



PUBLIC SEMINAR

Progressive Victories Lay the Groundwork for 2020

By Peter Dreier

Politics is a struggle for power – over ideas and interests – and after this year’s midterm elections two things remain clear. First, voter suppression and intimidation, racism, and corporate money continue to infect American politics like a virus. Second, despite those obstacles, America is a much [more progressive country](#) than most pundits and political analysts believe. Voters embraced many progressive candidates and ballot measures, even in so-called conservative states and Congressional districts.

The midterm victories give Democrats an opportunity to thwart much of Donald Trump’s agenda, to investigate his and his administration’s corruption, and to put forward a progressive policy agenda as an alternative to Trumpism that can help Democrats expand their majority in the House, take back the Senate, and win the White House in 2020.

Trump was not on the ballot this year but the midterm election was viewed as a nationwide referendum on his leadership. More than 116 million voters went to the polls – 49% of eligible voters – the [highest turnout](#) rate for a midterm election since 1914. Hundreds of grassroots groups helped turn the anti-Trump [“resistance” movement](#) into an electoral powerhouse. These include labor unions, immigrant rights groups, Planned Parenthood, MoveOn, the NAACP, Black Voters Matter, SwingLeft, and others. Students and graduates from Parkland, Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School -- where 17

classmates and teachers were gunned down in February -- spent the summer and fall traveling the country for the “Road To Change” tour urging people to register to vote. No group played as important a role as [Indivisible](#), founded soon after Trump’s election, which quickly expanded to every Congressional district, training and mobilizing first-time activists and new leaders in the skills of issue organizing and campaign work.

Women, [young people](#), African Americans, and [Latinos](#) turned out in significantly higher numbers than they did in the previous midterm election in 2014 – reflecting an anti-Trump backlash and the enthusiasm triggered by competitive races. Not surprisingly, the election saw an upsurge of women, LGBT people, African Americans, and Latinos elected to office.

The U.S. House of Representatives

In the 435 House races, [Democrats outpolled Republicans](#) by 55.2 million to 49.2 million votes. Despite the Republicans’ success over the past two decades at gerrymandering House districts, Democrats flipped many seats with Republican incumbents in blue, red and purple states, clear evidence of backlash against Trump. In contrast, Republicans flipped Democratic seats in only two districts, both in Minnesota. As of November 16, Democrats had picked up 37 seats and were leading in two of five races (all of them Republican-held seats) that were still undecided. If they win those two races, Democrats will gain a net 39 seats and hold 234 seats. However many they gain, the Democrats have broken Republicans’ eight-year lock that started with the Tea Party wave in 2010.



As a result of this outcome, progressives will have a larger role in shaping Democratic strategy and policy agenda. Many, perhaps even most, of the newly elected Democrats who won House races are left-of-center, including some who flipped GOP seats. They reflect the growing [grassroots activism](#) across America over the past decade, and especially since Trump's election. Some version of Medicare for All is now the Democrats' mainstream position. Ditto on a \$12 or even \$15 minimum wage, progressive tax reform, background checks and limits on assault weapons, a bold infrastructure and jobs plan, regulating Wall Street, a carbon tax, and support for the right to have an abortion.

One byproduct of Tuesday's election: After January, the House Progressive Caucus, which now has 78 members, is [projected to grow to](#) about 100 members. Two of them, New York City's Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Detroit's Rashida Tlaib, are members of Democratic Socialists of America. Progressives may seek to challenge Nancy Pelosi's hold on the speakership or at least insist that she appoint some of their ranks -- such as Ro Khanna, Judy Chu, and Karen Bass from California, Joe Kennedy from Massachusetts, Pramila Jayapal from Washington, Jamie Raskin from Maryland, and Mark Pocan from Wisconsin -- to House leadership positions.

With control of the House, Democrats will be able to block Congressional Republicans' plans for additional tax cuts for the super-rich, tougher immigration legislation, and the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Democrats will also now control House committees and have subpoena power to investigate Trump's personal and business dealings, including his long-withheld tax returns. One of Trump's toughest critics, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), will likely replace Trump puppet Rep. Devin Nunes (R-CA) as chair of the powerful House Intelligence Committee. Ardent progressives Reps. Maxine Waters (D-CA), Jerry Nadler (D-NY), and Elijah Cummings (D-Maryland) will chair the Financial Services, Judiciary, and Oversight and Government Reform committees, respectively.

