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#### **ELECTION 2004**

Excellent sites to go to for Election 2004 coverage: [Daily Kos](#), [DonkeyRising](#), [CJR Campaign Desk](#), the [Swing State Project](#), [Political Animal](#), [Atrios/Eschaton](#), [Talkingpointsmemo](#), [MyDD](#)

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## **ELECTION 2004 RESULTS - PART B**

### **POST-MORTEM: A Blueprint for the Future**

**Last Updated: 11/19/04**

[**Note**: In [Part A of Election 2004 coverage](#), I provide fairly comprehensive coverage on vote fraud, vote suppression, voting irregularities and anomalous/suspicious voting results in Election 2004. To send me feedback **please email feedback-at-eriposte-dot-com** (I can't promise a reply to every email I receive.)]

Friends, the soul-searching going on in Democratic Party circles and amongst supporters of the Democratic party seems to be largely happening devoid of context - the context being the [Republican Noise Machine](#) and the so-called [Mainstream Media](#) (MSM). Moreover, while bashing Kerry and the Democrats for losing a race that was theirs to win is well and good, in the useful attempt to get into the nitty gritty details ("Kerry lost this group", he gained "that group", he "lost in this location", he "gained there", etc.), I am concerned that we are missing the forest for the trees.

Now, some of you may believe that this election was 'stolen'. If that is the case, [please click here \(where I am documenting election irregularities/fraud etc.\)](#) to see my commentary/response on that. Let me also note that even if data emerges in the future that proves a 'stolen' election, that will not really change the message I have captured here. There are structural problems that the Democratic Party has not addressed well enough - problems that make it very difficult and costly for the Party to win elections and that is largely what I am addressing here. [Note: The above section(s) were edited for clarity and expanded]

I wrote a few points in an email recently to some bloggers about why I thought this election turned out the way it did and what must be done if Democrats are to win national or competitive elections in the future. Here, I'm going to expand on those points in order to create my own view of a blueprint for the future of the progressive movement and the Democratic party.

#### **WHERE DID THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY FALL SHORT?**

- [1. \(NOT LEARNING WELL ENOUGH THAT\) It's the media, stupid \(for the umpteenth time\)](#)**
- [2. \(NOT HAVING A\) Democratic Knowledge Machine \(as opposed to the Republican Noise Machine\)](#)**
- [3. \(NOT\) Winning the Safe \(Base\) States by a Big Margin](#)**
- [4. \(NOT GROWING OUT OF\) The "wimp" factor](#)**
- [5. \(NOT\) Contesting Every Seat, EVERY SEAT](#)**
- [6. Funds Raised during the Campaign Should Be Spent to Win \\*THIS\\* Election \(NOT the NEXT one\)](#)**
- [7. \(NOT\) Raising a Stink about the Appalling Election System](#)**

#### **APPENDIX**

[A: Why and How we can turn this around](#)

[B: An idea for a national progressive institution](#)

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## 1. It's the media, stupid [for the umpteenth time]

In this election, John Kerry's team did substantially better than what Al Gore did in terms of having a quick response team to rebut and refute spin and nonsense from the GOP and the media. Additionally, the left-leaning blogosphere mobilized remarkably, especially during and after the debates, to try and keep the media on their feet. This represented good progress from 2000. But it was nowhere near enough.

As famed journalist Robert Parry (who rose to prominence for his Reagan Contra scandal expose) [pointed out in Consortium News](#), the Democratic Party is significantly hampered by the lack of a far flung media apparatus to counter that of the Right and the Right-leaning mainstream media (bold text is my emphasis):

**George W. Bush's electoral victory is chilling proof that the conservatives have achieved dominance over the flow of information to the American people and that even a well-run Democratic campaign stands virtually no chance for national success without major changes in how the news media operates.**

**It is not an exaggeration to say today that the most powerful nation on earth is in the grip of an ideological administration – backed by a vast network of right-wing think tanks, media outlets and attack groups – that can neutralize any political enemy with smears, such as the Swift boat ads against John Kerry's war record, or convince large numbers of people that clearly false notions are true, like Saddam Hussein's link to the Sept. 11 attacks.**

**The outcome of Election 2004 also highlights perhaps the greatest failure of the Democratic/liberal side in American politics: a refusal to invest in the development of a comparable system for distributing information that can counter the Right's potent media infrastructure. Democrats and liberals have refused to learn from the lessons of the Republican/conservative success.**

The history is this: For the past quarter century, the Right has spent billions of dollars to build a vertically integrated media apparatus – reaching from the powerhouse Fox News cable network through hard-line conservative newspapers and magazines to talk radio networks to book publishing to well-funded Internet operations and right-wing bloggers.

Using this infrastructure, the conservatives can put any number of "themes" into play that will instantaneously reach tens of millions of Americans through a variety of outlets, whose messages then reinforce each other in the public's mind.

Beyond putting opposing politicians on the defensive, this Right-Wing Machine intimidates mainstream journalists and news executives who will bend over backwards and cater to the conservative side, do almost anything to avoid being tagged with the career-threatening tag of "liberal." [For details on this history, see Robert Parry's new book, [Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq](#).]

