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nytimes.com

Democrats, Don't Muck This One Up

The midterms are too critical.

By Michelle Cottle

Ms. Cottle is a member of the editorial board.

- Oct. 10, 2018



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Democratic leaders in both chambers of Congress are encouraging their members to pivot toward issues aimed at bringing more people into the fold.

CreditCreditDamon Winter/The New York Times

With less than a month until Election Day, it's time for Democrats to hunker down and get serious about their midterm messaging. In the dispiriting aftermath of the recent Supreme Court confirmation circus, this means taking a couple of deep breaths, not flipping out over the Republicans' purported "Kavanaugh bounce" (which might be more of [a hiccup](#)) and focusing on a few key issues that resonate with a broad swath of voters.

Republicans are twitchy about their electoral prospects. They know that midterm elections tend to go poorly for the party that holds the White House, just as they are aware that President Trump, while beloved by the base, has a popularity problem among the wider electorate. Party leaders are going all in with the culture-warring and scaremongering, looking to drive their voters to the polls with the specter of a wild-eyed, rage-filled Democratic "mob" hellbent on destroying the Republic. In a [Wednesday op-ed](#) in USA Today, the president himself indulged in some light red-baiting, claiming that "radical socialist" Democrats want to turn America into Venezuela. The entire screed was classic Trump: unhinged, [breath-takingly dishonest](#) and aimed squarely at making the opposition's head explode.

As part of this base-stroking, Republicans are eager to keep the debate raging over their freshly confirmed, ultra-polarizing Supreme Court justice, Brett Kavanaugh. The brutal fight to seat Justice Kavanaugh, which morphed from an inquiry into the judicial fitness of one man into a culture-war cage match over women's rights and shifting sexual mores, electrified many left-leaning voters. But it also stirred up die-hard Republicans, potentially endangering the "enthusiasm gap" Democrats had been enjoying.

With Justice Kavanaugh now safely tucked into his lifetime appointment, there's much less cause for conservatives to stay angry. And even if they're stewing today, or next weekend, three-plus weeks is an eternity in politics — all the more in a political climate dominated by this endlessly dramatic White House. Thus, we see prominent Republicans, including the [Senate majority leader](#) and [the head of the Republican National Committee](#), peddling the idea that if Democrats gain power in Congress, one of their top priorities will be to impeach Justice Kavanaugh. No

matter that this claim has no factual basis — it plays perfectly to the Republican base’s enduring sense of victimhood.

Which is why Democrats must resist the urge to follow Republicans down this spider hole, or that of any radioactive topic designed to inflame partisan passions.

Thankfully, Democratic leaders in both chambers of Congress seem to recognize this and are encouraging their members to pivot toward issues aimed at bringing more people into the fold. In the Senate, they have said they will [fixate on health care](#) in the coming weeks, with special attention paid to protections for people with pre-existing conditions. This is a wildly popular provision of Obamacare, and one on which Republicans know they are vulnerable. This explains why President Trump fibbed about having fulfilled a campaign vow to protect coverage for pre-existing conditions, when in reality his administration [has refused to defend such protections](#). Every single Democratic candidate should be laboring to make sure that every single American voter knows this.

The day after the Kavanaugh confirmation vote, the House minority leader, Nancy Pelosi, [called on her members](#) to pull themselves together — “DON’T AGONIZE, ORGANIZE” — and get busy selling voters on the party’s “For the People” agenda. In addition to cutting health care costs, Democrats pledge to focus on creating well-paying jobs through infrastructure investment and on tackling Washington corruption. The party ought to have a bit of fun with this last agenda item, given that polls have shown for months now that a strong majority of voters are favorably inclined toward congressional candidates who will provide a check on this White House.

So far, Democrats seem to be staying on point. A couple of lawmakers have called for the next Congress, presumably with Democratic control of the House, to revisit the allegations against Justice Kavanaugh. A handful of others have argued that, if it turns out that he lied to Congress, he should be impeached. Ms. Pelosi has swatted down such suggestions, declaring, “We are not about impeachment.”

None of this means that the masses of Americans rightly appalled by this Supreme Court fight, or any of Mr. Trump’s outrages, should simply swallow their pain and get over it. Outside groups and incensed individuals should be working to channel all that frustration and heartbreak into turning out voters next month.

But the truth is, voters repulsed by Mr. Trump and his congressional enablers are already fired up to turn out for Democrats. Thanks to an unforgiving Senate map, the party's more daunting challenge this cycle is to persuade people in not-so-blue areas of the country to give it a second chance.

As such, candidates and lawmakers need to take a more strategic approach. Stick to a message with broad appeal. Discuss the Kavanaugh battle in the larger context of the need for a responsible legislative branch to hold this out-of-control executive branch accountable. And no talk of impeachment — for anyone.

The only way to get the attention of a Republican Party that has proved itself interested in nothing more than power is to take away that power. Until that happens, the rest is just noise.

Reader Comments

•

1. Bruce Rozenblit
Kansas City, MO [Oct. 10](#)
Times Pick

We keep hearing that the Democrats have no message. Baloney!

Affordable healthcare for all isn't a message?

Investing in renewable energy isn't a message?

Realistic public college tuition isn't a message?

Worker training isn't a message?

Taking down the oligarchy isn't a message?

LGBT rights isn't a message?

Civil rights isn't a message?

Reducing the deficit by rolling back tax cuts for the super rich and corporations isn't a message?

Gun control isn't a message?

There is so much that Trump and the Republicans have totally screwed up, no single message will do.

The Republicans have greatly benefited from the two or three word slogan. Trump

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is the master of this tactic. Democrats should not fall into that trap. Tearing something down can be done with a few words. Trump is also the master of that tactic. Building something up takes more words. Restoring America can't be outlined in a sound bite. It takes a bit of speechmaking. Let the Republicans grunt and moan. We have something worth listening to. We just need to get the people to listen.

2. Gerald

Portsmouth, NH [Oct. 10](#)

“With less than a month until Election Day, it’s time for Democrats to hunker down and get serious about their midterm messaging.”

