

American Politics and Policy: We Don't Have Time to Despair



Fred R. Harris

*F*or a quarter of a century, I was a politician. Now, for the last quarter of a century, I have worked as a political scientist. This chapter springs from both backgrounds.

My purpose, here, is to focus on the answers to four pressing, and intertwined, questions: What is the present political situation in the United States? What happened in the November 2002 elections? Why did it happen? And what are American progressives to do now?

THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SITUATION: A VIRTUAL TIE

The central and most dramatic fact about American politics and government at this moment is best expressed by the word “tie.”

In the presidential election of the year 2000, the Democratic candidate won the nationwide popular vote, but by the slightest margin—only 543,000 votes out of a total of 105.4 million votes cast. The Republican candidate, with, of course, the help of Florida officials and the U.S. Supreme Court, won a majority of the vote in the electoral college, the peculiar way we elect presidents in the United States, but, again, by the slightest margin—only 5 electoral college votes out of a total of 538. The result, then, was a virtual tie.

Membership in the U.S. Congress is also split, and nearly down the middle. The Republicans presently hold only 51 of the 100 seats in the U.S. Senate. In the U.S. House of Representatives, Republicans presently number 229 out of 435 total members.

Or take the fifty state governors' offices in the United States. Twenty-eight of those governors are Republicans, and twenty-two are Democrats. Again, a virtual tie.

A SPLIT IN THE ELECTORATE

There is a split in the American electorate, too. Approximately 70 percent of eligible voters identify themselves as either Democrats or Republicans, and they are different from each other—racially, ethnically, ideologically, and along economic-class lines.

Race and Ethnicity

The pro-civil rights actions of President Harry Truman, followed by the 1948 adoption by his party of a first-time, and strong, civil rights platform, provoked the beginning of a white flight from the ranks of the Democratic Party in the American South and began to create a Republican Party in the southern states, where that party had scarcely existed since the Reconstruction period after the Civil War. Then, in the 1960s, following the passage by a Democratic Congress of two strong and enforceable national civil rights laws, the southern Democratic-to-Republican white flight grew into a stampede. President Lyndon Johnson presciently told his White House aide, Bill Moyers, immediately upon the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that the Democrats had thereby just lost the American South for a generation. President Johnson meant the *white* South, and he was pretty close to right—although in very recent times, there appears to have been some movement back toward the Democratic party among certain white women, suburban, and somewhat younger voters for whom the racial issue is not as crucial as it once was.

In addition, beginning in the 1960s, white flight from the Snow Belt of the northeastern and northcentral states to the Sun Belt produced, particularly in the South, an influx of new white residents there. A large percentage either already were Republicans before they moved or became Republicans after they arrived in the South. More recently, migration of conservative white Californians to states of the Mountain West has helped to make those inland-West destination states more Republican. Augmented by a great foreign immigration of Hispanics and Asians, the remaining electorate of California has become more progressive and Democratic.

But to get back to the African American–white split in the parties, the white flight of voters from the southern Democratic Party was offset considerably by the impact of the second of the 1960s federal civil rights laws, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which, for the first time following the end of Reconstruction, gave African Americans government-guaranteed access to the ballot box. Southern African Americans began to vote in large numbers—and they voted, and presently vote, overwhelmingly Democratic. The surge of *southern* African Americans into the Democratic Party was matched by a parallel African American affiliation with the Democrats in other parts of the country as well. The result is that a nationwide racial realignment of American political parties has taken place. The Republican Party is

virtually all white. And nearly all African Americans are today Democrats. In the presidential election of 2000, the Democratic candidate got 90 percent of the black vote, and in the elections of 2002 that Democratic percentage held or was perhaps even bettered.

The number of Hispanics in the United States continues to grow significantly. This is a favorable trend for the Democrats, and it has changed, or is changing, the partisan makeup of certain large and crucial states—particularly California, Texas, and Florida. In the 2002 elections, Hispanics appear to have voted for Democratic candidates by their usual two-to-one or somewhat better ratio.