They and their Democratic colleagues could initiate hearings and investigations about Trump's use of the White House to benefit his family businesses, his business activities in other countries, his payoff to Stormy Daniels, his incompetent response to Hurricane Maria, his firing of former FBI Director James Comey and obstruction of justice, his separation of families, his travel ban, his efforts to weaken consumer protections on banks, and his ties to Vladimir Putin and other Russians, especially his knowledge of their involvement with the 2016 elections. Under Democrats, the hearings, broadcast on TV and spread via social media, will bust open the piñata of Trump's corruption. They could also hold hearings on the Republicans' war on the Voting Rights Act through voting suppression and intimidation -- practices that change the outcome of midterm elections in Florida, Georgia, and elsewhere.

The Democrats can use a little-known 1924 law to obtain [Trump's tax returns](#) and even make them public, which would shed light on his business activities, philanthropy, and overall wealth. They can prevent Trump from firing Special Counsel Robert Mueller by attaching a provision to a must-pass appropriations bill. And after Mueller releases his report, House Democrats could even begin impeachment proceedings, which would further air Trump's corruption and incompetence in public, even if Senate Republicans refuse to convict him.

Laying the groundwork for the 2020 elections, House Democrats could also sponsor bills and hold hearings to lay out their policy ideas and force House Republicans to vote on them before facing voters in a presidential year. Their agenda could include raising the federal minimum wage, enacting a Medicare for All plan (including incorporating long-term care for seniors), lowering prescription drug prices, embracing a bold job-creating infrastructure plan, dealing with the high cost of college, adopting comprehensive immigration reform (that prevents Trump from deporting young immigrant Dreamers protected by the DACA program), expanding funding for reproductive health and family planning, strengthening regulations on Wall Street to protect consumers, reforming outdated labor laws, promoting a



progressive tax plan and campaign finance reform, strengthening voting rights, and adopting tougher environmental regulations. They will have the leverage to force Trump and his Republican allies to make concessions to pass a budget.

The midterm elections resulted in a record number of women, Latinos, Black, and LGBT members of Congress.

All nine of the [newly-elected Black House](#) members -- Texas' Colin Allred, Georgia's Lucy McBath, Connecticut's Jahana Hayes, Massachusetts' Ayanna Pressley, New York's Antonio Delgado, Nevada's Steven Horsford, Colorado's Joe Neguse, Minnesota's Illhan Omar, and Illinois' Lauren Underwood -- prevailed in predominantly white and mostly suburban districts. (Both of the House's Black Republicans -- Utah's Mia Love and Texas' Will Hurd -- were locked in a too-close-to-call races as of November 18).

McBath's victory was perhaps the most stunning upset. She defeated Republican incumbent Karen Handel in Georgia's 6th district in the Atlanta suburbs that was once represented by Newt Gingrich and where 61% of residents are white and only 14% are African American. McBath became a reluctant public figure in 2012 after her 17-year old son Jordan was shot dead at a Florida gas station by a white man who complained about loud music. McBath became a gun control activist, quickly becoming national spokesperson for Moms Demand Action. She decided to run for Congress after the mass shooting at the Parkland, Florida high school in February. Last year, Jon Osoff, a little-known Democrat and first-time candidate, laid the groundwork last year by giving Handel a [close race](#) in a special election in April 2017 to represent the district vacated by GOP Rep. Tom Price, who stepped down to lead the Department of Health and Human Services in the Trump administration. Osoff's long-shot campaign energized many people who had not previously been involved in politics. It received considerable national attention as a test of shifting voter attitudes in suburban areas in the wake of Trump's presidency. Osoff lost by a 52% to 48% margin. Osoff decided not to run again in

this year's regular election, but many of the activists mobilized in his campaign -- including groups like PaveItBlue and Liberal Moms of Roswell and Cobb -- stayed together and provided many of the troops for McBath's insurgency. McBath won her race -- by a 50.5% to 49.5% margin -- in part by improving on Osoff's outreach to African Americans and by drawing on the growing anti-Trump sentiment among women.

Hayes (National Teacher of the Year in 2016) became the first African American elected to Congress from Connecticut. Pressley, the first black woman on the Boston City Council, will now be the first black Congresswoman from Massachusetts. Delgado, a Harvard Law School graduate and Rhodes scholar, had to overcome GOP efforts to brand him as a "big-city rapper" to defeat Republican incumbent Cong. John Faso in upstate New York's Hudson Valley. Underwood, a 32-year old nurse, bested four-term Republican incumbent Randy Hultgren in a district once represented by former GOP House Speaker Dennis Hastert and where Trump defeated Clinton two years ago. Vice President Mike Pence and Donald Trump Jr. traveled to Texas to campaign for Republican Cong. Pete Sessions, who has served in Congress since 1997 and was chair of the powerful House Rules Committee, but he still lost to Allred, a voting rights lawyer and former NFL player. Neguse becomes the first Eritrean-American elected to Congress.