### Liberal Resistance

**In contrast to the Right's media juggernaut, the Left relies largely on a scattered network of cash-strapped Web sites, a few struggling magazines and a couple of hand-to-mouth satellite TV networks.**

**Plus, the evidence is that wealthy progressives still don't "get it." Even with Election 2004 looming, Air America, a promising AM radio network to challenge Rush Limbaugh and the right-wing talk radio monopoly, was hobbled by the refusal of rich liberals to invest in the venture. In a new book, *Road to Air America*, Sheldon Drobny, one of the network's founders, describes his frustrating appeals to East and West Coast "limousine liberals" who didn't want to engage in the project.**

**I have encountered similar rebuffs dating back to the early 1990s, after my experiences as a mainstream investigative journalist for the Associated Press and Newsweek convinced me that the biggest threat to American democracy was the growing imbalance in the national news media. Mainstream journalists were increasingly frightened that their careers would be destroyed if they came under attack from the Reagan-Bush administrations and their right-wing allies.**

**Yet, even as conservative foundations were pouring tens of millions of dollars into building hard-edged conservative media outlets, liberal foundations kept repeating the refrain: "We don't do media." One key liberal foundation explicitly forbade even submitting funding requests that related to media projects.**

Parry's comments are borne out by my personal experience even in liberal California. Many Democrats (even in

CA) are not aware of what was [really done to Clinton](#) and [Gore](#), and just barely aware of what was being done to Kerry mainly because they were much more tuned in to this election. "[The Hunting of the President](#)" is a **revelation** to almost EVERY Democrat I have met (**if this does not reflect a major failure of the Democratic party I don't know what does**). Many people express complete skepticism when told that the [media is not liberal](#) (politically speaking) or that it treats Republican politicians much better than Democrats - and these are supporters of the Democratic party! You can imagine the reactions from Independents and Republicans.

There are multiple ways in which the media contribute *in-kind* to the GOP, and the crucial role they played in this election is reflected in:

- ⚡ The Kerry-bashing that went on and on via [biased, misleading or downright fraudulent commentary or coverage](#) in both right-wing media and so-called mainstream media networks (remember [Sinclair Broadcasting](#) or [Clear Channel](#)? Remember the egregious cable TV networks who were [almost gleeful enablers](#) of the "[Swift Vets](#)"?).
- ⚡ The fact that most of the [media kept people deeply misinformed about virtually everything](#) that was important for Americans to know - 9/11, the Iraq war, tax cuts, George Bush and [John Kerry](#).
- ⚡ Much of the media's wanton ignorance of - or sometimes depraved indifference to - the Bush administration's mendacity, [corruption](#) and [trashing of America's traditions and national security](#) (to name just a few minor things)
- ⚡ Much of the media's **repeated, false portrayal**
  - ⚡ Of [Bush as a "strong leader", who is "steady" and "firm"](#)
  - ⚡ Of [Kerry as a flip-flopper](#) and as a [staunch liberal](#) (as if these could simultaneously be true), and
  - ⚡ Of this election as if it were *just another election* between two candidates, one of whom was repeatedly mischaracterized (e.g., [social loner anyone?](#))
- ⚡ The predictable anti-climax of the media constantly chiding Kerry for *not* having a clear enough message, when [research by independent groups](#) showed that the real problem was the opposite: most Bush supporters were deeply uninformed or ignorant about the real George W. Bush and Kerry's supporters were much better informed about Kerry's positions.
- ⚡ The climax of course was the fully expected Election 2004 coverage, where:
  - ⚡ [Spin and B.S. often took precedence over real issues and facts](#),
  - ⚡ [False equivalence between Bush' mendacity and Kerry's rhetoric](#) became common,
  - ⚡ Fact-checking (although clearly improved compared to the abysmal 2000 election coverage) [fell far short](#) of expectations, and,
  - ⚡ After the election, branding those genuinely concerned with [election anomalies/irregularities](#) or [downright voter fraud/suppression](#) (and the failure of democracy in many cases) as [paranoid/idiotic conspiracy theorists](#) has picked up steam

**Folks, let's stop bashing Kerry and the Democrats for not having a clear message. If anything they deserve to be bashed again and again for not fighting the conservative media apparatus and for not building an alternative media infrastructure all these years.** The fact that Faux News' Chief Political Correspondent and Bush supporter Carl Cameron got away scot-free [after completely fabricating a story about Kerry in the height of the campaign](#), tells you all you need to know about the Democratic party's failure of imagination and inability to learn from the past.

Put plainly, if the Democratic party does not build an extensive media apparatus that strongly challenges the established Republican noise machine and its extensive appendages in the mainstream media, national elections for the Party will remain Sisyphean tasks - they can be won but it will remain very difficult and very costly to do so, short of a complete meltdown of the country in the hands of the Republicans (not unlike [what happened in the 1920s as a result of policies somewhat similar to what has been practiced by the Republicans since 2001](#)). **The lack of strong interest among Democratic supporters to fund credible, center-left, alternative media is a crying shame - this reluctance needs to be addressed NOW.**

## 2. The Democratic Knowledge Machine (as opposed to the Republican Noise Machine)

In another case of weak learning from past experience, the Democratic party has continued to fail in building a strong counter to the vast right-wing spin and fabrication machine, manifested by their array of so-called "think - tanks" and allied groups that serve as "experts" in the media.

