

Radio Times with Marty Moss-Coane
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MARTY MOSS-COANE: ...can't win in 2004. What caught my eye though was his comment about the quote "McGovern Mondale wing of the party, defined principally by weakness abroad and elitist interest group liberalism at home. That's the wing that lost 49 states in two elections and transformed Democrats from a strong national party into a much weaker regional one." We've invited Al From to join us this morning to talk about the shape and the future of the Democratic Party. Good morning and nice to have you with us on Radio Times.

AL FROM: Good morning. Delighted to be with you.

MOSS-COANE: Nice to have you with us. Also with us to offer a different perspective on the Democratic Party is Harold Meyerson, editor at large for the American Prospect. That's a progressive political magazine. Also, political editor and columnist for LA Weekly. And, Harold Meyerson, good morning to you as well.

HAROLD MEYERSON: Eh, thank you for having me.

MOSS-COANE: Your welcome. 1-888-477-9499. Al From, who is in this McGovern Mondale wing of the Democratic Party that you talk about in this memo?

FROM: Well, I think that the point that we wanted to make in that memo. Is that the real soul of the Democratic Party is the soul of the party that is the party of great national purposes. That runs through Roosevelt and Truman and Kennedy and Clinton. It's a party of opportunity and economic growth. It's a party of national strength. It's a party of dealing with the big problems of the country. And it's not a party that's defined by narrow purposes and narrow constituency groups. The Democratic Party is a constituency group party, no question about it. But at the times that we have been the party of national leadership, we have subsumed the narrower interest into great national purpose. And that's the point of this memo.

MOSS-COANE: But when you talk about elitist interest group liberalism at home, what are the issues you're talking about here? What are the issues that you think have really derailed the party?

FROM: Look, I think that the party was hurt dramatically last fall because we were viewed as the party weak on security issues. Going into the election in the last Gallop Poll, there was a sixty-point swing on which party would keep the country strong against terrorism. It's a party that when we get off the purpose of growing the economy and creating opportunity for all and become a party that talks about redistribution. I think that in the 2000 election and 2002 we lost a lot of people that were more culturally conservative than Democrats are. And I'm not arguing that Democrats ought to be a culturally conservative party, because that's not going to be where

we are. But what we ought to be is a party that doesn't sort of have disdain when people have another point of view. What we're talking about is a party that's sort of defined by it's parts rather than its grand purposes.

MOSS-COANE: Let me get Harold Meyerson in on this conversation. What should the Democratic Party be in the year 2003? What should it believe in?

MEYERSON: To take the popular dichotomy of democratic typologies I don't see that there is any contradiction for the Democratic Party to, you know, be both Democratic and electable. First, as a general principle I would say to Al From, I actually don't think that the divisions in the party are as great this year and moving into the 2004 election cycle as...as some might think. There is a wide spread awareness among liberal Democrats as well as other Democrats that the Bush administration has a radical agenda that it will do anything to enact or reach fruition. And that stopping that administration with a candidate who can win in 2004 is very important. So I think that's a point of commonality. But then beyond that I think that the historic purposes of the Democratic Party to which AL From alludes goes beyond opportunity, equality of opportunity and growth. The historic purposes of the Democratic Party also include an agenda of security. And certainly one links the Democratic Party back the Roosevelt Truman era with programs like Social Security or up to the Kennedy Johnson era with Medicare. So that he party does have some grand purposes that go beyond good economic management. Which is a very important Democratic historic asset.

MOSS-COANE: I have to say that this...this discussion reminds me of the one that Republicans were having a decade ago trying to define this big tent and was there room in this big tent for both conservatives and...and centrists. Is there a parallel conversation going on here, Al From?

FROM: Well first of all, I don't think there's any question that there's room in the Democratic tent for liberals and progressives and centrists or however you want to define them. The Democratic Party has always been a coalition party. I mean I'd go beyond where Harold went on the tradition of the Democratic Party. I mean we've also been the party of inclusion. We're the party of...I mean my father was an immigrant. You know I've done quite well in the country in part because of the Democratic Party. We're the party of upward mobility. Look, we have grand traditions. The purpose of the memo that Bruce Reed and I did was really to try to get this party to focus on the grand purposes because when we do that we offer progressive ways to meet them. What the New Democrat movement is about is about taking the traditional purposes of the Democratic Party and furthering them with modern means. It's about reform. If you want to know at least in my view where the Democratic Party ought to come from, take a look at the Clinton Administration in the 90's. It was growth and opportunity and inclusion and national strength and civic responsibility, like John Kennedy, with Americorps and other things. And it was reforming welfare and turning welfare into work program and moving people out of poverty. And that's a very good record, but we have another challenge now as we go to 2004 that we can't back away from. And that is we have to convince the American people that our party will keep the country safe. And if we do that, we're going to do just fine in 2004.

