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OPINION

No Mandate for Right-wing Policies

We have to stand up and fight

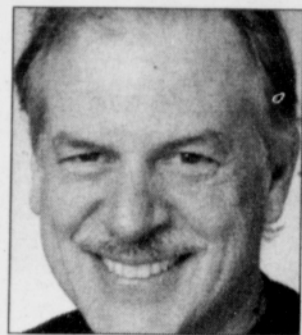
BY ROBERT L. BOROSAGE

Debacle. Bloodbath. Drubbing. Call it what you will. For Democrats nationally, this was an ugly Election Day. But there's no mandate for right-wing policies in its aftermath.

Arkansas voters chose to raise the minimum wage while electing a senator who opposes doing so. Colorado voters are pro-choice and elected a senator who isn't. Voters want action on climate change and gave the Senate over to those who are in the pocket of Big Oil.

The most rational voters — given what's coming in Washington — were those in the District of Columbia and Oregon, who chose to make marijuana legal.

The 2014 mid-term elections were fundamentally about frustration with a recovery that most people haven't enjoyed. The Republicans blamed this on President Barack Obama and claimed Democrats were guilty by association. That aroused the GOP base



as candidates played down their conservative stances on reproductive choice and went silent on marriage equality.

Democrats chose not to run nationally against Republican obstruction, under the assumption that their broad opposition to right-wing social positions would mobilize their own base.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who drove the Republican strategy to obstruct every Obama initiative and then paint Obama a failure, is now warbling the soothing tones of bipartisan cooperation.

Any "cooperation" will, of course, be on Republican terms. GOP leaders will invite Obama to join in on "reforms" like reducing corporate tax burdens, paring Social Security benefits, approving budgets that savage the vulnerable and lard the Pentagon, and cutting ruinous trade deals that undermine American workers.

To pay for infrastructure, the Republican-led Congress will champion the "repatriation" of the dough that corporations have stashed abroad, handing those tax dodgers a massive tax break and an incentive to avoid even more taxes in the future.

This is the Wall Street "bipartisan" agenda

and it's ready to go. Immigration and renewable energy? You can bet they're off the table.

The White House faces a choice. Will it lay out what the country needs? Will President Obama make his case against those who would take the country backward? Or will he just provide political cover for global deals that stack the deck even more for the powerful and against the rest of us?

He shouldn't be left to make that choice by himself.

In the circular firing squad already blasting away, Democrats will blame these losses on their own liberalism. Conventional wisdom will urge them to move rightward and cooperate with newborn "moderate" Republicans. They'll be told that the way back to power is to embrace "centrist" policies on trade, tax reform, and entitlements.

But this election exposed the Democratic establishment's fallacies. Social issues alone, which increasingly favor Democrats, can't spur victory. Sophisticated campaign targeting and get-out-the-vote operations can't substitute for the passion, clarity, and vision that motivate the Democratic base to vote.

Democrats won't win votes by adopting a corporate agenda. They must drive an

agenda that will bring about an economy that works for everyone.

There's a populist majority waiting to be forged. Millions will rally for full-employment economics, for fairly taxing the rich and corporations, investing in rebuilding the country and educating all children, strengthening retirement security, making college affordable, lifting the minimum wage, taking on the corruption of our politics by big money, and transitioning to the new and more sustainable energy options that will create good-paying jobs.

Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts has it right: Voters think the government is corrupted and doesn't work for them. If our country is to deal with the real challenges it faces — extreme inequality and economic decline for the majority, catastrophic climate change for the whole world, an oppressive war on working people — we the people have to stand up and fight.

Democrats will have to make it clear that they're ready to join in.

Robert Borosage is the co-director of the Campaign for America's Future, a center for ideas and action that works to build an enduring majority for progressive change.

Closer to the Finish Line on School Disparities

A giant step forward for poor children

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

With opportunity gaps widening for poor children and children of color, new guidance from the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education offers new hope and protection from discrimination.



For the first time in 13 years, the department now makes clear that states, school districts, and schools must make education resources equally available to all students without regard to race, color, or national origin. It prohibits schools and school districts from discriminating in their allocation of courses, academic programs and extracurricular activities, teachers and leaders, other school personnel, school facilities, and technology and instructional materials, and offers steps to level the playing field.

This is some of the unfinished business of the Civil Rights movement and a giant step forward for poor children, often children of color, currently taught at higher rates by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers and provided far fewer resources than their wealthier peers. Our responsibility now is to ensure that children left behind truly benefit from these protections. The new guidance has real potential to address many of the lingering disparities after Brown v Board of Education.

Sixty years after that historic court deci-

sion, the Department of Education has made it clear that poor children and children of color are still routinely denied access to their fair share of strong teachers, decent schools,

and current textbooks. These actions are not only immoral, but illegal under the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The guidance states that wherever a state or district has seen fit to provide any education resource like a chemistry course, high-speed internet access, or a school counse-

Students of color must not be consigned to dilapidated, overcrowded school buildings that lack essential educational facilities, such as science laboratories, auditoriums, and athletic fields, and that may not be able to support the increasing infrastructure demands of rapidly expanding educational technologies while providing better facilities for other students.

— Catherine L. Hamon, assistant secretary for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education

lor, it must be provided equally. This has been in the works for a very long time and was inspired by the Equity and Excellence Commission, convened in 2010 to examine and propose remedies to disparities in educational opportunities and student achievement.

Years of advocacy that preceded Brown sought federal oversight of unfair distribution of resources by schools, districts, and states. But fairness must be a continuing concern as separate and unequal continues to pervade the education of children in our

nation. The last time similar guidance was issued by the Department of Education was January 19, 2001 as one of the last acts of the Clinton Administration.

Catherine L. Hamon, assistant secretary for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education, said in her "Dear Colleague letter" to states, school districts, and schools: "Students of color must not be consigned to dilapidated, overcrowded school buildings that lack essential educational facilities, such as science laboratories, auditoriums, and

athletic fields, and that may not be able to support the increasing infrastructure demands of rapidly expanding educational technologies while providing better facilities for other students."

While this language may sound like a familiar argument from the desegregation cases in the 1960s when "educational technology" meant film strips and slide rules, this new guidance recognizes that disparities still exist today and demonstrates a heightened commitment by the Administration to eliminate discrimination "root and branch"

and protect students' access to education.

If students of color in a school are consigned to remedial courses and are denied a strong teacher or current textbooks that could be discriminatory. If Advanced Placement courses are offered only in schools with the lowest enrollment of black or Latino students, or if the only district school without air conditioning is the one most Latino students attend, or if the math teacher assigned to English language learners is the only math teacher without a major or minor in math, this may be evidence of discrimination in the distribution of educational resources.

The Civil Rights Act protects students both from intentional discrimination and from discrimination that rises from the disparate impact of policies and procedures on student groups by race.

This new guidance is good and long overdue news for poor students and students of color in education. The next step is ensuring what is promised is delivered. Students, parents, educators and community members who suspect children are receiving less than their fair share should seek to learn more, address problems they see, and file complaints with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights when disparities are not addressed.

Monitoring of enforcement is essential if the neediest children are to benefit. Every child deserves a level playing field and a fair chance to succeed.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.