What is sorely needed is a dedicated and IMMEDIATE effort to build a **nationwide institution of knowledge** that in turn will be the glue for numerous grassroots level organizations as well as progressive (real) think tanks. The [Center for American Progress](#) (CAP) and other less -well known groups are doing an excellent job on this but let me assure you that almost no one I know (Democrats, Republicans or Independents) had even heard of them (before I mentioned them). They had heard of groups like NRDC or the Sierra Club or the League of Women's Voters or MoveOn but these are all seen almost as disparate groups which are trying to achieve specific goals that they agree with. **There is/was no group providing a unified knowledge base for supporters of the Party or voters in general.**

Let me be clear. This is not a criticism of what has been done by CAP or anyone else. I am just emphasizing that **there is a vast support and donor base for the Democrats that is committed and interested - but which is underutilized and under-informed except on very specific issues of immediate interest to them.** A recent example illustrates this fact. I saw many people upset about the [Swift Boat Liars](#); they knew in their gut that these people were spewing garbage and lies - but being unconnected to the blog world and getting barely anything to

hold on to from the "mainstream" media, they simply did not know how to respond to friends or colleagues who used the Swift Vet charges against Kerry. **This is an egregious hole in the Democratic Party's strategy . If even your base doesn't know how to get information in an easy way, forget educating those outside the base!**

**It is also less than comforting to note that some of the Kerry/DNC representatives to the media (during this campaign) were [appallingly ill-informed](#) on *well-known* GOP fabrications or spin points and did more damage than good with their appearance.**

Folks, this is not an issue about getting more people to read blogs. People don't have time to browse select websites everyday and the reach of blogs is still very limited. **What I am talking about is an organization that can educate the voters, our leaders/pols, the media and just about everyone - with the facts and truths about Democrats and progressive values. An organization that can send representatives, if needed, to EVERY major radio and TV station in the country on a DAILY basis to debunk the lies or spin coming from the Right or from the media itself.**

The importance of this issue cannot be understated. I see a lot of concern in the blogosphere about whether Democrats should go softer on abortion or guns or gays, or what not. **These are important topics but the seriousness of these is getting blown out of proportion because the Republican Noise machine controls the message on all of them, painting fake caricatures of Democrats to systematically deceive voters.** If that machine can be equaled or reversed by the Democratic Knowledge Machine working with an independent media infrastructure, a lot of gains in voter support will automatically follow without Democrats having to split hairs on these topics.

Lest people wonder if I'm asking the party to turn "wonky", I am not. I am asking for the Party to create a lasting institution and knowledge base that will convey basic facts in simple language - as **Judd Legum continues to do exceptionally at his blog [Winning Argument](#).**

I would love to see ideas about how to create such an institution - one that would connect a nationwide network of *largely independent* organizations that nevertheless share some common goals, one that would help not just in voter mobilization and fund raising, but in day-to-day education of the voters, Democratic politicians and policy makers, media, radio and TV hosts. **The goal of such an institution should be to become a household name in the country.** A group or groups that any citizen can dial a number to reach (or go to the web) for information to rebut the latest garbage from the right-wing or to know the real facts on ANY issue.

I have some ideas on how such an institution could be built and those of you who are interested can [read about it in Appendix B](#).

### 3. Winning the Safe (Base) States by a Big Margin

Clearly, this year, tremendous progress was made by Democratic leaning groups (ACT, MoveOn, etc.) on voter mobilization - and kudos to them (not to mention, to the Republicans who got out their voters in even larger numbers).

**But guess what? I had to point out to many Democrats that their vote in the blue state of California was actually worth casting (I [wrote about this before the election as a cautionary point, urging blue staters to go out and vote](#)). These voters are not indifferent - and they surely wanted to get Kerry into the White House. But people are so used to thinking only about the electoral vote that they keep thinking that it would make no difference if they voted or not (after the 2000 debacle)! This is not just a matter of their being unaware of the *psychological significance and credibility* of the popular vote - **they also don't remember sometimes that their votes on other races and propositions can make the difference between light and day** - from local government all the way to Federal government.**

Sure enough, my worst fears came true.

As Prof. Alan Abramowitz has [pointed out \(slide 18\)](#), **the increase in voters in blue states (6.4% over 2000 levels) was significantly less - and objectively abysmal - compared to that in red states (17.2%) and 12 battleground states (18.5%).**

The [evidence also indicates \(slide 19\)](#) that **the increase in Kerry voters in blue (safe) states underperformed the increase in Bush voters in the same states.**

[Chris Bowers of MyDD](#) also mentioned this:

My source is the incomparable [Dave Leip](#):

...  
Presidential Nominee, Swing State Popular Vote (In Millions)  
2000 2004 Change  
DNC 21.67 25.82 +19.1%  
RNC 22.16 27.08 +22.2%

