

From: Seth London  
To: Discouraged Democrats  
Date: November 11. 2024

The election is lost but how Trump's victory gets interpreted will determine where the Democratic Party goes from here. Let's start by acknowledging that politics is the ultimate team endeavor, except our team is not an organization but a vast decentralized network of candidates, activists, donors, think tanks, media, and, most importantly, voters. Across the many different nodes of this network we disagree, sometimes passionately, about which priorities to set and how to achieve them. However, we are bound by a common purpose and a common fate that compel us to stick together and work to fulfill the promise of America.

Our objective is to grow the Democratic Party – not as an end, but as a means to improve people's lives and extend the American Dream. Few believe that goal is achievable. The prevailing sentiment is that we're too polarized, too tribal, too entrenched in our own echo chambers to meaningfully alter the balance of political power in this country. We disagree. The American people are not hopelessly divided. Persuasion is not a lost cause. There remains an electorally decisive slice of the electorate that defies easy characterization, but whose choices in the coming years will determine our collective political future.

Since 2012, Democrats have increasingly focused on the priorities of core party activists over the common voters we claim to represent. Parts of the Democratic establishment accepted as gospel the myth that elections are won by mobilizing the 'base' through appeals to group, not individual identities. The consequence of that strategy was apparent well before 2024 but laid bare in this election: we are a coalition that is too small, too geographically concentrated and too captured by its own special interests to reliably win.

One way of earning back [these voters' trust](#) is for the Democratic Party to cultivate a fighting spirit personified by the [candidates](#) who persistently overperform in competitive elections. These candidates are crucial to the long-term success of the Party, but if their only viable strategy is to run against the Party – or avoid it entirely – we can be confident the future will be Trumpian and it will be grim.

What's needed now is a strategy that can produce a partisan realignment, one that can capitalize on the moral and intellectual weaknesses of our opposition and reconnect with parts of the voter base that we have lost or that we see slipping away. It will not happen without a fight, and winning that fight necessitates building a faction – a "party within the party" – defined by an alternative vision for how to win and how to govern. The animating force of this effort – for now we'll call it [Common Sense Democrats](#) – is:

1. A return to a politics centered on delivering the American dream through simple, concrete action rather than race and group-based identity politics.
2. A recognition that most blue-state progressive governance (Colorado is one exception) has failed and should be replaced by an [Abundance Agenda](#) that aggressively lowers costs by removing regulatory impediments that make it easier to supply the core public goods like housing, energy, health care, and education that all Americans rely on. To make America more equal, [we must make it richer](#). We cannot achieve the former without the latter.
3. An ironclad commitment to social insurance for those who need it – the poor, the infirm, and those either too young or too old to care for themselves. However, we do not believe the solution to spiraling costs of essential social goods and services like health care, housing, and education is to [socialize](#) them and promote them as 'free.'
4. A future-focused narrative and policy vision that transcends the smallness of our current debates and speaks instead to our common national identity that's rooted in hard work, equal opportunity, the pursuit of the American Dream and an unyielding focus on helping the common man and woman achieve a better life.
5. rooted in common-sense ideals rewarding hard work, building prosperity for more Americans, uplifting. This vision must be independent from the actions and agenda of the opposition party.
6. A genuine pluralism that honors individual differences but prioritizes our shared American identity, that confronts racism and bigotry but doesn't seek to racialize every issue, and that actively resists adherence to ideology or dogmatic thinking that inevitably constrains decision making and undermines credibility with a supermajority of people.

These are principles, not policies. They are incomplete but suggest a foundation upon which a larger Democratic coalition is possible. The question now isn't whether the American people will embrace this direction, but whether a core group of leaders in the Democratic Party will. If they do, a critical mass of voters will follow.

One reason we think that is possible is because it's been done before. Consider the [Democratic Leadership Council](#), which was formed in the wake of landslide losses and ultimately succeeded at reshaping the party in the 1980s and 1990s. The DLC recognized that (1) elected leaders (not donors, activists or interest groups) shape the brand of the Democratic Party; and (2), a party's identity manifests during competitive presidential primaries, but the work of shaping that identity requires time, money and effort to forge. Our goal isn't to replicate the policies of the DLC, but to leverage its organizational model - a membership organization of and for aligned Democratic Party leaders – which successfully brought the Democratic Party back from the abyss.