When oh when will the Democrat party look beyond the next election cycle and develop a solid platform of policies for the longterm future? With a robust economy (admittedly not quite so robust for people who got slammed by the 2008 crisis or just low-wage jobs), how can Democrats develop a “message” that has traction in just a few short weeks? I’m sick of “messaging” and await the day when I see the kind of longterm plan for gaining power that the GOP and its very powerful donor class has been implementing, with great success, for decades. I wish Democrats would smarten up. And forget identify politics; I want to see policies that are meaningful to the vast majority of Americans, regardless of gender and color: subsidized education, infrastructure investment, universal healthcare, financial security in old age and retirement, etc etc. Until that happens and until we can persuade large numbers of current Trump supporters to move in our direction we will never have sufficient power to implement the sweeping reforms we need in so many areas of American life.

3. common sense advocate

CT [Oct. 10](#)

Democrats would do well to follow the Beto O'Rourke model of visiting every single voter county and talking with, and listening to, voters graciously, with true decency and humanity, and with the passion to do right by his constituents - all of his constituents.

4. CA Dreamer

Ca [Oct. 10](#)

Times Pick

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Very well written. The key for Democrats is to not let Trump and McConnell set the discussion. They want the Dems to fight about abortion rights or Trump breaking laws, but the truth is that the Dems have winning issues in Healthcare and the huge deficit that the GOP is exploding. Even the so called "greatest economy ever" is not looking so strong after today's massive drop, rising inflation and the tech down turn. China will probably also fight back closer to the election as an attack on Trump and his supporters.

5. Dave

Lafayette, CO [1h ago](#)

Three more specifics where the GOP is vulnerable:

1. Trump's \$1.5 trillion tax cut. It's already so unpopular in all the polls that GOP candidates are running away from it like it was Kryptonite. **DON'T LET THEM.** Relentlessly remind voters that 85% of that tax cut went to "The One Percent", while families earning median incomes of \$50K per year only got the crumbs (maybe enough to buy the family a night out at McDonald's each month).

2. The GOP's relentless threats to slash Social Security and Medicare (because the tax cut for the uber-wealthy "broke the budget" - so the GOP now demands that average Americans must now accept Draconian cuts in the benefits they've paid for all their lives in FICA taxes).

"Trump gave billionaires huge tax cuts - and now he wants YOU to pay for them." That's a message that would almost fit on a protest sign. Dems need to hammer that simple message home EVERY TIME they speak about the midterms.

3. Yes, health care. Specifically, on TV the Democrats should endlessly replay Trump's extravagantly empty promises from 2016 to replace Obamacare with something "really terrific" - which would "cost less, cover more people and provide better care."

"Trumpcare" - Where is it?

IMHO, the fact that Trump has lied blatantly and without shame to Americans over 5,000 times in the last 20 months should be enough all by itself to make Trump and the GOP off-the-charts radioactive.

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But Trump's "fake news" propaganda barrage has rendered "truth" as irrelevant.

cherrylog754

Atlanta, GA [Oct. 10](#)

"I don't belong to any organized party, I'm a Democrat"

- Will Rogers

Hopefully we've learned from those days of disorganized messaging that reaches absolutely no one.

Here in Georgia, Stacey Abrams for Governor is doing a terrific job at targeting our two top issues, healthcare, specifically Medicaid, and public education. And most of what I've been reading, candidates from other States are targeting issues that ring true with their constituents.

Make sure you vote though.

6. Jim

TX [Oct. 10](#)

Democrats should also talk about ending illegal immigration and having border controls. Not a wall. But all my Republican friends think the Democrats are for open borders and letting anyone and everyone into the USA no matter what. That's not true, so they need to state what their position is first, then go on to state how they intend to solve the problem.

7. Brad

Oregon [Oct. 10](#)

100 million voters stayed home in 2016.

Are they still saying there's no difference between Trump and Clinton?

Isn't it time to apply some control to the Trump chaos train?

8. FXQ

Cincinnati [Oct. 10](#)

You have to remember that the Democrats are paid by their big corporate donors from Wall Street, Big Pharma and Silicon Valley NOT to advocate for ideas that are popular with the American people. Therefore, don't expect anything but platitudes and identity politics. Expect to hear their common phases of "We lead with our values. We support good jobs and a chance at the American dream. Trump bad. " The Democrats that do address these issues, those of the progressive wing of the party are not getting any support from the DCCC or the DNC.

9. Anand Naidoo

Washington DC [Oct. 10](#)

Don't muck this up?

With Pelosi. Schummer and Clinton, the Democrats have already lost.

MS

If the Dems continue to endlessly promote sanctuary cities, open borders, illegal immigrants, DACAs, refugees and others, consider themselves toast.

10. John Brown

Maybe I am just too old to matter anymore

but I think LBJ would be choking on

his Pork Ribs and Fresca if he read this editorial.

Democrats: Stop pandering to the Left, they don't matter

nearly as much as the Blue Collar workers you abandoned.

Health Care, Health Care, Health Care and cutting the price

of Secondary Education/Training and a more just

Immigration Policy that puts American Citizens looking

for work - first.

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11.Humble Beast

The Uncanny Valley of America [8h ago](#)

The problem is NOT that Democrats aren't organized. It's that they are organized around only one issue: Immigration.

But Democratic leaders are not aligned with voters on this issue. It's the reason why working-class (and many middle-class) people voted for Trump.

The leadership under Perez, Pelosi, Schumer et al stopped representing actual American citizens decades ago. The Democrats are solely focused on helping illegal immigrants, migrant workers, asylum seekers, and immigrants. But our current immigration practices are unsustainable and incredibly unfair to American taxpayers and workers. We don't want lax or open borders. We want the laws changed and enforced.

When are Democrats going to start fighting for actual tax-paying citizens?

