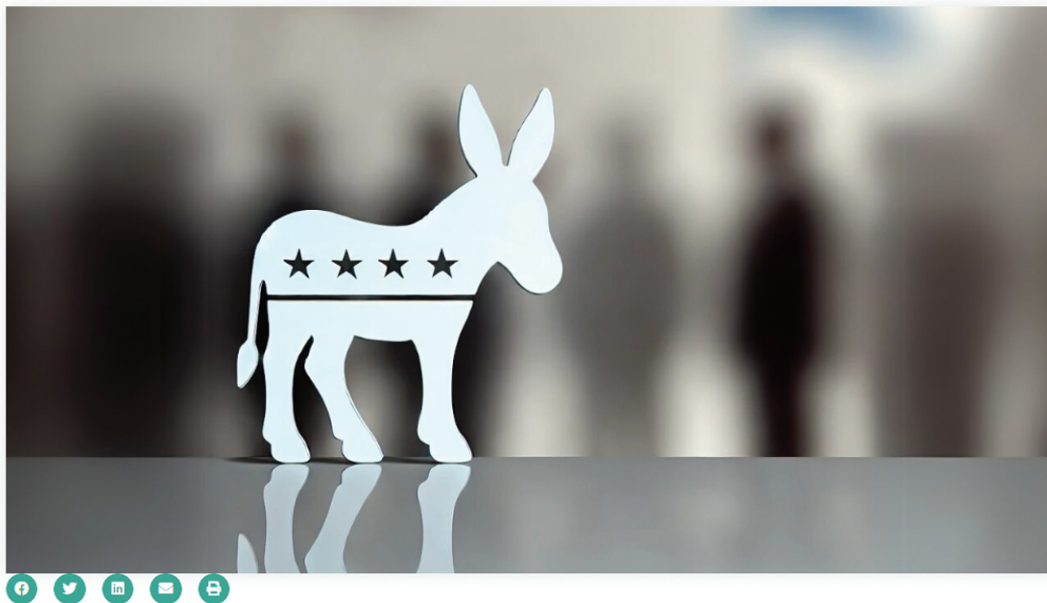




What Now for Democrats?

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There is nothing that concentrates the mind like losing. So what should Democrats do now?

Process the pain and don't give up.

Losing a political campaign — as a candidate, worker, or devoted supporter — can be intensely painful.

My father suffered his first electoral defeat in a close race for Mayor of Philadelphia in 1967 when he was 37 years old. I was nine and too young to be aware of his reaction, but years later, he told me he was angry for a year. I was 15 when he lost for a third term as District Attorney of Philadelphia in 1973. I was sad for months.

Having worked on statewide and local campaigns in the intervening 50 years, I'm better at not getting too low after defeats nor too high after victories. I saw those healthier boundaries develop in my father, who hung in despite more defeats until he finally won a Senate seat in 1980 at age 50. He went on to serve in the Senate for 30 years and made significant contributions.

Senator Bob Casey no doubt saw the same in his father. The elder Bob Casey lost three races but persevered and was eventually elected Governor of Pennsylvania when he was 54. He made a substantial difference there, as well. Those two men didn't quit, and we are better off for it. We humans aren't built to lose and slink away—we are built to fight and survive. That's good because the issues facing our families, our communities, our nation, and our world are too important for talented people to retreat and quit, especially now.

Pick yourself up and get back at it.

A good way through the pain and worry is to first talk in small groups and focus constructively on why Vice-President Harris lost and what might be done better going forward. That's already happening. Next, larger meetings should be held.

The Clinton triangulation defeat of Bush in 1992 was a moment of profound angst for the Republican Party, with deep parallels to what the Democratic Party is feeling now. I was an active Republican then and I participated in a cathartic and constructive dialogue of why-and-what-do-we-do-now with several dozen local and statewide Republican leaders in Norristown a couple of weeks after that election. We walked out of the meeting clear-headed, feeling supported and united, and armed with the rudiments of a plan to win going forward.

Elevate winning over ideological purity.

What matters most is public policy, but it's hard to affect policy unless you win elections. From decades in both Democratic and Republican politics, I've learned — and I hope this doesn't violate my trash-talk mantra above — that Democrats tend not to work together as well as Republicans.

That's because many of the activists in the various and diverse interest groups that comprise a big part of the Democratic Party — from pro-choice advocates to organized labor, from consumer rights lawyers to the LBGTQIA+ community and beyond — don't know each other and don't prioritize the same issues.

That's in contrast to Republicans who, in many places, are demographically fairly similar, believe mostly the same things, share priorities, and find it comparatively easy to get in a room together, put aside minor differences, and plan a path to electoral victory.

I know. I've been in hundreds of those Zoom and real rooms in both parties, and I know how much harder it is for Democrats to reach and keep consensus. From my personal experience, when Democratic activists know each other and each others' priorities and reasoning, the need for compromise is minimized, teamwork is produced, advocacy is strengthened, campaigns are well run, elections are won, and public policy is advanced.

Democrats need to accept the immutable truths that you can't affect change without serving, can't serve without winning, can't win without unifying, and can't unify without being willing to principally compromise, if necessary, to win. The next step is to honestly and calmly assess what, if any, compromise is necessary. That's informed by the results of this and recent elections.

What are the lessons of this election?

Inflation exacts the political death penalty on the party in power. It must be prevented, such as by not injecting too much money into the economy. Robbing people of purchasing power is cataclysmic, and even when inflation is reversed, it is not forgiven or forgotten. That was especially true this year and for President Carter in 1980 and was also a significant issue for the party occupying the presidency in 1976, 1992 and 2008.

A secure border is fundamental. A porous border won't be tolerated by mainstream American voters. Most Americans think personal freedoms must be honored, whether that means bodily autonomy or the right to think very differently, even if those

candidate was more likable. It was because their ideas were better liked by the swing voters who occupied the center. The United States has mostly been governed from the center for the last seven decades. That's unlikely to change.

Moving forward, Democrats must not cede the center to Republicans. They need to articulate and support the values and policies that they honestly share with Trump voters. Progressives need to accept incrementalism, hold their tempers, engage in quiet and honest introspection and conversation, be willing to thoughtfully and principally compromise, and look for common ground.

The Republican Party won, but its governing coalition hasn't gelled, will be fragile, and will likely depend on the center, including centrist Democrats and Independents. That's a point of leverage for Democrats and a ray of light in their present gloom. Democratic tactics should not include reflexive obstinacy just to keep stuff from getting done. The American people will likely see that for what it is and, anyway, the reason to be in public life is to improve the world, not frustrate political adversaries.

Harris supporters — be they Democrats, Republicans, or Independents — must stay in the arena and be smart about it. Our nation depends on it.

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