

Why are Democrats Losers

Since the 2014 election when Republicans took control of the Senate and increased their majority in the House I have been brooding about why Democrats lost that election – and that is clearly what happened – the Republicans did not so much win but the Democrats surely lost. I have read a number of commentaries analyzing the election and they have all made valid points but somehow do not explain sufficiently, to me at least, why Democrats are such losers.

That the Democrats are losers is on the surface odd because the Republican party has presided over one policy disaster after another. The war on drugs and crime has cost the American people trillions, done nothing to curb illegal drug use, turned the countries south of our boarder into narco-states, and jailed millions for being addicted. The war on government regulations has cost us trillions, culminating in the too big to fail banks who freed of any regulatory constraint, collapsed the economy. The war on taxes benefit the ultra-rich leaving government to be inadequately funded by the middle class and has resulted in a deteriorating national infrastructure. The war on terror has cost trillions, de-stabilized the Middle East triggering mass migration and spreading terrorists across the world. Since losing the Presidency to Democrat Barack Obama, the Republican Party has dedicated itself to sabotaging the process of normal government – a policy bordering on treason. And yet, with that record, the American voter still chose to reward the Republicans with majorities in the House, Senate, and most State Governments.

Now we are well into the campaign for the 2016 Presidential election and the Republicans have so many candidates that they have traded in their presidential campaign clown car for a bus. The Bozos on that bus seem determined to outdo one another in their collective assault on sanity. Meanwhile the Democrats plod along like burros hauling their burden of good intentions across the mountains of despair. The problem is that Democrats really have no governing philosophy. This is in contrast to Republicans who fervently believe in all kinds of things which are reliably wrong.

In the process of governing, Democrats seem most content when reacting to Republican excesses by ameliorating and softening the impacts. They offer no overarching vision other than everyone should get a little bit of what they desire from government. As a result, Democrats merit the label of “tax and spend.” In the Presidential campaigns, the Democratic Party promises to give one big thing to each of its perceived constituencies with the expectation is that this is all that is required to bind that group to the party: immigration reform to the Hispanics; support of voting rights laws for the African Americans; legalized marriage to the gays and lesbians; opposition to right to work laws for the labor unions; gun control for the urban liberal; affordable college tuition for the children of the middle class; belief in climate change for the environmentalists; and a woman candidate for the women.

These campaign promises, while generally proper and certainly well meaning, is a hodgepodge that does not fit into an overarching governing philosophy. And of course, let us be realistic, Democrats do not necessarily follow through. Look at what happened to health care reform. Back in 2008, Democrats were so panicked by the audacity of what was being proposed that they gave away all of the parts of the Affordable Care Act that would have actually curbed the runaway costs in health care. Democrats did this before even negotiating with the Republicans, who then had nothing left to demand other than the demise of the whole thing. Once Obamacare was passed with no Republican support, the Democrats ran for the hills letting the Republicans’ feverish imaginations run wild proclaiming that Obamacare destroys civilization as we know it. The core trouble is that Democrats don’t really believe in any kind of over-

arching governing philosophy and fear the things which they do profess to believe. Democrat lawmakers are most content when trying to soften the impacts of a Republican led agenda.

Before delving into what Democrats should believe, it would be useful to think about what people really want from their government. If one looks at history and what most people in today's world actually experience, we can conclude that people don't expect much. The world as it was in the past and as it is today is mostly governed by one form of autocratic government or another. What these autocratic governments have in common is that greed and ruthlessness is rewarded. In order to survive in such a society everyone must find his or her niche and the protection of a patron above them in the hierarchy.

The presumption is that each person deserves their fate. If you are at the top it is because your natural talents have rewarded you, if you are at the bottom you are not clever, enterprising, or too lazy to do better. What monarchies and dictatorial governments do best is enforce social stability by minimizing change. The economy may be bad, unemployment astronomically high, Justice arbitrary and dependant upon a network of patronage, but life is predictable. Conflict with enemies or imagined enemies binds the people into a community and war is an opportunity for the enterprising to advance. But today is like yesterday and tomorrow will be the same.