Republican core constituencies are shrinking—whites in rural areas, married white men, married white women, especially those who don't work outside the home. Even the polling director for the Republican National Committee, Matthew Dowd, has admitted that if American minorities and whites vote in future elections as they did in 2000 (and as they apparently did in 2002), the Democrats could win by 3 million votes.

Economic Class and Ideology

The racial and ethnic realignment of America's political parties carried with it, as well as helped to cause, an economic-class and ideological realignment, too—and not just in the South. Many better-off whites were repelled by the Democratic Party's support for African Americans and other minorities, disagreed with the party's advocacy of programs for poor people and welfare recipients, were appalled by the urban riots in the African-American sections of America's cities in the 1960s, were incensed about the anti-Vietnam War protesters of that era, and were increasingly displeased by what they saw as a big tax-and-spend federal government. Many middle-class people felt that they were paying more than their fair share of taxes, and they resented it. The Democratic Party got much of the blame for all this—and the Republican Party picked up votes and support.

Today, families with annual incomes of \$100,000 or more overwhelmingly call themselves Republicans. Families with annual incomes of \$20,000 or less are just as overwhelmingly Democrats. The higher the income level of a person, the greater the likelihood that he or she is a Republican. The lower the income level, the greater the likelihood that he or she is a Democrat. Republicans are more likely to be conservative; Democrats, moderate to liberal. Democrats are more likely to favor federal programs for assured low-cost health care and for jobs, for example, which Republicans are more likely to oppose. A majority of Americans have come to dislike the liberal label. A majority are, as Seymour Martin Lipset once put it, "rhetorical conservatives"—their words are conservative, but they are at the same time "operational liberals" (to use Lipset's term)—that is, they support liberal positions on a range of actual domestic issues.

WHY DON'T THE DEMOCRATS WIN EVERY ELECTION?

There are more Democratic identifiers among the American electorate than there are Republican identifiers, and the 2002 elections signaled no realignment in party affiliation. About 40 percent of Americans say they are Democrats, about a third say they are Republicans—and these percentages have remained virtually the same for fifty years. Moreover, these Democratic and Republican identifiers, when they vote, are remarkably loyal. A *New York Times*/CBS News Poll just before the November 2002 voting showed that only 8 percent of likely Democratic voters planned to vote Republican and only 4 percent of likely Republican voters planned to vote Democratic.

There are more Democrats in America than there are Republicans. There are more lower-income and working-class Americans than there are upper-income Americans. A majority of Americans support Democratic positions on domestic economic-class and social-program issues. A 2002 *New York Times*/CBS News Poll showed that nearly 60 percent of respondents believed that the Bush administration's tax cuts benefited the wealthy, 55 percent said they were opposed to oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, nearly two-thirds thought the federal government should do more to regulate environmental and safety practices of business, and, by a ratio of two-to-one, said that protecting the environment was more important than producing energy (though they thought, by a seven-to-one ratio, that the administration held the opposite view). The country has not moved to the right.

Then, why has the government done so? Why don't the Democrats win every election?

One reason they don't is that the Republicans have frequently been able to overcome the Democratic advantage on economic-class and social-program issues by shifting the public focus from those issues to so-called cross-cutting issues—in the past, for example, to the communist threat, or later to crime in the streets, the welfare mess, or big government, and more lately to homeland security, anti-terrorism, and war with Iraq.

A second reason is that potential voters in lower-income and working-class brackets, people who are likely to be Democrats, are less likely actually to vote than those of higher income. The Democratic Party, and Democratic candidates therefore, must always put extra emphasis on voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts if they are to turn a winning percentage of their identifiers, their potential supporters, into actual voters—real supporters at the polls. The lower turnout of Democratic identifiers, compared with Republican identifiers, tends to equalize the relative strength of the two parties among the electorate.

