

Memorandum: Democrats and the West

Since much of the American South defected to the Republican Party, Democrats and political commentators have focused disproportionate attention on the need for Democrats to win back the South. That has caused Democrats to nominate a number of Southern candidates and to seek “centrist” positions.

A more plausible strategy exists and that is to convert much of the Western United States to the Democratic Party. This strategy focuses attention on Democratic-leaning states, California, Washington, and Oregon, and potential Democratic states, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, and Arizona. It also requires attention to issues of particular concern to Westerners.

1. **The sanctity of property.** The Democratic Party should strongly condemn the Supreme Court decision in *Kelo vs. The City of New London*. The frontier expansion caused property to be viewed differently in the West than elsewhere. The “taking” provision of the Fifth Amendment for public use is one thing; taking homesteads, family farms and ranches, and small businesses for “public purposes,” such as malls, shopping centers, and WalMarts, is quite another. The Democratic Party, so far, has missed a substantial opportunity to identify itself with a deeply-felt Western issue. Conservatives are rallying Westerners on this issue.

2. **Resources and the conservation.** Except in the most rock-ribbed, pro-development areas, Westerners are for balancing resource development with resource conservation. Environmental concerns are strong. Conservation concerns are even stronger. The vast majority of Westerners do not want minerals, timber, and other resources plundered and exploited. They want them to be developed at a reasonable pace on a reasonable timetable. Renewable resources, such as timber, are to be properly managed and maintained for future use. The conservation ethic is very strong in the West.

3. **Energy and the environment.** Likewise, development of coal, oil shale, and other fossil fuels, uranium and nuclear power, and hydro projects are to be undertaken with the maximum attention to both short-term and long-term impact on the environment. Plunder is out. Wise development is in. Alternatives and renewables, solar, wind, and biomass, are favored and increasingly encouraged. Once again, the emphasis in the new West is on thoughtful and careful balanced development. The West would like to be the national leader in promotion of clean, renewable energy technologies.

4. **Public lands.** Unlike the Eastern United States, the federal government is the dominant landlord in the West. Percentages of public lands in the region vary from fifty to ninety percent federal ownership. National forests, public lands, national parks, and wilderness areas all place the national government front and center in any long-range planning for the region. Easterners simply want this entire public heritage kept as is for themselves and future generations. The federal presence is much more real and immediate for Westerners, a fact seldom understood by Eastern Democrats.

5. **Recreation.** Many Westerners believe a solution to conflict between growth and preservation lies in the region's vast recreational resources and assets. Recreational industries are crucial to the economy of the region. More importantly, those in these industries necessarily combine the profit motive with preservation of the resources required for recreation. Some of the strongest promoters of a clean environment and resource conservation are the owners of recreational businesses. They represent a bridge between the business and the environmental communities. Democrats should protect the region's recreational resources for national use and the regional economy.

6. **Growth and the economy.** As with resources, energy, conservation, and the environment, Westerners want to maximize contradictory values. Life-style Westerners want growth controlled and often limited. Entrepreneurial Westerners want resources developed to achieve maximum profit. The mere rhetoric of balance will not suffice. A case-by-case willingness to balance competing interests is required. The emphasis is on good judgment, long-term outlook, inter-generational responsibility, and wise administration. National Democrats have much to learn in this area, as Northern Democrats had much to learn about the intricacies of race in the South.

7. **Technology.** The West, including not only Silicon Valley but also the Denver-Boulder corridor, is the technology base of America and thus represents much of America's economic future. The Democratic Party should promote regional high technology education and training centers to stimulate this trend. There are a variety of additional national government initiatives that would build on this natural regional advantage. Unfortunately, there is no apparent Party policy to carry out this agenda.

8. **Mediation and arbitration.** All of this balancing of competing and often contradictory interests requires political leadership which understands the history and culture of the region, and especially the relationship of man and nature, sufficiently to guarantee good government. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the national Democratic Party was seen almost exclusively as the captive of the environmental movement at the expense of fully understanding the nuances of these regional interests. Democrats should become the region's mediators and arbitrators.

9. **National security.** The West is keenly focused on national security issues, having been the base for much of the nation's Cold War military structure and defense contract foundation. Democrats are not seen as having a coherent, consistent, thoughtful, and resilient outlook on America's role in the twenty-first century world or policies to make the nation secure during a turbulent period of globalization, information revolution, state failure, and changing character of warfare. Such foreign and security policy initiatives are central to Democratic hopes in the West.

10. **Principles or values.** Westerners are individualists who do not like the beliefs of others imposed on us. We are people who believe in principles: integrity, honor, courage, accountability. The religious right preaches values. Democrats, regionally and nationally, should espouse *principles*, for ourselves and for our country.

“Values” have religious overtones. Principles are humanistic and secular. Our domestic and foreign policies should always be based on the nation’s highest principles.

The national Democratic Party should look Westward. The South will return to the Democratic Party only when economic downturn requires it. Meanwhile, the West provides the Democratic Party’s greatest opportunity and represents its greatest future. National Party leaders must develop a plan to win the West in the early twenty-first century or risk settling into minority status for many years to come.

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