

▶ others, such as those in the beleaguered retail industry, could struggle.

The policy's supporters compare it to the minimum wage, which they say has not much dented employment even when set high. But that has typically been in rich cities. Were the terms of employment as generous as Mr Booker wants across the country, the impact on the government payroll could be huge. About half of America's 148m workers earn less than \$15 per hour. In some southern and south-western states, the figure is almost 60% (see chart).

That would not be a problem, were the government capable of productively employing tens of millions of new workers. Supporters of the policy envisage armies of labourers erecting infrastructure, caring for children and cleaning up the environment. Yet some of these jobs are skilled. Others are unsuitable for a programme that would face high turnover in a strengthening economy, and sudden influxes during recessions. In any case, it is hard to imagine the government operating the programme efficiently, even if the job of running projects were delegated to states, as proposed by the Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) a left-leaning think-tank. Government at all levels employs 22.3m Americans. Even if the CBPP's estimate of take-up of about 10m is right, it would represent nearly a 50% expansion of the government payroll. It is not clear whether these workers could be sacked if they performed poorly.

It goes without saying that Congress is unlikely ever to authorise such an intervention, not least because it would be expensive. The CBPP's conservative calculation puts the bill at \$543bn (2.7% of GDP)—about one-and-a-half times what the federal government spent on Medicaid in 2017. Mr Sanders has not yet set out where he will find the money. Raising that much cash with only new taxes on the rich will be difficult (although a jobs guarantee could cause other welfare spending to fall).

A more realistic route to improving the lot of low-skilled workers would be to beef up labour market regulation, and to subsidise unskilled jobs to the degree necessary to keep them profitable for employers. This could be achieved incrementally, for example by expanding tax credits for low earners. Many Democrats claim that such schemes subsidise big corporations, like Walmart, to pay low wages. It is true that firms see about a third of the benefit of such subsidies, according to the best research on the subject. But unlike a jobs guarantee, they do not risk the colossal waste of resources that is likely from a huge expansion of the government payroll.

That will not worry Democratic presidential hopefuls, who are happily playing to the left of the party. They seem most concerned with guaranteeing a job for themselves—in the Oval Office. ■

Gina Haspel

The lady from Langley

WASHINGTON, DC

A well-qualified insider with a troubling CV will be the CIA's next boss

REASONABLE people can disagree about Gina Haspel's fitness to lead the CIA. On the one hand, Ms Haspel, who has been nominated for the position by President Donald Trump and was grilled by the Senate Intelligence Committee on May 9th, has been a highly regarded member of the agency for 33 years. She would also be the first woman to lead it. On the other hand, her post-9/11 role managing a secret prison in Thailand where "enhanced interrogation" techniques such as waterboarding were used on an al-Qaeda prisoner recalls a bleak episode. She was also controversially involved in destroying evidence of those interrogations. Yet Ms Haspel's confirmation hearing was less an honest airing of this dilemma than a partisan mud-wrestle.

In her opening remarks, she sought to head off the coming Democratic assault on her interrogation record. "Having served in that tumultuous time," she said, "I can offer you my personal commitment, clearly and without reservation, that under my leadership, CIA will not restart such a detention and interrogation programme." Yet, under questioning from Kamala Harris of California, she refused to say whether she considered that programme "immoral". How could she? If it was not immoral, it would probably still be legal. Yet to admit its immorality would be a damning indictment of her record and deeply unpopular at the CIA. Democratic senators, most of whom will vote against Ms Haspel, may cite this as a decisive moment.

She will probably still be confirmed. Though a couple of Republicans—including Rand Paul of Kentucky and perhaps John McCain, ill at home in Arizona—may not support her, two or three Democrats will make up a majority. Joe Manchin of West Virginia says he will be one. Ms Haspel also offered a couple more reasons to welcome that. She oozed confidence in her brief. Richard Burr, the Republican committee chair, described her as the best prepared nominee to lead the CIA ever. In particular she stressed a need to improve basic intelligence-gathering skills, such as foreign languages, which sounded reassuringly sensible. This good impression also spoke well of the agency's previous director, Mike Pompeo, now secretary of state, who must have backed her nomination.

Even so, two worries about Ms Haspel's likely confirmation remain. One concerns the message it would send to the president,



Chairman of the (water) board

who has claimed to be a fan of torture. It is Mr Trump, not Ms Haspel, who makes her record most problematic. The second concerns the Senate Intelligence Committee. Steep growth in the CIA's powers and responsibility have made congressional oversight of it more important than ever. The fact that Ms Haspel would be such an insiderish appointment underlines that. Yet the deepening partisanship on the committee, one of the last effective congressional bodies, puts it in doubt. ■

Primary elections

The centre mostly holds

COLUMBUS, OHIO

A bad night for fringe candidates and House Republicans

THIS autumn Democrats must defend ten Senate seats in states that President Donald Trump won. They may well flip Republican-held seats in Nevada and Arizona, so Republicans have to pick off at least a few of those ten seats if they want to retain their majority. Primary elections in three of these states—West Virginia, Indiana and Ohio, as well as North Carolina—were held on May 8th. Viable candidates prevailed in all three, partly by emphasising their affinity with Mr Trump. Yet even though Republicans control both houses of Congress and the White House, anti-establishment anger still animates their base.

The fear for what remains of the Republican establishment was that Don Blankenship would prevail in West Virginia, where Mr Trump won 68.5% of the vote in 2016. Mr Blankenship is a doughy, charmless ex- ▶▶