MOSS-COANE: But are you saying that issues like abortion and prayer in the schools, the death penalty, the rights of gay Americans, gun control that these are issue that you don't want the Democratic Party to way in on? That you see these as divisive?

FROM: No. I'm not saying that at all. I mean Democrats are going to have positions on all those issues and ought too. They are important issues. But the central issues that we are ought to take to the country...the big things that ought to define our party as we go into this national election ought to be how we're going to keep this country safe, how we're going to grow the economy, how we're going to tackle big national problems like Health Care. That's my point.

MOSS-COANE: Well, would you agree with that Harold Meyerson that if the Democratic Party has to come up with a winning formula that this is the formula: a safe America, a growing economy, and a more inclusive health care system?

MEYERSON: Well yes at that level of abstraction, I sure wood. I...I think that the Democrats...Al From is right the Democrats are at a disadvantage on the national security question. That gets a little trickier though when it gets down to therefore is the only candidate Democrats can support is a candidate who unequivocally backed the war in Iraq. I think that gets much more complicated and the fact that the rationale for the war continues to look shakier every day makes it trickier yet but there are ways to support national security and they go beyond the Democrats arguing for greater homeland security which I think is a) valid but b) doesn't really connect that much. I think that the party does have to be a...a party committed to dealing with the Al Qaeda of the world effectively. But with that said, I think there is some real differences from where I come from and where Al is on say the proper way to expand health insurance among Americans. I think there are some ambitious programs out there that a number of the presidential candidates have put forth, Congressman Gephardt, Senator Kerry, Governor Dean. That don't actually...I mean they're not in the classic model of government programs. All of them take of their premise that their working within the existing health care system and just enabling more Americans to get health care. I think that Democrats need a big identifying program like that because one of the problems of the party if you look at the polling is that people have a clear sense that the Republican Party stands for something. And the Democrats, for reasons that aren't I think fundamentally ideological but maybe psychological, don't strike many Americas for standing for anything very clear at all.

MOSS-COANE: Are you saying though that a more expensive health care system is a winning issue for the Democrats, Harold Meyerson?

MEYERSON: Yes, I am. I think anxiety that people have over their rising premiums, their rising co-pays, the cut back in...of available services. This strikes the majority of Americans who have health insurance and part of the problem that their health insurance is so shaky is because such a large number of Americans, in excess of 40 million and rising, don't have health insurance but there's got to be a way to pay for those people too and that raises everyone's cost. So, I think it's a major issue and it's certainly a major point of differentiation between all the Democrats and President Bush who really has no program at all.

FROM: Look...

MOSS-COANE: Go ahead Al From.

FROM: Let me just say a couple of things in response. The Democrats actually do have quite a lot to talk about on National Security. We have a little magazine that's not quite as big as Harold's called Blueprint Magazine and in the next edition we're going to have a piece that talks about who's military won the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. And it's the Clinton military. You know Vice-President Cheney when he was running for president said that whenever a president wins a war he ought to thank the military...his successor for the military. And he said that's why in the Golf War we thanked Ronald Regan. I think that president Clinton's probably still waiting for his thank you note. But the point is, the military transformation by President Clinton in the 90's is one of the reasons that we were so successful. Ah....

MOSS-COANE: (laughter) But the public doesn't know that.

FROM: Well, part of our challenge is to make that known and for us to engage in the debate on national security issues and drive the continuation of military transformation. But Harold made a really good point....

MOSS-COANE: Well you know what, I've got to jump in here only cause we're coming up on a break Al From and I want to hear that point after the break. And we are talking today about the Democratic Party. What is it? Al From joins us, he's the CEO and Founder of the Democratic Leadership Council. Also with us: Harold Meyerson, editor at large for the American Prospect that's a progressive political magazine. 1-888-477-9499. Taking a short break. We'll come right back. Stay with us.

-Commercial Break-

MOSS-COANE: And today on Radio Times: Is the Democratic Party having an identity crisis? And we're talking with Al From, founder and CEO of the Democratic Leadership Council, and Harold Meyerson, editor-at-large of the American Prospect. Wanted to open lines at 1-888-477-9499. Al From, you want to finish your point?