Other Democrats swept to victory in one-time Republican bastions. In Virginia, Abigail Spanberger upset Republican Rep. David Brat (a Tea Party candidate who dethroned House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in 2014), Elaine Luria defeated Rep. Scott Taylor, and Jennifer Wexton upset Rep. Barbara Comstock.

South Carolina will send a new Democrat to Congress for the first time in more than 25 years after attorney and ocean engineer Joe Cunningham beat Republican Katie Arrington, a strong Trump supporter, in a district that has sent Republicans to Congress since 1981. Democrats [Cindy Axne and 30-year old Abby Finkenauer](#), who both unseated



Republican men, will become the first women elected to the House from Iowa.

Democrats flipped six Republican seats in California, including all four GOP-held seats in Orange County, once one of the most conservative Republican strongholds in the country. Harley Rouda defeated Dana Rohrabacher – one of the most reactionary Republicans in Congress and Putin’s strongest ally in the House, who represented the Orange County district for 30 years. Katie Porter, a one-time protégée of Elizabeth Warren, defeated another Republican incumbent, Mimi Walters. Democrat Gil Cisneros defeated Republican Young Kim to capture the seat vacated by Ed Royce, who has represented the area since 1993. Mike Levin, an environmental lawyer, beat Diane Harkey in a once-solid GOP Congressional district that straddles San Diego and Orange Counties. Levin replaces powerful Republican Rep. Darrell Issa, who retired rather than face a tough re-election battle. In addition, in a suburban district in northern Los Angeles County, Katie Hill, an advocate for the homeless, upset Republican Rep. Steve Knight, by mobilizing a grassroots campaign led by unions, Planned Parenthood volunteers, and immigrant rights activists. Democrat Josh Harder beat four-term Republican Rep. Denham in California’s Central Valley farm belt.

The blue wave also swept through New Jersey, where two Democrats (Tom Malinowski and Jeff Van Drew) upset long-term GOP incumbents and where military veteran Mikie Sherrill will be the first Democrat to represent the 11th CD in the Morris County area in nearly three decades after Rodney Frelinghuysen, a powerful party leader in Congress, retired this year rather than defend his support for Trump. In the Philadelphia suburbs once dominated by Republicans, four Democratic women – Mary Gay Scandlon, Chrissy Houlahan, Madeleine Dean, and Susan Wild – triumphed over their GOP rivals.

Until the midterms, only one on New York City’s Congressional districts was represented by a Republican. That changed when 31-year old Democrat Max Rose, a combat veteran and health care executive, beat 61-year old Republican Dan

Donovan in a district that includes Staten Island and a small part of Brooklyn. The district voted for Trump by nine points two years ago. By New York City standards, Rose is a moderate, but his victory means that Trump won’t have even one ally in his hometown’s Congressional delegation.

The Senate

In the total vote in the 35 Senate races, Democrats won a huge majority—50.3 million (58.5 percent) to 34.4 million (39.9 percent). This year, Republicans dislodged four Democratic senators, while Democrats won two GOP-held Senate seats. Depending on the result of the Mississippi run-off scheduled for November 27, Republicans could hold expand their majority to 52 or 53 seats.

Although the Democratic-controlled House can thwart Trump’s legislative initiatives, the GOP’s continued control of the Senate allows the president to further put his right-wing stamp on the federal judiciary. For progressives, this makes it imperative that 85-year old Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg stay healthy.

Despite being in the minority, Senate Democrats can still propose a similar progressive policy agenda to their House colleagues, participate in joint hearings, and raise holy hell to challenge Trump’s nominees to the federal bench.

Trump took his traveling circus to 23 states to campaign for Republicans in the midterm elections and helped defeat Democratic Sens. Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota, Claire McCaskill of Missouri, Joe Donnelly of Indiana, and Bill Nelson of Florida. But he couldn’t unseat Montana’s Jon Tester, West Virginia’s Joe Manchin, Ohio’s Sherrod Brown, Wisconsin’s Tammy Baldwin, Michigan’s Debbie Stabenow, or Pennsylvania’s Bob Casey, even though Trump won in those states two years ago.