These are of course the principles that guide the Republicans: social stability is enforced by putting more police on the streets and locking up everyone who questions their authority; the economy is managed to enrich the rich and outsources the work of the poor to countries who are even poorer; and war is the preferred response to every inside and outside threat. Under this governing philosophy the well-to-do need not feel guilt about their abundance because they deserve that abundance, and they do not have to share wealth with the poor because the poor deserves to be poor. The Republicans cannot prevent change resulting from new technology and globalization but they can exaggerate the fear and promise to return society to the good old days. The Republican governing principals are, therefore, closely aligned with the human species' version of a default governing principle.

The reason for all of this are in the genes that we have inherited from our monkey ancestors. Emotionally we are most comfortable when ruled by a strong male who ruthlessly enforces his whims. Change is the most frightening. These are times when nothing is fixed because globalization and the technological revolution is daily morphing the economy which in turn buffets our lives. Change causes us to live with anxiety and fear. Someone must be blamed for our fear and amongst our monkey ancestors, the monkeys outside of the immediate circle are the most suspect and frightening. To our monkey brains the only good foreigner is a dead foreigner.

If Democrats presume to be the elected majority, they will need to present a clear alternative that they can do better in governing a complex democratic republic in a global economy where change is the norm. That would require having a coherent set of governing principles. But we Americans are not too good at history and, therefore, don't remember why we have adopted a Constitution and a common set of national ideals. Back when Communists were our obsession my little rural school held an annual essay contest asking the question: "Why I am proud to be an American." Invariably the winning essay would answer this question in the negative, as the essayist would be "proud to be an American because he or she was not Russian." As a whole, Americans don't know why we are proud but we certainly "FEEL" that we do and that is the problem. It is easy for the unscrupulous to distract us with foolish rhetoric. It is much harder to present a logically consistent set of principles and policies capable of responsibly leading this country into the rest of the twenty-first century.

So, what are some of those better principles and core beliefs that Democrats should be espousing and not just espousing - but actually believing:

Campaign Finance Reform – Every Democrat candidate from Dog Catcher to President must prominently work for a Constitutional Amendment that limits the amount any individual or corporation can donate to candidates. Failure to pass such an amendment will result in a plutocracy. Already an oligarchy has inordinate influence on how we govern ourselves. Reports as of October of 2015 find that 158 families have provided one half of the money funding the 2016 presidential campaign. This is a defining issue of our times and if Democrats are not on the correct side of campaign finance reform than they do not deserve our support.

Economics – Democrats should prominently embrace free enterprise or if you prefer to call it – capitalism. This may seem a no-brainer because everyone says that they believe in a free enterprise economic system. The trouble is that they don't really– least of all the capitalists. From the lowliest street vendor to the world's richest man, all capitalists seek to wield some kind of advantage over their competitors. Actual market competition is the last thing that they want. Street vendors chase competitors off of favored street corners and the best way for the very rich to become richer is for a compliant government to legislate them a monopoly.

True and open competition is what drives efficiency, innovation, and thereby economic growth. Protecting competition is the core reason for public intervention in the economic arena. The problem is that decades of lip service to the principles of free enterprise has left us with crippled competition in virtually every economic sector. This country has had anti-trust laws on the books for nearly 150 years but we rarely employed them. But we do need to consider that evolution in corporate organization and entire new technologies have also made the anti-trust laws which were enacted in the 1880's archaic, so they do need revision.

We desperately need a national dialogue about what really constitutes transparent market competition in a globalized economy. If capitalism is to be re-vitalized so that the benefits of the economy flow to all people, we need to re-legislate anti-trust laws applicable for today's realities. A failure to do so will result in a global dictatorship of multi-national corporations, a situation that is clearly in process. Democrats if they have the guts should be leading this dialogue.

Globalization – The recovery from the 2007 Great Recession is weak, no one can live on part time jobs paying minimum wage, and the middle class is shrinking while the One Percent is getting richer. Everyone notices and remarks about this, but no one dares name the cause. Remember Ross Perot's comment about the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that there would be a "great sucking sound" as jobs were offshored? Twenty-one years of "offshoring" manufacturing to low-wage no-regulation countries, twenty-one years of trade deficits at the rate of forty billion dollars a month, along with twenty-one years of union busting and erosion of wages have had its predictable outcome. There is no mystery. Although the rhetoric was that NAFTA and the subsequent trade treaties would be a win-win, the reality is that the American standard of living has been re-aligned downward.

