

Raising an Anthem for a New Generation of Democrats

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anthem • noun 1. an uplifting song associated with a group or cause, especially a patriotic one. 2. a musical setting of a text...to be sung by a choir.

-Oxford Dictionary, 2007 Edition

It's tough to be a Democrat right now. In the bad old days before the 2006 election, it was easier to be discouraged about the state of things because we had a clear and identifiable opponent—the Republicans. When they owned both majorities it was simpler for us to be outraged about the slow, agonizing attrition of our democracy because we could, from the relative discomfort of our opposition, hold out the hope that one day the Democrats would regain the government and turn the devastating tide of neo-conservative rule.

Then, in 2006, it seemed that our dream came true. Democrats won a respectable majority in the House and picked up enough votes in the Senate to win an important, albeit slim, majority. It was a day when Democrats rejoiced all over the country and a moment when many of us dared to dust off our hope for the future. However, almost immediately, our dream eluded us and we woke to find the status quo firmly in command and a party leadership too often afraid to place *principles* over *politics*.

Like most people, I was, and still am, confused. Now that we have the majorities, it seems a straightforward assignment to hold a rogue administration accountable, and move forward. But even more to the point, why are we, as Democrats, helping to *extend* those policies, the most obvious of which is continuing to fund the war in Iraq, the most confounding of which is the sanctioning of wiretapping American citizens? Where is the vaunted heart of our great party—a party that has made history time and again with its commitment to Justice and Peace and Democracy?

The answer is essential to our future not only as a party, but as a nation. Because at the root of our problem as Democrats, Republicans, Conservatives, Independents, Radicals, and ultimately *Americans*, is that we live in a country that has allowed itself to be *governed* by fear. We've run amok against our own best interests, ravaged our Constitution, and conceded every legally protected freedom from Habeus Corpus to the right to a private phone conversation--and yet we are told that our country is *still* not secure, that the world will *never* be safe, and that democracy is a luxury we cannot afford. But democracy is not a luxury. And we *must* afford it.

One solution to the problem of fear, of course, is *courage*. But from where will we muster this rarest of qualities when half of our country is in a frenzy over the next terrorist attack and the other half is in a panic about the weekly shedding our civil liberties in the name of “protecting” us from the attackers?

I think Franklin Roosevelt left a clue. During one of the most difficult *and frightening* periods in our history, he declared, quoting the bible, “Without Vision, *the people perish.*” What Roosevelt understood was that *Vision*, the primal, unrelenting optimism that the world will be a better, kinder, more rational place *tomorrow* than it is *today*, is the seed of our courage and character as Americans. Roosevelt also knew the dangers—that a people without such a vision are doomed. Sadly, this is the state we find ourselves in today-- hypnotized by fear and perishing under the disintegration of a country, and a world, without *Vision*. But where will we find it? How will we construct this elusive “Vision” Roosevelt was talking about?

As Americans, we needn’t look further than the first three words of the Constitution. In a democracy, *Vision* emanates from *the people*, not in any abstract way, but in the most concrete terms possible. Because while there is plenty of blame to be spread among the Democratic Party leadership, it is ultimately *not* the responsibility of our leaders to provide a blueprint of ourselves as citizens, but rather quite the opposite-- it is the responsibility of *the people* to provide their leaders with a *Vision* of who they are and where they want to be lead.

And that brings me to my purpose. I began by providing Oxford’s definition of the term “anthem” because that is what the campaign and the video linked here hopes to offer; an anthem for a new *Vision* of ourselves. It is a tall order, to draft an anthem, but it is nonetheless *essential*. And to be clear, nothing particularly qualifies me to fill this order other than my status as a concerned American citizen. But maybe that’s as it should be. Maybe the anthem for a new generation of democrats is to be raised by the *a-political* class, the “unqualified” among us who accept, with finality and resolve, that the status quo has failed, that our leaders have indeed lost their way, and that our democracy is not broken, but merely failing to hear from the people it was initiated to serve.

As you watch this video and consider the campaign, please keep in mind that its highest calling is not merely as a new brand identity, or a new commercial, but also as what Oxford Dictionary defines as “an uplifting song” to be “sung by a choir.” And while I must admit that it is odd to propose a new brand identity campaign for a party that seems to be careening away from its constituents, that is precisely my point: like turning into a skid, we must not pull *away* from our party but *turn directly into it*, all of us, at the same time, and recover our control before it is too late.

So, what you are about to watch is not a *Vision* of the party *as it is* but rather *as it one day might be* if each of us knew what to sing when applying the most rudimentary chord of our uniquely American freedom: *We The People*. It is how we began. It is how we will start again. And it is always, if we truly commit ourselves to it, an act of evolution.

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Adam Klugman first presented these ideas at the 2006 Democratic Party of Oregon conference in Eugene. In that same year, shortly after the Democratic Party victories in

the House and Senate, he was invited to present the campaign to the Association of State Democratic Chairs (ASDC) meeting in Jackson Hole. The campaign received overwhelming support from the attending state parties at the ASDC meeting, garnering thirty-three formal letters of endorsements representing twenty-two different states. Today, the DNC is currently considering producing the spot for 2008

If you like this campaign and want to see it produced, help spread the word--send this link to everyone you know and ask them to do the same. Help get the internet conversation started by posting it on blogs. Send the link to your Senator or Congress Member and/or call the DNC @ 202.863.8000 and let them know that you want them to produce this campaign in 2008.

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