

Snap Out of It, Democrats

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DECLARATIONS
By Peggy Noonan

Democrats looked like fools Tuesday night. We don't need to dwell on how they sat grim-faced, seething, or walked out while the president spoke. One stood, yelled, brandished his cane and was removed by the sergeant at arms. Others held up little paddles bearing little insults. Some wore special color-coded outfits. Almost all refused to show normal warmth or engagement. From my notes, as the camera turned and dwelled on the furious faces: "They look like the green room in hell."

On Tuesday they looked as if they aren't going to win for a long time. That's dangerous for America.

All while Donald Trump romped. Three thoughts. One, these aren't serious people. Two, their job was to show they are an alternative to Mr. Trump, and instead they showed why he won. Third and most important, they will continue to lose for a long time. I hadn't known that until Tuesday.

Sometimes a party takes a concussive blow, such as the 2024 presidential loss, and you can see: They'll shape up and come back, they're pros, they lost an election but not their dignity. But now and then you see: No, these guys don't know what happened, they are going to lose over and over before they get the message.

What I saw Tuesday night is that the Democratic Party in 2025, as

evinced by its leaders on Capitol Hill, is too proud and stupid to change. I saw 1981. The Reagan era had begun, the Democrats had taken quite a drubbing—a landslide loss by a sitting Democratic president, and the loss of the Senate majority they had held since 1955. It was the kind of blow that reorders the mind: Democratic policies weren't popular! They had just been massively repudiated! But the blow didn't reorder their minds. They kept doing the same thing, as if they had a secret death wish. They lost in another landslide in 1984, and again in '88. Finally, as 1992 approached, they realized: We need to readjust our policy stands to be more in line with those of the American people. They did, and Bill Clinton squeaked in.

We are in "Death Wish II."

In this space we believe two strong and healthy parties vying for popular support is good for the country, and we offer advice for the Democrats.

I will start with something they won't believe. In politics, there is bringing the love and bringing the hate. When the 13-year-old boy who had brain cancer and has always wanted to be a cop is appointed as an honorary Secret Service agent, laminated ID and all, and the child, surprised by the gesture, hugs the normally taciturn head of the Secret Service, the only thing to do, because you are human, is cheer that child. And when the president honors a young man whose late father, a veteran and policeman, had inspired his wish to serve, and dreams of attending West Point, and the president says that he has some sway in the admissions office and young man you are going to West Point—I not only got choked up when it happened I'm choked up as I write. The boy with cancer high-fives the young man, and the only response to such sweetness is tears in your eyes.



Democratic lawmakers at President Trump's speech Tuesday night.

That moment is "the love." *It was showing love for regular Americans.* To cheer them is to cheer us. It shows admiration for and affiliation with normal people who try, get through, endure and hold on to good hopes.

The Democrats brought the hate. They sat stone-faced, joyless and loveless. They don't show love for Americans anymore. They look down on them, feel distance from them, instruct them, remind them to feel bad that they're surrounded by injustice because, well, they're unjust.

Mr. Trump says: No, man, I love you.

Which is better? Which is kinder, more generous? Which inspires? Which *wins*?

Democrats have to understand where they are. They have completely lost their reputation as the party of the workingman. With their bad governance of the major cities and their airy, abstract obsessions with identity politics and gender ideology, they have driven away the working class, for whom life isn't airy or abstract. Democrats must stop listening to the left of the left of their party. It tugs them too far away from the vast ma-

jority of Americans. They have been radical on the border, on crime, on boys in the girls' locker room. They should take those issues off the table by admitting they got them wrong.

Why do they allow the far left to punch so far above its weight? It's not only money. "They play dirty, make threats, make people uncomfortable," a Democratic elected official said. Normal Democrats want to dodge a fight with them. But the fight has to be had. The sooner you have it, the sooner it's over and the party makes itself into a fighting force again.

In the near term, James Carville says the party should play possum—"roll over" and make believe they're dead when the predator approaches. (It almost worked for Joe Biden.) I'd add play shrewd possum—align with what the Trump administration is doing that might be productive, but with a variation that shows you have a heart, you are protective of the excellent and the diligent and deserving of protection. Help Elon Musk fight waste, fraud and abuse, but make clear you are protecting essential programs and peerless professionals. Mr. Musk is going to make bad mis-

takes; he's new to government and doing everything everywhere all at once. When he does, the possum should become a lion.

Know your stuff, have the data. "Trump bad" isn't enough to win. You have to start realizing how popular he is with your own voters. He's a masculine presence, he's funny, and he likes Americans. Those are three powerful qualities in America right now.

Democrats on Capitol Hill are pushed to act like jerky drama queens by activists in their base. Leave that to Nancy Mace. If they need behavioral role models: Take the seriousness of John Roberts and Amy Coney Barrett, who present themselves as even-keeled adults and speak thoughtfully, and add in the public good cheer and capability of Elena Kagan. Sen. Elissa Slotkin was calm and plain-spoken in her response. Emulate her. It will help retrieve and rebuild your party's reputation.

Taking all bait won't work. The administration is throwing new chum in the water every day, you'll look disorganized, insatiable and desperate if you endlessly swim to it.

Be strategic. Mr. Trump is a man who goes too far. He confuses boldness with wildness, can't see the line. He'll give you opportunities. Take the big ones.

Stop listening to your consultants. They know the Democratic Party but not America. They've always had the media in their pocket and it's made them lazy and lacking in insight. Keep going to town halls in small and medium-size towns and listen, listen, listen.

If Democrats don't wise up and sober up, Mr. Trump and the Republicans will know there is no major party to slow them, temper them, stop them. This wouldn't be good. They need an opponent. The Democratic Party's not reporting for duty is a dangerous thing.