Vista will instead have an adviser function that could be carried out by "one or more City staff members or consultants with privacy and technology exper-

tise," reads the policy.

Sophia Rodriguez, the task force's chair, said hiring a chief privacy officer is a vital investment for the city, especially with major projects under way and a rise in growth.

"With the new bayfront project, we're going to have a lot of foot traffic, a lot of personal information (that) these new companies, these new hotels will be collecting," said Rodriguez. "This is prevention at its finest."

City Manager Maria Kachadoorian ultimately decided which policy elements that the task force developed would be proposed to the City Council. She approved the majority,

but not to hire a chief privacy officer. She said the move would require budget consideration and that hiring a consultant to do the same would be faster than going through the recruitment process.

Pedro Rios, a task force member, said he wanted the policy to acknowledge that Chula Vista had shared license plate reader information with federal agents and that the community pushed for corrections.

Mayor Mary Casillas Salas agreed with Rios. Though not specific to ALPR, city staff added language that one of the policy's purposes is to "respond to valid community con-

cerns regarding the sharing of personal information through the use of technology that has the potential for adverse impacts on civil liberties."

Task force members and residents also encouraged the city to consider creating a privacy rights ordinance, much like San Diego's surveillance ordinance approved earlier this year.

Councilmember Steve Padilla, who is poised to become a California senator, said he hoped the new City Council would "consider codifying (the policy) in a more meaningful way" by way of an ordinance.

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