The lowered standard of living has been masked because the offshoring of manufacturing resulted in a flood of cheap consumer goods. We are in the odd position of being monetarily poorer while drowning in stuff. We in essence have traded cheap consumer goods for economic vulnerability and Americans are now more vulnerable than ever to the loss of their job and most have no savings.

Unfortunately, we cannot reverse globalization by simply tearing up the “free trade” agreements. Globalization abetted by the revolution in communication technologies is here to stay but we can level the playing field. Our trade negotiators agreed to rules that disadvantage American based manufacturing. Among these are the manipulation of currency rates by trading partner countries to favor their exports and discourage imports from the US. Provisions in the current trade treaties do not provide for adequate mechanisms to redress currency manipulation.

The trade rules also allow countries with Value Added Taxes (VAT), a type of national sales tax, to impose that tax on imports and to rebate the VAT on their exports. Globally the VAT averages seventeen percent (17%) making US based manufacturing seriously disadvantaged. The US is one of very few countries in the world that do not use a VAT. Instead we fund most of our infrastructure needs through locally levied sales and property taxes which according to the trade treaties, cannot be rebated on exports or added to imports. In addition, Americans usually receive their medical insurance through their employer in contrast to foreign countries where health care is funded through the VAT. This makes the cost of health care a cost in our products for export. Why our trade negotiators and Congress have agreed to this built in disparity is a mystery, but it is nonetheless true.

Then too we have the question of national sovereignty. Through the World Trade Organization (WTO) a tribunal system has been agreed to which can and does overturn laws and regulations established through our Constitutional process. These tribunals protect the interests of multinational corporations by overturning laws and regulations passed by national or state governments that are deemed to disadvantage those multinational corporations. The tribunals operate essentially in secret and citizens of our country do not have standing to be party to the deliberations. For instance the WTO has ruled against our Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) law which requires that retail meat carry a label informing consumers as to the national origin. Although our COOL regulations treat foreign and domestic origin meat exactly alike, because multinational packing corporations want to keep American consumers ignorant of the origin of their meat purchases, the WTO has ruled that the US must stop requiring labels.

Effectively what the WTO and subsequent trade treaties have done is put multi-national corporations outside of the control of nation states. They exist on a global plane and answer to no country. The trade rules allow multi-national corporations and the billionaires who own them to intervene on national policies but deny the right of any nation’s citizens the right to question labor, environmental, or product safety standards of these corporations. The result is that wages in this country have stagnated making the recovery from the Great Recession tepid. Our national standard of living is being reduced in a global race to the bottom.

The policies that Democrats should pursue include re-negotiating trade treaties to prevent currency manipulation, redress the effects of the VAT by allowing for levies on imports lieu of the VAT and by rebating the equivalent amount of the VAT on our exports. Finally, the tribunal process of the WTO should be made publicly open and accessible by allowing everyone standing to access the deliberations. And, finally, citizens should have the right to challenge labor, environmental, and product safety practices in trading partner countries.

Foreign Policy: When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, I along with most everybody assumed that there was nothing left to fight over. Free enterprise and representative democracy clearly delivered a superior outcome, providing both economic security and political freedom. Boy were we naïve! Like leopards, cultures don’t change their spots. The best predictor of a people’s future remains the past.

Russia is still Czarist. China is still Imperial. Turkey is still Ottoman. Egypt is still ruled by Mamelukes. Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel, North Africa, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia are still riven by the cultures that have struggled for supremacy over a 5000 year history. Among these, the Arab tribes are still tribal and religious extremism still enflames them just as it did in the seventh century AD.

Republicans believe that all of these forces of chaos can be contained militarily in a new incarnation of the *Pax Romana*. Is that what the rest of us want? Should legions of American children occupy and govern all of these places and people. I don't think so, yet, we are torn between anger, disgust, pity, and fear over the daily occurrences coming out of Africa and the Middle East. The urge to impose order through military intervention is strong, and must be resisted in favor of diplomacy.

