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Current Events

Edited by Barsha Parajuli

Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill: A Much Needed-Victory for Biden and America

by Andrew Daly



After a long period of apathy, delays, and compromises, President Joe Biden's \$1.2 billion infrastructure bill has been signed into law. The bill aims to create jobs by improving bridges and roads across the country and by expanding access to broadband internet. Its passage comes as Biden's job approval rating reached an all time low this month.

According to the latest Washington Post-ABC News poll, Biden currently has a 41% job approval rating, plummeting 11 points from his 52% job approval last spring. Some of this drop can be attributed to the public apathy surrounding legislation the administration is working towards, and along with Biden's frequent

gaffes and tangents, this makes it easy for critics to question Biden's mental fitness to be in office. Essentially, infrastructure doesn't grab headlines as well as a video of the president sputtering about an anecdote from his youth in front of the United Nations general assembly.

There's also Biden's failure to deliver on many promises made while campaigning. According to Politifact, Biden has only fulfilled 12% of his campaign promises, with another 42% "in the works." All of these things are causing Americans to be understandably frustrated with Biden's performance thus far, and that frustration is the likely cause of his approval rating drop as well as the Republican swing in November's off-year elections. One such campaign promise Biden made was improvements to America's infrastructure, and although it is drastically scaled back from the package many progressive Democrats would have liked, this bill will cause vital improvements to public works.

According to the White House website, the bill will:

- Deliver clean water to all American families and eliminate the nation’s lead service lines.
- Ensure every American has access to reliable high-speed internet.
- Repair and rebuild our roads and bridges with a focus on climate change mitigation, resilience, equity, and safety for all users.
- Improve transportation options for millions of Americans and reduce greenhouse emissions through the largest investment in public transit in U.S. history.
- Upgrade our nation’s airports and ports to strengthen our supply chains and prevent disruptions that have caused inflation.
- Make the largest investment in passenger rail since the creation of Amtrak.
- Build a national network of electric vehicle (EV) chargers.
- Upgrade our power infrastructure to deliver clean, reliable energy across the country and deploy cutting-edge energy technology to achieve a zero-emissions future.
- Make our infrastructure resilient against the impacts of climate change, cyber-attacks, and extreme weather events.
- Deliver the largest investment in tackling legacy pollution in American history by cleaning up Superfund and brownfield sites, reclaiming abandoned mines, and capping orphaned oil and gas wells.

With this first key policy goal out of the way, Biden can now focus on passing his “Build Back Better” plan, which is more focused on social spending and less popular with Republicans and moderate Democrats like Senators Joe Manchin (D-VA) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ). The bipartisan bill should serve as a much-needed win for Biden and a Democratic party at its lowest point since the 2016 election. It’s main focus is on staying competitive with China and doing so in a climate-conscious manner. Considering that the American Society of Civil Engineers gave the U.S. a C- grade on overall infrastructure, the upgrades are imperative.



Midterm Elections in Virginia

by Deetya Adhikari



On November 2nd, states across the US held their regular elections - New Jersey and Virginia held their gubernatorial elections and state legislative elections, while other states reserved this day for any special elections, as a result of deaths or vacancies. The main candidates for governor in Virginia were Republican candidate, Glenn Youngkin, and Democratic candidate, Terry McAuliffe. In New Jersey, the candidates for governor were Republican candidate, Jack Ciattarelli, and Democratic candidate, Phillip Murphy, Democratic. In the end, Youngkin won for Virginia and Murphy won for New Jersey.

Historically, a new president's party suffers losses from the first midterm elections after the new administration takes power. President Biden appears to be no exception from this trend, as the Democratic party begins to lose some of its grip, illustrated through Virginia's gubernatorial election. Especially over the past few elections, Virginia has been known to flip between a Democratic and Republican governor, but has a somewhat greater inclination to Democratic candidates overall.

There has been some controversy surrounding how the election went down. Governor-elect Youngkin made a mark on people by promising that public schools would stop teaching critical-race theory and topics of great controversy, especially in many of the more urban counties, which tend to vote democratic. Furthermore, because of Youngkin's stance and pledges regarding education, a survey found that Virginian parents were 56% more inclined to vote for him than McAuliffe. Moreover, Youngkin has promised to make a change in abortion legislation, which is very possible now since the Virginia House of Delegates may soon see a Republican majority.

