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Merely opposing President Trump and pushing a woke agenda won't win voters back to the Democrats.

You Can't Beat the GOP With a Tired Old Party

By Ted Van Dyk

I recently thought of a question I was asked shortly after my boss, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, narrowly lost the 1968 presidential election: If you were in an unfamiliar city and needed help, where would you go? I replied, almost without thinking, that I would go to the nearest union hall or black church. They would welcome me and call me their brother.

Having spent most of my life active in Democratic Party politics, would I give the same answer today? It probably wouldn't occur to me. Labor and minority constituencies then formed the party's voting core. It now has no core, unless you count the woke advocates who propose guaranteed out-comes in society for certain de--fined groups.

My generation of Democrats, born in the Depression and coming of age in post-World War II years, took our cues from Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, which used federal programs and agencies to lift the country from economic depression. Then we welcomed Harry S. Truman's Fair Deal and John F. Kennedy's pledge "to get America moving again" with Keynesian remedies including business and personal tax cuts, an investment tax credit, and an historic Trade Expansion Act leading to global liberalization of trade and investment. Those were followed by the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Medicare, Medicaid, federal aid to education, and a War on Poverty instituted by Lyndon B. Johnson. All came at the federal level and were instituted by Democratic presidents and members of Congress acting on the FDR model.

The woke agenda owes more to Richard Nixon's "affirmative action" initiatives, with quotas and guarantees for certain favored groups, than it does to the "equal opportunity" objectives at the heart of the prior Democratic platform. In 1975, I wrote a widely circulated article calling on my party to move from its reliance on support from labor, minorities and other constituencies toward broad policies benefiting a larger share of the general electorate. Jimmy Carter's 1976 campaign, in part, was based on that thesis and was a forerunner of campaigns in both major parties that adopted antiestablishment themes.

Ronald Reagan, after his 1980 election, declared that he "had voted four times for Franklin Roosevelt" but was moving on to governance less reliant on federal initiatives. He took a path that led us

in time to Donald Trump's campaign against a so-called deep state, supposedly governed by federal bureaucrats insensitive to the needs of ordinary citizens.

Now, in Mr. Trump's second term, Democrats' poll ratings show them less popular than either the president or the Republican Party. Their primary message has become one of rage against Mr. Trump and Trumpism. If history holds, Democrats may make some gains in the 2026 midterm elections, but certainly not based solely on Trump derangement syndrome.

Mr. Trump's overreach and missteps may cost him congressional majorities next year. But, at this point, he continues to enjoy far greater public confidence than Democratic officeholders and candidates. What is the alternative Democratic platform, and who are the leaders proposing it? Even at the height of Reagan's popularity there were numerous Democratic proposals offering alternatives, such as the Bradley-Gephardt legislative plan to reform the tax code.

Having lost the 2024 presidential election decisively, and without control of either house of Congress, Democrats lack a credible alternative vision to present to American voters. Not being Donald Trump isn't enough. Democratic congressional leaders, governors and prominent private citizens need, separately and together, to develop national-

security, economic and social-welfare proposals that will appeal to a majority of citizens. How do we propose to keep them safe and prospering? What are our plans, beside our plan to replace Mr. Trump?

Mr. Van Dyk is the author of "Heroes, Hacks and Fools."

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