A strong push by organized labor helped Democratic Rep. Jacky Rosen, a stalwart progressive, defeat Nevada’s Republican Sen. Dean Heller. In Arizona, efforts by unions and immigrant rights groups to increase Latino turnout paid off.



Democratic Rep. Kyrsten Sinema [narrowly defeated](#) Republican Rep. Martha McSally for Republican Sen. Jeff Flake's vacant seat by a 49.83 percent to 47.79 percent margin, a gap of about 46,000 votes. But Green Party candidate Angela Green, who received at least 54,764 votes, almost cost Sinema the seat by attracting votes that would have otherwise gone to the centrist Democrat.

Progressives had hoped that charismatic Democratic Rep. Beto O'Rourke could win his uphill battle to unseat Republican Sen. Ted Cruz in Texas. He came much closer than most pundits expected, gaining 48.3 percent of the vote, but even a last-minute endorsement on Instagram from Beyonce couldn't push him over the top. His showing puts O'Rourke in a good position to challenge Texas' other Republican senator, John Cornyn, in 2020, when turnout among Democratic-leaning voters may be higher.

Following a recount, Florida's Republican Gov. Rick Scott defeated incumbent Sen. Bill Nelson by 10,033 votes out of more than 8 million cast. Florida's tough voter suppression laws, which kept many African Americans from voting, hurt Nelson.

The [Senate map for 2020](#) gives Democrats a good chance to gain a majority. Republicans will be defending 22 seats, including five battleground races (Arizona, Colorado, Maine, North Carolina, and Iowa) that Democrats could flip. In contrast, only two of the 12 seats that Democrats will be defending (Alabama and New Hampshire) are in likely battleground states.

Governors and State Legislatures

For more than a decade, Republican control of state governments has given the GOP the ability to redraw Congressional districts—gerrymander—to increase the number of safe Republican districts, even in states where votes for Democrats outnumber those for Republicans. The Democrats' gubernatorial and legislative victories this year will limit Republican gerrymandering of the electoral maps following the next census. In addition to redrawing congressional maps, the new wave of

Democratic governors and legislatures can use their influence to expand Medicaid for many low-income families whose access to health insurance was stymied by the opposition of the GOP. They can embrace higher minimum state-level wages, promote green jobs and carbon taxes, expand funding for public schools, and resist the privatization of prisons.

Before the mid-term elections, Republicans held 33 governors offices while Democrats held just 16 (Alaska had an Independent governor). The gap has now narrowed to 27 Republican governors and 23 Democrats.

Before the mid-terms, Republicans also controlled two-thirds of the 99 state legislative chambers. (Nebraska has only one house in its legislature). The GOP held a trifecta (governorship and both houses of the legislature) in 25 states, [according to the *New York Times*](#), compared with just eight for Democrats. Democrats chipped away at the GOP's advantage. The number of states with Republican trifectas will fall to 22, while the number of states with Democratic trifectas will grow to 14. Democrats [flipped at least](#) one legislative chamber in Colorado, New York, New Hampshire, Minnesota, and Maine.

Democrats flipped control of [governors' offices](#) in seven states—Kansas, Illinois, Michigan, Maine, Wisconsin, Nevada, and New Mexico. In Kansas, Democratic state Sen. Laura Kelly defeated Republican Secretary of State Kris Kobach, a close Trump ally. Wisconsin's education chief Tony Evers, a Democrat, handed another Trump supporter, Republican Gov. Scott Walker, his walking papers. Democratic Maine Attorney General Janet Mills won her race for governor, replacing combustible Republican Gov. Paul LePage, who was term-limited. Democratic Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham succeeds New Mexico Republican Gov. Susana Martinez. In Michigan, Democrat Gretchen Whitmer defeated Republican Attorney General Bill Schuette. Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner in Illinois lost his bid for a second term to Democrat J.B. Pritzker. Ned Lamont's narrow victory in Connecticut means that Democrats will maintain control of the



governorship there. Rep. Tim Walz, a member of teachers' union Education Minnesota, kept the Minnesota governor's office in Democratic hands.

The races for governor in Georgia and Florida illustrate how voter suppression and racism are still major factors in our political system.

Georgia's Republican Secretary of State Brian Kemp stole the governorship from former state Sen. Stacey Abrams by using his position to [purge](#) hundreds of thousands of voters from the rolls. Since he took office in 2010, Kemp [removed](#) more than 1.4 million so-called "inactive" voters (almost half of them last year), who were disproportionately African Americans. For this election, Kemp's office put [53,000 voter registration applications](#) on hold — 70% of them from people of color — because of the state's controversial and racist "exact match" law. Abrams, who was vying to become the nation's first Black woman governor, reluctantly conceded on November 16, but questioned the legitimacy of his victory. Officially, Kemp outscored Abrams by a [50.3 % to 48.8% margin](#).