In the twenty swing-states the two campaigns spent the most time and money, Republicans and Democrats improved at almost exactly the same rate (the twenty swing states in these calculations are AZ, AR, CO, FL, IA, ME, MI, MN, MO, NV, NH, NM, NC, OH, OR, PA, VA, WA, WV, and WI). Further, Kerry improved on Gore's total by at least 9.2% in all twenty of these states. However, now

look at the "safe" states:

Presidential Nominee, Safe State Popular Vote (In Millions)	2000	2004	Change
DNC	29.35	31.47	+7.2%
RNC	28.32	33.61	+18.7%

In fifteen of these thirty-one "safe states," Kerry improved on Gore's total by less than 9.2%. In 2004, Bush turned a safe state deficit of more than a million votes into a safe state victory of more than two million votes. The overall swing in the safe states, nearly 3.2 million votes, accounts for over 93% of Bush's current national vote margin. Had Kerry increased the Democratic vote total in the safe states at the same rate that Bush managed to increase his safe state vote total, Kerry would currently be down by less than 50,000 votes nationwide, and few, if any people, would find the recount efforts unjustified. Bush would be under 50%, Kerry would be over 49%, and there would be no talk of a mandate whatsoever.

Unfortunately, by ignoring the non-swing states, we sowed the seeds of our own illegitimacy when it came to Ohio. Starting in 2006, Democratic activism must permanently work toward a fifty-state strategy.

Here is a concrete example from California - by [Chris Bowers again](#):

Today, when I was shifting through the data for House races in California in 2004, I noticed a horrifying trend. In California, a fortress of Democratic electoral and congressional strength, Republican districts still regularly had a higher total number of votes than Democratic districts. This may not seem like a big deal in California, but it is:

- ⚡ Of the fifty-one congressional districts in California that were contested by more than one candidate (one D and one R ran opposed even by third parties), Democrats won thirty-two seats and Republicans won nineteen.
- ⚡ In the thirty-two Democratic districts, the total combined vote 70.47% for the Democratic candidates, and 26.13% for the Republican candidate, a margin of 44.34%.
- ⚡ The thirty-two Democratic districts averaged 163,864 total votes cast for the House campaigns. The nineteen Republican districts averaged 194,589 total votes cast for the House campaigns. The margin between the two is 30,725 total votes.
- ⚡ A 44.43% margin out of 30,725 votes is 13,624 votes. Had turnout in Democratic districts in California been equal to turnout in Republican districts, Kerry could have expected to increase his California margin over Bush by at least 13,624 votes per district.
- ⚡ 13,624 multiplied by thirty-two is 435,970. Considering the undervote in congressional races, had turnout in Democratic districts in California been equal to turnout in Republican districts, Kerry would have closed the national popular vote gap by nearly half a million votes just in California alone.

This is a very big deal. Winning the popular vote goes a long way toward establishing credibility.

New York [wasn't much better](#). (Also [see this](#) for a slight counter).

**This is/was a serious error in strategy and tactics. It CANNOT be repeated EVER AGAIN.**

#### 4. The "wimp" factor

Right after the Democratic National Convention this year, I [wrote](#):

[The Convention] made it clear that the Democratic Party is not about to lay low on issues of national security and foreign policy and aggressively challenge the so-called policies of the Republican Party in this area. This is long overdue, and in part it does move the party forward in the direction I had hoped, when I last [wrote about this in 2002](#).

I was also impressed by Kerry's performance in the debates.

**However, all of that was not sufficient to overcome the long-standing "national security" deficit that Kerry had with respect to Bush through Election 2004 - a deficit that arguably cost Kerry this election in the end.**

A dominant reason for this deficit is the media's own bias towards the Republicans and ignorance of gross Republican incompetence on national security time and again - but over time it has become clear that the Democrats keep feeding this perception.

Two examples - much has been said on the "Internets" about Kerry's somewhat weak ads during the campaign (in response to Bush's ads), and his (initial) weak response to the [Swift Vet Liars for Bush](#). But there's a bigger factor at work here, which appears to be an innate fault line running through the ranks of the Democratic party leadership. The Democrats' repeated kow-towing over the years to Republican arrogance and corruption and meek response to outrageous incidents during the campaign, confirmed what many people have expressed to me - that the

Democratic Party leadership is, **politically speaking**, an extraordinarily timid bunch with little backbone. This, despite the fact that the [same Democrats portrayed as commie pinkos are much more likely to have served in the American Armed Forces](#) and actually defended this country, than the [draft-dodging chickenhawk Republicans](#) who fled from war service like wimps or were [caught asleep at the wheel before 9/11](#), but keep busy maligning Democrats as traitors or being weak on defense.

Let me say this first to the Democratic Party leadership:

Statements like "Vice President Cheney should apologize for his words" (paraphrasing) sound extraordinarily meek and weak.

How does the party plan to compete on the topic of terrorism purely based on the facts about Bush's incompetence when people are making a **value judgment** that the party is wimpy?

Back to regularly scheduled programming.