The corruption in the Senate, judiciary, Washington, White House must be addressed. But we also desperately need to look to examples in advanced nations (Canada, Europe, Scandinavia and Japan) to restore our democracy:

1. Single payer universal healthcare
2. Modernized updated infrastructure
3. Non-privatized utilities, cable, internet cell data
4. Sane immigration policies
5. End Citizens United, gerrymandering, lobbying etc
6. Restore consumer protections, environmental regulations, clean water, air, food
7. Livable wages, benefits
8. Restore checks and balances, regulations, services for which we pay taxes. We The People NOT corporations and NOT illegal immigrants.

Democrats will lose again if they don't wake up

12.RCJCHC

Corvallis OR [Oct. 10](#)

I'm a Democrat and even I think we are past the point of anyone being able to help us. Yes, I'll vote. But unless the Democrats start doing some hard core maneuvers

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toward thwarting global climate change, it won't be much different than the Republicans. It will be politicians beholden to big corporations who got them elected. If the Democrats were in power, do we really believe they'd say "no" to coal and fossil fuels?? To beef production? To human overpopulation?

13.emb

manhattan, ny [Oct. 10](#)

I feel despondent. The Democrats have already lost. They don't have a clear, consistent message that appeals to most Americans: good jobs, good health care, good and affordable schools, clean air. They respond rather than act. They're against Trump and but aren't loud and clear and forceful and persuasive about what they're for.

14.old lady

Baltimore [Oct. 10](#)

After seeing the UN report on climate change and currently having a monster hurricane Michael that was significantly exacerbated by global warming, climate change should be THE highest priority for anyone. If this issue does not inspire people, we are doomed and head to a potential extinction of human species. Although time is short, Democrats need to make people aware of this and persuade them. We really need a strong leader to deal with this.

15.David A. Lee

Ottawa KS 66067 [Oct. 10](#)

Times Pick

It couldn't hurt the party to buy 15 minutes or a half-hour of prime-time at some critical moment before the election to do some simple math on health-care policy to show how their position on the issue will actually give the American people better health care for less money. The enormous advantage is that a simple explanation of it will track with the reality, which is that the American people pay twice as much as other countries for less health care. In such a case, some of the party's most respected leaders--especially Barack Obama and others--could help stabilize people's feelings on this issue, which massively favors Democrats. I have been bitterly critical of the culture radicals in the party, but this is one issue which engages the American people where they really live. Does the national leadership of the party have the good sense to try something like this?

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16.Talbot

New York [Oct. 10](#)

If you want to know what resonates with Democratic voters, read the 600+ comments in the magazine section on illegal immigration.

17.bnyc

NYC [Oct. 10](#)

Conservatives now control the Supreme Court--perhaps for decades. Why? Because it wouldn't have even OCCURRED to Democrats to hold up a candidate for months and not even consider him. And McConnell, who was most responsible, howled with rage when the Democrats held up Kavanaugh for a WEEK. His hypocrisy is staggering.

Much worse is to come unless unless Republicans are defeated soundly next month. And the millions who don't vote, or vote for third party spoilers, are--in effect--voting for Trump.

18.etfmaven

chicago [Oct. 10](#)

I'm pretty sure the best way for Democratic Congressional leadership to help is to stay home. The best they are able to come up with is the stellar "Better Deal". Saints preserve us and they needed focus groups to do that. I think Taylor Swift can help more.

Norm Weaver

Buffalo NY [Oct. 10](#)

The Democrats have to develop a platform beyond gender issues and perceived support for illegal aliens and sanctuary cities. Right now if you are simply a white citizen or a black citizen, the Democrats aren't interested in you. You're passe. However if you are white or black and you are "gay" or if you are an illegal alien then the Democrats want to help you. Also, while President Trump is developing security and trade policies to confront China, I hear nothing from the Democrats on these critical issues (apologies too Sherrod Brown). As dreadful as the Republicans are, the Democrats offer nothing if you are an everyday American. If the Dems

make solid gains in the midterms, it won't be because they have earned them by virtue of their policies.

19.Sharon

Ravenna Ohio [Oct. 10](#)

Amen. The country doesn't need impeachment. It needs quality, reasonably priced healthcare, living wage jobs and quality education. Concentrate on that. Compare what Democrats are offering to what republicans have done and will do. Repeat it over and over again. Republicans can't win on their ideas so they gerrymander districts and disenfranchise voters to win. Time to call them on it.

20.robW

US [Oct. 10](#)

It's already mucked. The liberal agenda needs to be re-centered around the working class, which isn't in the liberal agenda at this time.

So, after the continuing going the Democrats will receive come November, maybe we can start a real dialog centered around the working class and less centered around the identity movement.

Or not. The working class can still cast it's strength to the Trump conservatives, meanwhile the liberals will wonder what ever happened to the working class. The rest of us will continue booking tickets to Australia and South America...

21.Skidaway

Savannah [3h ago](#)

News flash: Democratic Party unable to develop strategic approach to connecting with electorate.

Advice: focus on making education affordable, nationalizing health care, program to remodel nations infrastructure

Most importantly, start serving your constituents. Please.

22.JW

New York [Oct. 10](#)

Got it. Just throw in more half-crazed mobs calling for blood, even without any proof of any wrong-doing, stalk some Republicans to their homes, offices and where they eat; shout down more speakers on campuses who you don't agree with ... and then accuse Trump of bringing totalitarianism to America. That'll do the trick, for sure.

23.Mimi

Baltimore, MD [4h ago](#)

Times Pick

Democrats DO have a message. In fact, they have lots and lots of messages.

That's the problem. Too many messages makes the "lean Republican" voters confused and dubious about putting Democrats in charge.

What is missing from the Democrats is true leaders. Sorry, Nancy; sorry, Chuck; sorry, Elizabeth; sorry, Bernie; sorry, Corey; sorry, Kamala.

None of you cut it because you're competing with each other.

The GOP have - like it or not - one voice. A big booming voice named Trump and he uses it all day, all night, every day, every night, on Twitter, on TV, everywhere. He is campaigning, campaigning, and campaigning. This is not the President speaking - this is a campaigner speaking.

