

## Democrats Should Listen to the Voters

By Congressman Jim Matheson  
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Democrats got whopped on November 2<sup>nd</sup> and anyone who says otherwise is on another planet. In House races, Republicans gained over 60 seats—the second-largest net gain in the chamber by either party since World War II. The carnage was especially severe among moderate to conservative members of my caucus, including at least 23 of my fellow Blue Dogs. Because Blue Dogs traditionally represent the most competitive districts, they are always vulnerable. Despite their best efforts, the tidal wave—which most of us knew was coming—swept them out to sea.

Such a steep loss cries out for shaking things up on my side of the aisle. If a CEO presided over such a poor performance, he or she would be shown the door. The same is true for a coach whose team flounders on the field. That is why I have joined many of my colleagues in calling for change – starting at the stop, with a new Minority Leader.

A quick glance at the exit polling data tells you why staying with the status quo would be madness. Across almost every voting demographic, Democratic candidates were rejected. Women voters, senior voters, high school and college graduate voters, suburban and rural voters and most strikingly, independent voters sent a loud and clear message that jobs and the economy are what matters.

What they didn't say is that they are enamored of Republicans. Polls show neither party in Congress is very popular. In my own district, what I heard time after time on the campaign trail is that both parties are guilty of engaging in too much bickering and not enough problem-solving. Because many moderate voices in the House are now gone, I fear one scenario is that the atmosphere will be even more polarized. But it doesn't have to turn out that way.

Some have argued that moderate Democrats are to blame for their own demise – that they disappointed the liberal base. But the numbers don't back up that theory. In 2006, self-described liberals comprised 20% of those exiting the polls; an identical 20% made up the 2010 electorate and 90% voted for Democrats. Meantime, for the first time since exit surveys began asking the ideology question in 1976, conservatives outnumbered moderates. In 2008, President Obama won 60% of moderates; Democrats-- in 2010-- attracted 55%.

If you look back on history, you'll see that moderates in both parties are critical to forging good public policy. Most of the signature pieces of legislation passed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—the Civil Rights Act, The Social Security Act, welfare reform—came about through the efforts of broad, bipartisan coalitions.

As we heed the voters' message and sharpen our focus on the economy and jobs, all sides have a willing partner in those of us who make up the “radical center”. Compromise on

tax cuts, so as to create more certainty for families and small businesses, a fiscal blueprint that lowers deficits and moves towards balanced budgets, and a serious discussion about how to address the unsustainable path of excessive growth in health care costs are warranted. Other areas include tort reform, lasting incentives for research and development and fewer layers of regulation.

The time-honored adage of “when you find yourself in a deep hole, the first rule is to stop digging” holds true not just for deficit hawks like the Blue Dogs. It also applies to a party that just had the earth move out from under it almost everywhere. Before we re-apply for our jobs, we must demonstrate that we listen to those doing the hiring.