

**Democratic Victory Task Force
Saturday, Feb. 21, 2015
Washington DC
Gov. Steve Beshear**

Ladies and Gentlemen ... my name is Steve Beshear.

I'm the Democratic governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and I'm here to tell you that the Democratic Party has lost its way.

We have always been the party "*of the people, by the people and for the people*" – and yes, I purposely used the words of the first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, a great president ... because if he were here today, he would be so disappointed by what his party has become that he would have already re-registered as a Democrat.

Democrats have always been the party that believed deepest in – and fought hardest to protect – the economic and political well-being of all Americans.

Thanks to our efforts, the dream of a better life has been both visible and reachable for workers, families, entrepreneurs and new arrivals – no matter what their economic background, no matter how humble their origins.

Unfortunately, the last few decades have given birth to a dangerous and ugly trend in America.

We now live in an era in which the privileged few are grabbing a larger and larger share of wealth, power and hope.

And those vulnerable by birth or health or circumstances have found themselves powerless and voiceless.

This should be a time for Democratic leaders to rise to the forefront as defenders of the people.

But while we think we have, the American people through their votes have indicated that they don't agree.

They don't think we have, because in this increasingly volatile and hostile climate, when the American people need us the most, the Democratic Party has too often allowed its message to become muddled ... its passion and strength to be diluted ... its strategies and execution to grow flabby ... and our core supporters to grow distracted.

Rather than gain in strength and stature, our candidates find themselves increasingly shunned by a frustrated electorate in search of quick answers and a need to vent.

Now, Democrats have been successful in presidential races, and thank God for that, but the results at almost every other level bode ill not only for our future but for the future of this nation.

Since 2008 the collective Democratic Party has suffered devastating losses.

Losing Congress hurts, but we're also being squeezed out of governor's offices, state legislative chambers and city council halls around the country.

The numbers are scary.

Now, the problem lies not with the party's core beliefs.

They are as relevant and necessary today as ever in our country's history.

And it is clear by many measures that the American people support the issues that the Democratic Party fights for.

Rather, the fault lies in our inability to convey our principles to the American people in a concise, precise and passionate way.

It lies with our inability to demonstrate the truth of how we are the party that puts people first and whose values and priorities best align with a brighter future for the vast majority of Americans.

And finally, the fault also lies with single-dimensional election strategies that are blind to anything beyond 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

For the sake of this country, we have to fix these shortcomings.

And we will fix those shortcomings.

For three months the members of the Democratic Victory Task Force have been formulating a plan – based on input from you, the entire Democratic family – to improve the long-term strength of the Party and return it to strength at all levels.

I congratulate Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, the DNC's chairwoman, for having the courage to step up and set this process in motion.

Like us, she obviously believes in the Democratic Party and shares our passion for election victories.

Today we formally unveil a preliminary draft of the plan's recommendations, with the goal of the Democratic National Committee releasing a complete and final report in May.

That report will serve as a strategic plan to guide the Party's efforts through the 2022 elections.

However, the preliminary recommendations unveiled today identify several areas where work must start immediately.

I've been chosen to speak briefly about those.

Why me?

I'll tell you why.

Because Kentucky's political story demonstrates how we can stem the tide moving against us.

Nationally, the Bluegrass State is considered red.

After all, the president received just over a third of our vote.

Both our U.S. Senators and five of our six Congressmen are Republican.

And thanks to defectors, the GOP took control of the state Senate years' back and maintains that control today.

But six of our seven statewide Constitutional officers are Democrats, and since the 1930s, Republicans have held the governor's office only three times.

Democrats have also controlled the House of Representatives for almost 100 years.

In 2007, I defeated a Republican incumbent governor, and in 2011, I easily won re-election.

But after Democratic setbacks nationally in 2012, Kentucky Republicans smelled blood in the water ... and they publicly proclaimed that they would take over the state House in 2014.

And many GOP groups, including the Koch brothers, joined in that effort.

And yet in the 2014 mid-term election this past November, Kentucky Democrats retained control of the House, even though Republicans swept to victory across the land.

In fact, we Kentucky Democrats didn't lose a single seat in the House ... and actually were only 200 votes short of gaining a seat.

Successfully defending our House in this political climate was a dramatic achievement.

How did we do it?

Because we spent our time talking to families about things they care about: Jobs, health care and education.

And we did it in a way that engaged them, excited them and demonstrated in clear terms how Democratic leadership was making their lives better.

Some cautioned me against talking on the campaign trail about things like health care, core academic standards and the economy because so-called “Obamacare” and Common Core were too unpopular and the economic narrative wasn’t convincing.

Today, Kentucky remains the lone southern state with a Democratic-controlled legislative chamber because I ignored that political advice.