Dems are sorely lacking a counterweight - one big booming voice - discrediting Trump's every lie.

24.Erik Olson

Sykesville [Oct. 10](#)

Dear Democrats, please please run on impeaching Trump and Kavanaugh. Thanks, Republicans

25.John Murray

Midland Park, NJ [6h ago](#)

Even though I am a Republican, I would happily vote for a strong Democratic candidate for President. I happily voted for President Obama in 2012, mainly

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because he organized the operation that killed Bin Laden. I thought Bill was a great President, particularly in his choices of Cabinet members. One in particular who stood out was Robert Rubin as Secretary of the Treasury. I believe that for a couple of years the US ran a government surplus under his stewardship.

I know many people who would vote for Mayor Bloomberg if he should run as a Democrat. Strong Democratic candidates are good for America. Decent people vote for the best person for the job. That person could be a Democrat.

26.Reed Erskine

Bearsville, NY [9h ago](#)

The Russians are coming. The ties between the Russo-Republican party are clearer now than ever before. Russian oligarchs have pumped millions into Republican campaigns as documented by the American press. Trump publicly defers to Putin. Why? Money.

Russian oligarchs wishing to diversify and protect their wealth are acquiring a stake in America by buying its politicians. Democrats are about sharing wealth and power, Republicans not so much.

Republicans, like their Russian oligarch allies, are all about concentrating wealth and power at the top. Democracy is a nuisance to oligarchs, and an anathema to Putin.

This may be a negative campaign theme, and dismissed as fake news, but it's real. Voters should understand the deep ties between shady Russian money and the Republican party.

27.Tkeennj

Nj [11h ago](#)

Democrats can't cede the economic issues.

The economy is good, but it's been on a continually upbeat path for years. Extra juice from tax cuts - but at what cost? Benefits largely to the wealthiest, while cost of deficits likely borne by the rest in the form of reduced benefits and services.

Trump always goes for the flashy deal, fueled by debt. He benefits, and leaves everyone else holding the bag. I'm sure he'll do the same for our country.

28.Evan

Rehoboth Beach [3h ago](#)

Times Pick

This article reminds me of the constant complaints from the Clinton camp in 2016. If only the people could see the real Hillary, they might like her. That after 30 years in the public eye.

If only the Dems could have a clear message, they might win. That they are trying to find a message 30 days out is frightening.

29.Max & Max

Brooklyn [Oct. 10](#)

Republicans probably know the words of Article III of the Constitution that establishes that there are no limits to the number of supreme court justices for the Supreme Court. If a Democratic president and congress want to put 20, that's not against the Constitution. The Republicans, therefore, have far more to fear of Democratic retaliation and are far more motivated. Sadly, the Democrats seem to have no idea of the power they waste.

30.adm3

D.C. [9h ago](#)

First, Trump “fibbed” when he said that he wouldn’t fiddle with preexisting conditions? How about lied? Why for god sakes, would you soften what’s really going on? He’s telling not just a lie but The Big Lie. The Adolf Hitler kind of lie that accuses your opponent of what you do yourself. And because it’s so outrageous, people will believe it.

Second, you acknowledge that the Ds are doing everything right but you shame and scold them like they were children.

31.Fred Smith

California [Oct. 10](#)

Hillary's message. No civility till we are in charge.

Holder's message: when republicans go low we should kick them.

Good luck with that.

32. Shenoa

United States [Oct. 10](#)

Unfortunately, the Democratic Party has drifted too far to the Left to appeal to moderate voters like ourselves...particularly as regards illegal 'immigrants'. The Left-Prog faction appears deeply committed to their hysteria-driven cheerleading for foreign nationals...people who unilaterally decided that our nation's sovereignty and immigration laws don't apply to them...who cross our borders illegally and park themselves permanently on our soil so that we can provide them with the all necessities of life...food, housing, healthcare, welfare, education, jobs... while we ourselves struggle to provide for our own families.

Please let us know when the Democratic Party will once again rally behind the interests of American Citizens. Until then, we're voting the other side.

33. Doctor Woo

Orange, NJ [10h ago](#)

If they run on expanding the ACA, essentially expanding Medicaid, and that will be at the expense of Medicare, they will not win as big as they should. The Middle Class does not like ObamaCare, and neither do I... It's Medicare for all, or at least expanding that from 50 years old. That's the ticket. It has to be articulated so people will see it's the best thing. Get the for profit insurance companies out.

34. Tony Cochran

Oregon [Oct. 10](#)

Agreed. This article is spot on. Democrats win when they talk about issues that matter to voters: stagnating wages, ending Trump's tariffs (North Dakota!), affordable access to healthcare, women's rights, and investigating corruption (or at least protecting the investigations into corruption - Mueller!). The principled Democratic Senators from North Dakota to Missouri need our help. Donate, vote, talk to your friends and neighbors if you have any in those states, or if you live

there. And Texas: Make us proud and elect someone with some decency and morality: Beto O'Rourke is quite clearly that person. The Democrats will take the House:

We must focus on taking the Senate.

35. Mark Thomason
Clawson, MI [9h ago](#)

"The brutal fight to seat Justice Kavanaugh, which morphed from an inquiry into the judicial fitness of one man into a culture-war cage match over women's rights and shifting sexual mores, electrified many left-leaning voters."

It did electrify. But that electricity did not reach all the left leaning the same way. The culture war left is not the whole left. There is an economic left. There is an old school civil rights left that has stayed focused on the original and still frustrated goals of the civil rights movement.

Electrifying also reached those offended.

Electricity lasts about the same length of time for both sides. If one fades in three weeks post-fight, so may the other.

The culture war left has convinced itself of itself. It has no idea at all of how it is perceived by others, nor how they react, except to be judgmental about their failure to be the same.

This pattern of convincing themselves is how Hillary lost.

36. Not Amused
New England [Oct. 10](#)

Character matters, and truth telling is a big part of character. Lies are meant to deceive, so the Democratic party needs to make very clear **what** the GOP lies are and **how** those GOP lies are hurting the average voter.