From the perspective of Campaign 2004, perhaps the over-emphasis on getting the vote of independents/moderates (a vote that Kerry got and should feel good about) led Kerry/Edwards and the Democrats to be somewhat cautious with their demeanor and language. But, with occasional exceptions, they were far less strong and firm and in-your-face than they should have been. Indeed, I will also admit that I myself misjudged the effectiveness of the Democrats' strategy - thinking that the campaign *knew what it was doing*. **In hindsight I realize I should have paid more attention to what I was hearing from many people - a common description or impression of the Democratic Party as "wimps" (or Kerry as being indecisive) - which is serious considering how important national security was for many voters in this election.** I heard this from people across political orientations, especially Democrats who were incensed about Democrats not standing up to Republicans and from Republican supporters who had a stereotypical image of the Democratic party, fashioned largely by right-wing or mainstream media.

None of this means that the party leadership should appear boorish or rude. What it means is that **they have to have a backbone and conviction about themselves and their values** - I would much rather support a party that stands up for what it believes in, strongly, and loses in the end than one that is timid and weak and still **LOSES** (2002 and 2004). (Of course I prefer the party actually win).

**Sadly, though, it appears the Democratic Party leadership is still not getting the obvious message. Time to act like an opposition party, folks!**

[Liberal Oasis:](#)

On Nov. 4, 1992, the day after Bill Clinton beat George H.W. Bush by **5 percentage points and 202 electoral votes**, this was the first thing out of Sen. Bob Dole's mouth:

*57 percent of the Americans who voted in the presidential election voted against Bill Clinton, and I intend to represent that majority on the floor of the US Senate.*

He finished his remarks with:

*I think [Clinton] got some good news and some bad news last night...*

*...The good news is that he's getting a honeymoon in Washington. The bad news is that Bob Dole is going to be chaperone.*

With that fighting attitude, the GOP stymied the centerpiece of Clinton's agenda, health care, and **took over Congress in two years.**

Compare that attitude with what was displayed by the lone Dem on the Sunday shows, Sen. -elect Barack Obama. From [NBC's Meet The Press:](#)

*...one of the things I told the president was that we all have a stake in seeing him have a successful presidency.*

*I don't think that the Democrats succeed by rooting against the president in office.*

*But we have to be honest where we disagree with him and he's got to make his case where he's presenting issues that we're skeptical about.*

It's not just Obama showing softness. This is **the party line.**

Here's House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, in the [weekly radio address:](#)

*I hope that in this term President Bush will fulfill his promise to be a uniter, not a divider.*

*A new term is indeed a new opportunity to bring America together.*

*House Democrats stand ready to work with the President.*

*Despite our divisions, there are many places where we should be able to agree.*

Granted, both Obama and Pelosi went ahead to explain some areas of potential disagreement.

But the overarching tone and message of conciliation is just **wrong, wrong, wrong**.

Whereas the **only remotely conciliatory remarks** in Dole's post-election remarks was, "Obviously we'll cooperate with the new administration, if it advances the best interests of our nation," though that was quickly coupled with, "but we will stand up against bad policy."

Another Senate Dem, Nebraska's Ben Nelson, was quoted by [NY Times' Nick Kristof](#) saying, "The first thing we have to do is shake the image of us as the obstructionist party."

Kristof also chimed in that it is "lethal" to be seen as obstructionist.

**Tell it to Bob Dole.**

What is potentially lethal is to be obstructing because of **craven politics and not noble principle**.

And what is also potentially lethal is **ceding fight after fight**, because then you clearly don't stand for any principles at all (and that's what happened in 2002).

Obama and Pelosi **had the opportunity** this weekend to tell the nation what our noble principles are, and how those principles will be guiding the fights that lie ahead.

They didn't.

Unless leading Dems do so, quickly, it will much harder to win those fights.

[Matt Stoller](#) (bold text is my emphasis):

I want to highlight a few articles on a very important subject - how to be [a politically viable opposition party](#). The best model to look at is not the Republicans in 1993, though that's somewhat useful, but towards parliamentary systems. In 1993, Southern Democrats were very willing to buck party discipline - today that is just not the case with moderate Republicans, and there aren't enough of them to matter anyway. What we are facing is more a unified Republican machine with control over all levers of government, not a fractious coalition. So how do you create a viable opposition that isn't obstructionist but does *oppose*? Well, the key is to set yourself up to win elections in the future, not to obstruct what the other side does or to attempt to govern with the party in power.

Currently, the pitiful candidate Kerry is busy setting himself up for 2008 by [shitting on the base](#) operatives striving to have every vote count. **This is a mistake. When you are in opposition, every ally is important, and you do not sacrifice allies to stay in game, because you are not in the game.** Kerry and many Senate Democrats do not understand this. *They are not players anymore.*

Kevin Brennan and Ian Welsh, two brilliant Canadians who have a deep interest in American politics, lay this out. In [Learn How to Lose](#), Kevin shows that there is a right way to lose that scores you points in later elections, and a wrong way to lose that just fosters the perception of ineffectiveness. In [The Bright Red Line](#), Ian talks about the battles that need to be fought and filibustered, the things upon which we cannot compromise or we lose the American polity for a generation.

