



Exclusive to OpEd News:

OpEdNews Op Eds 5/7/2025 at 3:46 PM EDT

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At a family-and-friends dinner in Winter Park, Florida over the holidays with 28 attending, conversation was nonstop about the flaws of both the Republican/Trump and Democratic approaches to the current administration actions and the 2026 congressional midterms. Some new and insightful points came forward:

For the Republicans, it's not just Trump who needs a GOP intervention on reversing the extreme actions on tariffs, the markets, the economy, and program benefit cuts, including Social Security, health care, jobs in many critical federal areas, but House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), too. If Johnson wants any leadership job in the next congress, assuming the House flips-- a real possibility given the current backlash to tariffs-- he must recognize the problem of the House's acquiescence. It's normal to have a congressional election reversal against the President's party. Even President Obama acknowledged a "shellacking" in Congress in the first off-year election (2010) that faced him.

Regarding the other side of the Capitol, Senator John Thune (R-SD), not Trump's choice for Senate Leader but who won none the less, at least somewhat protected the Senate institutions by insisting to Trump's chagrin that there were cabinet nomination hearings with all points of view, even though the votes were pre-ordained. Thune also allowed a Senate floor vote on Congress's tariff power, and the Senate vote blocking the White House passed by three votes. However, Johnson has blocked it in the House by changing the "date" and absurdly saying Trump's "emergency" power is not a single day but the whole rest of the year, bypassing the law by saying that it is all during one long legislative "day". So the vote to block the tariffs was itself blocked by Johnson's sleight of hand. Few are aware that Congress was ready to block the tariff policy that Federal Reserve Board Chair Jerome Powell said April 16 was likely to cause an economic downturn in jobs and a rise in inflation.

Regarding the Democrats, it's frustrating to constantly hear the drumbeat on television about the "feckless Democrats" and "lack of leaders". Even The Wall Street Journal [urges](#), "Snap out of it, Democrats." Hardly. The Zoom meetings of DNC Chairman Ken Martin, House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer tell a different story. There are ongoing actions and strategies for recruiting hundreds of lawyers and supporting mostly winning court cases; creating a network of 4000 candidates from top to bottom in the making for 2026. Additionally, the rallies,

demonstrations, and town meetings have generated enormous local and national press coverage regularly and, according to recent polling, have shifted American perception over Trump's handling of the economy. A Reuters [poll](#) recently showed 57% of Americans oppose his tariffs.

But here's the question: Will Democrats successfully capitalize on this frustration or end up dropping the ball like they did in the 2024 election? Three weeks before the election, Harris had a 2.4-point national lead in the [polls](#), 48.5% to 46.1%. This would [slip](#) to 1.8 points, 48.2% to 46.4%, two weeks before. Finally, in the last week of the election, Trump overcame Harris's slight 49.2% lead to 47.7%, according to an average of 13 national [polls](#). Part of this success can be attributed to Trump's aggressive negative campaigning. His rallies, like the Madison Square Garden event, played on people's fears with the baseless claim of Haitian migrants eating pets. By contrast, former Vice President Harris was less aggressive, adopting a softer "Kumbaya let's all work together" platform. Guess which worked.

Democrats had also dropped the ball earlier during the January 6 congressional committee hearings. The coverage of the witnesses and evidence led to them rising 10 points over Trump. Then Democrats went stone silent, while Trump fought back, ignoring the potential for negative fact-based campaigning.

Now, that seems to be changing. On "Morning Joe", former Sen. Claire McCaskill said the perception is strong that "Democrats aren't messaging enough, aren't out there enough, aren't doing enough." She asked Democratic firebrand Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), "What do you do about it?" Warren responded, "Tell your story." Also, "Never underestimate the power of organizing."

While Democrats are now on the offensive, it remains to be seen whether their new strategy will be enough to win over voters or if Republicans will win the day and reverse the current polls.

On that question, the Orlando family-and-friends gathering "jury" was out.

Robert Weiner was a spokesman in the Clinton and Bush White Houses and spokesman/senior staff for Reps Claude Pepper, Ed Koch, John Conyers, Charles Rangel, Sen. Ted Kennedy, and 4-Star Gen. Barry McCaffrey. Khel Gordhan is a senior policy analyst at Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions For Change Foundation.