The GOP are also masters of anger, and many Democrats feel that stooping "low"

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by employing anger is beneath them. Anger, though, is a tool that is neither inherently "low" nor "high" - it has been given to us as part of our fight-or-flight response...and if Democrats are to win, they cannot allow flight...they must fight and, if necessary, get dirty doing so.

Yes, the Democrats need to put out a positive message of "what we will do if elected" that puts the 99% up front...but mixed with generous portions of anger. Righteous anger at the haughtiness of the GOP, the callousness of the GOP, the ineptitude of the GOP, and the corruption of the GOP.

37.skanda

los angeles [Oct. 10](#)

Not to worry, Dems muck up everything they touch.

38.Dave

Philadelphia [1h ago](#)

Times Pick

The Democrats have been mucking up elections for decades. With the exception of the Watergate year, 1976, they lost every presidential election between 1968 and 1988. They also lost two unlosable elections, in 2000 and 2016 because of incredibly poor campaigning and candidates who didn't connect with anyone.

The winning issues for the Democrats are NOT gender and minority identity issues. They are basics, as indicated: protecting people's Social Security, which the GOP has repeatedly targeted, protecting their jobs, fostering economic security, health care and preexisting conditions.

Republicans have won by stoking fear and divisions within the country. In this, they have used scapegoating and inflated rhetoric to take advantage of the fact that Democrats abandoned the working and middle classes in favor of others. The GOP has then stabbed those abandoned people in the back by betraying their economic interests.

Democrats must recapture that constituency. They can only do it by focusing on basics.

39.Steve

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[LA](#)[Oct. 10](#)

It's a bit too late not to "muck it up". The republicans don't need to scaremonger, all they have to do is play video of the Dems doing what they are told to do and what they apparently want the American people know what they plan to do. Awful, hateful behavior during the BK testimony. Delay & resistance, withholding Ms. Ford's letter, Senators giving speeches rather than asking questions, (average of 3:22 pontificating of the 5:00 minutes allotted for questions), and outright slander.

Unhinged: Unsatisfied that the slander did not derail BK's appointment to the SC, Dems are promising to impeach him from the SC if they gain the house. Despite needing 2/3's of the senate (extremely unlikely) to remove him.

The new standard as per Dems; Uncorroborated allegations that "must be believed" because a woman made the allegations. Guilty until proven innocent? Are the Dems willing to resign whenever any woman accuses them of a crime? If so, why is Keith Ellison in a leadership position and running for office as a Democrat? Hypocrites.

Advocating violence. Maxine "get in their face", "not welcome here or anywhere". Booker "get in their face". Holder "kick them". Despicable. It's already mucked up, and people are voting early.

40. Alfred Francis

[NY](#)[10h ago](#)

You can count on the identity politics driven, politically correct, socialist Democrat party to continue to run candidates who do not connect with enough Americans so that the Republicans, who are the adults in the room, will run our country, with Donald Trump as our President 2024. Perhaps then Democrats will again nominate centrists and be competitive nationally.

41. Chandra Prince

[Seattle, WA](#)[10h ago](#)

The current Democratic Party's platform and talking points resonate only with urban city populations. Even in a staunchly blue state--20 miles outside the city is quite a bit red. The Democrats are also by and large depends on cities for their campaign funds. As Jimmy Carter pointed out recently, the Democratic Party cannot afford to ignore the independents and fair minded moderates, outside the

cities, if they want to win a national election. The majority of the Democratic Party's Congressional Caucus is now only from 3 states---MA, NY, CA...

42.

Rolf

Grebbestad [11h ago](#)

Democrats have already "mucked this up," and will soon be in their weakest position since their party's founding.

Whereas Republicans are approaching Democrats in the generic Congressional polls, something that should be overwhelmingly favorable to Democrats at this point.

Senate races are growing tighter, with new polling showing likely Republican gains in North Dakota and Missouri.

House races are closer, but most pollsters agree they come down to about 20 undecided seats.

But when President Trump steps in, all races tend to go in his favor.

America is coming to understand that economic progress, military might and excellent health care are essential to all,

And increasingly see President Trump as the man to make everything finally happen.

43. Anthony Flack

New Zealand [Oct. 10](#)

@Bruce1253

"Try to avoid the 'pie in the sky' promises, such as Universal Health Care. Great idea, how do you pay for it? " - I don't know, maybe ask every other developed nation how they manage it. Since the US is considerably more wealthy, it shouldn't be that hard.

"America is a centrist country, Trump has gone over the far edge, we do not have

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to go over the edge the other way." - no, the US is a right-wing country and what is regarded as the political center in the US would be considered right-wing elsewhere.

44.Jonathan
Oronoque [Oct. 10](#)

The Democrats have boxed themselves in between two possible positions; social justice warrior, or tech billionaire's stooge. Neither position appeals much to the general voting public any more. If it's either Bernie or Hillary, then the voters will reluctantly chose Trump.

Their coalition is quite incompatible. As long as affluent suburban professionals dominate the policy-making wing, the other groups are going to feel uncomfortable. The GOP has already picked off some unionized blue-collar workers, and with a little effort could pick off some black and Hispanic men.

I agree that the last thing the Dems should do is send forth hard-core 'progressives' to represent the party, but the press and the hard-core political base are cheering every time one of these candidates wins a primary. It will be very enlightening to see what happens when they all lose.

45.James Ricciardi
Panama, Panama [Oct. 10](#)

"Democrats want to turn America into Venezuela."

This is the kind of statement that should cause everyone who lives in the United States to question Trump's sanity. His lack of veracity has already been proven. Venezuela is a humanitarian catastrophe, but unfortunately there are many such catastrophes in the world. Why did he choose Venezuela; because it is a Latin American country? He could have said Syria or Myanmar, etc. I know of no person living in the US who wants to turn it into Venezuela. Trump boggles the mind.

46.Shend

47.TheShire [4h ago](#)

Total voter turnout in the last midterm election 2014 was just 36.4%, the lowest in 70 years. Almost two out of every three eligible voters did not even bother to vote in 2014.

