

The Delray Democrat

If Manchin Is the Enemy, Wait Until You Get McConnell¹

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Many Democrats, at least those in Congress, appear focused on West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin. They continuously challenge his stances on important issues and his desire to work across the aisle to build consensus or more broad-based support for legislation as well as his resistance to end the filibuster rule. It is more than fair to hold different opinions and work to bring Manchin into the fold. However, to consider him the “enemy” is foolhardy. He represents his constituents in a state that voted over 2 to 1 for Trump. More importantly, without Manchin, West Virginia will most assuredly send a conservative, perhaps another Trumpist, and Democrats would lose the Senate. Mitch McConnell is lurking around the corner.

To be fair, Senator Manchin is not the only Democratic voice of hesitation, he is simply the one willing to stand up and express his views. There are at least several Democratic Senators and a group of House Democrats that disfavor using mechanisms such as budget reconciliation to avoid the normal process. Although Manchin is wrong to oppose the voting rights legislation, he is correct in trying to build consensus on legislation. Bills passed strictly on party line are highly likely to be repealed when the majority shifts. This worked to the detriment of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), as Republicans tried endlessly to repeal it and came dangerously close to succeeding. Hate it as we might, we must anticipate that Republicans may regain control of the Senate and/or the House. This must be the priority.

It is essential to win in more states and at a minimum put more states in play and force Republicans to compete. Democrats cannot win Congressional majorities, certainly workable ones, without winning most of the swing districts and races in swing states. To do this, we can advocate for our core values and explain why they are good for the nation. Demonstrate that we can enact these policies and programs while being fiscally responsible (to include re-assessing corporate taxes and taxes on the mega wealthy). Progressive values with a moderate voice. However, Democrats lost most of the swing House districts in 2020, along with some winnable Senate seats, and must reconcile that failure before 2022.

Two essential commitments are required for Democrats to control both houses of Congress, both of which are critical to obtaining the support of enough voters across the nation. First, Democrats must embrace moderates as well as progressives. To control Congress, Democrats need Senators like Joe Manchin, Kyrsten Sinema, et al, who can win in red states. Every state gets two and there are more red states than blue states. Do the math. Second, Democrats must convince the country that we are the responsible party. Democrats must be seen as the party of good, smart governance. Themes of “socialism” and “defund the police” regardless of inaccuracy, were highly effective and almost led to Republicans sweeping 2020.

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, July 2021, p. 3.

There is more on the line than ever before. While the battle used to be about policy, it is now a fight between authoritarianism and democracy. Republicans have blatantly enacted massive voter suppression legislation across the country that are so extensive that neither voting rights bill currently being debated in Congress even addresses the most dangerous and extreme provisions. These are open attempts to “win” elections and maintain power at any cost based on the ability to prevent the votes of millions of eligible voters. Republicans demonstrated a willingness to trample over the Constitution and negate a free press, prevent lawful dissent, and abuse government institutions as agents of their political power. The threat is real.

The horror we witnessed in January was not a one-time assembly of zealots. This was planned for decades, at least in the case of multiple extremist/supremacist groups, who were effective at concealing their planning and attracting angry misinformed individuals manipulated by desperate, despicable leaders like Trump, Cruz, Hawley, Jordan, Gohmert, Gosar, and too many more to name. The peril displayed by that calamity continues to threaten our democracy and the functioning of government. They still believe Trump will be “reinstated” and when this does not occur there is a strong chance of additional violence and insurrection. As much as people want to minimize or limit the impact of January 6, the dangerous truth is that our country remains at risk.

Democrats need to embrace the largest ideological tent in party history to ensure electoral support and successful campaigns. When voters see the Democratic Party (whether or not accurate) as moving too far to the left, they lean more to Republicans and Republicans win the swing districts obtaining Congressional majorities. Often the party seen as more extremely partisan loses voter support. Although Republicans clearly abused the budget reconciliation process to pass bills in the Senate that lacked sufficient support, Democrats must tread very carefully in doing the same, lest they risk voter backlash. This is especially true if voters perceive reckless spending, a likely consequence of this tactic and pronounced Republican campaign messaging.

We must not demand perfect candidates or ideological fealty only to lose races. Every campaign must be competitive, and Republicans should have to work hard and commit resources in every race. Republican voter suppression means Democrats must win an even greater percentage of the vote in more places. Every House and Senate seat makes a difference. Not just for a Democratic majority, but for the future of the nation as a democracy. Welcome Joe Manchin as well as Elizabeth Warren.