

# Americans need a hug to get through the months ahead

Mary Milwaukee was the key to the swing states. But she wanted her President to have Biden's demeanour with Trump's policies.

By JOE HOCKEY

From **Commentary** November 8, 2020  
5 MINUTE READ •  211

The American people have spoken. Joe Biden deserved to win.

When I wrote two weeks ago that our fictional swing voter Mary Milwaukee had made up her mind to vote for Joe Biden readers lambasted me as anti-Trump. It turns out that her vote made the difference.

Mary wanted her President to have Joe Biden's demeanour with Donald Trump's policies.

This election was always pro-Trump vs anti-Trump. It was not right vs left or even Trump vs Biden. This election went beyond the traditional battle formulas.

Mary Milwaukee ignored the tweets, narcissism and shenanigans because she supported Trump's policies on the economy, law and order, the environment, border control and draining the swamp in Washington DC.

She wanted her son to come back from Afghanistan and her husband to hold his job as a truck driver. In particular she wanted her daughter to have a chance to go to college. Her higher wages and her husband's new-found job security made that more possible. She thought the coronavirus would pass and that Trump would protect her and her family.

But when Trump fell ill with coronavirus it became clear through his own words and behaviour that the President was more focused on himself than the health and welfare of Mary and her family.

Trump's confused messages on the coronavirus combined with the impact of a horrible new outbreak of the virus in her local Wisconsin community were the end for Mary.

It was the same suburban white women, and their parents, that voted for Trump in 2016 that abandoned him four years later.

Trump knew it was coming so he responded by trying to broaden his voter base. This was not the normal Republican play. Political folklore says that Democrats win by getting more people to vote, and Republicans win by suppressing the votes. This election smashed that theory.

Trump grew the Republican vote in America by more than 10 per cent over George Bush's high water mark in 2004. He won 10 million more votes than his GOP predecessor Mitt Romney.

He also defied stereotypes. More Hispanics and black men voted for Trump than in 2016. This confounded Democrats. Trump also picked up more first time young voters than expected.

Trump's enthusiasm and energy clawed back the campaign. Arguably, if the election had gone on another week then Donald Trump may have won. No sensible analysis

would suggest the Democrats had momentum at the end of the campaign. Early voting trends confirm that Biden won the early campaign.

He had to get more votes than any other presidential candidate in history to beat Trump. It was a magnificent and heroic victory. It took more money, more third-party advocacy and more unity than ever before to beat a candidate that has disrupted American politics and turned modern political battle on its head.

His moderate policies and unifying message vaulted him over the line in key states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. But only just.

Critics will say that Biden should have won by more. I don't accept that. The US is a bitterly divided nation. Those same critics have consistently underestimated Trump. They viewed him as an unelectable fool and they took his every word as a spear from an adversary. They saw no good in anything Trump did whether it was genuine peace agreements in the Middle East or criminal justice reform that got record numbers of blacks out of jail.

The bottom line is that Democrats should be happy with the outcome. Whatever comes of the Georgia recount and ongoing uncertainty in Arizona, Joe Biden and the Democratic Party managed to win states that Trump needed to hold.

Far more Americans like and admire Biden than voted for him. That's why Trump could not lay a glove on Biden's character. He tried hard but failed. Biden is a very decent man and his story is inspiring. He suffered gut-wrenching personal tragedies and has lived a humble life. He first ran as a Democratic candidate for president in 1988 before a huge cohort of his current voters were born. He lost again in 2008 then served as much admired deputy to Barack Obama for eight years.

From day one of Biden's campaign, when he jogged across that stage in Philadelphia to announce his candidacy for president, he framed his campaign as a "battle for the soul of our nation". He never once wavered from the theme for 18 months.

The message consistency has been remarkable and it is also purpose-built for a time when the nation is hurting.

And it's been reflected in his nomination of Kamala Harris as his running mate. On the candidate stage Harris landed the most aggressive blow on Biden's character. He still chose her as his running mate. That's Biden the forgiver.

He also knows that it sends a powerful message having a woman as his legal successor for the next four years. Mary Milwaukee may never admit it because she is focused on policy first, but she would be really pleased to see a woman in leadership. She would see it as an inspiration for her daughter. For most of us it is much more inspiring.

This election was a repudiation of both the far left and far right of the political spectrum. At a time of tumult, Americans gravitated towards the centre. They bucked Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primary and then voted out Donald Trump. Americans want respite from disruption and zero-sum politics.

Many people around the world also wanted a break from the tumult. The fact that Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, publicly congratulated Biden on his victory before he had even claimed the win, says it all.

Every election is deemed important. Every election is crucial. Biden has been in American politics for 47 years. He knows his nation and his people better than most. How he handles the next few weeks will determine whether he succeeds or fails.

While many people these days eschew the big hug, Biden needs to be himself. He is a hugger and healer. He shows emotion and empathy. All Americans need a hug to get through the rollercoaster of the next few months. If nothing else, being Biden will be his great legacy.

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