

Donald Trump is the Republican Party's new national standard bearer. Trump's pitch appeals to the darkest impulses, but it also zeroes in on how everyday Americans have been betrayed by ruling elites and how the government is serving a few at everyone else's expense. The establishment types of both parties have conspicuous blind spots to this appeal, as both Trump and Bernie Sanders are seen as unwelcome intruders.

ALTOONA, WI - Establishment Republicans are having to come to terms in a hurry with the unsettling reality of having **Donald Trump** as the party's national standard bearer. Nowhere is the discomfort higher than in Wisconsin where top GOP leaders and right-wing talk radio mouthpieces led the #NeverTrump movement, uniting behind a candidate they can't stand in hopes of derailing one they despise and fear even more.

While they either can't see it or won't admit it, in some ways Trump is a perfect reflection of what the Republican Party has made itself. In other more important ways, Trump exposes the party leaders' biggest blind spots.

Trump understands something the party brass can't bring themselves to accept. Most voters — including many who consider themselves either Republicans or Democrats but also the self-described independents who make up the biggest single voting bloc — hate both major parties and believe that your average politicians are nothing but self dealers, interested first and foremost in advancing their own careers and feathering their own nests. Trump appeals to quite a few of those who are thinking this way because he's already rich and famous and doesn't need to hold any office to make a name for himself or line his pockets.

The other blind spot Trump is exploiting is that Republican insiders figure most Americans hate the government, period. For decades they have demonized anything having to do with government. Their message has been self-centered, putting the individual on a pedestal, and their policies have torn at the fabric of society. It's clear Trump sees a miscalculation here. He's found sizeable numbers of disenchanted voters — especially working-class white men — who clearly yearn for some common aim or uniting cause. He seems to instinctively sense that it's

not the government itself they hate, it's a government that they believe stopped working on their behalf quite some time ago that has them exasperated. He's offered them common enemies to unite around, tapping into powerful feelings of nativism and nationalism.

Trump's pitch appeals to the darkest impulses, the fear of outsiders, the fondness for walls. But it also zeroes in on how everyday Americans have been betrayed by ruling elites and how the government is serving a few at everyone else's expense. All of this leaves the Republican Party at greater risk of splintering and disintegrating than at any time in living memory.



You'd think this would put the Democrats in the proverbial catbird seat. But Democratic establishment types have conspicuous blind spots too. Those blind spots explain why they couldn't see the **Bernie Sanders** insurgency coming and why they still can't seem to fathom Sanders' appeal, especially to young Millennials . Like Trump, but for different reasons, Sanders is immune from the "typical politician" characterization. With Sanders, the immunity was built up over a lifetime of standing on principle even when those principles weren't fashionable. And like Trump, but in a vastly different way, Sanders calls Americans to a common purpose while Democratic insiders continue to cater to their most loyal constituencies and ignore other very large swaths of the population.

To party regulars, both Trump and Sanders are seen as unwelcome intruders, as skunks at the picnic. On one side, the skunk is feasting. The other side's skunk is being shooed away. But the fact that the inner circle on both sides see both Trump and Sanders as such says a lot about the similar mindsets in the two major parties and the glaring vulnerabilities both parties have.

— *Mike McCabe*