My friends, when you take care of the people, the politics takes care of itself.

Because of our strategy and our messaging, Kentucky voters know that a vote for a Democrat in state races means access to health care for families who don’t have coverage ... a job for those who need one ...

... early childhood programs that get children off to a better start in life ... and tough curriculum in schools.

They know that Democrats are fighting for families and a higher quality of life for all Kentuckians – not just a privileged few.

We’ve also made it clear that Kentucky Democrats are willing to work with anybody at any time on any issue – provided only that they leave the partisan politics at the door.

And voters of all persuasions have appreciated that we’ve put families first – far ahead of partisanship for its own sake.

All of us know the Republican narrative: It’s the narrative of negativity that plays on fear, frustration and bitterness.

The national Republican Party as a collective whole is an expert at that.

Its leaders have been successful at playing to people’s emotions, and they use that passion to fuel the rank partisanship and narrow-minded nature of their views.

Democrats on a national level need to channel the passion of the American people in a positive direction – by focusing effectively on the things that Democrats stand for.

And that’s the very top recommendation of this report.

Recommendations fall under five primary areas, with four others still under discussion.

The first area has to do with the Party’s brand.

Quite simply, we need one.

As the report says, our Party is “loosely understood as a long list of policy statements and not as a people with a common set of core values.”

That hurts recruiting and support.

We need a cohesive, values-based narrative that quickly and succinctly defines our beliefs and helps voters identify with who we are and how we best represent them.

This National Narrative Project is already under way.

The second recommendation is equally as basic.

We need to strengthen partnerships with state parties to ensure wins at the local and state levels.

For the last several election cycles, the DNC has focused time, resources and talent on presidential battleground states and has had great success in the fight for the White House.

And we must and will be successful again in that fight in 2016.

But that strategy has not been broad enough to win seats in Congress, governors’ offices and state legislatures.

We can and we must aim for wins at all levels.

The third recommendation aims to protect the vote.

We need a more aggressive, multi-faceted legislative and legal strategy to ensure every voter is registered and has access to the polls.

We used to do this.

We need to do it again.

Because every vote counts.

The fourth recommendation is to prepare for the next round of redistricting.

We need a three-cycle plan that targets and wins back legislative chambers to ensure that the next redistricting and reapportionment cycles encourage Democratic growth.

The current GOP success is the result of more than 30 years of organizing, fostering talent and significant financial investments at the state and local levels.

My friends, it all starts at the local level.

Which is why we have the fifth recommendation, which is that we need to build our bench.

We need to increase the number of Democrats running and winning at all levels by helping to identify, engage, train and nurture the next generation of Democratic leaders.

This includes not only candidates but their advisers and staff.

Now, the task force continues to talk about other issues, including the need to engage voters outside the election cycle ... to create a more open and accessible national party ... to invest in more aggressive communications strategies ... and to broaden our coalition of voters.

All of these recommendations and this discussion are just the beginning.

We continue to invite feedback as we work to firm up and flesh out these recommendations with action steps in advance of the May report.

Look, this is not rocket science.

It's basic Politics 101.

We're not calling for changes in the values of the Democratic Party.

We know who we are, and we're proud of it.

We don't have to convince Americans that Republicans don't represent America's core values.

They can sense that.

We don't have to redefine words like "family," "patriotism" and "freedom" and turn them into negative weapons to use against other Americans.

We don't have to incite divisions or create imaginary crises to spur allegiance to a cause.

That's not who we are.

Nor do we have to hide who we are.

We are the party of equal opportunity and empathy.

We support fairness in all dealings.

We respect both the dignity of the individual and the strength of the unified people.

And look at what that simple formula has produced over the past 200 years:

We've led the fight for civil rights, workers' rights and women's rights.

We created Social Security, Medicare and the GI Bill of Rights.

These all represent major turning points in the history of this nation which set our people on the path to opportunity, security and prosperity.

And the Democratic Party is still making history.

President Clinton eliminated the federal deficit and gave the country its first balanced budget in a generation.

And President Obama – with a steady guiding hand and sound economic policies -- not only saved this country from a deep depression but also made health care affordable to millions of Americans.

But neither the president nor Democrats have received the credit we deserve for these accomplishments because we have failed to effectively communicate these accomplishments to the American public.

What we are fighting for is the very identity of this nation, its heart and its soul.

On one side are voices who want to return this country to the days of anxiety, suspicion and fear.

On the other are those of us who believe that Americans are better than that ... that this is still the land of opportunity ... that if you work hard and play by the rules, you will create a better life for yourself and your children.

The Democratic Party is the voice for all Americans in search of a better life.

Today let us begin reclaiming the confidence of the American people.

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