"I acknowledge that former Secretary of State Brian Kemp will be certified as the victor in the 2018 gubernatorial election," Abrams said. "But to watch an elected official who claims to represent the people in this state baldly pin his hopes for election on suppression of the people's democratic right to vote has been truly appalling." She decried the "deliberate and intentional" voter suppression by Kemp that she believed had led to her defeat.

Florida's [tough voter suppression laws](#), which kept many Black voters from casting ballots, hurt Democrat Andrew Gillum's gubernatorial campaign against Republican Rep. Ron DeSantis. Even after a recount, Gillum, the charismatic 39-year old Tallahassee mayor, fell 34,000 votes short. But the number of disenfranchised Black voters far exceeded DeSantis' margin of victory.

State and local victories

The headlines understandably focused on the races for Senate, House and governorships, but

progressives scored many impressive victories for state and local candidates and ballot measures.

In contrast to the razor-thin Republican margins of less than one percent in Florida's Senate and governor races, the Sunshine state's voters overwhelmingly embraced a progressive ballot measure that could transform the nation's largest "swing" state to a Democratic bastion, a move that will likely dramatically shape future presidential, Senate, and gubernatorial races. About 65% of Florida voters supported Amendment 4, which ends the state's Jim Crow-like law that disenfranchised anyone with a felony conviction for life unless the governor and cabinet restores their voting rights on a case-by-case basis. The measure will automatically give nearly 1.5 million former felons — a group that is disproportionately African-American — the right to vote. If they exercise that right, it could usher in a huge increase in Democratic voters. In presidential races, this could put Florida's 29 Electoral College votes in the Democratic column, increase the likelihood of Democratic candidates winning Florida's governorship and its other U.S. Senate seat, and change the make-up of the state's Congressional delegation and state legislature, now both dominated by Republicans.

In addition to the success of Amendment 4 in Florida, voters in Nevada, Michigan, and Maryland supported measures to make voting easier, including automatic voter registration and Election Day registration. Missouri, North Dakota, New Mexico, Florida, and Portland (Oregon) adopted measures to limit the role of money in elections. Voters in [Michigan](#), [Colorado](#) and [Missouri curbed the ability of state lawmakers to redraw districts that benefit one political party](#).

Aaron Ford -- Nevada's progressive Senate majority leader and a strong proponent of raising the minimum wage, paid sick leave, and gun control -- will become the state's first African American Attorney General. Tish James, New York City's Public Advocate, became the first woman and first African American to be elected New York State attorney general. Minnesota Cong. Keith Ellison, an



African American, won his race for state Attorney General, making him the nation's first Muslim AG.

For several years, African American community activists have been focusing on electing progressive candidates as local district attorneys to address such issues as police brutality, cash bail, and mass incarceration. Reformers such as Kim Foxx in Chicago and Larry Krasner in Philadelphia have led the way. This year, Democrat Rachael Rollins won her race to become the first African American to serve as Suffolk County (Boston) district attorney, running on a promise not to prosecute [15 low-level nonviolent offenses](#). On a similar platform, Wesley Bell, a City Council member in Ferguson, Missouri, was elected St. Louis County prosecutor.

Maria Elena Durazo -- the daughter of immigrant farmworkers, longtime head of UNITE HERE Local 11, and former head of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor -- won her race for the state Senate from Los Angeles. In her first try for public office, she received 62% of the vote. She'll immediately become a powerful force in Sacramento after three decades of helping other progressives win elections in the LA area. She is one of 743 union members who won public office across the country, according to the AFL-CIO.

California state senator Ricardo Lara, a progressive (and gay) Democrat who sponsored legislation to adopt a single-payer healthcare-for-all system in the state, will be California's new insurance commissioner. He will work with newly-elected Gov. Gavin Newsom and his former legislative colleagues to expand health care coverage for more Californians.

North Carolina voters elected Democrat Anita Earls, executive director of the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, to a seat on the state's Supreme Court. The daughter of a black father and a white mother, she is the state's prominent voting rights lawyer and a leader in the fight against voter suppression.

Immigrant rights activists and their allies in New York, North Carolina, Minnesota, and Maryland [defeated](#) local officials -- a county executive and

three county sheriffs -- who had cooperated with federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to carry out President Trump's war on immigrants.