**In other words, being an effective opposition is about resisting structural changes that tilt the playing field away from you while allowing the governing party to enact policies you do not agree with, all the while proposing clear alternatives and publicizing them. Meanwhile, at the state and local level, governing well is essential to showcase how effective the Democratic alternative really is. At the federal level, though, we have no power, so we can be honest, like Al Sharpton in the primaries.** Imagine that, a party of Sharptonian rhetoric.

[Liberal Oasis](#):

If anything this Sunday should send fear shooting through your bones, it is this revelation from Sen. Joe Lieberman, said on [Fox News Sunday](#):

*I hope that in the second Bush term that President Bush will develop a kind of consultative relationship, certainly with Democratic leaders like Harry Reid.*

*And I think that will help avoid the kinds of filibusters that really a lot of us moderate Democrats — and we talked about this just last week when we had a phone conference — don't want to be involved in.*

*And we'd much prefer to give an up -or-down vote to a president's judicial nominations.*

*He earned that right when he got elected.*

*[emphasis added]*

Yes that's right. The so-called moderates are already **organizing and strategizing** over how to avoid standing up to the GOP.

Their rallying cry? Filibusters. Eeewwww. Icky.

Making Lieberman's remarks more bizarre is that he preceded them with some understanding of what Dems are up against:

*During the Clinton years, as far as I can tell, more than 60...judicial nominations were blocked not by a filibuster but because the Republican-controlled Judiciary Committee never even gave those nominees a hearing.*

But of course, he draws the exact wrong lesson from that:

*The point of fact here is that both of these, the filibuster [by the Dems] and the blocking of even a hearing under President Clinton, are signs of a government here in Washington that has grown too partisan.*

No, the point of fact is that **the Right is on a ruthless mission** to remake the judiciary and shred the civil rights protections that have been established over the last half-century.

And they are not interested in getting your permission for it.

Fortunately, over on ABC's This Week, **Sen. Chuck Schumer showed more spunk:**

*Some of nominees...the President put forward for the Court of Appeals said there should be no zoning laws [because] it's a taking of property, it's unconstitutional.*

*[And] there should be no labor laws -- if...an employer wanted to have a child work...80 hours a week, that would be OK.*

*If that's strict constructionism, then we don't want it...*

*...if the president nominates an extremist who wants to roll back the clock [to the] 1930s, 1890s, of course he'll be opposed.*

*If he nominates a mainstream judge, he won't.*

That's the kind of thing all Dems should be doing now.

Laying down the substantive groundwork for future filibusters by detailing how right-wing judges will **directly harm your life, your family, and your community.**

[Mark Kleiman has a more direct message:](#)

In 1993, when Dan Rostenkowski was indicted, the Republicans in the House were looking for a way of pinning his strictly private financial scandal on the other Democrats in the House. Someone had a clever idea: [make it a rule of the House Republican Conference that anyone in a leadership position who was indicted would have to step down.](#) So the rule was duly passed.

Like many of the ideas behind the Gingrich Revolution (remember term limits?), that turns out to be sauce for the goose only. With Tom DeLay facing indictment in the fundraising scandal surrounding the Texamander, the House Republican Conference is expected to rescind the rule tomorrow. (Hat tips: [The Stakeholder](#), via Kos.)

What should we do about it? Why, we should **make them pay**.

The contemporary Republican Party has demonstrated a complete lack of scruple and no sense of limits in either taking power or using power. (The current "purge" -- their word, not mine -- of the Directorate of Operations at the CIA to rid it of those not personally loyal to GWB is just the latest example.)

If they keep playing football and we keep playing croquet, guess who's going to keep winning?

Pelosi and Reid, and the rest of us, need to take a page from the Republican playbook of 1993-2000. No surrender, no compromise, no bipartisanship, no civility, no reaching out to Republican officeholders (as opposed to detachable Republican voters): nothing but scorched earth from here to victory.

No, it won't be pretty. But continuing to be ruled by these thugs is worse.

## 5. Contesting Every Seat, EVERY SEAT

[Chris Bowers ay MyDD](#) has been saying this for a long time and here is his recent update:

So, we didn't challenge Republican incumbent James Walsh in the NY -25, a district where Bush only received 45.3% of the vote in 2000. [I have complained about this before](#). This story is [exactly why I complain](#):

Republican Nancy Lorraine Hoffmann, a state legislator for 20 years, on Monday conceded the race for the 49th state Senate district, according to her Democratic opponent.

Political newcomer David Valesky said Hoffmann conceded the election to him in a telephone call Monday evening. A telephone message left with Hoffmann's office was not immediately returned.

Onondaga County Election Committee workers were still counting absentee ballots as Republican attorneys challenged 400 votes. Valesky remained 443 votes ahead, according to Helen Kiggins of the elections committee, and the deficit appeared too large to overcome.

"I don't think it's going to change the results," Kiggins said.

Valesky, 38, a Democrat from Oneida, emerged from election night with 49,420 votes and a 1,278-vote lead. Hoffmann had 48,142 votes, and Conservative-Independence candidate Tom Dadey had 12,299 votes.

About half of the voters in the NY -25 congressional district are also in the NY -49 senatorial district. In 1992 and 1996, I voted for Hoffman. At that time, she was a Democrat. Between the 1996 and 2000 elections, she switched parties. James Walsh is the son of a congressman who also represented Central New York—a Democratic congressman who represented Central New York.

