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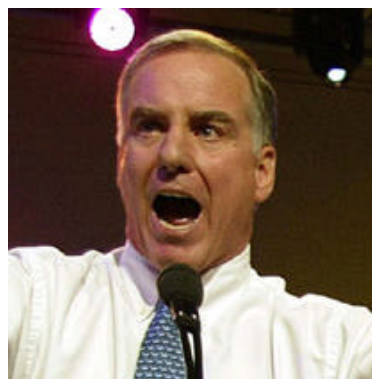
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## What I Want From the Democrats

*Liane Ellison Norman - Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

Republicans appear to be in disarray. President Bush's Iraq war, entered into on the basis of lies, requires fluctuating rationales. American soldiers and Iraqis die without any end in sight. Bush's response to Hurricane Katrina and that of his appointed incompetents was crudely unsympathetic. Key members of his administration appear likely to be indicted for criminal activities and cover-ups having to do with attacking someone who exposed the administration's false reasons for the war in Iraq. (Republicans, who waxed wrath about Bill Clinton's lie about sex, are suddenly less judgmental.) Bush's most recent nomination to the Supreme Court seems, at minimum, to be unqualified.



I am a lifelong Democrat and I am appalled by this administration. But I delete or toss out the daily solicitations I get from various Democratic organizations. I take this occasion to tell them why.

I need something from Democrats beyond glee at the collapse of what is surely the worst presidency in our history. Here's an idea of what it would take to get me excited about the Democratic Party:

First and probably most important, Democrats must restore and articulate the idea that there is a common good, and that it entails a commonwealth. That is to say, we all benefit when those who have prospered acknowledge that in addition to their hard work, they have benefited from public investments as well as from their origins and luck. The rich are not entitled, therefore, not to contribute to the common good. This understanding involves repeal of the Bush administration's tax breaks for the richest Americans and a willingness by legislators to forswear pork.

Second, Democrats must insist on mandatory public financing for elections. There are two reasons for such a policy: So that rich corporations and individuals cannot hijack the democratic process, buying candidates who are therefore indebted and will serve their interests; and so that public servants do not have to be wealthy or in the pockets of the wealthy to run for office.

Third, Democrats, to be credible, must acknowledge complicity in having signed on to the disastrous war in Iraq. They must articulate a plan for prompt disengagement. As signatories to the U.N. Charter, the United States has agreed not to wage pre-emptive or unilateral wars, and Democrats must affirm compliance with this commitment.

Democrats must repudiate the use of torture anywhere and by any means and must promptly repeal any legislative or executive measures that wink and nod at such practices. This country, after all, declared its independence by saying something about a "decent respect for the opinions of Mankind."

Democrats must move swiftly to design and press for the adoption of a national, single-payer health care system that is not beholden to health insurance or drug companies. There is plenty of experience among industrialized countries to help us do this and plenty of evidence that Americans would support such a system, which would

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reduce health care costs and make health care available to all. Lawmakers would have to be clear that certain kinds of rationing would be required.

Democrats must articulate the reasons for and actively promote environmental health, to include immediate reductions of reliance on fossil fuels, restoration and strengthening of controls on all kinds of pollution, restoration of the principle that forest and wild areas are to be preserved and protected by government for the well-being of all.

Democrats must insist that all government agencies requiring scientific expertise be staffed by reputable scientists.

Democrats must insist that industry be regulated so as to serve the public good.

Democrats must institute programs that provide high-quality public education for all Americans and must refuse to tolerate second- or third-class school systems for poor, inner city and rural children.

Democrats must forswear the hiring of cronies to fill government posts, and must support the clear meaning of the Constitution's separation of church and state.

Democrats must recognize that all of the people who reside in the United States, rich and poor, white and non-white, young and old, are citizens to be represented and protected by the government against interests that would exploit or injure them. Neither a president nor elected officials represents a "base." Once elected, they represent all of us.

Democrats must be fiscally responsible. Running up huge debts to be paid by our children and theirs so that the rich can get richer and endless wars can be paid for is neither just nor sensible.

These are ambitious goals, requiring courage. But without them, Democrats look a lot like the people who have undermined our standing in the world and endangered our country.

*Liane Ellison Norman is a writer living in Squirrel Hill, Pa. She can be reached [here](#).*

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