

PUT DEMOCRATS' MONEY WHERE MOUTHS ARE - Orlando Sentinel, The (FL) - August 18, 1991 - page G3

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A year before the massive machinery of a presidential election clanks into full swing, George Bush looks unbeatable for a second term. Indeed, only one Democratic challenger has stepped forward.

But even beyond 1992, can Democrats hope to ever again occupy 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.? If the party expects to win the presidency in our lifetime, it will have to do something bold.

I, for one, believe Democrats could win the affection of a skeptical and media-weary public - and re-establish their credentials as the party that truly champions social mobility for the poor and middle class - if they not only talked about their policies, but also put some money behind them.

Imagine a presidential campaign whose funds went not to media blitzes promoting issueless images, but directly to programs dealing with the social and environmental problems that the party is so vocally concerned with.

It's a modest proposal for Democrats: Try money for policies, not politics. And it might work. The postwar patriotic fervor and a widespread revulsion against the greed of 1980s could offer a unique opportunity for Democrats to rally support for programs to deal with deep-seated domestic programs.

While businesses ignore problems that do not appeal to their immediate self-interest, the Bush-style expectation that the incremental deterioration of the U.S. social fabric can be solved with voluntary participation has a certain B-movie charm. But on the other hand, most voters are disillusioned with higher taxes for government bureaucracies that don't seem to solve most problems.

Democrats should put their money where their mouths are. In 1988, Democratic presidential candidates spent \$94 million in primary campaigns; even a small portion of that amount, directed to social problems, could make a difference. Financial support for programs that have worked to help the homeless, to get welfare recipients into the work force, to keep children in school, to preserve land for parks and wilderness areas, and to achieve a host of other socially helpful, moral goals would be the best way to show people the Democratic vision for America, rather than just talking about it.

Most people would relish the chance to contribute money to a campaign directly targeted to social problems rather than being pumped for contributions for advertising to get someone elected (maybe) to raise taxes to employ civil servants to deal (maybe) with persistent social problems. Moreover, the action-oriented projects would bring a wealth of positive publicity in themselves - especially in a public starved for "good news."

Establishing a series of such Democratic demonstration projects would tap the energy of activists in the party and gain support from a public disgusted with money raised for campaign spots that have become like so much visual noise. The logistics might be difficult, but the fund-raising machinery and public concern is in place.

A campaign to raise money to deal directly with problems could become a patriotic crusade. It could potentially co-opt Bush's pitch for voluntarism to solve social problems, while reinforcing the image of Republicans as the party of the rich and powerful.

When Democrats have dared to be different, they have been successful, as was Lawton Chiles when he would not accept campaign contributions of more than \$100 in his victory for the Florida governorship.

Democrats, why not give my idea a try?"

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