

## Title:

Communicating Democrats' Agenda For The 'common Good'

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## Summary:

All the polls today point to a significant Democratic advantage, both on how the parties are handling the key issues as well as how people will vote on Election Day.

Yet, as early November approaches, Democrats would be wise to understand that they are where they are, not because of their efforts, but frankly in spite of them.

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## Article Body:

All the polls today point to a significant Democratic advantage, both on how the parties are handling the key issues as well as how people will vote on Election Day.

Yet, as early November approaches, Democrats would be wise to understand that they are where they are, not because of their efforts, but frankly in spite of them.

The only conclusion we will be able to draw from a big Democratic win is that Americans are not so much embracing Democrats as much as they are rejecting Republicans.

As a Democratic strategist who helped President Bill Clinton fight his way back from the GOP takeover of Congress in 1994, I have been disappointed that the Democrats have not offered a positive and forward looking agenda for America that expresses how in President Clinton's words they will address the "common good".

The 2006 Congressional elections thus far are a missed opportunity for Democrats

to lay out an agenda for change that both unifies the party and presents them to the electorate as the logical (and acceptable) alternative to what the Republicans are offering America today.

Unfortunately, the Democrats have simply not done a credible job defining who they are or what they stand for. Their rationale today is simply a litany of individual top scoring policy proposals, and not an agenda to move the country forward by addressing the common good.

Some quarters of the Democratic Party are already calling for an ideological agenda should the Democrats win. This unfortunately isn't the answer. The Democratic agenda must not tackle ideology. Real results for average people must come first.

Just last week, The Washington Post ran an article about nine Democrats on the ballot who are all former Republicans. They are running as Democrats, not because they now believe in more progressive policies, but because they are rejecting the Republican policies that put conservative ideology over everything else.

This apparent microcosm is important for Democrats to understand. If they should take control of Congress, the country will begin to turn to them for answers to their pressing everyday problems. People like never before are looking for practical answers and results – and real results will trump ideology.

What's clear is that it's not that the ideology of the Bush Administration that the American people reject so much, although in the end I think they do, but what is really causing so many voters dismay is that Republican policies are simply not working for regular people.

And the reason they are not working is that their policies place ideology first while the circumstances of reality come second.

In a recent speech at Georgetown University, Former President Clinton explained the ideology problem Republicans face very clearly. He stated: "... if you got an ideology, you already got your mind made up, you know all the answers, and that makes evidence irrelevant and argument a waste of time, so you tend to govern by assertion and attack. The problem with that is that discourages thinking and gives you bad results."

A few months ago, I conducted a poll for the Aspen Institute's Ideas Festival. My overwhelming finding was that Americans are not just hurting economically, but that they are losing hope in our economy and country itself.

61 percent of Americans don't believe they are living the American Dream at all and of that group, 62 percent don't believe they will ever reach it in their lifetime. This means that currently almost 2 in every 5 Americans have lost all hope that they will one day experience the economic promise of this country.

What is causing this loss of confidence? It mostly stems from the fact that Americans are finding life as we know it is to be too expensive. Healthcare is unaffordable; a college education is now harder and harder to afford; basic needs like housing, utilities and childcare are more and more expensive; and people are forced to rely more on individual pensions than ever before.

In order for Democrats to fully benefit politically from Republican failures and begin to position themselves for success in 2008, their Common Good agenda must address these matters and move away from the pie-in-the-sky political rhetoric that promises healthcare and college for all. The consensus in the minds of the public is to move away from policies that seek to redistribute wealth and pursue market based solutions instead.

This agenda must seek out centrist common-ground solutions that will improve and better people's everyday lives. The agenda must emphasize consensus and cooperation as a way to achieve results for everybody.

Should the Democrats win, the first 100 days of the new Congress will be a defining and critical moment for them to showcase this agenda for the country.

Failure to do so will damage their ability to shape public policy and lock in Independent swing voters for the 2008 contests. Without a centrist common good agenda, public sentiment can swing back to the Republicans in 2008 as the electorate remains fiscally and socially conservative.