FROM: Yes. What Harold said that the Democratic Party...people have a hard time saying what the Democratic Party stands for. I don't think there is any question about that and that's one of the liabilities of not having the presidency. But let me just suggest, one of the reasons we're going through this debate now about who the nominee of the party is, is because once we have a nominee next spring we will have a single voice. We'll have several months to contract our views with President Bush's. I think President Bush will be weaker then than he is now. And, to me the most important part in our political system is this third year of the nominating process or cycle...the presidential cycle cause it's when you have the intra-party debates that lead to definition. And then you have a candidate that defines the party. And it's important incidentally for the candidate to do what President Clinton did in 1992 and what other candidates in the 80's who lost did not do which is impose their own platforms on the party so you have a clear definition and the candidate can run on his own platform.

MOSS-COANE: But are you also saying...you keep coming back to national security...that something like a health care reform is not a winning issue for the Democrats.

FROM: No, I didn't. I didn't say that.

MOSS-COANE: Ok.

FROM: But my view about how you run for president and win the presidency is that you don't just take advantage of your advantages you've also got to deal with your liabilities. And, in order to get to the table, in order for people to even consider voting for a Democrat we've got to cross the threshold on national security. Once we do that then people will say 'ok, we'll compare your economic ideas to President Bush's; we'll compare your plan for keeping health care costs down, improving quality, expanding coverage to President Bush's. But, if people don't think we'll keep the country safe, they'll say 'well, you know this is a nice guy or this is a nice woman running for president but they're not ready for prime time.'

MOSS-COANE: Let me get a response from you Harold Meyerson. And the lines have filled up and I do want to get to our callers. Is safety the bottom line issue for the country?

MEYERSON: Well, there's more than one bottom line issue. That said, since 9/11, the profile of that issue is much higher and Al From is right the Democrats do have to convince Americans that the safety of the nation will not suffer if a Democrat is in the White House. You know we're kind of back in a post 9/11 situation that was somewhat lifted from the Democrats in the 90's. Bill Clinton had what was electorally the good fortune of running when the cold war was over. And there was more focus in the '92 campaign on domestic issues where the Democrats play stronger. That's not a luxury right now that the Democrats have. Even if the national security crisis may be somewhat hyped. Nonetheless, the hype becomes part of the political reality. Again, I don't think this means that Democrats have to therefore be bellicose on Iraq or some such. But, it is a threshold issue. But as Al From said, that's playing defense. The Democrats also need an offense. And the offense is related to the performance of the American economy and what a miserable stewardship George W. Bush has had over the economy. And I think issues like health care and education and the environment where the administration has played a really pretty destructive force. So the Democrats need an offense and a defense.

FROM: No question that Democrats need an offense and a defense. But there is also an old saying in pro-football, which is probably not very far different that it is in party politics. Which is 'offense puts people in the seats and defense wins championships.' You need both. And the tendency, often, is to just forget about the defense.

MOSS-COANE: But interestingly you both have talked about the vulnerabilities of George W. Bush and yet he still enjoys pretty strong popularity.

FROM: Um, there's no...

MOSS-COANE: Al From.

FROM: No question that President Bush's approval ratings are high, even though no higher incidentally than President Clinton's performance approval ratings when he left. But, if you look at the underlying numbers for President Bush, in spite of getting the boost from the war and his so called leadership attributes, he's not doing very well on the economy. People are very worried about the economy. You know the personal attributes that have helped sustain President Bush's numbers will decline. The other thing that happens is when a president's numbers are high that means he's also getting a large amount of support from the other party and from independents. That is not necessarily reliable support a year from now.

MOSS-COANE: And, I've got to jump in here only because we have so many callers including Chris from Mount Holly. Good morning Chris. You're on Radio Times.

CHRIS FROM MOUNT HOLLY: Good morning.

MOSS-COANE: Good morning.

CHRIS FROM MOUNT HOLLY: My question, to both your guests, regards something that's happening in New Jersey right now today. We have a primary going on all throughout the state. And a name that many people in the Philadelphia area know, Diane Allen, who is a state senator, is now facing opposition from a conservative and she's not the only one. What I'd like to know is what you guys are going to do to face and stare down the out and out conservative wave that is sweeping the Republican Party. Diane Allen's a Republican and she's considered to be a liberal.

MOSS-COANE: Well, let me put that to you Harold Meyerson. And... when did liberal get such a bad name?

