

Blakeman's burden is a heavy one

County exec and company don't seem, at this moment, to have the cards



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Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman's still-early run for governor, and that of his ticket mates — Todd Hood for lieutenant governor, Joseph Hernandez for state comptroller, and Saritha Komatireddy for attorney general — carries a national partisan burden not of his making.

Even against Gov. Kathy Hochul, the Democratic incumbent who looked quite vulnerable in 2022, Blakeman and company don't seem, at this moment, to have the cards as his ally President Donald Trump might say.

The problem stems from deepening party polarization.

Only Democrats now govern from Albany. This tilted playing field isn't news. Nor is it unique across America, for either side of the aisle.

When one party holds the

governorship as well as control of both legislative chambers, it's known as a trifecta. Currently there are 23 Republican state trifectas, 16 Democratic state trifectas, and 11 divided governments where neither party has all three domains.

These trifectas can prove sturdy — Utah's GOP dominance has lasted since 1985 — but they are not always unbreakable. In November 2024, Republican victories in the Michigan and Minnesota legislatures ended Democratic trifectas in those states. That occurred as Trump won back the presidency.

In 2022, Rep. Lee Zeldin, from the Republican redoubt of Suffolk County, came closer to breaking the trifecta from the top than any GOP candidate in three decades. But that was amid a midterm backlash against President Joe Biden when Democratic turnout lagged.

Around comes the cycle again. Facing the threat of a newly flipped House, Trump months ago directed his allies



Nassau County Executive and GOP gubernatorial candidate Bruce Blakeman, second from right, with his ticket mates, from left, Joseph Hernandez, Todd Hood and Saritha Komatireddy, at the New York Republican state convention on Feb. 11 in Garden City.

in Texas to gerrymander their 38-seat congressional district map in hopes of expanding the current House GOP majority.

Could this have happened without a trifecta in Austin? Could blue New York have joined in the national Democrats' retaliation campaign by working to manipulate its 28 seats without a trifecta in Albany? Probably not. That's how key these state fortresses are.

The make-or-break House fight might have given Trump reason to favor Blakeman to run against Hochul, whom he

does not seem hell-bent on dislodging. Before the Long Island politician was chosen over Rep. Elise Stefanik — a star to some Republicans — Trump's allies talked about how Blakeman on the ballot could help GOP House candidates in the region including challengers to Democratic incumbents in his home county.

Making congressional coattails a priority seems to make more sense for Washington strategists than embarking on an expensive and difficult odyssey to return the state GOP from the wilderness to its past

glory. And if Blakeman loses, he can keep his current job through 2029.

Just months ago, top Republicans were pressuring Curtis Sliwa, their party's nominee for New York City mayor, to withdraw in favor of Democratic ex-Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo. Whatever flaws Sliwa had as a candidate, surely some help from GOP funders and party leaders could have made it less of a party embarrassment, given the socialism and anti-Israel stance of the winner, Zohran Mamdani.

Mocked by Trump before votes were cast, Sliwa got 7%, Cuomo 41%. For Blakeman to win statewide, he's expected to need about a third of the city-wide vote while maintaining a grip on suburban and upstate support. Zeldin didn't reach that. Will Blakeman rely on anti-Mamdani sentiment to offset Democratic strongholds?

Politics can change quickly and shock the "experts." For the moment, it's hard to see exactly how that will happen this year, in this state.

■ **COLUMNIST DAN JANISON'S** opinions are his own.

GUEST ESSAY

With AI, what's the use of a college education?

Some ways students can prep to succeed

BY MARK ZUPAN
Guest essay

Twenty-nine years ago, IBM's computer Deep Blue beat the reigning world chess champion Garry Kasparov. It has since become clear that computers are superior to humans at the Game of Kings. Yet despite that, the popularity of chess among humans has soared.

According to a recent podcast by The Economist, the growing popularity of chess provides insights regarding the impactful roles humans can continue to play notwithstanding the ever-increasing presence and potency of artificial intelligence. Educational institutions must be mindful of these insights as we prepare the current generation of students for the AI future that

they will have to navigate:

Versatility. AI is rapidly changing the nature of work. It has proved superior at mining, summarizing and analyzing data and information, at administrative operations such as scheduling and calendaring, and at generating new artwork from source designs and images. However, it is not yet adept at dealing with multifaceted, dynamic tasks requiring versatility and subtle judgment — scenarios where the system must make decisions based on changing contexts, where complexity increases over time, or where new information or environments are introduced.

Colleges can prepare students to succeed by encouraging them to pursue multiple majors and/or minors: art and design students think differently than

engineers; business students apply analytical frameworks that differ from those used in the humanities. Survey research by The Wall Street Journal finds that completing a multidisciplinary college degree enhances professional success. Together with a disposition toward adaptability, it diversifies the skills that graduates can draw on in a dynamic economy.

Social connections. As social animals, we instinctively trust fellow humans more than machines. The ability to develop meaningful social connections is a core skill necessary to the future team-oriented workforce, and focusing on active learning and faculty mentoring builds the capacity to work with others and cultivate personal resilience. Social connections are a key reason why students valued the return to campus after the pandemic, even though new technologies such as Zoom allowed

us to work and study remotely.

Applied learning. We learn by doing. That is why Alfred University promotes experiential, hands-on learning for our students in tandem with technologies such as AI. Our AI minor teaches students to integrate it into their studies, manage AI agents and benefit from machine learning.

Judgment. It is now possible to learn chess more rapidly and skillfully than ever thanks to powerful teaching apps. Striving to become an elite player without these tools is a fool's errand. That said, these are only tools to teach, not compete. To protect the integrity of the Game of Kings, in-person chess tournaments require referees and extensive screening for banned devices such as smartwatches. The attraction of the game is still pitting the best human minds against each other.

While professional success

is different from winning at chess, sound judgment is similarly required when it comes to deciding which tech tools to use, and when. David Deming, the dean of Harvard College and a leading labor economist, finds that in simulated, team-based tasks, the best managers are those who have the judgment and social skills to figure out which team members should do what. This outcome holds whether a team member is a someone or a something.

The more we deepen students' versatility, social connections, active learning and judgment, the more successful they will be in today's AI-impacted world.

■ **THIS GUEST ESSAY** reflects the views of Mark Zupan, president of Alfred University, in western New York.