There is no solution other than calm and patience. In the cold war our society became obsessed by exaggerated fears of Communist infiltrating our government and society. Because the reality of nuclear war was and even remains real, we poured trillions into military hardware and ill-advised wars. In the end we triumphed over Communism, not by military preparedness and might, but by a clearly superior government and economic system. The same shall be true with ISIS, Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Ayatollahs.

Guns, God, Gays, Drugs, and Abortion: Come on people - get over it! These are the issues at the heart of the culture wars that are tearing American society into rags. Extremists and charlatans are exploiting these issues to divide us. We have to be better than that if we value the future of a prosperous United States where tolerance and good will prevails.

It is clear that the availability of a gun contributes to the incidents of suicides and murders. Yet there are so many guns in circulation that the idea that gun ownership can be curtailed gets us nowhere. Instead we need to focus on changing a culture that says that violence is the first choice to solve all problems. Denying the seriously mentally ill, the suicidal, and criminals' access to guns would be useful, but eliminating guns from our communities is not feasible. We should focus on what can actually do and move on.

North America was colonized as the religious wars in Europe sputtered to an exhausted end. I don't why but the history classes I attended in High School and College skipped right over those civil wars of religious extremism that shaped what we term the Reformation. Those history classes celebrated the Reformation but ignored the cruelty that tore European society into pieces. The most brilliant part of our Constitution is the Amendment which separates the state and religion. As in 1789, and just as the writers of the Constitution knew, religion is social dynamite and has no business in government.

Thankfully the younger people have more sense than their elders when it comes to the issue of what people do in the privacy of their lives. The good Libertarian instinct to mind one's own business is the operative guidance. Somehow the right wing Supreme Court has upheld the right of same sex people to marry. That is a move in the right direction. Live and let live should be the Democrats motto.

Human beings have drives that are contrary to their own best interests. Getting high is one of them and trying to ban intoxication obviously causes more harm than good. The forces of prohibition are waning as access to medical marijuana is slowly becoming legal across this nation. We don't personally have to like it, but cocaine and heroin should also be legalized. The ill effects of legal access to these drugs fall mostly on the individual addicts and their families. The effects of prohibition are, however, organized

crime and political corruption which from a governing perspective is much worse. Legalizing access to drugs and using the resulting tax revenues on addiction treatment is the better alternative.

No one is in favor of abortion but like the human drive to get high, the drive to have sex will not be eliminated by moral prohibition. Programs to encourage responsible sexual activity most certainly have their place, as does a moral proscription against abortion as an easy solution to unwanted pregnancy. But denying legal access to abortion services will only drive abortions underground as criminal elements respond to fill a profitable demand.

Race and Immigration: Just as mentioned above that the Russian people still tend towards to a recreation of its Tsarist past and the Chinese still look to a hidden Emperor governing from a Forbidden City, the people of the United States struggle to put our slave owning past behind us. Overall we have done well and most Americans do their best to be fair to all of the different races and cultures that populate our country. But it is not easy and this goes back to our monkey ancestors who also did not easily welcome strangers into their closed clans.

These feelings of distrust of those who look, dress, and talk different is not unique to whites of European ancestry. All people struggle with these feelings. However, the benefits of multi-culturalism are manifest. This is our country's strength and we need to celebrate our multi-cultural background at every opportunity. However, in times of stress, the feelings of distrust of strangers and foreigners are inevitably exaggerated. Clearly Republicans are exploiting the fear of Muslims and illegal immigrants for political gain.

Obviously we cannot open our borders to all who wish to immigrate. The best solution is that people have economic and personally secure opportunities in their own country. We can't be responsible for every incidence of tyranny in every country of the world but we can be responsible for those incidences that result from our connivance and interference. It goes back to following a patient and principled foreign policy and an economic policy that favors transparency and competition.

Energy, The Environment, and Food: Usually the hype of an emerging technology overstates the actual benefit. However, solar and wind electrical generation along with energy savings technology is actually meeting the expectations. This is great news and Democrats are generally on the correct side of the debate of our energy future. Political posturing does, however, occur with some Democrat leaders espousing coal mining and other polluting energy projects. Those instincts need to be discouraged yet we must be realistic in that our economy needs time to transition. In particular, this country needs to have as much energy independence from Middle East oil as possible so that we can limit our direct involvement in the turmoil of that region.