MEYERSON: Oh, well on this historically Al From is probably right. I would say coming out of the 60s when there were really two kinds of liberalism. There was the liberalism of the kind of universal program that applied to everyone in the 1930's in which Medicare continued the tradition of. Then there were programs that were directed by race and aid to particular segments of the poor, which had the unfortunate effect of alienating many folks in the white working class who said we're not doing so well, why are other folks getting aid. Now I supported that aid and I support that aid now. But part of the lesson of the 92 campaign, and Al From and I can probably debate which factor had more success in the 92 Clinton campaign, was a sense that he was out there to help sort of all segments of the potential democratic electorate and his pollster Stan Greenberg had sort of specialized in how you win back some of those voters with out forfeiting the democratic base, the voters of color within the Democratic Party, and so on. As for the Republican Party, the fact is that the Republican has generally shifted its ideological profile steadily to the right. And this I think, ultimately is a Democratic strength because...and Al From's diagnosis of the Democratic Party today, which I do agree with all of, is a pretty good diagnosis of the Republican Party in some ways. It's strong in many ways but it's regionally based, it's ideologically based, and nothing in the 2000 election suggested a terrific capacity to win over the center of the spectrum. So as the Republicans continue to be taken over by the far right, ultimately this is potential advantage for the Democrats if the Democrats ever get their act together.

FROM: Well, I...

MOSS-COANE: Go ahead Al From.

From: ...just want to say that I want to comment on a couple of things. One is that Harold is right: the Republican move to the right is a potential advantage for Democrats if we don't seek the center. We live in a world where whether we like it or not the default goes the other way. There was just a Gallop Poll on ideology and on social issues. I think there are 37 percent conservative and 23 percent liberal. On economic issues I think it was 43-15. So...we have to control a good part of the center. If 50 percent of the national electorate is moderate, 30% conservative, 20% liberal, if they win the conservatives and we win the liberals we have to win 60% of the moderates to break even and that's not just an academic thing. If you look at 2000 and 96, Clinton won them by 24 gore won them by 8: the difference between a tie and a substantial victory. The other question is one that Chris raised, which is really an important issue. And that is we are seeing in both parties, I believe more clearly in the Republican Party, a real polarization. One of the worst things that happens, I believe the worst political scandal in the country, bigger than campaign financing is the way that redistricting has locked in incumbents. Made the districts in bipartisan way in a sense safe for the party that's in there. Which means on the Republican side candidates tend to get challenges on the right on our side from the left. And, it sort of squeezes the voters in the center where most voters happen to be. In the last ten years the two parties have become more ideological. And the Republicans have become a more conservative party and we've have become a more liberal party in some ways. There's more party line voting, for example, in Congress. That's all a reflection of where the districts are and the loss of moderate Democrats mostly from the South in our party and moderate Republicans who were from New England. I think that's a problem for our political system to be honest with you. And, I think it's important for people in both parties to try to rebuild a political center. I happen to believe that if we do that it will be a progressive center and the Democrats will prevail. But I don't...I think this increased polarization is bad for the country and I don't think it's good for the Democratic Party.

MEYERSON: But I, I, I,

MOSS-COANE: Go ahead.

MEYERSON: I want to ad that I think the polarization is being driven largely by the Republicans. I mean there are more party line votes in Congress right now, but that's largely because the administration has chosen to go with a hard line conservative Republican policy and very few Democrats...

FROM: Yeah, but Harold there's another...there's another....

MEYERSON: ...of any stripe are willing to join them. I mean....

MOSS-COANE: But, but, there....

MEYERSON:Al From and I....

FROM: But there's another important factor.

MEYERSON: ...agree totally to the just enacted Bush tax cut. Although we probably differ on some of the things we'd like to see that money go for.

FROM: We agree on the opposition to the Bush tax cuts, probably. But the other factor in this polarization is that...you know when I grew up in politics in the '70s with Fred Muskie there was a... you always had a good number of Republicans you could count on working with. The parties have become...there used to be a whole host of districts in Congress that voted one way for president and the other for Congress. Now those districts are a handful. There were a handful of contested districts in the general election last year. All that means, is that more and more decisions in the political were made in party primaries. And that, whether we like it or not and I don't particularly, means that it gives the extremes...it just pulls the parties apart. But...

MOSS-COANE: But it seems to me though, I've got to jump in here just only cause we have so many callers to join us and I realize that each of these issues is worth probably an hours worth of debate, it seems that the Republicans or the Republican Party has been able to capitalize on whatever changes, divisions within the country because for the most part they control the White House, they control Congress, they control many of the state legislatures.

