

Blue Jean Nation "How Democrats might escape from exile"

Written by Mike McCabe, Blue Jean Nation

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Today's Republican Party seems bound and determined to implode. For you Democrats, there is no shortage of opportunity. Are you up for it?

ALTOONA, WI - Now here's a telling measure of how weird our political system has gotten. The Republican Party is [more unpopular](#) than it's been in nearly 25 years and is [turning more people off](#) with each passing day, yet the GOP is undeniably the majority party in this country.

Republicans control Congress. They control two-thirds of statehouses across America. Here in Wisconsin, they control a majority of congressional seats, both houses of the state legislature, the governor's office and the state Supreme Court.

Elections don't lie. As much as voters dislike the Republicans, they've repeatedly shown they'd rather have Republicans running the government than Democrats.

The Democratic establishment shows little willingness to change and little openness to outside advice. In all likelihood this will fall on deaf ears, but here goes anyway. Democrats, you won't likely find your way out of the political wilderness unless you:

- Stop trying to shame voters into backing candidates that wide swaths of the population find unappealing with scare tactics about what disaster will befall us if the latest ever-more-extreme Republican wins and how the catastrophe will be all their fault if they don't vote Democratic. Only saying the other side is worse is an admission that your side is bad. Aspire to thrill voters instead.
- Stop blaming voters for your defeats with the lame excuse that they are voting against their own best interests. Figure out how they see their interests and make them a better offer. Voters can be persuaded to realign. FDR turned a whole bunch of Republicans into Democrats, and Reagan turned a bunch of Democrats into Republicans. If you are consistently falling short of 50% in elections, that's not the voters' fault. It's on the losing party to do something different to become more appealing to more people.

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- Stop using the vast Republican spin machine as an excuse for repeated losses. Of course opponents go to great lengths to badmouth you. Always have and always will. You can't control that. Focus on what you can control.

- Focus less on policies that [benefit a particular constituency](#) and more on programs with universal reach where everyone pays and everyone benefits. Wisconsin Democrats staked the last several elections on bargaining rights for a small minority of the state's workers in just one sector of the economy, and lost decisively. This kind of strategy reinforces the image of a party devoted to benefiting favored interests and also makes the party vulnerable to divide-and-conquer tactics that were indeed successfully employed by Republican opponents.

- Think long and hard about the fact that lower-income white working-class voters, especially those living in small towns and rural areas, used to support Democrats but most no longer do. There's [no shortage](#) of [clues](#) about why they now prefer the Republicans. In those clues is a call to [think bigger](#), to start doing things for blue-collar workers

[the Republicans won't](#)

. Rebuilding governing majorities depends on it.

- Try to become more than a confederation of interest groups, confined to their own issue silos, operating largely in isolation and sometimes even working at cross purposes. Doing this requires agreeing on and then expressing [overarching values](#) that knit these interests together. Republicans do a far better job staying focused on bedrock values while Democrats concentrate on issues and try to persuade people with a torrent of facts while not being willing or able to confidently describe a coherent underlying world view.

And then if and when voters decide to trust Democrats with power, you need to actually do what you say you believe in. No more hand-wringing about how acting boldly could cost you the next election. Doing little or nothing when given the opportunity to steer the ship of state has cost you way more elections than decisive action ever has.

Today's Republican Party seems bound and determined to implode. Democrats, there is no shortage of opportunity for your party. There also is no shortage of doubt that you will take advantage of the opening.

— *Mike McCabe*