Forget about Rs and Ds for a second. You cannot have a democracy when nobody votes. When only 36.4% of voters even show up that is not even a quorum in my book, let alone a functioning democracy. We are no longer majority rule, we are more accurately an 18.5% rule.

51.citybumpkin

Earth [1h ago](#)

There are quite a few congressional races, so I'm not following them all. But I am following quite a few. While they have talked about, the Democratic candidates I've seen are not particularly fixated on the Kavanaugh confirmation. In fact, many of the messages are targeted at issues that affect their specific constituency rather than broad national issues. Seems to me the hysteria is more in the imagination of pundits than in reality. All politics is local, so I doubt advice from the backseat drivers from hundreds of miles away have much value at this point.

52.caveman007

Grants Pass, OR [Oct. 10](#)

Pound away at the GOP on health care and the debt. The GOP has dealt itself a losing hand by attempting to destroy Obamacare. How does that benefit us? On the debt, remind the voters that no one receives value from their taxes when those taxes are diverted to debt interest payments. Back off on immigration - it never had much support - and it has cost us elections.

53.Lynne Shook

Harvard MA [Oct. 10](#)

Yes, but no. Yes, talk about important issues to voters, but no--Democrats need to stop being cowed by the hateful propaganda of the Trump party. There is no reason to discount impeachment, of Trump or Kavanaugh. Dems should matter of factly say that of course they will pursue investigation and impeachment of any public servant if the facts warrant it, and move on to other topics. If Democrats refuse to speak their own measured truth to this ugly power they will not win the house or

the senate. And if they are feeling really emboldened, it wouldn't hurt to point out that the Trump party's constant complaints of victimization are just plain SAD.

54.Mike B

Ridgewood, NJ [Oct. 10](#)

Dear Michelle,

It ain't easy when you got the courts stacked up against you, when you got unlimited and anonymous cash against you, when you got the media covering rallies free of charge like they're news, against you, when you got three branches of gov't against you, when you got hostile sovereign nations against you, when you got a Senate leader who ignores the Constitution against you. Other than that, we should be able to knock this one out of the park!

55.Blair

Los Angeles [Oct. 10](#)

If it's true that Millennials are historically the least reliable voters among analogous generational cohorts, then even I, a lifelong liberal, find my motivation flagging. Who are we supposed to be advocating for? Young citizens who can't be bothered? People who aren't even citizens of my country? Protesters who sometimes seem more interested in protesting than voting? The Democratic Party needs a giant, glamorous, galvanizing marquee issue around which we can't help but rally; 2020 is already shaping up as closer than it should be.

56.Electroman72

Houston, TX [Oct. 10](#)

There is no angry Democratic mob, there is no mob, there is no message on the left. Democrats are not heard. I haven't heard a message even when Hillary was running. Their platform is the same as usual: more healthcare, good wages, pet Bambi, and blah blah blah. I just want to see the anger and outrage on the left in the eyes of the politicians in office and running for office that is there constantly in the GOP and in Trump. Because it is working for the GOP and Trump. Truth doesn't matter, and it doesn't vote as we've found out with Trump. Anger and outrage do.

57.American Patriot

USA [Oct. 10](#)

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There is only one way for the Democrats to win the midterms, they have to make healthcare the main priority in their agenda. Gun control will only damage their agenda, and will cause them to lose votes. Bernie Sanders understood all this, Hillary Clinton did not.

58.Boregard

NYC [Oct. 10](#)

I've been worrying about the Dems tendency to mess the bed for months now. All the talk of a blue wave, of excitement and unprecedented turn-out...have me worried. Very much so. Because as a powerful turn-out and vote video by Knockthe vote, explains - old white people vote way more than young voters. And in every election. They don't forward memes and tweet their outrage, they go and Vote!

Being young and energetic doesn't mean much if there are no votes to be counted. Tweets don't count. Memes are not on the ballots!

And the women worry me too...lots of talk, but then their (too many) responsibilities kick-in (their dopey men, family, work, etc) and they don't show up.

There is no real excuse to not voting. None. Unless you're incapacitated, or seriously being restricted by outside forces looking to hinder your vote - there are no good excuses.

But even if the Dems win next month...I'm more worried that the Dem leadership is gonna go all complacent, get all nice and civil, and forgiving of the real Opposition Party. Playing T-ball, while the GOP plays Whack-a-mole with axes.

I simply don't trust Pelosi, or Schumer to get aggressive and fight with guts and real conviction.

The GOP has clearly made this a blood sport, while blaming the Dems...and then all Schumer does is look over his glasses and speak in slow, measured tones, like he's reading aloud to himself. Or a baby is sleeping nearby...

Mucking it up...its a Dem thing of late...

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59.Clyde

Pittsburgh [1h ago](#)

Times Pick

While I know that abortion is a critical issue for many Dems, it is also the cudgel that the GOP has used to beat us with for decades now. We need to rethink abortion and guns as our fundamental issues, and start rethinking education, healthcare and wages. In other words, leave the cultural stuff behind and focus on the bread and butter.

60.Ben Ross

Western, MA [10h ago](#)

Look the only way Democrats are going to return to sanity is by unfreezing their quota driven charters.

Which while not specifying quotas of women, gays, blacks and the newest identity flavor of the month pretty much does demand quotas.

The result is a party that sees everything through the prism of identity politics.

Get these provisions out - let ideas prevail - let citizens unite on values not identities --- that is the only way democratizes will work there way out of their rut.

Because there are differences between genders, there are differences between races just as there are differences between individuals. And the reality is that those differences will account in part for differing success rates and attitudes about everything under the sun.

If we don't accept that we will be forever looking to blame someone for differences in outcomes.

Focus instead on moral behavior (10 commandments are not a bad starting point), a little humility, and some empathy. And a recognition that we all are better off when we pull together.

That should make for a good contrast with our winner take all president.