FROM: They have the majority of state legislatures and more state legislators than Democrats since any time since 1952.

MOSS-COANE: There you go. Let me just jump in here only because...thank you Chris...let me get George from Bethlehem to join us. Good morning, George, you're on Radio Times.

GEORGE FROM BETHLEHAM: I'm going to jump from the point that I originally started to make that is most of the older Democrats that I know seem to vote that way in spite of the issues. In other words, they think they're voting for the Democratic party of 20-30 years ago, which was much more conservative. And when you challenge them on individual issue or bring up points they literally don't believe the situation, which is why when they talk about putting out a liberal talk show host, I'm all for it. I think I'd love to have people see more of the issues and more of the party. I think the Democrats have moved further and faster to the left than Democrats to the right. The question that kills a Democrat when you ask them is how much is enough taxes, how much is the maximum that should be taken from us.

MOSS-COANE: And that's the question, I think, about big and little government. Harold Meyerson, do you want to respond to that?

MEYERSON: Well, uh – I mean, I would say, you know, most folks in Bethlehem aren't in the top couple percent, uh, of the American people which is where just about half of all the Bush tax cuts have, uh, gone. I mean, you know, there are tax cuts and there are tax cuts as we find out now looking at the Bush tax cut and noting that millions of uh – there's no credits for millions of children in families of modest means - and people, I suspect, making around what the median income is in, uh Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Uh – so, I mean, it's easy to say that tax cuts will trump a particular policy, but actually the polling doesn't show that. And I think what the

Democrats are, are waking up to is that if the debate is tax cuts versus nothing - are you for or against tax cuts – obviously, the pro-tax cut side, which is largely the Republican tax cut side – will win. But if its, do you want this tax cut, half of which goes to the wealthiest one percent – or do you want a comprehensive health – health insurance program that can help you on cost and that can insure the 40 million plus Americans who don't have health insurance, you'll get health insurance as the answer. So, a lot of this question, is based on, you know, compared to what – politics is about comparisons, not absolutes.

MOSS-COANE: Well, Al From, Al From, let me just toss in a question, because we've talked a lot about health care, and I wonder whether Bill Clinton ruined that issue for, for the Democrats

FROM: No

MOSS-COANE: ...because of, of his inability to come up with a program to meet the need?

FROM: No, Bill Clinton didn't ruin that issue for the Democrats. We have a sensible program and, uh, you know, circumstances change. But I want to go back to a couple points the caller made cause they're really important. The polarization is, is being driven, the Republicans, by the Republicans – the Republicans are a conservative party, they are a much more a conservative party than the Democrats are a liberal party. We've got polling data going back years and years to show that. If you ask Republicans whether, who they look to – moderate Republicans or conservative Republicans, on issue after issue – they look to conservative Republicans. Democrats look to moderate Democrats. So, but the second point is, look, we, we need a progressive tax system in this country, and we've always fought for it. It doesn't have to be confiscatory, and it shouldn't be. Uh, it should be a tax system, the right level of taxes, level of taxes gets the economy growing and gets everybody a chance to get ahead and makes the country more upwardly mobile. What I'd argue is that if we make this an election about whether you want higher or lower taxes, we'll lose. But if we make it an election on whether you want an economic policy that has the capacity to create 22 and a half million new jobs, get people out of poverty, raise incomes, uh, you know, get the country out of hoc, then we'll do just fine, and that's what we did in the 1990's.

MOSS-COANE: Well, today on "Radio Times" - wither(?) the Democratic Party. That's Al From, Founder and CEO of the Democratic Leadership Council, and we're also joined by Harold Meyerson, Editor at Large for the American Prospect, that's a progressive political magazine. More of your calls after this break.

(Commercial Break)

MOSS-COANE: And, today on Radio Times we're talking about the future and shape of the Democratic Party with Harold Meyerson and Al From. 1-888-477-9499. Harold Meyerson, let me go back to the 2000 election when Ralph Nader running as the Green Party candidate essentially said that there is no difference between the Republican and Democratic party, you might as well vote Green. Was he on to something?

