

Democrats' "National" Silence Was Deafening

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By Robert Weiner (/author/itemlist/user/45634) and Evan Baumel (/author/itemlist/user/50143), Michigan Chronicle
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Why the wave against the Democrats and loss of the Senate? DNC Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz and President Obama are now asking why the Democrats lost, despite polls showing agreement on the issues, so they can make strategic corrections. Here's a main reason: Aside from the sheer numbers against them (21 of the 34 Senate seats up were Democratic), the national Democratic party's silence was deafening on recent accomplishments.

They could have talked about: consistent job growth for five straight years, unemployment almost halved, the deficit halved, stock market tripled, health uninsured cut by half in states that fully implement the Affordable Care Act, gas prices falling because of record US energy production, Osama bin Laden dead. The solvency of Medicare and Social Security has been extended. It would have been easy to compare those successes to Republicans blocking the jobs infrastructure bill which would have added 1 million jobs and reduced unemployment by 1%, blocking a minimum wage increase while ignoring income inequality, trying 55 times to repeal Obamacare, pushing "reform" (meaning cuts) in Social Security, removing women's health rights and their clinics, and stopping equal pay. In an ad, that message would have been very persuasive to the American public.

It was not only the main Democratic national campaign organizations that failed to take a strong stand, but also the PACs. They, too, did not put out national ads blanketing the TV networks, despite breaking fundraising records. We have never seen an election where there were no 1, 2, or 3-minute national network ads blanketing the country the night before the election or in the weeks before —whether by the national party or the PACs.

Instead, the national party stood back and assumed that the election could be won on local issues. Recent memos and statements confirm that was the strategy of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, as well as the Democratic National Committee. Moreover, it was obvious both the PACS and the party apparatus followed the same "local only" strategy, even though PACs could have picked up the slack.

Local issues and connecting with constituents are absolutely vital, but without a strong national agenda Democratic candidates were left to fend for themselves. Meanwhile, the Republicans were loudly criticizing supposed scandals and weaknesses and took advantage of the fact that many

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As far as the Republican message machine on leadership on Ebola, the fact is we've had a total of one death of a person who Nigeria said lied his way here by saying he saw no Ebola patients when he did; in the US we know to immediately give patients treatment including fluids, and none of the other three died. That's it. On ISIS, in the US we've had a couple of homegrown nuts try solo acts just as we've had people by other names for decades. There is no "there" there on any of this other than Republicans creating paranoia and fear. Obama has created a broad coalition of dozens of countries to tackle these modern threats abroad—showing US altruism and leadership. There is even a real question of whether we should fall for the trap of troop re-involvement in the Middle East.

The question is why Democrats were so insistent on only strategizing state-by-state. In 2006, when then-Cong. Rahm Emanuel was incoming chair of the DCCC, Ricia McMahon (Clinton's New Hampshire leader) and I went into Rahm's office, and said, "We need to have a national message" — at that point it was about ending the war in Iraq and protecting Social Security. Rahm said, "I agree," and he said he was planning on doing it. Largely because of his aggressiveness in that strategy, Democrats took back the Congress.

Fast forward to 2014... Rahm is Mayor of Chicago. In the national congressional and senate campaign strategies, we're back to state-by-state, and no money spent on national message on national TV. The local congress members and senators demanded that the money go only to them because in their view that's the only way to be effective — which the results prove was nonsense. This is the 21st century, and in this day and age people feel and think nationally, as well as "all politics is local." In 2006 and 2008, DNC Chair Dean's 50-state strategy and Rahm's national strategy were both executed, together, and we won as a result.

Spending is incomplete if it does not capitalize nationally on Democratic successes to rebut the Republican message of the-sky-is-falling over fill-in-the-blank.

The claim was made that opinion polls mandated not mentioning the President. The opinion polls may well have been the product of the flaws in unaggressive national Democratic message strategy. Regardless, given the polling, the national Democratic apparatus could well have used "Democratic" to cite the accomplishments list, though if they proudly stood with Obama with the recitation, it still could have worked. But they did neither.

Democrats are in a better position to make gains in the 2016 election. Unlike the vulnerable 21 Democratic US Senate seats versus 13 Republicans in 2014, in 2016 it will be 24 Republican seats contested versus 10 Democratic ones. In 2012, 1.7 million more people voted for Democrats than Republicans in Congressional elections, a fact that will likely be repeated in 2016 thanks to higher voter turnout.

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Ebola, they should point out all the Democratic actions that benefit the middle class.

It will take a lot to counter the Republicans' predictable ongoing gerrymandering, voter suppression, reduced early voting, and scandal creation. The Justice Department has fought tooth and nail to prevent harmful voter suppression throughout the states, but politically appointed courts have split on decisions. **If progressive and mainstream Democratic Michiganders and people nationwide want to win the White House, retake the Senate in 2016, and keep it beyond, the Democratic Party must return to inclusion of their own national message instead of hiding from it.**

The results for Democrats hiding under their desks could not have been any worse. Winners like Gary Peters, John Conyers, and Debbie Dingell were outliers: They spoke out. The lesson: Democrats must be loud and proud on what they have accomplished and what they stand for, including with a national megaphone.

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