

LIBERALS ON LIFE SUPPORT: ARE WE WITNESSING THE DEMISE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY?

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What is power? Is it tangible? Something you can hold, see, touch...feel? Power is a feeling. Money is power, influence is power. Power can be used for good and for bad, but it is not often that power is used for nothing at all. Except for one thing: The Democratic Party of the United States of America.

Under previous administrations, Democrats had countless wins with the election of Barack Obama in 2008, control of both the House and Senate the same year, flipping the House in 2018, the shocking election of Joe Biden in 2020, and once again taking the reins of both branches of Congress. Democrats have made great strides for the United States in the last two decades, including the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, legalizing gay marriage in 2015, and the Affordable Care Act, all done under Obama, and the American Rescue Plan and Bipartisan Infrastructure Bills under Biden.

However, when the 2024 election came around it became clear that the time for Democratic victories was over. A last-ditch effort was displayed by Presidential Candidate Kamala Harris and Vice-

Presidential candidate Tim Walz to take back the election, but President Donald Trump once again took his seat as Commander in Chief of the United States. How did we get here? What happened to the American psyche that has allowed a cult leader to take over our country? Perhaps it was Biden's age or that voters couldn't fathom a Black woman for President. Maybe they didn't have enough time to campaign, or was it simply that they didn't try hard enough? A combination of all these is probably the answer, but the key difference between the candidates and parties is this: Republicans would do anything to achieve the outcome they desire. Democrats would too—as long as it doesn't offend anyone.

Despite their vast and varied opportunities, Democrats consistently fail to take meaningful action on key issues, ultimately leaving their supporters frustrated and disillusioned. The 2020 Election marked a significant turning point in American politics. It was framed as a referendum on the country's future direction, particularly concerning pressing issues like healthcare, climate change, racial justice, and economic inequality.

The Democratic Party promised bold changes aimed at addressing the systemic challenges facing the nation. The election served as a platform for pushing forward progressive policy agendas that sought to reshape the U.S. in a more inclusive and equitable direction.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare was at the forefront of the 2020 campaign. The Democratic Party advocated for a more accessible healthcare system, with Biden backing the expansion of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and running on the promise of a federal 'public option' health insurance plan. Yet, after taking office in January of 2021, no mention of a public option was made by Biden or his administration. Elizabeth Rosenthal, a senior contributor for KFF Health News, stated the backtracking was due to backlash. She quotes Matthew Fielder, an economist at the Brookings Institute, saying, "Out of the gate, you'd have a huge powerful lobby against the public option — the hospitals — since providers have the most to lose: lots of money" (2024). Due to the potential of political fallout, the public option was shelved. Fielder says that a public option structured like Medicaid or Medicare could save both the government and consumers billions of dollars per year, but rather than fight the good fight for the betterment of the American people, Biden and his administration chose the easy way out (Rosenthal, 2024).

Lack of follow-through is not a new theme for the Democratic Party. The Green New Deal (GND) is another great example of ambitious rhetoric met with little

legislative action. In short, the GND says the entire world needs to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 and calls on the federal government to "dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, create high-paying jobs, ensure that clean air, clean water and healthy food are basic human rights, and end all forms of oppression" (Friedman 2019). The problem with the GND is that it was portrayed as an end-all, be-all solution to countless issues ranging from clean water to general oppression. Additionally, it was never determined how much the GND would cost. Estimates placed it somewhere in the hundreds of billions, with the benefits surpassing one trillion dollars. Yet, as Robinson Meyer, a former staff writer at *The Atlantic*, points out, this is impossible. Why? Because the Green New Deal doesn't exist. Meyer (2021) writes, "Nobody has written it down. Three years after the idea of a Green New Deal broke into the mainstream, you can't find an authoritative and detailed list of Green New Deal policies anywhere. There is no handbook, no draft legislation, [and] no official report that articulates what belongs in a Green New Deal and what doesn't." How lawmakers were expected to vote and pass legislation that would alter not just how the United States operates, but the entire world, isn't just ambitious, it is disconcerting. Without a concrete framework, lawmakers were essentially being asked to endorse a vision rather than a viable plan. This lack of specificity made it easy for opponents to characterize the Green New Deal as unrealistic, while supporters were left defending a concept with no agreed-upon framework. In the absence of actionable

policy, the initiative became more of a symbolic gesture than a legislative roadmap: an emblem of intent rather than an instrument of change.

Frustration among key demographics, particularly progressive voters, young people, and marginalized communities, has only intensified in the wake of these shortcomings. For many, the Green New Deal represented not just a climate policy but a broader vision for economic justice, racial equity, and generational survival. Its failure to materialize in any substantive form has deepened a sense of disillusionment. These groups, who turned out in large numbers with hopes of transformative change, now question whether the Democratic Party is willing, or even capable, of delivering on its boldest promises. As economic instability grows, rights are rolled back, and systemic injustices persist, the perceived abandonment by party leadership threatens to erode the very coalition that helped bring them to power. This is exemplified by the Democratic Party's favorability dropping to a new record low of 29% in March of 2025. According to a CNN Poll, "Democratic-aligned adults say, 52% to 48%, that the leadership of the Democratic Party is currently taking the party in the wrong direction" (Edwards-Levy, 2025). Unless party leadership addresses these grievances with more than rhetoric by embracing bold, material policies, the cracks in the Democratic alliance may soon become irreparable.