While the era of Big Oil is waning another cartel is emerging in Big Agriculture. Wars in the future will be fought over food not oil. Unfortunately, the United States is leading the world in the development of a monopolized food production and marketing system. A food system controlled by an oligopoly will not have the flexibility to respond to the dramatic climatic fluctuations that we are already experiencing. The result will inevitably be a mal distribution of food, resulting in shortages and high prices. Democrats need to support anti-trust enforcement to restore competitive markets for all agricultural commodities. In addition we need to reverse decades of farm policy that has favored large corporate farms over family sized operations. The dictum that the best fertilizer is the farmer's footsteps has always been true, and

one which our society has forgotten. Food security in the future will require more farmers selling into a transparent and competitive market system.

Health Care: There are clear humanitarian reasons why this country needs radical reform in our health care delivery system. However, from a governing perspective, humanitarian concerns are not the primary reason why the Federal Government should interfere with the health care system. Plainly and simply our fractured system of accessing and paying for health services is unaffordable. Compared to all other nations' health care delivery systems, ours is nearly twice as expensive. This results in American goods and services being un-competitive on the world market. We must reform our health care system because it makes American industry non-competitive. That is all that craven Democrats had to say in the face of the Republican intransigence over the Affordable Care Act. Because Democrats failed to address the reasons that health care costs are exorbitant when Obamacare was passed in 2008, they still need to fix a broken health care system. The reason to do so is still the same – global competitiveness.

Surveillance: Police states rigidly control communication between its citizens and given that computing technology has made surveillance of a population easier than ever, the issue of freedom from surveillance is front and center. How does security and law enforcement agencies protect citizens from terrorist and criminal activities while not infringing on our freedoms of speech and association is an open question. The National Security Agency has already been illegally gathering and archiving all of our telephone and computer communications. Balancing national security with personal freedoms is not easy but critical. Democrats must remain skeptical of the claims of those calling for the infringement of our civil liberties in the name of fighting terrorism.

Conclusion: Most of the problems facing American today are self-imposed. That means we can, if we have the will, reverse the failed policies and restore an economic system that works for all citizens. Foreign relations are, however, a mess with no easy solution or conclusion. Perhaps the collapse of the regimes of the Middle East and North Africa was inevitable but the decision by the Bush Administration to declare war on Iraq was a war crime and treason. That President Obama and the Democratic leadership did not hold George Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld accountable has resulted in the current Congressional dysfunction. The right wing understands that Democrats will never hold them accountable for their sabotage of government.

Democrats are also culpable to the extent that they have no united coherent agenda on how to lead this country out of the current morass and into a firmer future. Will Rogers famously said that he did not belong to an organized political party – he was a Democrat. Decent intentions are not a sufficient governing agenda and it is time that the Democrats stepped up to the challenges of leading and governing.

The real foundation of our Democracy is not in Congress and the Presidency. Rather it rests on the city councils, school boards, county commissioners, state legislatures, and the strong civic engagement of grassroots organizations. Much of the craziness of Republican politics stems from its angry virulent grassroots lead and funded by billionaires with fascist tendencies. These right leaning grassroots movements are often concerned about real issues, it is rather on who they blame and what they believe will redress the problem, where they go wrong. To a large measure this is because they are never confronted by fact and reality checks by either the Democrats or the press and most certainly not by the Republican Party. Politicians are generally comfortable with hypocrisy and given that the Republicans

have willingly pandered and fanned the flames of the craziness, they have managed to sabotage even their own self-interests.

But it is not only on the right that you have grassroots civic organizations. Generally everything that is the best in America first came from progressive grassroots organization, either formed around a church or organized in response to a local concern. The Democrats should give civil society more respect, because this is where progress comes from.

Granted, Democrats do believe in and work for all of the issues I presented above, but they do not do so in a coordinated manner. It is piecemeal and fractious. Voters have little expectation that any of their concerns will ultimately be addressed and supported by the entirety of the parties elected officials, because the governing philosophy is not articulated in a coherent systematic manner that makes sense to everyone.

