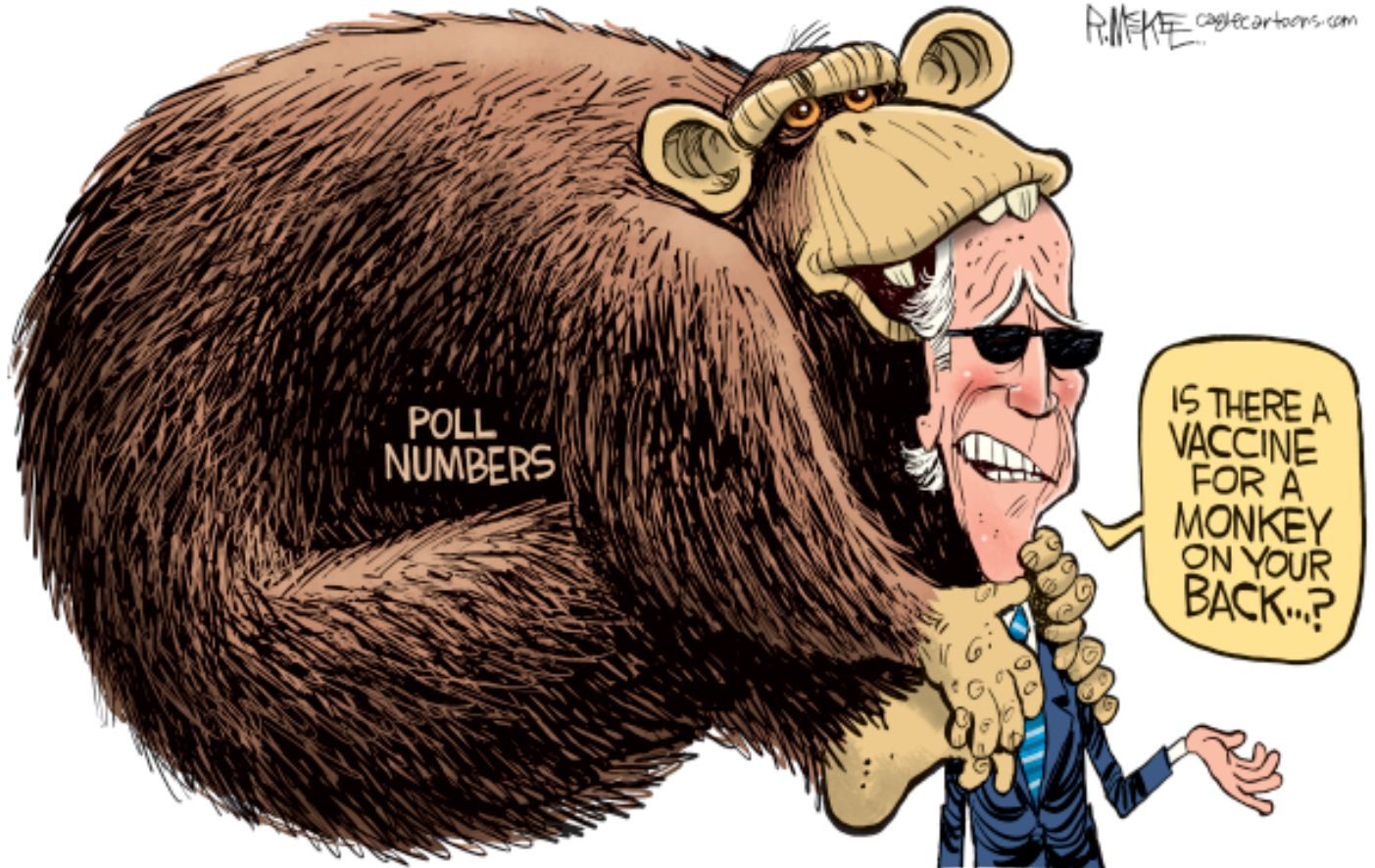


IT'S INFLATION, STUPID

by Carl Golden, June 1, 2022



When the draft Supreme Court opinion overturning the constitutional right to an abortion was leaked to the media last month, it tore through Washington, D.C. with the force of a category five hurricane. The draft set off a mad scramble to pronounce the dynamic of the congressional midterm election had been irrevocably altered and the Republican wave momentum blunted.

Despite it being a draft document - a working opinion subject to change - peddlers of conventional wisdom promoted it as the inevitable outcome of the court's deliberations and the 50-year-old abortion rights ruling was about to be discarded, returning decisions on regulating the procedure to the states.

Abortion rights would, pundits intoned, become the turning point in national campaigns - an outcome, they said, that largely favored Democrats.

More than a month has elapsed since the leaked disclosure and it appears the hair on fire pundit-outrage machine was wrong. Again.

Now that the dust has settled, it's clear voters - while supporting access to abortions - are focused on individual economic issues, motivated to turn out on election day to vote their self-interest and express dissatisfaction with the administration's ineffective response to record inflation and punishingly unprecedented cost of living increases.

And that largely favors Republicans.

The president and his party have been slowly circling the drain for months, gaining speed and intensity with the release of one dismal public approval poll after another.

Democratic strategists agree the party faces a messaging problem, that if only the administration can break through with a powerful cogent narrative touting its accomplishment, popular fortune would turn in its direction.

The public perception, though, is of an administration that is increasingly befuddled, unsure of what steps to take while gasoline prices teeter on \$5 a gallon, grocery staples rise by double digit percentages, and working men and women fall further behind as inflation erodes their income.

Initially, the White House dismissed inflation as “transitory” - a temporary hiccup in the economy that would soon vanish despite warnings to the contrary.

The spike in gasoline prices was, the administration said, caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, disrupting the global oil supply. Costs had begun to rise steadily before the outbreak, however, suggesting that the blame Russia’s President Vladimir Putin narrative was specious at best.

There seems to be no understanding by the administration of those millions of Americans who lie awake each night mentally balancing their checkbooks seeking relief they can make it through until the next paycheck.

Upgrading to a newer or larger home is out of the question while paying for repairs to keep the eight-year-old car on the road is the only alternative to purchasing a new one.

Commodity shortages, like the unconscionable scarcity of baby formula, were blamed on “supply chain issues,” a catchall default position from those without answers.

It’s no surprise that a great number of Americans have concluded the administration is inept, that no one of substance is in charge, the well of ideas has gone dry or it is so frighteningly out of touch that drifting aimlessly is preferable to acting at all.

It is unfortunate as well that the loss of public confidence has fueled increasing and painful doubts about the president’s cognitive powers, whether his ability to fully and incisively grasp the seriousness of the national condition and act decisively to meet the moment have eroded to a dangerous point.

It is the perception that the administration doesn’t know how to proceed, that it cannot lead at a time of national risk. According to the Real Clear Politics polling average, for example, an astounding 70 percent believe the nation is heading in the wrong direction.

It is this belief that will be the dominant force in the midterms, driving voter turnout and expressing discontent and frustration with the party in power.

While preserving the right to an abortion may be at issue in select individual congressional contests, it’s impact across a wider band of the electorate will be minimal.

The rush to political judgment created by the court opinion disclosure is merely another lemming-like stampede by self-appointed opinion influencers that turns out to be at odds with reality.

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Carl Golden is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University in New Jersey. You can reach him at cgolden1937@gmail.com.