In addition, Biden's declining popularity has lent itself towards dwindling margins between parties, and resulted in hurting McAuliffe's run for governor. Many people of color, who usually tend to vote more liberal, are displeased with Biden and his lack of policies supporting them. Former President Trump was better with handling the legal immigration process than Biden is right now, and voters have been complaining about inflation surrounding the Infrastructure Bill, increasing gas prices, the mismanaged withdrawal from Afghanistan, and how the Democratic members of Congress don't seem to be helping much. Since Youngkin campaigned in such a way where he did not show any relation to the former president, he was able to keep his core conservative group, while also still being able to appeal to a more moderate group. The combination of all

these factors has led to a decrease in popularity for the Democratic party statewide, and even though most counties retained their Democratic or Republican majority to some extent, overall, the number of Republican ballots increased, lending Youngkin the win.

The low democratic showing in Virginia, alone, does not seem overly significant, but is a prelude to how the 2022 midterm elections will turn out. Even in New Jersey there was a surprisingly close election - considering that New Jersey is a consistently Democratic-voting state - with Murphy winning by only a 6 percent majority. These events show how conservative candidates can have mass appeal across various groups and maneuver the political waters without touching taboo subjects, such as former President Trump.

Opinion

Edited by Sanjana Mittal

BLACKFISHING, REPRESENTATION AND APPROPRIATION IN FASHION MEDIA

by Kavya Malla

TW: Racism

Blackfishing is the act of white people trying to look ethnically ambiguous by altering their features for the validation and support of POC (People of Colour). Major fast fashion brands like Fashion Nova and Pretty Little Thing are often partaking in such practices in order to look inclusive without actually being inclusive. These brands also endorse the extreme hourglass body type which is often stereotypically portrayed as a feature of a person with African ancestry. This leads to a lack of representation in mass media which invalidates a lot of POC which can often lead to body dysmorphia, self-worth and mental health issues. These brands are represented by major POC celebrities like Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B which is not a bad form of representation. However, when it comes to influencer ambassadors predominantly featured on their Instagram page, these models are often just white people whose skin is simply tanned. The representation of East-Asian people and other POC is evidently scarce.

One of the many influencers on Instagram who is known to blackfish is Emma Halberg, whose photos imply that they are a POC. The fact that she is in fact, a Swedish girl, came to light when a picture of her before she was tanned was released. Upon which she responded “I’m not “posing” as a coloured person as you claim, I’ve never tried to be or look black, I was born with naturally curly hair, and my skin gets very easily tanned in the sun.”



This is done not only by influencers but also celebrities with massive followings like Ariana Grande, Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner.

Luxury fashion brand Dolce & Gabbana (D&G) is also known to be really ignorant of such issues despite a lot of criticism.

In a show of Spring 2013, D&G showcased earrings and dresses with African figurines and prints which are basically caricatures of African cultures and gestured to colonialism and slavery. After getting backlash, the company made an apology. In November of 2018, the company posted a clip in which a Chinese woman is shown struggling to eat Italian food with chopsticks as part of the ad campaign for “The Great Show” which was supposed to take place in Shanghai as a tribute to Chinese culture. This received a lot of backlash as it portrayed a stereotypical character of Asian women. Upon being confronted on Instagram, Stefano Gabbana made some very racist and condescending remarks including “China Ignorant Dirty Smelling Mafia” and “So you are racist because you eat dogs?”. However, both him and the company denied being racist claiming that the Instagram account got hacked.

Another high fashion brand Gucci, in a winter line in 2018 released a sweater which pulled up to the face covering the nose. The sweater was black in color and the fabric around the opening for the mouth was red. It hugely resembled Blackface (theatre makeup used mostly as a caricature by people who were not African). This was also very offensive, resulting in an apology from the brand for being insensitive.



Appropriation disregards the history of a culture. Often people use elements of a culture for the aesthetic without completely understanding it. This is ruinous to the culture as the true meaning of it is lost when brands and people with a huge influence do this. Due to which the opinion of said culture is falsified due to appropriation and misrepresentation.

The problem with blackfishing and misrepresentation, especially when one has a significantly large following, is that it would hamper the opportunities that could be given to real POC, hence interrupting the progress of POC in a world in which systemic racism is already prevalent.

In 1998, Yves Saint Laurent warned to pull an ad from French Vogue if they didn't put Naomi Campbell on the cover. Despite the missteps being taken by a lot of people in the fashion industry, there are strides being taken to make the industry better at representation and inclusivity.



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Midterm Elections in Virginia

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