A final reason the Democrats don't always win is that political campaigns in America have become increasingly and outrageously expensive. The Republicans are much more successful at raising campaign money in large amounts. Money buys

them advertising and voter mobilization. Democrats get substantial financial campaign contributions from organized labor and other progressive groups, such as the trial lawyers. But these money sources cannot come close to matching the amounts of money the Republicans raise from business and businesspeople—and the Republican advantage in this respect is growing. For years, Republican leaders in Congress have pressed corporate and trade groups to hire more Republican lobbyists and to support more Republican candidates, delivering regulatory relief for business, tax cuts, and limits on lawsuit awards in return. These Republican efforts have resulted in a shift in campaign contributions to the two parties by nineteen major American industry sectors from an even split, a decade ago, to a more recent five-to-one advantage for the Republican Party today.

THE ELECTIONS OF 2002

What happened in the U.S. elections of 2002? The answer, numerically at least—insofar as office changes and popular-vote margins are concerned—is that not really very much happened. A mild tremor.

The Republicans gained a net of only 2 of the total 100 seats in the U.S. Senate and a net of only 5 of the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, while at the same time they actually *lost*—and the Democrats gained—a net of 3 of the 50 state governors' offices. Compare that with 1994, the first off-year election after President Clinton was elected, when the Republicans gained a net of 52 House seats, 9 Senate seats, and 10 state governors' offices.

And look at the popular-vote totals in the 2002 elections. The widely respected Washington political analyst Charlie Cook has pointed out that a swing of 94,000 votes of the 75.7 million cast nationally would have resulted in the Democrats capturing control of the House and retaining a majority in the Senate in 2002. "If that had occurred, obituaries would have been written—inevitably and prematurely—about the Bush administration," he has said. "Instead, we are entertained by predictions that the Democratic Party, as we know it, may cease to exist. Some of the most experienced and partisan Republicans I know even chortle over the turn of events—recognizing how easily this type of exaggeration, combined with acts of self-immolation, could instead have been taking place on the G.O.P. side of the table."

What happened in the U.S. elections of 2002? The real answer: Well, insofar as historical precedent, control of the government, and the kind of government policy and actions that we can expect are concerned, a great deal indeed happened.

Historically, the president's party loses net House seats in the off-year elections, and the loss has usually been especially severe when the public perceives that the economy is in bad shape. By dramatic contrast, in this particular off-year election, despite the fact that, just before the voting, 70 percent of Americans thought the

condition of the country's economy was poor or only fair, and despite the fact that the stock market had collapsed, retirement accounts were decimated, unemployment had increased, business was mired in scandal, the federal budget surplus had turned to deficit, economic growth was slowing, and consumer confidence had plummeted, the in-party still won. That was an earthquake.

As observer Ruy Teixeira put it, "The very evenness of partisan division in the country lends itself to sudden lurches in political power driven by small switches in public sentiment. And that's what we had in . . . [the 2002] election."

Very importantly, the election produced a unified government, with the Republican Party in control of the White House and both houses of the U.S. Congress. They were "ready to rumble," and the rumble began. What did we get? We got more—a good deal more—of the same: weakening or elimination of environmental protections, more loopholes and deregulation for business, more tax cuts for the already well-off, more right-wing judges, more alarming attacks on civil rights and civil liberties, and a unilateralist, militaristic foreign policy, not focused on global justice. And, of course, war.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

How did the Republicans win in the 2002 elections? By presidential campaigning, by what pollster Stanley Greenberg has called "cross-dressing" and "sword rattling," by muting the opposition, by spending enormously, and by mobilizing their voters.

Presidential Campaigning. Leading up to the 2002 elections, President Bush became, as one observer called him, America's "campaigner in chief." His campaign efforts were unprecedented and nonstop. For example, he traveled to fifteen separate states in just the final five days prior to the vote. His 65 percent job approval rating was an undoubted factor in the Republican success at the polls. During those fateful last five days before the election, when President Bush was campaigning so hard, the Gallup Poll showed that in regard to the generic congressional question "Who would you vote for if the election were held tomorrow?" a three-point Republican disadvantage was converted into a six-point advantage. A *New York Times*/CBS News Poll found that 55 percent of those who reported that they voted Republican on November 5 said they did so because of their support for President Bush.