If this were easy, it would have already been done. Moderates are conditioned to believe that unity in politics is paramount. But unifying a party that is too small to reliably win is manifestly wrong, as is the insistence on ideological uniformity. While factions

necessitate a certain degree of ideological coherence, common sense dictates that a politics rooted in place is necessary. Rural Democrats should not be expected to hold the same positions as urban ones, and efforts by national interest groups to impose across-the-board litmus tests – even on seminal issues like guns, the environment and abortion – should be resisted. Obviously that produces inherent tensions: starting with too big and broad of a tent will backfire. Our effort will focus initially on building a small fort, focused less on adherence to a set policy agenda than a willingness to fight against elements within the party who would rather maintain the status quo (even if they profess otherwise). Only from that solid foundation can we differentiate and forge the trust needed to prevail.

Here are five initial steps we propose to begin implementing this strategy:

- (1) Organize a leadership committee of federal and state elected officials committed to executing on the strategy outlined above. The first task will be to draft a clear statement of purpose. The second task will be to articulate a platform that Democrats should run on in 2026. And the third task will involve convening a series of events and public forums highlighting our most talented leaders. The structure of the organization will resemble a Congressional committee – including a chair elected by the members and a staff to provide member services: fundraising, media booking, policy research and support, message development, polling, and general campaign support along with the inherent near and long term benefits of a network
- (2) Grow the Democratic Future Fund. In 2023, we formed a PAC to provide direct financial and tactical assistance to some of the most talented Democrats in the U.S. House. Led by Lis Smith and Steve Israel, the concept proved out and should be scaled to encompass downballot candidates and House recruitment. We have an opportunity in the 2025 New Jersey and Virginia gubernatorial races to demonstrate an alternative way for Democrats to run that we should fully leverage.
- (3) This can be done in partnership with Welcome PAC.
- (4) Create an institution to resource the intellectual capital that will enable Common Sense Democrats to effectively engage and ultimately win the battle of ideas. There is currently no institution fulfilling the mandate to inject the Democratic Party with fresh ideas and political communications strategies for expanding the coalition. The Center for American Progress previously played that role. but it has become a shell of its former self, while others are too captured by donor and special interests and are simply not built to fight.
- (5) Secure funding to grow an existing platform – or start one – that allows a new crop of aligned thinkers to work under the same organizational umbrella and become a megaphone for the larger effort. The ability to cogently communicate

and distribute ideas is fundamental to the success of any political project. The DLC had the New Republic and Blueprint, the New Right had National Review and Public Interest, the Progressive Left had Dissent and MAGA originally had Breitbart but now has too many to count. At the moment, we have [The Liberal Patriot](#), and several excellent Substacks including Matt Yglesias' Slow Boring, Noah Smith's Noahopinion, the Realignment podcast and Jonathan Chait's column. But we lack the type of cohesive institutional mechanism to promote the faction and engage with our opposition.

- (6) Build state-level equivalent institutions that simultaneously build from the bottom up what we're trying to do top-down nationally. That involves identifying and resourcing state leaders to create in-state political networks that cut against the dominant orthodoxy of their state's Democratic culture in places where we're consistently losing (i.e. Texas) or seek to cultivate a new governing ethos in blue states that have gone awry. We have piloted this with the [Agave Fund](#) in Texas, which has started organizing a group of talented Texas officeholders to redefine what it means to be a Texas Democrat.

The medium-term yardstick for success is the 2028 presidential primary. If we can measurably shift the tenor and substance of the debate to more favorable ground, and offer a platform that influences the terrain of the presidential primary, it will constitute success. We need to get to a place quickly where endorsements are sought and signify something important about the person running.

We have no illusions about how extraordinarily difficult this will be to pull off. It requires inventing frameworks that currently do not exist to hold Democrats together while simultaneously broadening our appeal to reluctant Trump voters. It requires donors with FDR's disposition to embrace "bold, persistent experimentation" and become "traitor[s] to their class." Finally, it requires politicians with imagination, who know what they want, know what they stand for and who are willing to lead public opinion and not just be led by it. That's unusual in any era – politicians are not a natively courageous species – but necessity demands we get outside our comfort zone and start building.