Democrat Safiya Wazir, 27, who moved to the U.S. from Afghanistan, was elected to the New Hampshire's House of Representatives, making her the first former refugee to win a seat in the state legislature. She fled the Taliban as a child, lived in an Uzbekistan refugee camp for ten years, moved to Concord, N.H. in 2007, and became an American citizen in 2013.

In Missouri, 62% of the voters approved a ballot measure to hike the state's minimum wage to \$12 an hour by 2023, giving more than 600,000 workers a raise. In Arkansas, 68% of voters embraced a similar measure to raise its minimum wage to \$11 an hour by 2021. In Anaheim, California, a coalition of unions and community groups appear to have won a ballot measure to adopt a minimum wage for the 30,000 workers at Disneyland to \$15 an hour next year, gradually going to \$18 an hour by 2022.

Voters in Idaho, Utah, and Nebraska -- three traditionally Republican states -- embraced ballot measures to expand Medicaid benefits to more low-income adults. Louisiana voters endorsed Amendment 2 which eliminates a Jim Crow-era law that allowed juries to render non-unanimous verdicts in felony trials. It was put in place to make it easier for juries to convict Black defendants. Voters in Washington State [passed](#) an initiative to make it easier to prosecute police for negligent shootings. Oregon voters [rejected](#) an effort to repeal the state's sanctuary law, which limits cooperation between local police and federal immigration officers. And Coloradans voted to [remove](#) language in the state constitution that allows prison labor without pay.

In Washington state, voters passed a ballot measure tightening gun control laws, including raising the minimum age to purchase firearms to 21 years. San Francisco voters approved a tax on businesses that make more than \$50 million per year. That money will go toward housing e homeless people. New



Jersey approved Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy's proposal to raise an additional \$500 million for public schools. [Massachusetts](#) voters passed the nation's first statewide law providing anti-discrimination protections for transgender people. In Oakland, voters approved Measure Y to close eviction loopholes, a significant expansion of local eviction protections to cover renters in thousands of smaller buildings that were previously exempt. In nearby Alameda, a renter-led campaign defeated Measure K, a real-estate industry measure to preempt rent control efforts, despite heavy spending in favor.

More Diversity

Trump's election, the Women's March in January 2017, and the #MeToo movement inspired a record number of women to run for office this year, from school boards to the U.S. Senate. An unprecedented 277 women were on the ballot this November for Congress and governorships, according to the *Washington Post*, including 210 candidates in the U.S. House alone. The upsurge of women's activism shifted voting patterns. Exit polling collected by CNN and analyzed by the *Washington Post* found that in Congressional races, [59 percent of women voted for Democrats](#)—“the largest margin ever seen in midterm exit polls.” White women favored Republican candidates in the House in 2010 and in 2014, but this year they split their votes evenly between the two parties.

There are currently 84 women (61 Democrats and 23 Republicans) in the House—19.3 percent of its 435 members, [according to](#) the Center for American Women and Politics. More than 100 women (overwhelmingly Democrats) won House seats this year, shattering the record. Newly elected U.S. Representatives include the first Native American women (Sharice Davids of Kansas and [Deb Haaland](#) of New Mexico), the first Muslim women (Michigan's Rashida Tlaib and Minnesota's Ilhan Omar), and the first Latinas in the Texas Congressional delegation (Sylvia Garcia and Veronica Escobar).

There will be [at least 23 women](#) in the Senate's next session. (Cindy Hyde-Smith's Mississippi run-off

has yet to be decided.) Two of the 17 Democrats (McCaskill and Heitkamp) lost their seats to Republican men, but two other Democrats, Jacky Rosen and Kyrsten Sinema, won seats that had been held by Republican men. In addition, Tennessee Republican Rep. Marsha Blackburn won her election to the Senate.

Democratic Senators Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota (who gained notoriety for her battle with Brett Kavanaugh during his Supreme Court hearing), Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, and Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, all likely presidential candidates, won their re-election bids by large margins.

The number of women holding [state legislative seats](#) will increase from 25.4% to potentially as much as 38% in January. Their numbers jumped from 1,879 (the previous record) to 2,019 women state legislators.

Democratic women won all four statewide races in Michigan – Debbie Stabenow (Senate), Whitmer (governor), Dana Nessel (attorney general), and Jocelyn Benson (secretary of state). Twenty-two women won seats in the Nevada Assembly, making that state the first to have a state legislature with a majority of women.