Cross-Dressing. Republicans correctly charged, when President Bill Clinton ran for re-election in 1996, that he had "stolen their clothes," that he had preempted traditionally Republican positions—balancing the federal budget, for example, and "ending welfare as we know it," as he said, and being tough on crime. In 2002, the Bush administration in many ways played the same game. It offered proposals on education, for prescription drugs under Medicare (though a plan that the pharmaceu-

tical companies favored), and on Social Security (though soon retreating from their earlier claim that the private investment accounts they advocated amounted to “privatization”). A postelection poll by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner found that, in the 2002 elections, while the Republican advantage among male voters remained pretty much unchanged from two years earlier, Democratic support among women dropped by 6 percent—a result of the fact, according to a spokesperson for the pollster, that the Republicans had been able to “muddy the waters” on the issues of education, prescription drugs, and Social Security. The same polling firm found that a plurality (43 percent to 34 percent) of those they questioned agreed that “this year, [both] the Republican and Democratic candidates supported a prescription drug benefit for seniors.”

Sword Rattling. In his standard campaign speech as he crisscrossed the country before the 2002 elections, President Bush spent only the first seven paragraphs of his remarks on taxes and the economy, vigorously devoting the remaining twenty paragraphs to the cross-cutting issues of national security and anti-terrorism—issues that clearly favored the Republicans. The images Americans have long had in their minds about the two major parties didn’t change with the 2002 elections. A *New York Times*/CBS News Poll, taken just before the voting, showed that 57 percent of respondents thought the Republican Party was more concerned with big corporations than with ordinary Americans, but the same poll showed that the respondents also overwhelmingly believed that the Republican Party stood for a strong military and for protecting national security. It was on the latter set of issues that the 2002 elections turned—Democratic leaders in Congress had ceded the Iraqi war issue to the president and offered no alternative. No wonder, then, that a postelection Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Poll showed that the number-one reason people gave for having voted Republican was “to support the war on terrorism and a strong military.”

Muting the Opposition. One important effect of President Bush’s campaign appearances in 2002 was to preempt and smother the news about Democratic candidates and Democratic issues. But in a larger sense, the Democrats may have more or less muted themselves. They offered no party opposition to plans for war in Iraq. They took no party position in favor of rolling back big tax cuts for the rich. They had no Democratic economic plan of their own. Democrats ran almost entirely on two issues: opposition to President Bush’s proposal for allowing people to privately invest a portion of their Social Security funds; and support for providing prescription drugs under Medicare—issues on which party differences were blurred by Republican “cross-dressing.” Roger Hickey of the Campaign for America’s Future said in assessing the 2002 elections outcome: “The big story is that Republicans had more of an economic plan than the Democrats.” That’s the way the public saw it, too. Just before the election, a *New York Times* poll asked Americans: “Do the Republicans have a clear plan for the country if they gain control of the Congress?” Some 43 percent answered “yes,” 39 percent “no.” But the weakness of that response in favor of

the Republicans didn't really matter so much because the voters apparently saw no alternative. Only 32 percent of the respondents in the *Times* poll thought that the Democrats had a clear plan for the country, while 49 percent thought that the Democrats did not. And as politicians say, "You can't beat something with nothing."

Spending. Most of the successful candidates for the U.S. Senate and House were those who raised and spent the greater amount of campaign money. The Republican Party, its candidates, and its associated business and other interest groups, as usual, considerably bested their counterparts—the Democratic Party, its candidates, and its associated labor and other interest groups—in fundraising and campaign spending. Especially in the crucial races, the Republicans and their allies outspent the Democrats and their allies—particularly for negative ads and for voter mobilization—and this was one of the important reasons for their relative 2002 success.

