

OPINION

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Children Succeeding Against the Odds

It's time to hear and help them

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

After two years of divisive, hateful rhetoric from the highest levels of government, the profoundly inhumane treatment of immigrant families, and the placing of corporate profits ahead of the basic needs of children—the poorest age group in America—the results of November's election instilled in many that most precious resource: hope.

Change began sweeping across our country with the election results, bringing a new, diverse set of faces into the halls of Congress, governors' mansions and statehouses. With them comes a new opportunity to improve the odds for children.



We look to the two years ahead with more hope and determination that incumbent and new leaders alike will commit to common sense, fiscally responsible and compassionate policies to help end child poverty and inequality in America. Every child deserves health care and food, schools that are equitably funded, and protection from relentless gun violence. Every child needs a level playing field and an end to the Cradle-to-Prison Pipeline crisis.

But it is not our political leaders that give me the most hope—it is our courageous and resilient young people. I was reminded of that yesterday as the Children's Defense Fund honored five Washington, D.C. metro-area high school students at our annual Beat the Odds celebration.

The Beat the Odds program identifies

and rewards young people who have overcome tremendous adversity, demonstrated academic excellence and are giving back to their communities. By providing them college scholarships, leadership skills and more, the program supports these astounding youths—who too many people would write off—to become the next generation of effective servant leaders.

Because of CDF's Beat the Odds program hundreds of young people who have persevered and overcome profound family challenges, homelessness, parental incarceration, drug and alcohol addiction, neglect and abuse, or gun violence have been able to attend college and become outstanding adults. They are doctors and lawyers, teachers and Peace Corps volunteers, and responsible parents. They are living proof that no one should ever give up on a child.

These amazing young people have beat-

en formidable odds stacked against them, challenging our notions of what is possible and inspiring us all to persevere despite setbacks. But the truth is, our children should not have to struggle so hard to beat the odds.

You and I and our political leaders must improve and even the odds for children, especially children of color and those living in poverty. Across our country children are crying out for us to protect them from hunger and homelessness, abuse and neglect, and gun violence and bigotry. It's time to hear and help them.

If the challenge seems too great or our political system seems too broken, just remember the example set by brave young people across our nation and commit to fight for their future and countless others like them.

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

2018 Midterms: Hardly a Sigh of Relief

The issues that won't go away

BY ROBERT C. KOEHLER

How much real change manifested itself in the 2018 midterms? How deeply does the outcome reflect the American soul?

Apparently, about 113 million Americans, basically half the electorate, felt compelled to vote in the midterms, revved up either by intense opposition to or support for Donald Trump. This is a lot more than usual for a non-presidential election, but still fairly pathetic for "the world's greatest democracy."

How much closer did we move to becoming a nation able and willing to focus on the real issues that threaten the planet?

Some progressives determined to change the game were among those who gained office in this election, which is something worth celebrating — but hardly reason to heave a sigh of relief. Most of the issues that truly matter, that require a fundamental shift in American politics, remain rawly unaddressed and unacknowledged. They were essentially invisible in the mainstream election coverage, which, as usual, presented it as a horse race for the entertainment of Spectator America, not the creation of the future.

The issues that won't go away include:

A. Militarism, endless war, unconscionable military spending, nuclear weapons. This was utterly off the table in the midterms. As Chris Hedges pointed out, some 85 percent of Senate Dems voted for this year's \$716 billion military spending bill, indicating a "unity" of surrender to military-industrialism. We no longer glorify our wars, we ignore them. And even progressive candidates seldom declare an in-



tent to challenge the culture of war. Is there any political traction whatsoever for the antiwar movement? I fear there hasn't been for four and a half decades — since the defeat of George McGovern.

B. Climate change, environmental catastrophe. This is not unrelated to the issue of war, since the world's militaries are by far the biggest polluters. While environmental sanity is at least something that can be addressed politically, the urgency of global warming hardly has political traction. And, as a headline on Vox summed things up regarding the midterms: "Fossil fuel money crushed clean energy ballot initiatives across the country."

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C. Poverty, inequality. "In the wealthiest country in the history of the world," writes Maria Svart, national director of Democratic Socialists of America, "many of us live in quiet desperation. Farmers are committing suicide, and so are taxi drivers in New York City. That's why in the battle for the soul of our country, we must win." Capitalism is still sacrosanct and Donald Trump, the alleged working class populist, cuts the taxes of the rich and is, as Hedges notes, an "embarrassing tool of the kleptocrats." But socialism is no longer a taboo word in American politics and

self-declared socialists are getting elected. Medicare for all and publicly funded college tuition are gaining political traction. The 99 percent have a voice. But of course the rich still have almost all the power; for the most part, this means that their self-interest rules.

D. Guns, violence, mass murder, a culture of violence. This issue still carves a deep gouge across the American electorate. Mass murders keep occurring. Should we get serious about gun control or should teachers and rabbis be armed? There is no real dialogue across the divide. We still live in a culture that worships violence. Just as we will not, as a nation, consider demilitarizing, neither will we disarm. And

war keeps coming home.

E. Militarized police, police shootings and racism. The antidote emerges in concepts such as community policing and restorative justice — security that involves connecting with and understanding others, even those we dislike and distrust. This transformation is taking place across the whole planet, quietly, and for the most part beyond the world of politics. From my point of view, it's one of the biggest sources of hope — it's the cultural path beyond the worship and glorification of violence.

F. The prison-industrial complex. The

United States has the largest prison system in the world (and it's becoming increasingly privatized), with 2.3 million people — mostly impoverished people of color — behind bars. Our prison system is a regrouping of Jim Crow America, which can't stand having a country without second-class and tenth-class citizens. But here's some good news from this year's midterms: "Florida restored voting rights to more than 1 million people with felony records, which amounts to the biggest enfranchisement since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the women's suffrage movement," Vox reports.

G. Immigrant scapegoating, hatred and fear. Because our unwinnable, endless wars can no longer serve the function of unifying the country, Trump has turned to immigrants — in particular, that "invading caravan" of desperate, shoeless Central Americans — as the Other he needs to rev his base and get the vote out. However, the Trump administration's treatment of immigrants, including the cruel separation of parents and children, has shocked and enraged much of the country, putting the country's long-standing policy of cruel indifference to global suffering (and of course one of its leading creators as well) into the national spotlight like never before.

H. Voter suppression, gerrymandering, hacking. Ah, democracy, a nuisance to the powerful, a system to be gamed! If the voting can't be controlled, my God, Republicans could lose. Witness Georgia and North Dakota, where bureaucratic twists deprived African-American and Native American citizens of their right to vote in large enough numbers to skewer election results.

Robert Koehler, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is a Chicago award-winning journalist and editor.