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Progressive Populist

Dear Editor

I have read and listen to a very large number of opinions about the election debacle. Every commentator has had their own interpretation and most make valid points. It is a complex issue. I was especially heartened that a few have acknowledged that Democrats (candidates, office holders, and partisans) have in general been dismissive and derisive of factory workers who have been at the losing end of globalization. This is not a totally true observation but true enough, and yet the few voices of concern through the years have come primarily from the left. It is the right that has been most solidly in favor of the not so free trade treaties. So, it remains mysterious that the electorate has chosen to further reward the party which has perpetuated the assault on working people. To my mind, the actual significant result of this election is not the grotesque election of Donald Trump, but the fact that very little has changed in the political power structure.

What, however, seems to be totally missing in the post-election conversation is recognition of the largest political divide of all – urban versus rural. Speaking from a place that is about as rural as it gets I don't think that the urban cultural/political elite understands or cares much at how angry rural people are. Granted, demographically, we don't count. There are more people in jail than there are farmers and ranchers in this country. However, in influence we punch above our weight class.

The things that have us thoroughly upset and solidly Republican revolve around environmental and wildlife issues, along with the dismissive attitude coming from those circles that seeks to impose their urban values on our rural lives. An example. In this fall's Montana ballot there was an initiative calling for the banning of the trapping of predators and varmints on public lands. If the ballot had had a flashing neon sign attached saying "Do Not Vote For Democrats" it would not have been more detrimental to the democratic candidates.

Granted the Montana Democratic Party and most of the candidates did not endorse or had anything to do with putting this anti-trapping initiative on the ballot. But the damage was done. Montana does on occasion vote for Democratic candidates. The Democratic governor won his re-election and we have one Democratic senator (not on the ballot this year) who figures among the most progressive leaders in Washington. Otherwise Republicans swept the ticket in Montana and the Legislature has an increased Republican majority.

On reading this you might say to yourself, "So what, Montana's three Electoral College votes are irrelevant." Which is true. But you might multiply Montana's electoral preferences by the fact that every single rural county in the nation votes Republican, and herein lies the reason why Democrats are such electoral losers. In addition, you might also be saying to yourself that rural people should not be trapping wild animals. You might in addition say that public lands are the patrimony of all of us and that, as an urban person, you have a right to express your views on these rural habits.

Which is true, you do have a right to express your views on these matters. But you have so many views. And so many views that are contradictory, ill informed, downright un-educated, illogical, selfish, self-serving, and derisive of the people who live and work in rural America. To rural people it looks like a conspiracy to marginalize and displace them in favor of enhanced recreational opportunities and half-baked environmental sensibilities.

For many in this country, rural places are good only to the extent that they provide recreation and makes them feel righteous that they are doing their small part in preserving the planet by sending dues to their environmental organization of choice. Never mind that they may be stomping on the very people who are in charge of the environment. Think about it. Every piece of ground in the nation that is not owned by the government and not paved over, is owned by this insignificant number of farmers and ranchers, who strive to care for it, grow food on it, and attempt to raise their families on it.

While a professional or amateur environmentalists looks upon the land from an outside - in perspective, a farmer and rancher looks upon his/her land from the inside - out. We are intimately tied to a specific parcel of the environment and charged with looking after that piece of the planet to the best of our abilities. In addition, we must do so economically, taking into account both human imposed and natural laws: i.e. monetary policy, farm policy, tax policy, international trade policy, environmental policy, drought, hail, frost, tornados, blizzards, invasive weeds, and predatory wildlife. Does it not seem reasonable that we would resent, ignorant people imposing well-meaning (from their perspective) environmental constraints on the already difficult science/art of raising food.

I am not sure what can be done about all of this except to rail. The interesting thing is that most rural people are populists. Of course, the regressive variety out numbers the progressive ones. But still the issues that animate us are mostly identical, it is in the level of anger and whether one blames the government or corporations that marks the division. This magazine is of no particular help when it comes to clarifying rural concerns. I previously wrote complaining about the shallowness of the coverage that you gave the Bundy incident on the Malheur Wildlife Refuge. As misguided as their methodology was, the Bundy's had an underlying complaint that was ignored by the media. An Oregon jury was apparently more sympathetic. Unless this callus superiority evidenced by the urban elite is moderated, one can only assume that rural voters will continue to vote against the Democrats.

Sincerely yours

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