



Democrats will win again when they show discomfort with the current political culture and all the ladder climbing and nest feathering and back scratching gives way to actual public service and sacrifice for the greater good.

ALTOONA, WI - Over the course of my 57 years, I've never seen a time when our public institutions were more disrespected and distrusted. And with good reason. I've also never seen a time when government was less responsive to regular people. Over and over, our government is put to work for a privileged few, the wealthy and well-connected. People notice this. They realize their own voices aren't being heard and their own interests are not being served. That's a sure recipe for disrespect and distrust of public institutions.

These conditions are especially poisonous to the Democratic Party. The Democrats are widely seen as the party of government. There is reality to that perception. Of the two major parties, it's the Democrats who most strongly believe that government is essential to a civil society and can have a positive and constructive impact on people's lives.

But here's the problem for Democrats. It's next to impossible to be popular as the party of public institutions at a time when so many people have so little faith in those institutions. People see public officials climbing the ladder, advancing their careers, feathering their own nests. They see those officials exchanging favors, scratching the backs of those who scratch theirs. None of that looks much like public service.

This is why Democrats have been on a decades-long losing streak and are in worse shape as a

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party than at any point in my lifetime. It's why Democrats do not control either house of Congress or the White House. And why they are not calling the shots in [two-thirds of state capitals](#), including Wisconsin's. Being the party of disrespected and distrusted public institutions explains why Democrats have [lost more than 1,000 seats](#) in Congress, state legislatures and governor's offices across the nation just since 2008.

The current political culture celebrates greed. It emphasizes self advancement over the common good. It treats public service as just another opportunity for self dealing. When such a culture flourishes, it's today's Republican Party that much more comfortably fits the role of the party of the times we live in. Democrats can say they are concerned for the common good and are acting in the public interest, but when they appear to be operating comfortably within the system as it works today and when they cater to a few constituencies at everyone else's expense, voters inevitably see them as hypocrites. In a political culture where greed is triumphant and self dealing the norm, Republicans are credited for at least being upfront about their intentions and Democrats are punished for hypocrisy.

Democrats will win again when they show genuine discomfort with the current political culture and the way the system presently functions. Democrats will win again when the political culture is changed, when all the ladder climbing and nest feathering and back scratching gives way to actual public service and actual acts of sacrifice for the greater good. Democrats will win again when today's me politics becomes tomorrow's we politics.

And not before.

— Mike McCabe