61.lou andrews

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Portland Oregon [Oct. 10](#)

They probably will, they have in the past. They'll muck up a free lunch. They're like sloths, slow, lazy except when its feeding time. Spineless too. When push comes to shove; they'll get pushed by their opponents instead of the other way around. I'm glad i'm an independent.

62.Marty

Pacific Northwest [Oct. 10](#)

For one thing, try to avoid another debacle like the one we witnessed last week. Couldn't have worked better for the GOP if they had staged it themselves. By the way, did anyone ever figure which GOP operative -- sorry, I mean which Feinstein staffer -- leaked the unfortunate Ms. Ford's name?

63.Tom

Upstate NY [3h ago](#)

"I don't belong to an organized political party. I'm a Democrat."

Will Rogers.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

64.Richard Luetttgen

New Jersey [5h ago](#)

Ms. Cottle's exhortation to Democrats is a fair one for an exponent of Times editorial interest. This is an important election for liberal Democrats. Lose it and your ability to do what the Tea Party did dies. That could damage the emotional grittiness required in future to present a compelling counter-argument to conservatives.

But her argument about "messaging" is months late. The time to have coalesced around a set of salable and moderate messages was many months ago (as I urged here many months ago). Instead, you approach this election riven between messages of moderation and the desire to transform us as a society into ... Denmark.

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As a consequence, if you're able to flip the House, it won't be by a strategic shift of the people leftward, but by a conviction by enough voters that Republicans have gone too far. You've lost the initiative and perforce must rely on perceptions that you don't control. And this is happening at a time when Trump claims serious wins: the economy and unemployment, foreign policy generally, and a willingness to address important issues over which other administrations simply have kicked cans down roads – North Korea, Iran, China, among others. And the creation of an originalist federal bench is an issue that appeals to more than Republicans.

I just don't see Ms. Cottle's comfort that Democrats are "staying on point". This election is a crapshoot, you're badly divided, and people should suspect polls as they SHOULD have suspected them in 2016.

65.Dan

St. Louis, MO [11h ago](#)

It is very hard to interpret one poll like the Politico Poll quoted by Ms. Cottle, as we know that averaging of numerous polls is the only way to get reasonable interpretation.

Having said that, the Real Clear Politics averages of Generic Ballot show sharp drops in the Dems advantage since Ford's name was disclosed on Sept. 15. Likewise, on Oct. 4 fivethirtyeight.com published an analysis based upon averages of many polls showing Trump's approval rating has gone up significantly since Sept. 15, as have House GOP and Senate GOP chances (although their House GOP chances are still not in favor of GOP).

These much more reliable average of polls do seem to be showing a Kavanaugh bounce (or more likely a Ford bounce since it starts on Sept. 15) for the GOP.

66.AK

Cleveland [Oct. 10](#)

Thanks for the view of political climate from the NYT newsroom. As I see it not much has changed. The view from below is that unfortunately Trump is as popular as he was in 2016. Despite all the critical and adversarial coverage attitudes have remained frozen. The only game in town is turn out. Issues such as healthcare and tax windfall for the rich will not matter. For Democrats turn out depends on

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antagonism to Trump and for Republicans turn out depends on continued antagonism to Hillary, imagine she is still occupies so much Republican mind-space, and reinvigorated antagonism to mainstream media. Keep the focus on mobilization articulating all the angst in antagonism to Trump.

67. Ronald B. Duke

Oakbrook Terrace, IL [Oct. 10](#)

Has anyone noticed that the Blacks have sort of disappeared from the mid-term election battle? I suppose Democrats know that emphasizing Black Voter desires for more social services is guaranteed to rile White Republicans, but (and isn't there always a 'but'?) if this election is really about the anxieties of White Women, and climate, and abstract constitutional issues, and Blacks see themselves relegated to the margins of Democrat concerns, isn't there a chance that many of them will feel sufficiently uninvolved that they stay home on election day? All the Democrats need is perhaps a 5% fall-off in the Black vote and they won't win anything--yet I don't see Democrats taking any particular notice of Blacks at all. Then there's the well known fact that Republican voters are undercounted in polling data. This is partly a Republican game--not being available to pollsters. We saw the effect that had in 2016--about 5%, a big margin. If you put together Black uninterest in this election with Republican 'invisibility' to pollsters, Democrats could be in real trouble and not even know it.

68. Slidezone70

Washington [Oct. 10](#)

One must wonder how effective this focus on issues could be, stacked up against the mind-bending attack ads so expertly wielded by the opponents. It may be the most important mid-term election since the Civil War, weighted as it is by the need to reestablish a check on the other two branches of our Constitutional democracy. Democrats must be bold as well as rational in their choice of platforms. They must do so with a sense of moral rectitude not displayed across the board so far. Are they capable of energizing those who decry the loss of decency in government with a cleaner hand than last week? Lord, we need good leadership.

69. Paul Wortman

Providence, RI [Oct. 10](#)

Kavanaugh, as you note, will not be an issue except as just the latest example of why so many are fed up with Mr. PTSD, Persistent Trump Stress Disorder. But, never underestimate that master media manipulator to try to spring some sort of October surprise in the next few weeks to motivate his base. There are many possibilities: firing Attorney General Jeff Sessions and replacing him with Lindsey Graham as has already been rumored; pardoning Mike Flynn and/or Paul Manafort; or threatening to impose marshal law to prevent "mob rule," and who knows what else. Meanwhile, the Democrats have the issues, the candidates, and the momentum. They just need a massive turnout to retake the House and perhaps even the Senate. And with the markets showing their usual October jitters due to Trump's trade war, those who thought the economy was a Republican plus may see that's not the case. so #RememberThisNovember and V-O-T-E!

70.I Heart

Hawaii [10h ago](#)

If the Democrats want to run on a solid platform of universal healthcare, affordable college tuition and living wages, they need to first learn basic math. Rolling back tax cuts to the wealthy and corporations will only scratch the surface. Defense spending must drastically decrease. Social Security and Medicare reform will also be needed. Let's start having a real conversation; yes the painful conversations that even Democrats avoid.