MEYERSON: (laughter) Uh, no. Boy, was he not on to something. I mean, uh, I think George W. Bush has sobered up, actually, a number of Greens. I mean, there's been reports, there have been reports in the media of a number of Greens considering backing, backing a Democrat this time. Now, are there some similarities between the two parties? Well sure, and some of these things I would, I would very much object to. I mean, I think the Democrats don't differentiate – and I know I disagree with Al on this – the Democrats don't differentiate themselves enough from the Republicans on what used to be called the Washington consensus - which is sort of on a free trade vision of the world. There are, there, there a few things that the two parties have in common that, that would irk a liberal such as I. But, but, I think, and what's important, and I'm not just speaking for me, if you talk to many, uh, long-time liberals, or people on the left, um, George W. Bush has sobered a lot of these folks up, uh, I think, pretty, pretty thoroughly, uh, that the radical, the effective radical in American politics is the President of the United States. And, um., I think you'll find, actually, a good deal less of the third-party impulse in 2004 than you found in 2000.

MOSS-COANE: Well, and I don't mean to be a broken record, let me just put this back to you, Harold, and then we'll get some more callers to join us, though. Does that mean these hot-button issues, and these issues that really do divide Americans, like: abortion, prayer, the death penalty, gay rights and gun control – are those winning issues for the Democratic party, for a Democratic candidate?

MEYERSON: Well, you know, they consolidate the Democratic base, and they lose some votes elsewhere, and a good Democratic presidential candidate has got to be able to walk on two legs and somehow do that and, Bill Clinton in 1992, and, of course, in 1996, I think, absolutely did that. Do those issues help in a state like West Virginia, which the Democrats somewhat stunningly lost in 2000? No. They, they probably don't help at all. Uh, in West Virginia, you don't want to stress those positions, and you want to stress a kind of economic populism, which is one of the ways the Democrats have, have won states like that. But, um, a good candidate, and I think there are in the current Democratic field, several candidates who I have hopes for, should be able to deal with some of the cultural liberalism of the party, uh, but be cognizant that's not shared by all of the political universe that a Democrat needs to, uh, win an election.

MOSS-COANE: And who are you behind then, of this particular (unintelligible) of candidates...

MEYERSON: Well, I'm not, you know, I mean...I don't ...I don't ... I'm not behind a particular candidate. There's nobody here who I've, you know, uh, said, this is my guy, or in the case of Carol Mosley Braun, this is my girl, uh, but I think that there are candidates who have substantially progressive positions, who, um, you know, can be electable. And I..I think, you know, its funny, I also think there are a number of Democratic liberals who are pretty flexible as to which candidate gets in there because they understand the importance of this upcoming election. You're not going to find anyone saying, well, you find some people saying, but not as many as before, um 'I don't care if the candidate's electable, I just want somebody who stands for this, that or the other thing. I think the president has, has diminished the Democratic constituency that would say that.

MOSS-COANE: And, and Al From, I know that you want to say something.

FROM: Well, look, I mean, first of all, George Bush, the biggest problem with George Bush is he's not what he told us he was going to be. He said he was going to be a unifier, not a divider, he governs like he had a 75 per cent majority, not a split country. Ah, he said he was going to be a compassionate conservative – he got half of that right. He's been a very, very, real conservative. You know, as the tax deal to kids of middle-income families, you can go to our website, ndol.org today and read about that. But, in terms of the hot-button issues, the most important thing is expressing a tolerance for opposing point of views, points of view, its, and understand... and respecting people who have different points of view. We have a particular point of view, Clinton and Gore have the same point of view on abortion, on guns, on the role of government, but yet, among people who agreed with us, Clinton and Gore ran exactly the same – Clinton in '96 ran way ahead of Gore among people who disagreed with us. It's how you talk about them. It's how, you know, Clinton said abortion ought to be legal, safe and rare. He was strongly pro-choice, but what he said to people who were pro-life by saying that was, we don't, you know, we respect your, your point of view, even if we disagree with it. You know, we believe in gun safety in the Democratic party – that's a big issue in a state like Pennsylvania, but you can talk about guns without, you know, by saying look, we agree people have a right to own a gun, but with rights come responsibilities and that's why we shouldn't have guns in the wrong hands and we all have a responsibility to make sure that doesn't happen. The point is, you can talk about those issues in ways that doesn't have to divide the country. If you do that, then, you don't get the focus on those issues, you get them on the focus on the issues that cut for us.

MOSS-COANE: Well, and can you fit those issues, fit those ideas on a bumper-sticker? That's often the difficulty on a campaign is, is getting the sound bite that talks about the complexity that you're referring to but, but and speaks to the issues and concerns of the American people?

