

Fellow Democrats:

We've all heard the expression, "There are two kinds of people in politics – those who want to *be* something and those who want to *do* something." It isn't hard to tell the two apart. The *be* people are the ones who say, "vote for me because the other guy's a rat." The *do* people say, "this is what our community/state/nation needs and this is how I plan to accomplish it."

The Democratic Party has become associated with the former group (the *be* people) in recent years. It isn't hard to understand why. Our opponents' assault on civil rights and social justice has put us on the defensive and taken away our initiative. They have proposed tax cuts (mainly for their constituents – the selfish rich) and roll-backs of important social policies under the guise of "individual rights and responsibilities." This has been passed off as "new ideas." We have spent so much effort in defending what we had already fought for, we forgot to tell people about the future they were giving up. We went back on our heels and started backing up. We lost the initiative and have been off-balance.

Without the initiative, we cannot win. We need to take the initiative back. We can only do that by proposing an attractive vision for the country, the state, and our communities, and ideas to achieve that vision.

It is no longer enough to complain that the administration's plans are divisive and destructive. We need to answer the obvious follow-on question in the minds of the voters: "Yeah, well what would *you* guys do?" We as a party haven't been able to answer that question because we have been too afraid of losing. We have also been (justifiably) worried that going on record with an independent idea will alienate some contributors (maybe we need to change our contributors).

I challenge my colleagues on the Central Committee to propose alternative ideas whenever they attack our opponents' policies, no matter how justifiable that attack may be. The majority in Congress and the current administration are making some terrible mistakes in domestic and foreign policy that will have long-lasting consequences. This does not give us license to simply snipe from the back of the crowd. We must present to the people what we see as wrong with the policy and what alternative (besides "we wouldn't do that") we would propose.

It is incumbent on us to show that Bill Clinton was right when he said that there is nothing wrong with America that can't be fixed by what's right with America. This wasn't just a platitude. I believe he really intended for us to look at the resources we have and apply them to the problems we face, not just complain that the other people aren't doing it right.

Two prominent Democrats have taken the lead in expressing a vision for the United States and its people into the future. Representative Gephardt has formulated a domestic policy that provides concrete and reachable goals for retirement and health care. Senator Gary Hart has presented a vision for America's relationship with the world as a leader in trade and democracy. Again, it contains concrete proposals and policies that people can get their hands on and understand. This is not an endorsement of any particular Democrat (yet), and I hope more leading Democrats follow suit.

I propose that the Alameda County Central Committee create some means of analyzing and proposing or endorsing specific policy alternatives. This could take the form of a policy committee or we could create task groups to tackle individual problems or policy areas. I further think that we need to take a more active part in the platform process at the state and national party. When we vote as party members for delegates to conventions, how the delegates will use their votes and participation should be a factor.

We are not just spectators – we are selected by our Democratic neighbors to represent their ideas of what the Democratic Party should be and ultimately what kind of society they want. Our constituents care about issues such as housing, education, health care, and transportation. They deserve to know how we would use governmental power to address these issues.

We would not necessarily have to do original research, or even develop original policy alternatives. There is a lot of work being done by policy analysts that we can tap into and endorse, as well as proposals by Democratic policymakers. The only requirement is that they be workable and they adhere to Democratic principles of social justice and fairness.

For too long, we have let Republicans define what it means to be a Democrat. By taking the lead in defining ourselves by what we'll do for our communities, state, and nation, we'll take this power away from our opponents and take the lead in shaping the future. Standing for something will make our message more memorable to the electorate, and the voter will know what the "D" means on the ballot. And most of them will like it.