Mobilizing. Low Democratic turnout was a factor in the party's 2002 defeat. The Republicans did a much better job of mobilizing their traditional voters, greatly aided by President Bush's unprecedented nonstop campaign travels and efforts. Overall nationwide turnout was up (to 39 percent of voting-age citizens), but the number of voters actually declined in traditionally strong Democratic areas. African-American and Hispanic turnout appears to have been off, too. Curtis Gans, director of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate at Columbia University, said: "The Republicans got their vote out better than the Democrats." The Republicans had an effective and highly organized campaign to turn out their vote. The Democrats did not. The Republicans also had clear issues to rally around and mobilize. Democratic activist Steve Cobble was quoted as saying after the 2002 elections that "President Bush was out there maximizing Republican turnout, while the Democratic leadership was running around saying, 'Look, we agree with the president on the war, and we might agree with him on tax cuts and, hey, vote for us anyway.' The Democratic message was not enough even to get Democrats excited."

WHAT ARE PROGRESSIVES TO DO NOW?

What's next from a progressive point of view? What should be done? We must find a practical and strategic response and determine not only *what* to do but *how* to do it.

Give Up. Democrats could resign themselves and leave the field—waiting for the administration to make mistakes. That, of course, is not an option for good citizens, people who feel deeply about their responsibilities to others.

Join the Greens. Progressives could say that there are no major differences between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. But that's patently dishonest. Does any progressive really doubt that America would be a much different, and better, country if the Democrats had won in 2000 and 2002?

Progressives could say that they are not going to support the Democratic Party and its candidates because they're not perfect. But that's a rather self-righteous and unrealistic position to take. The truth is that perfect candidates don't run for public office; there aren't any. Nor is there a perfect political party, either, one that's totally pure. In *this* world, we have to do the best we can with what we have to work with—and try to make what we have better.

In fact, Green stands for “Get Republicans Elected Every November.” That's the real effect of support for that party and its candidates. There are those who think things have to get worse in America before they can get better. That's both an immoral and elitist position which would callously and cavalierly allow millions more children and other Americans to be hurt, while those advocating it would most often not, themselves, personally have to suffer much.

Texas writer and populist Ronnie Dugger, who presented Ralph Nader as a presidential candidate to the Green Party conventions in Los Angeles in 1996 and in Denver in 2000, concluded that Nader's candidacy cost the Democratic candidate the election. To no avail, he urged Nader not to run again in 2004. “It is very clear—who can persuasively deny it?—that the more votes Nader gets in 2004,” Dugger has written, “the likelier it is that Nader and his supporters will [re-elect the president].” Dugger concludes with “the lamentable truth”—that the only vehicle that can secure an alternative outcome in 2004 is the Democratic Party.

Work Within the Democratic Party. It doesn't have to be invented. It already exists. Though flawed, as are all human institutions, and too dependent upon big money, it is an open and democratic organization (made that way, beginning in 1969 and 1970 with the report of the McGovern Commission, which I appointed). As a former National Chairman of the Democratic Party and, more recently, a former State Chair of the New Mexico Democratic Party, I can tell you that it is far easier and more effective to work within, and take over the Democratic Party—to make it a strong force for producing progressive candidates and progressive public policy—than it is to try to fight or influence government policy as an opponent from the outside. I strongly believe that progressives should work *within* the Democratic Party—to make it more democratic, still more progressive, and more effective in American politics and the formation of government policy.

WHAT MUST THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY DO?

From this analysis of what happened in the 2002 elections, and why, the work to be done by and within the Democratic Party is clear. There is a need for obstructing the worst of the conservative proposals, reforming campaign finance, organizing voters more effectively, and adopting strong alternative policy that is “a choice, not an echo.”

Obstruct. Democrats in Congress, especially in the Senate, with its power of filibuster, should obstruct the worst and most right-wing aspects of the Republican proposals, as they should have done with the Bush tax cuts for the rich and as they have been doing in regard to confirmation of the appointments of right-wing appellate judges. As someone has said, the only people who would be made angry by such actions are the right-wingers, and they have never been Democratic Party supporters anyway.