FROM: Well, legal, safe and rare was a perfectly bumper-sticker way to talk about abortion, which seemed, you know, if you looked back at the exit polls, Clinton won a good part, he won almost everyone that was pro-choice and won a good part of the pro-life vote. The, so the answer is yes, but the most important thing about a campaign for presidency, it's about the direction of the country. You've got to get the big things right, and the big things, you know, the big things are: keeping the country safe, growing the economy, making sure that everyone has the chance to get ahead, uh, making sure the country has good health, has education, the environment's clean, I mean those are the big things. And, you know, that we have an energy policy that doesn't keep us dependent on people who may want to destroy us, I mean, look there are a lot of big issues. You talk about those issues, and I, I'm confident that any one of a number of the candidates running for president on our party, when he gets one-on-one with George Bush would be able to make the argument

MOSS-COANE: Let me get Elaine from Morrisville to join us. Good morning, Elaine, you're on Radio Times.

ELAINE FROM MORRISVILLE: Hi, I agree with what was just said about the big issues, um, but isn't the number one big issues as far as getting a Democrat elected in 2004 going to be voter turn-out? The people that are most hurt and de-politicized by Bush's uncompassionate

conservatism are the people that aren't going to vote and shouldn't the Democrats be doing something unifying now behind a huge get-out-the-vote campaign?

MOSS-COANE: Elaine, let me put that to Harold Meyerson. It's a good point we haven't really talked on about what is the Democratic party doing to energize some of the disaffected voters, Harold?

MEYERSON: Yeah, absolutely. Your caller's exactly right. You know, there's a multiplicity of ways Democrats lose elections. They, they can lose, uh, for some of the reasons Al From sights. But, you know, there have also been some disastrous congressional elections in 1994 and also in 2002 where, um, the Democratic *base* collapsed. And, uh, the turn-out was such that a lot of hard-core Democratic constituencies were under represented at the polls. So, uh, the Democrats, the Democrats can lose either way, or both simultaneously, they have a genius for this. And, uh, there are, there are efforts, and one of the ongoing challenges to the Democratic party is getting higher, higher voter turnout out of folks who, if they were to vote, would vote Democratic and there isn't, among other things, an effort underway in Washington as sort of a response to changes in the campaign finance laws, uh, that some unions are, are funding. The unions have done a pretty good job, pretty much since John Sweeney became president of the AFL-CIO in 1995, of mobilizing their own members and getting them to the polls. That, I think is the single success, in fact, of the Sweeney tenure at the AFL/CIO. Now, the person that was the political director of the AFL/CIO in the Sweeney years, Steve Rosenthal, is setting up an organization that would, would try to use those techniques and put a lot of money into mobilizing, as it were, the non-union part of the..

FROM: Look...

MEYERSON: of working-class America, of black voters (unintelligible)

FROM: Let me just say...

MOSS-COANE: Yeah, hold on, hold on one second because I just want to thank Elaine for calling in and very briefly, if you don't mind, Al From because I do want to get Dee from northeast Philly to join us.

FROM: Ok, but let me just say that, of course we ought to try to get our vote out as much as we can. Efforts that try to get only one part of the vote out and don't have a response on the other side are often very difficult. If we win the heart of the middle-class voters, people who used to be the core of the Democratic party, we'll do just fine. We should try to get our vote out, we should do everything we can to get it out, but you also gotta go hunting where the Ducks are and you gotta get the voters that are voting because there the most, the people that are most likely to vote again.

MOSS-COANE: But are you, are you saying, wait, wait, wait...

(Cross Talk)

MEYERSON: But these are not either/or's, the Democrats need to do both, or, or

FROM: Right, absolutely. Nobody argues with that.

MOSS-COANE: Ok, let me get Dee from northeast Philadelphia to join us this morning on "Radio Times". Hi Dee, go ahead.

DEE FROM NORTHEAST PHILADELPHIA: Yes, good morning. I was at a luncheon last fall with Hillary Clinton and I figured this is an ample time for me to hit the politician up, so, I said, you want to support president Bush, because, you know, we knew we were going to war, activate the draft, have your sons and daughters enlist. They don't want, they see me coming, they walk away from me. Why don't they want to address this issue?

MOSS-COANE: Dee, I'm a little confused, are you saying that, that bringing back the draft would be a winning issue for the Democrats?

DEE FROM NORTHEAST PHILADELPHIA: Yes, because we have friends on both sides of the party, young, old, and they all agree...

MOSS-COANE: Really?