The parallels between the two campaigns are obvious. In both cases, you have a truly moderate Republican incumbent in a Democratic district (Walsh is regularly ranked among the top ten most liberal Republicans). In one case, we challenged the incumbent and won. In the other case, we didn't even put up a fight, and the seat was held by a Republican for free. Even if we had fought Walsh and lost, how many resources could we have drained from other Republican House campaigns? By fighting Marilyn Musgrave and Tom DeLay, races that almost went uncontested, [we drained \\$7M from other Republicans](#). Even though Ginny lost, she drained \$3M from other Republicans.

There are [thirty-nine](#) other congressional seats held by Republicans in districts where Bush did not receive a majority of the vote in 2000. That is more than twice the number of seats we need to regain control of the House. In 2006, every single one should be challenged vigorously. Only by challenging everywhere can we make Nancy Pelosi third in line for the Presidency.

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## 6. Funds Raised during the Campaign Should Be Spent to Win \*THIS\* Election (NOT the NEXT one)

This is a really distressing bit of news, [via DailyKos](#):

... [this story](#) demanded comment.

Democratic Party leaders said Wednesday they want to know why Sen. John Kerry ended his presidential campaign with more than \$15 million in the bank, money that could have helped Democratic candidates across the country.

Some said he will be pressured to give the money to Democratic campaign committees rather than save it for a potential White House bid in 2008.

"Democrats are questioning why he sat on so much money that could have helped him defeat George Bush or helped down-ballot races, many of which could have gone our way with a few more million dollars," said Donna Brazile, campaign manager for Al Gore's 2000 presidential race.

Brazile is a member of the 400-plus member Democratic National Committee, which meets early next year to pick a new party chairman. One high-ranking member of the DNC, speaking on condition of anonymity, said word of Kerry's nest egg has stirred anger on the committee and could hurt his chances of putting an ally in the

chairmanship.

That "ally" is likely Tom Vilsack, who Kerry is depending on to grease the skids for his likely 2008 run.

\$15 million may have netted us a couple Senate seats, more than a few House seats [eRiposte: It may have netted Kerry the election for God's sake!]. For example, \$1 million would've allowed the cash-strapped Mongiardo campaign to compete against Sen. Bunning's air attack the last two weeks of the Kentucky Senate contest.

Instead, Kerry hoarded the cash for his 2008 run.

I am a reform Democrat.

Bad, bad, bad. No other words to describe this. No excuses.

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## 7. Raising a Stink about the Appalling Election System

If the Republican Party had lost the White House in Election 2000 after winning the election (like Al Gore did), you can bet that heaven and earth would have been moved in the succeeding years to dramatically alter the election system in this country (although not necessarily in a direction favorable to voting rights). The Democratic party on the other hand did a lackluster job on driving election reform - as [Election 2004 clearly shows](#). **Nothing reflects this more than the fact that electronic voting machines today do not require paper trails in many states**. This is utterly baffling. Why did the party did not aggressively fight to change the NATIONAL election laws (using the power of the media and the grassroots) to make sure that electronic voting machines have paper trails, considering that [independent non-partisan experts have pointed out that this is a problem for quite some time](#)?

It is also stunning that the party did not fight aggressively day and night for changes in the laws and processes on disenfranchisement of former felons -- especially considering what was done in Florida (and other states) in 2000. After all, [historical data has shown clearly that](#) vast numbers of eligible citizens are wrongly prevented from voting every year because of shoddy state election procedures - bad, inconsistent or non-existent felon purge criteria and limited means to challenged purges.

Of course, the party was a signatory to the the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) passed in 2002 which made some progress on voting rights, [but this Act left in place enough loopholes to allow states to continue to suppress voting](#). This was reflected in the Republican Party's and Republican friendly judges' blatant and outrageous suppression of provisional ballots not cast in the "right precinct" in many states this year (we are in 2004 in a high-technology world and we are suppressing votes for this?).

Look, I am not denying that the party did a fair amount to fight against vote suppression in 2004. But, so much more **could** and **should** have been done **previously** to highlight these and other problems in the eyes of the public - considering there is a [vast history of voter intimidation, suppression and fraud](#) that could have been used to highlight and back this effort.

As the Bush administration continues its assault on voting rights, by [joining efforts to block individual citizens from fighting for their voting rights in court](#), the public silence of the Democratic party continues to be stunning.

Even if the Democratic party got all its ducks in a row (1-6 above) before the elections, it may still be thwarted from winning elections because of the numerous opportunities usually exploited by the Republican party to suppress and destroy votes. If the Democratic Party does not get its act together on this (and educate citizens to fight for it), the immediate future may continue to be unpleasant for the party.

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## APPENDIX A: Why and How we can turn this around

[Liberal Oasis points out something](#) we all need to know

The Dems have a **real shot to take over Congress** in 2006. That's good.

**It is doubtful** that many people in the Beltway will believe Dems have a real shot in 2006. That may be good too.

**The big question is:** can the Dems turn 2006 into their 1994, when Newt Gingrich was able to rally his base against Dem dominance in DC?

