

In the House, Everything New is Old Again

In late November, Democratic members of the US House of Representatives met to begin choosing their leadership for the 116th Congress, which convenes on January 3.

The party's endorsed candidate — although not a shoo-in — for Speaker of the House is former House Speaker (until her party lost the chamber in 2010) and current Minority Leader (since then), 78-year-old Nancy Pelosi of California, in Congress since 1987.

The incoming Majority Leader is former Majority Leader (until his party lost the chamber in 2010) and current Minority Whip (since then), Maryland's 79-year-old Steny Hoyer, in Congress since 1981.

The incoming Minority Whip is former Minority Whip (until his party lost the chamber in 2010) and current Assistant Minority Leader (since then), 78-year-old South Carolinian Jim Clyburn, in Congress since 1993.

Notice a trend? House Democrats are raiding the Smithsonian's dinosaur exhibits to fill their leadership positions. They're tapping some younger faces for a few less powerful leadership positions, but the old guard — the politicians who lost Congress in 2010 — are simply stepping back into power as if the last eight years never happened.

But those eight years DID happen, and to the extent that Democratic gains in the House can be ascribed to a "blue wave" in last month's midterms, said "wave" was as much a response to the abject failure of the Democratic Party's leadership during those eight years as a reaction to Republican misrule and the ascent of Donald Trump.

These are the same party leaders who relentlessly pushed Hillary Clinton's failed presidential campaign on a party rank and file who had begun taking a serious look to the left, arguably handing the White House to Trump two years ago.

These are the same party leaders who supported "middle of the road" establishment candidates in midterm primaries across the country versus a new crop of "democratic socialist," or at least "progressive," insurgents who did surprisingly well given that they had to fight their way past their own party's establishment before confronting their Republican opponents.

As a partisan Libertarian, I'm not one to give ideological or policy advice to Democrats of either party faction. They believe what they believe, however wrong-headed those beliefs may be.

As an interested onlooker, however, I have to offer a strategic "is the party establishment

nuts?” to this.

Given an opportunity — even arguably a mandate from their voters — to change things up, the party establishment is doing the same old thing again while apparently anticipating different results.

That approach doesn't bode well for Democrats' 2020 prospects in Congress or for the White House. It might, however, bode well for change and for freedom.

America's two largest political parties are tearing themselves apart in different ways — the Republicans by abandoning any pretense of actually believing their own “smaller government” guff, the Democrats by refusing to drag themselves forward in time out of the Reagan era.

Perhaps voters will look to the Libertarian Party, the Green Party, or the Reform Party for the changes the dinosaur parties keep promising to give them and then failing to deliver.