Today the Democratic Party finds itself stuck in an internal ideological battle that not only jeopardizes its legislative

effectiveness but also its identity. There are progressives like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Bernie Sanders (D-VT), who support reforms such as Medicare for All, the aforementioned Green New Deal, and tuition-free college. But on the other side, there are centrists like Joe Manchin (IND-W.VA) and Krysten Sinema (IND-Ariz.), both former Democratic U.S. senators who left the party and registered as Independents, who represent a sect of Democrats interested in taking a more pragmatic approach by implementing change gradually.

This divide doesn't just point to a disagreement in policy, but rather a fundamental discordance over the purpose and ambition of the party. Bold, transformative policies are what is needed in a country where voting for the lesser of two evils every election cycle has become the norm. Unfortunately, it is unclear whether the Democratic Party can make these policies politically viable, especially with centrists in the same party arguing that these kinds of proposals are unrealistic given how polarized Congress has become.

The result of this ideological tug-of-war is a legislative stalemate and weakened policies. Landmark bills are often reworked, stripped of their most ambitious elements just to placate centrists, ultimately forgetting that the entire point is to better the lives of Americans. The Build Back Better Act is a prime example of this. In short, "The Build Back Better Act delivers once-in-a-generation action to lower the everyday costs that burden working families – from health care to

childcare [and] more. The Build Back Better Act lowers costs and fights inflation because it is fully paid for by making big corporations [and] the wealthiest pay their fair share," according to Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky's (D-IL) 2021 website. But the act never came to fruition. Thwarted by Senator Joe Manchin and his disapproval of the amount of money that would go towards "social safety net programs and climate policies" (Mastriana, 2022), which Manchin argued would not be consistent with what his constituents in West Virginia want. So, the Build Back Better Act died, along with the little faith that American Democrats still had left in the administration and party as a whole.

Behind the paralysis of legislative action lies another significant issue: the overwhelming influence of special interests and corporate donors. Centrist Democrats frequently cite fiscal concerns or the need for bipartisanship when resisting progressive legislation, but their financial connections reveal a more complicated reality. Fossil fuel interests, pharmaceutical companies, Wall Street firms, and other powerful lobbyists have long supported moderate Democrats, shaping what is deemed politically "realistic." Often, it is not the specifics of policy that hinder reform, but rather campaign donations and the implicit repercussions of opposing big money. This ideological divide is weakening the party's legislative agenda and alienating voters.

Younger, more diverse, and economically vulnerable Americans are increasingly drawn to the progressive wing, demanding

action on issues like climate change, housing, healthcare, and racial justice. However, they frequently watch in frustration as Democratic leadership compromises with centrists who are more concerned with reelection strategies than with pursuing systemic change.

For all the talk of democracy being on the line, you'd expect the Democratic Party to act like it. Yet time and again, its leaders opt for caution over convictions, optics over outcomes, and compromise over courage. In doing so, they have broken the trust of the very public they claim to defend. Their reluctance to take risks has become a defining characteristic of Democratic politics, and the party too often retreats to familiar talking points and half-measures, watering down proposals before negotiations even begin out of fear that they might be deemed 'too radical.' But the time for playing it safe has passed, leaving the Democratic party in the dust and voters in the dark. Just as damaging is the party's lack of accountability when it fails to deliver. Campaign promises vanish after elections, and when posed with inquiries as to why policies didn't pass, politicians resort to doing what they do best: deflect, spin, move on, and hope no one notices.

The one thing all politicians do is mistake the American public for being stupid. The same grassroots movements that helped elevate Democrats to power are often ignored post-campaign, and the activists who marched, organized, and rallied for racial justice, climate action, women's and LGBTQ+ rights are sidelined in favor of poll-tested centrism and elite donors. It is

the ultimate betrayal, and it doesn't go unnoticed. Young and working-class voter turnout has begun to waver, arguing that their vote doesn't matter anyway. Some vote Republican, some vote third-party, and some turn away from politics completely. Either way, the consequence is the same: a weaker Democratic coalition and a stronger right wing enthusiastically waiting to fill the void.

This failure to act doesn't just hurt the party, it hurts the country. When Democrats shy away from confronting corporate power, expanding healthcare, or tackling the myriads of other issues they promised to correct, the problems do not disappear. They become more intertwined in how Americans live their lives, intersecting with other systemic problems—just another missed opportunity for change, deepening public frustration and furthering the political divide. The window for progress closes just a little bit more. The Democratic Party has hit a breaking point and is left with limited options. Either come together or a new party and political identity will take form, ousting them completely.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

The Democratic Party still has a chance to be the catalyst for meaningful change, but only if it finds the courage to lead. That means uniting around bold policies that meet the scale of the crises we face. It means holding elected officials accountable always. It means listening to the grassroots movements that have long been the conscience of the party. It means taking a page from the Republicans' book and stopping at nothing to secure the future America that the American people deserve.

Rebuilding the trust won't be easy, but it must start somewhere. It has to start with action, not press releases. No more performative hearings, diluted policies, or backing down.

Real, legislative, life-improving action.

The path forward is clear and open; the only thing missing is the political will. The American people are not asking for perfection; they are asking for leadership. If Democrats want to keep the trust of those who put them in power, they'd better start delivering.

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