

READERS' LETTERS

Democratic Party's values should embrace middle ground

By reading the front-page article in this past weekend's Daily News entitled "Shades of Blue," I learned that one of the Democratic Party's core principles is "women's choice." The article also quoted the chairwoman of the Middletown Democratic Town Committee as stating that legislators who are "against women's choice" are "just not Democrats." ("Women's choice," of course, is a code phrase for "abortion," a word that those who support abortion rights apparently find repugnant.)

Does that mean that the president of the state Senate, M. Teresa Paiva Weed, is not a real Democrat? She has always, to my knowledge, stood against expansion of abortion rights in Rhode Island.

Does that mean that Lou DiPalma, one of the most principled and widely respected legislators in the Statehouse, is not a real Democrat because he "leans left on fiscal matters but right on social issues?"

The other issues mentioned as Democratic values — economic policies helping low-income workers, gun control, even free tuition at public universities — are in fact supported by most Democrats (and the first two by many moderate Republicans). But the article had a curiously narrow viewpoint. It did not

even mention other issues heavily supported by Democrats and not so much by Republicans: concern for the environment, immigration reform, protection of minorities, the growing disparity between rich and poor, and affordable housing and health care.

I have a suggestion for the Rhode Island Democratic Party. The fact that the Republican Party has swung far to the right in the wake of President Donald Trump's victory does not mean that the Democrats should swing just as far to the left. That just opens up a big hole in the middle, which will lead many voters to react to the Democrats, hold their noses and vote Republican, or just stay home on Election Day.

Of course, holding extremist political views can give a sense of moral superiority, which may be gratifying to the individual and fellow believers but not best for the party. If the goal is to build a robust political party and win future elections, look for what is good or at least reasonable in opposing views, and settle on some middle ground.

That way the firebrands can keep their torches burning while working toward a palatable (i.e., broadly liberal) government that is more likely to adopt their views.

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N.D.N 3/16/17