Reform Campaign Finance. The Democratic Party and its candidates are too dependent on big contributions. When I was the party's National Chair, I hired the head of UNICEF's direct mail fundraising program. She and I began a Democratic Party small-givers campaign, though unfortunately I stepped down as chairman before the program was fully functioning. The Democratic Party should intensify direct-mail fundraising efforts and use all other ways, including the Internet-based methods of MoveOn.org and door-to-door solicitations, to broaden the party's financial base. The party should begin a grassroots organizing effort now, to build nationwide support for laws to reform campaign financing, including the provision of public funding in congressional campaigns and for a constitutional amendment that will permit strict legal limits on campaign spending.

Organize and Mobilize. In every locality in America, there is a wonderful array of private, nonprofit organizations which are working on all sorts of good causes—from affordable housing to living-wage ordinances. The great majority of American college students are personally engaged in some service activity—from tutoring poor children to feeding the homeless. All these groups and individuals should be encouraged to see that political, electoral action is needed too if the problems they are concerned with are to be truly solved. They will realize that when they get together, they are a majority in America.

In regard to political and electoral action, we know that personal contact increases voter turnout. There hasn't been enough of it in the Democratic Party. There wasn't enough of it in the party's 2002 campaigns, with two notable exceptions: in the Iowa reelection race of Democratic Senator Tom Harkin, who won, and in the Minnesota reelection race of Democratic Senator Paul Wellstone, who would have won had he not been killed in a tragic plane crash. These two campaigns organized down to the precincts to get their voters out to the polls. Elsewhere, there was no similarly intensive mobilization effort. As Professor Thomas Patterson has said, today's campaigns have been professionalized and "are based on money rather than volunteers," and he adds, "The insular professionalism that marks other areas of American life has captured our politics, which is one area of modern life that would actually work better if a spirit of amateurism prevailed."

The Democratic Party and its candidates need to have "real-life organizers," as it has been put, and voter mobilization should be a central focus of party and campaign efforts.

Adopt Strong Alternative Policy. The Democrats should offer “a choice, not an echo,” to borrow a Republican slogan of the Goldwater era. It is not true as the more conservative, pro-business Democratic Leadership Council has asserted that the Democratic candidate for president in 2002 lost the presidency by being too populist. In fact, as a *Newsweek* poll at the time showed, after attacking “big tobacco, big oil, the big polluters, the pharmaceutical companies, the HMOs,” at the 2000 Democratic National Convention, the Democratic candidate, Al Gore, who had been down in the polls, achieved an astounding twenty-one point turnaround. E. J. Dionne of the *Washington Post* wrote that the Democratic candidate’s “quasi-populist message . . . helped send his numbers soaring.”

The Democrats must issue a clear call to arms around a forceful statement on the major issues confronting the country—to put forth a vision of what America ought to be. There is no other way that the party and its candidates can gain new supporters, energize and mobilize their base—and win.

The process for arriving at a statement of the Democratic issue positions is almost as important as the result. The national chair of the party should appoint a national Democratic Policy Council, as I did in my capacity as national chair after the Democratic Party lost the 1968 presidential election. Representative not just of the congressional party and other public officials but of the whole party in the country. The council should be divided into committees, each headed by a kind of shadow cabinet officer. It should reiterate and flesh out the party platform in bold terms, then should foster the creation of state, local, and college discussion groups—“Wellstone Camps,” as Jim High-tower has suggested in chapter 36, to react, to respond, and vote.

Focus groups held and polls taken among progressive Americans, and among young people particularly, have found that, nationwide, Senator John McCain of Arizona is immediately identified as a great political hero, and in Minnesota, where they knew him best, the same was true in regard to the late Senator Paul Wellstone. Why? Because these men are, and were, seen as principled—as standing for something. A poll taken after the 2002 elections showed that a plurality of America’s youngest voters—age eighteen to twenty-five—identified themselves as Republicans, rather than Democrats, by a margin of 46 percent to 41 percent. No wonder, when you consider that too many of the Democratic Party’s candidates did not offer strong, principled statements on big issues. And they talked primarily about Social Security and prescription drugs under Medicare—issues aimed at appealing only to older people.