And please don't use the Nordic model for comparison. EVERYONE (even the middle class) pays high taxes. And the sovereign wealth fund that provides cradle to the grave benefits relies on oil exploration and extraction with large investment in international stock markets (particularly the US). So the Democratic rallying cries of environmental stewardship and corporate thievery are the antithesis to the very things they want.

71.Jonathan

Oronoque [10h ago](#)

@Ronald B. Duke - Actually, a number of lesser-skilled black men are warming up to Trump. They've been shut out of jobs for the last ten years because employers preferred to hire illegal aliens, but now things are looking up. Don't be surprised if some of them vote Republican.

72. PoliticalTango

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Washington, DC [Oct. 10](#)

I hesitate to propose this, but I wonder if Dems also need to start fighting back via Twitter. Twitter seems to be one of Trump's most powerful weapons against his opponents (of all kinds) and a powerful means of mobilizing his base. Is it not time for certain Dem reps to hit back on that platform? Call him out (using factual evidence) as the criminal and ignoramus that he is? It's not taking the high road, but in these increasingly desperate times we may no longer be able to afford such principled restraint.

73. Phyliss Dalmatian

Wichita, Kansas [Oct. 10](#)

Amen. Eventually, you get what you Vote for. Or what you ALLOW, by NOT Voting. Please, let's stop the infighting and get to Work. We can resume the fracas AFTER the Midterms. Seriously.

74. MWR

Ny [2h ago](#)

You are asking the party to restrain its progressive wing. That's good advice, but the Republicans know exactly which buttons to push to get a rise out of progressives, and regrettably, the progressives always respond predictably. And mainstream voters don't like it, especially when the economy is humming along just fine, relatively speaking. But, if indeed the culture wars can be sidelined, identity politics muted, protests moderated and most importantly, if Democrats can avoid insulting swing voters who supported Trump, then maybe, just maybe, Democrats have a shot at it.

75. Ron Cohen

Waltham, MA [6h ago](#)

"They stupidly handed us the best issue they possibly could going into the fall election..." Mitch McConnell was quoted as saying after the confirmation vote. And he's right!

The Republicans are playing by a different set of rules; they're playing to win. Too

many urban Democrats are still dwelling on divisive, cultural issues; they're still smugly patronizing the working class; they're still framing issues in terms of moral absolutes. They're NOT prioritizing winning.

In the case of Kavanaugh, the Dem's made their case without regard to the political cost, failed utterly in stopping his confirmation, and now they've put the Senate, already a long shot, beyond reach. Why? Because they managed to do the unthinkable: they created a backlash; they fired up the opposition. It's called shooting yourself in the foot.

If the Democrats want to save democracy and decency in this country, they MUST win the House. To do that, they MUST tone down the moral absolutism, the 24/7 moral outrage, the constant finger-pointing, and concentrate on economic issues, including health care. It's called pragmatism.

If the Democrats don't clean up their act, they won't win the House, and the country will surely descend into authoritarianism, perhaps becoming a single-party state on the model of Putin's Russia.

76. Daniel

NY [8h ago](#)

Democrats need to have a plan for addressing problems on election day. Voter suppression is going to be more brazen this year. Also, free shuttles in competitive districts would be nice.

77. Steven swan

philadelphia [11h ago](#)

It is true. We cannot, with clear conscience, emulate Trumpublicans for the pure pursuit of power. If our experiment in democracy is going to fail, it will be while I stick to the high road.

78. Barbara

D.C. [11h ago](#)

I agree with all your points and suggest that Dems really need to focus on THE MONEY. Just a couple of examples:

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REAL tax reform. Simplify everything. It's fine for the corporate tax rate to be low, but the loopholes gotta go. After reading about Trump's finances here in the NYT, knowing that the rich are largely practicing the same tactics to avoid paying their fair share, we need a vision for a complete overhaul of the tax system.

FULL TRANSPARENCY for PACs. The sources of all campaign and political donations must be publicly available. Any other fresh ideas about how to actually drain the swamp of the real pollutant - cash - is welcome.

79.Bruce1253

San Diego [Oct. 10](#)

This is a tune up for 2020. Many of the issues are local, but to the extent that national issues are important, they must be aimed at the middle class. They must show that the Democrats have a plan that will benefit the entire country, not just Trump's buddies on Wall Street.

Try to avoid the 'pie in the sky' promises, such as Universal Health Care. Great idea, how do you pay for it? Having said that, strengthening the safety net is a winning proposition, the Boomers are getting old and will need good insurance.

Let's help those who were left behind in the recovery, let's show people how we would govern, let's show people how we would address problems around the world with out going to war with our allies. Let's demonstrate that we would bring civility and sanity back to our government.

America is a centrist country, Trump has gone over the far edge, we do not have to go over the edge the other way. He is our best argument for a change. Be engaged, thoughtful, and caring of people's concerns. Let the extremes rant and rave, be the calm center of good, effective government and that will be a winning plan.

80.Howard Gregory

Hackensack, NJ [Oct. 10](#)

There are two reasons why Democrats must prioritize the economic justice issue if they are going to meet expectations in this midterm election and regain control of the House, and defeat Trump in 2020.

First, millions of Americans in the heartland disagree with our stances on social issues, such as abortion rights, based on cultural and religious reasons. This is why Democrats are so stunned come election night when, for example, they are faced with the recurring surprise that they did not win as many white female votes as they expected despite the Republicans' conservative views on women's rights. Democrats must take a more deliberate approach when campaigning in the heartland for support for social issues.

Second, given the attention the media has given to the capture of our American government and economy by the wealthy corporate elites and the resulting economic damage it has done, a growing group of progressive Democrats have smartly focused on bringing economic justice to working Americans in the middle and lower classes. They have been focusing on achieving measures, such as living wages and worker participatory rights in corporate decision-making.

Bernie Sanders's success last week in pressuring Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos to raise the Amazon minimum wage to \$15 per hour and help us increase the federal minimum wage, is proof that the economic justice issue is the most common political denominator Democrats must prioritize to win back control of the government.