The number of women governors will increase from six (two Democrats and four Republicans) to nine (six Democrats and three Republicans), reflecting a Democratic upsurge in state elections. Voters re-elected Democrats Gina Raimondo (Rhode Island) and Kate Brown (Oregon) and Republicans Kim Reynolds (Iowa) and Kate Ivey (Alabama). Democrats Laura Kelly (Kansas), Michelle Lujan Grisham (New Mexico), Mills (Maine), and Whitmer (Michigan) will replace Republican governors. Republican Kristi Noem will replace term-limited fellow Republican, Dennis Daugaard, in South Dakota.

At least 244 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender candidates – all Democrats – ran for office this year at all levels of government, including 21 for Congress and four for governor. In what the LGBTQ Victory Fund is calling a [“rainbow wave.”](#)



152 of them won their races. Cong. Jared Polis of Colorado will become the nation's first openly gay man to be elected governor of any state. (Jim McGreevey was elected New Jersey governor in 2002, but didn't come out of the closet until 2004, after which he resigned). In his race for governor, Polis embraced single-payer healthcare, repeal of the death penalty, universal full-day preschool and stronger gun laws. Kate Brown, a bisexual who was the first openly LGBT person elected governor when she won her Oregon race in 2016, was re-elected. Ricardo Lara, who is ahead in the vote count for California insurance commission, will become the state's first openly gay man to win a statewide office.

Lesbian Angie Craig (Minnesota), bisexual Katie Hill (California), and Chris Pappas, a gay man from New Hampshire, will be going to Congress. So will Sharice Davids of Kansas, making her the first gay Native American woman elected to Congress. Krysten Sinema will be first and only bisexual in the upper chamber.

There is currently only one trans person in any state legislature, but that number quadrupled after Gerri Cannon and Lisa Bunker won seats in the New Hampshire House of Representatives and Brianna Titone was elected to the Colorado House. Democrat [Gina Ortiz Jones](#), a first-generation American, a lesbian, and a veteran of the Iraq war, may still become the first Filipina-American congresswoman. Her race against incumbent Republican Rep. Will Hurd in a district that stretches from San Antonio to El Paso was, by November 16, still too close to call, with the [official tally](#) showing Jones behind by roughly 1000 votes. Hurd declared victory but Jones has refused to concede

The number of [Latinos](#) serving in Congress reach a record high, to at least 41 -- and possibly 43 after the votes are counted in two undecided races. Only six of them are Republicans. The increases all occurred in the House. The number of Latinos in the Senate (four) won't change. Republican Ted Cruz of Texas and Democrat Robert Menendez won re-election and the other two (Republican Marco Rubio of New Jersey and Democrat Catherine

Cortez Mastro of Nevada) did not have to run this year.

Likewise, the number of Black members of the House will grow to an all-time peak of 55, with an [additional nine Black candidates](#) (five of them women) who won their races this year.

Setbacks and Disappointments

This election was a two-steps-forward-one-step backward scenario. Overall, progressive gained momentum, but they also suffered some casualties around the country.

In Kentucky, Democrat Amy McGrath, a former Marine fighter pilot and Naval Academy graduate, who gained notoriety for her impressive [commercial](#) announcing her campaign, lost a close race (51% to 48%) to Republican incumbent Andy Barr in a district that Trump carried by 15 percentage points. Similarly, Randy Bryce, a union ironworker, excited progressives when he posted a [viral video](#) in June 2017 to launch his challenge to House Speaker Paul Ryan in his conservative Wisconsin district. Bryce's move contributed to Ryan's decision to retire, but Bryce proved to be a flawed candidate and was defeated by Ryan's former aide, Bryan Steil, by a 55% to 42% margin.

Nebraska progressives had high hopes for Democrat Kara Eastman, a former history professor and founder and head of the Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance, a lead poisoning prevention organization. She won the Democratic primary with an upstart campaign that emphasized free college, Medicare for All, and stricter gun control. But her bid to unseat Republican Cong. Don Bacon fell 7,300 votes short. She lost by a 52% to 48% margin in a district that includes Omaha and its suburbs, that Trump won by two percentage points.

Christine Hallquist, [the first transgender person](#) nominated for governor by a major party, lost her race in Vermont. Former Dallas County Sheriff Lupe Valdez, the daughter of migrant farmworkers, hoped to become the first Latina and first lesbian Texas governor, but she lost her challenge to



incumbent Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican, by a 54% to 44% margin. Ben Jealous's campaign to unseat Maryland's Republican Gov. Larry Hogan and become its first African American governor never got much traction. Jealous, the former president of the NAACP, faced a popular incumbent who had distanced himself from Trump. Hogan received 56% of the vote including those of about [one-third of Democrats](#).