As Gary Hart and Jessica Tuchman Mathews set forth in chapters 1 and 2, the Democratic Party needs not “me-tooism,” but a strong statement of its own on *foreign policy*. This must embody and seek to spread America’s basic values of freedom, human rights, democracy, opportunity, the rule of law, global justice, and an equitable world order. Policy should not be based on American unilateralism. It should only rely on military force as the last, not the first, option for action. The Democratic Party—and America, generally—should learn from the fact that, as Ralph Nader

points out in chapter 23, it's not Scandinavia that has produced the world's present terrorists. The terrorists have come from countries where poverty is great and opportunity is low, countries ruled in undemocratic ways by governments that have mostly been supported and armed by the United States.

The Democratic Party must make a strong statement of its *economic policy*. Jeff Faux, Robert Greenstein, Jamie Galbraith, and William Greider have articulated that policy in chapters 20, 21, 22, and 24. America's economy is lagging, the gap between rich and poor is growing, and poverty is rising. In addition to increasing the minimum wage, *stimulation* of the lagging American economy is needed—and this stimulation should, in the Keynesian manner, include both tax cuts and spending increases of types that are most fair and most stimulative. The recent tax cuts for the rich should be repealed and not made permanent, and any proposals for more such unfair cuts should be blocked. Instead, we need tax relief for wage-earner and middle-class taxpayers, those who deserve cuts most and who will most likely spend this additional money left in their own hands and thus help the American economy. An immediate two-year holiday on payroll taxes on the first \$20,000 of annual income, for example, would put *tax relief* where it's most needed and where it will be spent. This would cost the U.S. Treasury \$700 billion, which would be worth about \$5,000 for each of 130 million American families and would be exactly offset by repealing the estate tax cut (aimed at benefiting only the richest 2 percent of America's families). As Robert Reich, who has proposed this idea has said, the Democrats could starkly demonstrate who is on whose side in America.

Increases in *federal domestic spending* should include needed new school construction, as well as *increased revenue sharing* for beleaguered American cities and states. The National Governors Association has announced that, primarily because of plummeting state tax collections and rapidly mounting health care costs, state governments have been experiencing their worst financial crisis since the end of World War II. Because most state constitutions require balanced budgets, state governments have had to cut spending or increase taxes, or both, the fiscal effect of which, unless offset, is to further dampen an American national economy that is already mired in trouble. An immediate and large increase in federal revenue-sharing funds for the states and cities is greatly needed, both to help them cope with grave financial problems and to pump money into the national economy for much-needed stimulation.

Strong Democratic Party support should be expressed for *education*, including smaller classrooms and increased teacher salaries, not vouchers; for *universal health care* coverage; for vigilant *environmental protection*, including action to deal with urban sprawl and global warming; and for *energy security* and independence, including moving toward increased energy efficiency and alternative sources.

Thus, that the Democratic Party stands for something, and what, should be made clear, and wide participation of all types of Americans should be engaged in developing and popularizing such a policy.

THE FIGHT DOESN'T CHANGE

Do I think we can be successful with all this? To be successful we must get rid of the pessimism that exists on the part of progressives. There is too much resignation and too many people who have been talked into the proposition that the voters are just dumb and misinformed and are not vitally concerned about the things they ought to be concerned about—the Iraq war, for example.

The polls show that people are not dumb or misinformed. The disquietude about the war and its aftermath has been rising. For example, a 2003 NPR poll found that, while 48 percent of the respondents said that the war was a success and worth the cost, exactly the same percentage, 48 percent, said either that the war was *not* a success or *not* worth the cost. That was a big change. A 2003 CBS/*New York Times* poll found that the percentage of Americans who thought that Iraq was either a threat that could have been contained or was not a threat at all had grown to 45 percent. And in the same poll, 58 percent said that locating the weapons of mass destruction *did* matter to them. A 2003 Program on International Policy Alternatives poll found that 63 percent of respondents believed the Bush administration was not fully truthful in presenting evidence on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction to justify going to war. Later polls have given similar results.