First some numbers.

In 1993, Dems controlled the House 258-176. In 2005, the GOP will be up [228-206](#) (1 race is still undecided).

In 1993, Dems had 56 Senate seats. [In 2005](#), the GOP will have 55.

So, these odds have been beaten before.

Now, if you thought turnout was key in 2004, it is absolutely everything in an off-year election.

Turnout is always lower in an off-year election than a presidential year -- off-year turnout [hasn't broken 40%](#) since 1982.

(However, since the off-year turnout tends to be about 15 percentage points less than the prior [pres year](#), and this year [we hit 60%](#), we could have a bigger than usual off-year in '06.)

So if one base is more ginned up than the other, it will have a major impact.

But all the promise of history (1993) is only useful if the Democratic Party \*really\* learns from it. [Another way to look at this: "Those who forget history (2000-2004) are condemned to repeat it".]

**The Republicans turned Congress and the White House around, not by luck- but by building a vast fraudulent right-wing media and infrastructure that systematically decimated the Democratic Party nationwide. The Democrats don't need to be fraudulent. The issues are already ON THEIR SIDE. What the Democrats need to do is hone their message and get it out by either forcing the media to reform or by building an alternate media infrastructure, by building a country-wide knowledge base to educate voters, themselves and the media, by getting the vast majority of their base motivated and out to vote in every state and every precinct and every race, by fighting ultra-aggressively for election reform, and displaying the spunk to stand up and do what is right.**

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## APPENDIX B: An idea for a national progressive institution

If a goal is set to promote progressive values and win elections on those values, it calls for a larger and more comprehensive vision, strategy and execution. In [Section 2](#), I specifically called for:

[A progressive institution] that would connect a nationwide network of *largely independent* organizations that nevertheless share some common goals, one that would help not just in voter mobilization and fund raising, but in day-to-day education of the voters, Democratic politicians and policy makers, media, radio and TV hosts. **The goal of such an institution should be to become a household name in the country.** A group or groups that any citizen can dial a number to reach (or go to the web) for information to rebut the latest garbage from the right -wing or to know the real facts on ANY issue.

If someone is to be asked to donate or invest in this cause, a professional plan is needed that clearly identifies the objectives, the path, and how return on that investment will be measured (not necessarily in dollars). Although there are exceptions, by and large it may be unwise to burn dollars for mere short-term gains without long-term benefit, especially in an effort such as this one. To avoid this problem requires, first, an understanding of what IS out there already and where the gaps are that we need to fill. This is not just to avoid redundancy/waste but to ensure that the objectives are clearly understood before one gets too far into it with too much wasted expense. I'm talking about doing a detailed analysis of what IS and ISN'T in place - the gaps (not just hand-waving) - and once the gaps are clear, to put together a project (plan) on the best way to fill those gaps.

This has to be run as a Program - not unlike running a big company. It can be done. I suggest that the best way to start this is to call a conference of all the relevant, interested parties (think tanks, media outlets, vote mobilization groups, groups involved in progressive causes, targeted bloggers and activists, etc.). The goal of this conference should be to get a concise summary from each group on their activities, successes, failures, achievement gaps and their interest in forging a common ground nationally via an umbrella organization that is devoted to the broad progressive cause, not just one particular aspect of the cause. This is the kind of detailed information that is needed to build a national network of strengths and weaknesses - a network that will allow asking the right questions on what kind of effort/activity, what kind of resources and what kind of funding is required in which part of the country to advance the causes that are mutually agreed upon. Once this *requirements-network* is in place, one could put together a comprehensive program (plan) in place to fill the gaps in the network.

This may sound too impractical to some or like a bit of wishful thinking to others. Let me make it clear that it is neither. If the Democratic party really wants to build the kind of infrastructure that rivals the impressive one built by the Republican party I don't see another way to do so at the lowest cost. Funding is clearly not limitless. This requires careful, well thought-out planning and resource/fund allocation - and it has to be run with accountability, dedication and clear expectations (which also means that we have to pay qualified people competitive salaries to make it happen). Anything less may produce some beneficial results but the results may not be lasting or extensive enough in the short or long term to guarantee that we meet our objectives for a long time to come.

One of the advantages of running this as a Program with well defined, yet broad, objectives, is that it will provide donors greater assurance that they are not being repeatedly tapped for short-term, single-issue-based funding, but rather for a broad cause with long term ramifications that will have measurable impact on American society at large -- and on their wallets. I suspect that even the smaller donor base - tens of thousands of people - might be happier to donate money to a broad cause than to repeatedly fund an issue advocacy or political candidate each time an issue or election comes up - and with no guarantee that the candidate or the results will be to their liking.

Now, clearly, progressive groups have done similar things before. So, one does not have to reinvent the wheel in terms of methodology if we can use an existing infrastructure. But, the goals of this new effort are likely to be more

overarching and require an extension of existing efforts into new arenas, in a professionally managed fashion.

If any reader has the ear of some donors who might be interested in funding at least a conference, I would encourage the reader to explore this idea and see if a conference can be arranged (*you know how to reach me: feedback-at-eriposte-dot-com*).

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