DEE FROM NORTHEAST PHILADELPHIA: ...what are they afraid of?

MOSS-COANE: Well, Al From, is this a winning, a winning issue?

FROM: Well, As Dee may know or not know, the DLC's cornerstone issue was national service. That led to Americorps, and the original plan was to be both military and civilian. I personally believe in universal service, I think it is, I think we all have obligations of citizenship. I mean that's what John Kennedy talked about, its part of the great Democratic tradition. It ought not just to be the military draft, it ought to be for men and women, if we're going to do it, it ought to be men an women, and it ought to be civilian or military. But I do believe there is something to be said for having every person as a right of citizenship, have a responsibility to give something back to his or her community.

MOSS-COANE: Interesting. Dee, thanks for calling in. And , actually, what I see on the screen is "Democrats are wimps". That's what I thought she was going to say. But let me put something to you, Harold Myerson, and this is me describing Tony Auth's picture in today's Philadelphia Inquirer, I will do my best, he's our political cartoonist....

MEYERSON: Right.

MOSS-COANE: ...at the Philadelphia Inquirer and it says "Democrats in Oz". He's got three donkeys impersonating the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion. Uh, the scarecrow's saying "If I only had a brain", the Tin Man is saying "or heart" and the Lion is saying, "or courage". And what Tony seems to be saying is the Democratic party are a bunch of wimps!

MEYERSON: Well, they have a brain, and they have a heart. I would say it's the cowardly lion question that, that looms. And some of the exasperation of the Democratic base really isn't ideological at all. It's, it's just noting, as Donna Brazille has noted, that the Republicans seem to play hardball, and the democrats seem to play softball. And, for instance, the, ah, after all the non-sensical stuff the Republicans raised about Travelgate and Filegate and all this stuff, then you have the Republican leader in the House of Representatives, Tom Delay, um, trying to enlist the Homeland Security Department for a purely political function of finding some Democratic legislators so the Republicans can reapportion Texas yet again, and the Democrats are largely silent on this as they've been silent on this as they've been silent on the Republicans when they delivered vicious attacks against Tom Daschle, um, I, as I said before, I think some of the Democratic problem is less ideological than it is psychological. They've been cowed. They've been cowed by a – a right-wing electronic media, not so electronic, it's more than electronic. Uh, and some sort of just basic impulses just don't seem to be there anymore, which I think a lot of the Democratic voters find very frustrating.

MOSS-COANE: Well, Al From, is it time to play hardball?

FROM: Absolutely. The late Dulles Long of Louisiana actually said this in Philadelphia at the mid-term convention in 1982. He said the Democratic party needs the compassion to care and the toughness to govern. We have the compassion to care, we always need to, what we need to always demonstrate is we have the toughness to govern – that is, both the toughness to take on the Republicans, to, you know, to play hardball with the Republicans but its also the toughness to do the right thing even when some of our own constituencies don't want to do it.

MOSS-COANE: I wonder too, Harold Myers and we're almost out of time, whether you think the country has gotten more conservative in the last couple of years.

MEYERSON: Uh, I don't. I think the-the response to 9/11 has raised national security, you know, concerns about national security to a level that it, it clearly wasn't at in the 1990's. I don't think that's necessarily conservatizing, though I do think Republicans had a certain advantage during the cold war, and this may give them a certain advantage now. But on issues like, uh, people favoring better education, better environmental protection, understanding the need for, uh, really beefing up health security and health insurance coverage in America, uh, I think those, those are there, and, you know, there's always a split in America between, uh, a public that just left to its own devices will say, ok we're ideologically more conservative, but then, then on real bedrock issues of how the economy works and what their lives are like, they opt for the more, the Democrats kind of, kind of program.

MOSS-COANE: And Al From, I read some where that the Democratic Leadership Council's behind Lieberman? Is that correct? We're almost out of time.

FROM: No, the Democratic Leadership Council can't endorse candidates. In fact, people at the DLC are helping all candidates. I just want to say...

MOSS-COANE: Very quickly.

FROM: ...that the Democratic party under Franklin Roosevelt built the greatest military in the history of the world, won World War II. John Kennedy's platform went 19 sections before it talked about anything but national security. This is a party that has defended freedom, knows how to defend freedom, and all we have to do is tell people that, we're also the party that has been the party of most of the social and economic progress of the 20th century.

MOSS-COANE: I've got to end you there, Al From. I'm sorry its just the clock tells me we're out of time and I thank you, Al From, and you Harold Meyerson for joining us.