A 2004 International Monetary Fund report showed that the U.S. economy, with unprecedented federal deficits, is heading toward big trouble—and Americans instinctively know this. Polls show that President Bush has the very lowest support from members of the opposition party of any modern president in history; there's a floor under his support, but there's a ceiling on it, too.

Can I guarantee that the course I advocate for progressives will be a winning course, that it will soon change American politics and policy for the better? No, of course not. But I do believe that concerned progressives have to try and that there is existential value in the struggle itself. I agree with something the late Democratic Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota said—more important now, following his death, and after the elections of 2002. He said: “We don't have time for despair. The fight doesn't change. It just gets harder. But it's the same fight.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dan Balz, “Strategists Prescribe No Rest for G.O.P.,” *Washington Post*, November 24, 2002.
Century Foundation: *Public Opinion Watch*, “Election 2002: What, Why, and Where (and How the Democrats Can Do Better).” <http://www.tcf.org/Opinions>.
Common Cause, “Election 2002,” <http://www.commoncause.org/votereform/default.htm>.

- Charlie Cook, "The 'Where Did We Go Wrong' Debate," *The Nation*, November 19, 2002. www.NationalJournal.com.
- David Corn, "Less-Than-Zero Dems," *The Nation*, November 25, 2002.
- Ronnie Dugger, "Ralph, Don't Run," *The Nation*, pp. 14-18, December 2, 2002.
- Editorial, the *Nation* (November 25, 2002) <http://www.thenation.com>.
- Thomas B. Edsall, "Big Business' Funding Shift Boosts GOP," *Washington Post*, Page A1, November 27, 2002.
- , "The Sum of Its Parts No Longer Works for the Democratic Party," *Washington Post*, Page B4, November 24, 2002.
- Jeff Faux, "Reclaiming the Party: Three Suggestions to Jump-Start the Democrats," the *American Prospect*, pp. 14-16, December 16, 2002.
- Federal Election Commission, "National Party Fundraising Strong in Pre-Election Filings." <http://www.fec.gov/press/20021030partypre.html>.
- Donald Green and Eric Schickler, "Winning a Battle, Not a War," *New York Times*, November 12, 2002.
- Daniel Gross, "As Washington Giveth, States Taketh Away," p. 4, *New York Times*, December 1, 2002.
- Bob Herbert, "For Struggling States, All Solutions Point to Washington," *New York Times*, December 2, 2002.
- John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (New York: Scribner, 2002).
- , "Why Democrats Must Be Populists," *The American Prospect*, pp. 25-28, September 9, 2002.
- Harold Meyerson, "Dems in the Dumps," *The American Prospect*, pp. 22-24, December 16, 2002.
- Adam Nagourney and Janet Elder, "Positive Ratings for the G.O.P., If Not Its Policy," *New York Times*, November 26, 2002.
- John Nichols, "Failed Midterms," *The Nation*, November 25, 2002. <http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20021125&s=nichols>.
- Thomas E. Patterson, "The Nation: Disappearing Act," *Boston Globe*, p. D1, August 25, 2002.
- Robert Pear, "States Are Facing Big Fiscal Crisis," *New York Times*, November 26, 2002.
- Robert Reich, "Whose Tax Cuts?" *The American Prospect*, pp. 2-3, December 16, 2002.
- Ruy Teixeira, "Where the Democrats Lost," *The American Prospect*, p. 16, December 16, 2002.
- , "Next Steps: Why the Democrats Lost, and Where They Go from Here," *The American Prospect*, November 12, 2002. <http://www.prospect.org/webfeatures/2002/11/teixeira-r-11-12.html>.
- Edward Walsh, "Election Turnout Rose Slightly, to 39.3%," *Washington Post*, p. A10, November 8, 2002.