

Mid-Term Misfortune

Barack Obama strives for a sound legacy *By An Gang*



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Predictably, the U.S. Republican Party (GOP) took back the Senate after eight years in a landslide victory during the mid-term congressional election in November. While the GOP is still in control of the House of Representatives, it also gained ground in state governor elections in Illinois, Maryland, Iowa and Colorado—the traditional spheres of influence of the Democrats.

A big loss

The loss for the Democratic Party was clearly a backlash against perceived failures of President Barack Obama's administration. Despite making some achievements in reinvigorating the economy, creating jobs, advancing healthcare reform as well as ending the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the past six years, the Obama administration has not been able to sustain a positive public image. The general public doesn't sense the practical benefits that the "change" Obama advocated has brought to them.

In contrast to a 7-percent growth in per-capita GDP, U.S. household income has fallen since Obama became president, according to the Economic Report of the President 2014. As a result, the GOP focused its campaign strategy on economic issues while avoiding sensitive social issues before the mid-term election.

The changing situation both inside and outside of the United States has further worsened the Democrats' poll numbers. The Obama administration's strategy in fighting Islamic State

extremists in Iraq and Syria has been indecisive and poorly executed, lacking strong leadership to eradicate the threat of terrorism. In the face of the Ebola epidemic invasion into the United States, the Obama administration also gave the public an impression of poor preparedness. In addition, Obama's embattled healthcare overhaul has also frustrated supporters.

Some Democratic candidates attempted to distance themselves from Obama during the election, such as Senate candidate Alison Grimes from Kentucky, who declared publicly that she does not support Obama's policies. Even so, people expressed dissatisfaction toward the poor ruling performance of Obama and the Democrats in the national vote. Exit polls after the election showed that 59 percent of the voters were dissatisfied with the Obama administration, 60 percent of voters had an unfavorable opinion with GOP leaders, and more than half of voters were discontented with both parties.

Since the GOP took control of the House of Representatives in 2010, it has adopted a confrontational tactic against Obama, aiming to thwart his administration's reforms in healthcare, taxation, education and immigration policy with utmost effort.

After the mid-term election, the confrontation between the White House and Capitol Hill will be further intensified, making Obama a lame duck president. The GOP-dominated Congress will not only continue to hinder Obama's policies, it may also forcefully pass through bills to ruin the past reform achievements of the Obama administration. However, the GOP cannot get the two thirds majority needed to override the president's veto power.

In his first public speech after the mid-term election, Obama said, "Still, as president, I have a unique responsibility to try and make this town work."

In the past year, Obama was more likely issuing executive orders to bypass the Congress

or seeking support from lobbyists and other nongovernmental organizations to promote his policies. Soon after the Democrats lost the mid-term election, Obama reportedly ordered his staff to reset the agenda to seek new reform motivations in boosting employment and raising the minimum wage.

On November 20, Obama announced a set of executive actions that allow undocumented immigrants who are parents of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents, known as green card holders, to legally live and work in the country for a period of three years. The move will help roughly 5 million undocumented immigrants in the country avoid deportation. The measure is the latest move that Obama has used to bypass the Congress.

However, the order on immigration stirred much controversy, with outraged opponents accusing Obama of acting more like an emperor than the head of the world's oldest democracy. Republicans in the House of Representatives even threatened to file a lawsuit and pledged a budget boycott. In 2013, though the immigration reform bill of the Obama administration was passed in the Democratic-controlled Senate, it was vetoed by the House of Representatives.

Preparing for 2016

In face of an uncooperative Congress, Obama is more concerned about how best to capitalize on his remaining two years in office—to leave his historical legacy. Overcoming the political impasse should, however, be the focus of discourse in the society. The end of history, a thesis put forward by Francis Fukuyama, lamented that the United States has entered an unprecedented institutional crisis in that Americans not only need strong leadership, but also need to reform the political structure and related laws, in order to reduce the use of the veto and simplify decision-making procedures.

However, politicians have already turned