Progressives were pleased that many Republican reactionaries went down to defeat, but disappointed that the most racist, xenophobic, and Neanderthal member of Congress, Steve King of Iowa, managed to escape defeat by a razor-thin margin. (He referred to immigrants as "[dirt](#)" during his campaign). In 2016, both King and Trump received 61% of the votes in the 4th Congressional district. But their brand of white nationalist extremism might be wearing thin. Although the district has 52,000 more registered Republicans than Democrats, King beat first-time candidate J.D. Scholten (a paralegal and former professional baseball player) by less than 11,000 votes – 50.4% to 47%. But when he returns to Congress in January, King, beginning his ninth term in Congress, will be the only Republican in Iowa's four-person delegation and will lose his chairmanship of the Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice.

Voters in Washington rejected a plan to charge companies for their carbon pollution and the revenue to fund investments in clean air, clean water, and clean energy, especially in low-income areas and communities of color. It would have been the first carbon fee in the country and would have raised an estimated \$1 billion a year. Oil interests pour more than \$31 million into defeating the plan.

In Arizona, voters gave a thumbs-down to Proposition 127, which would have required power companies to get half their electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

Wall Street banks and corporate landlords spent over \$70 million to defeat a statewide ballot measure to give California cities the authority to expand rent control. Outspent by nearly four to one,

the coalition of tenant groups, community organizations, labor unions, and other progressive forces were only able to convince 35% of voters to embrace the plan. But activists pledged to push for other forms of rent regulation through local ballot measures and lobbying their city officials.

In Alabama and West Virginia, voters approved amendments to their state constitutions designed to prevent public funding of abortions, but Oregon voters rejected a similar measure. Voters in [North Carolina](#) and [Arkansas](#) approved measures that will require voters to show some form of photo ID when they cast ballots in person. Maine voters rejected a proposal to raise taxes by 3.8% to provide universal home care for all Maine seniors and individuals with disabilities regardless of income.

What Now?

This year's midterms were in many ways a dress rehearsal for 2020. The unprecedented level of activism-turned anger against Trump resulted in grassroots victories for Democrats. Nationwide, Democratic candidates combined garnered [nearly 52 percent](#) of the vote in the House races, a good measure of public sentiment. In the next two years, as they anticipate that Trump will be at the top of the ticket, can Democrats and progressive activists sustain that activism?

Trump won the presidency in 2016 because he got about 77,000 more votes than Hillary Clinton in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, but polls show that Trump [has lost support](#) in those states. This November, Wisconsin voters ousted Republican Gov. Scott Walker (a Trump clone) and re-elected progressive Democrat Sen. Tammy Baldwin. Michigan voters flipped the governorship by electing Democrat Gretchen Whitmer and re-electing Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow. Pennsylvania re-elected Democrats Bob Casey to the Senate and Tom Wolf as governor.

One lesson the Democrats should learn after almost two years of dealing with Trump: Don't take his bait. Whether he's daring you to make a deal on a government infrastructure plan (that primarily



benefits private investors), forge a compromise on DACA by agreeing to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border, or take a DNA test to prove you're a Native American, just say no. You can't trust him, he'll win the public relations battle by appearing willing to cooperate, and you'll be normalizing his racism and authoritarianism.

Another lesson is the importance of sustaining a progressive movement in between election cycles. Progressives and Democrats can't just parachute organizers into swing states and districts a few months before the next election. As occurred since Trump took office, progressives built and expanded their base by getting ordinary people organized around local and national issues. That needs to be expanded, which means liberal and Democratic funders allocating resources to hire organizers for the mosaic of progressive organizations who can continue to mobilize people, train leaders, and build the progressive infrastructure. A key task is to register voters, particularly in states with voter suppression laws, so they'll be (as Obama often said) "fired up and ready go" for the 2020 elections.

At his embattled post-election press conference, Trump [stated that](#) he'll declare war on Democrats if they insist on investigating him. This *is* war, and the Democrats just won an important battle. Democrats—and the progressive movement—will need to keep their troops mobilized for the next, even bigger battle in 2020. The soldiers are ready. Are the generals?

Peter Dreier is E.P. Clapp Distinguished Professor of Politics at Occidental College. His latest book is *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame* (Nation Books). An earlier and shorter version of this article appeared in *Rewire*.