

OPINION

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Should the Democrats retain Pelosi as speaker of the House?

AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California is cheered by a crowd of Democratic supporters during an election night event.

PRO: House Democrats don't need to replace Pelosi with a stronger progressive

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — The modern speaker of the House is not solely the ideological leader of the majority party; nor is he or she simply a presiding officer guiding floor proceedings.

Rather, the position requires leadership in and across the institutional, legislative, and electoral arenas. Nancy Pelosi remains the Democrat best suited to fulfill that role.

First, the speaker leads the House of Representatives as an institution within a system of separated powers.

Nancy Pelosi has 30 years of House experience, including service on the powerful appropriations and intelligence committees and as whip to her predecessor as leader, Dick Gephardt.

Her time in Congress has spanned six presidents and all manner of unified and divided government. Pelosi has the institutional knowledge and experience that a challenger would almost certainly lack, along with an appreciation of the sharing of power that defines our fragmented national government.

This is especially vital in a House that must work with and be a check against a president who has little regard for history and norms.

Second, the speaker possesses the responsibility of shepherding important bills through Congress and into law. Pelosi is widely lauded as a proficient legislative tactician and wrangler of votes.

In her first term as speaker, with Republican President George W. Bush from 2007 to 2009, Congress passed significant lobbying reform, a major farm and energy bill, and several measures to address the financial crisis.

In the first two years of the Obama presidency, Pelosi played a significant role in getting the president's signature legislative achievements over the finish line, including the Affordable Care Act, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the 2009 fiscal stimulus, Dodd-Frank, and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" repeal.

Many of Pelosi's progressive challengers cite the issues addressed by these bills as cornerstones of their new agenda, yet Pelosi herself achieved tangible results.

Third, modern speakers have taken the

lead in helping their parties win and maintain majorities. While detractors may point to the Democrats' eight-year stretch in the minority, Pelosi did preside over the party's initial return to power in 2006, before Barack Obama became the face of the party.

In her time as party leader, Pelosi has excelled as a fundraiser, raking in millions in campaign contributions, without which many of her would-be challengers would have never made it to Washington.

The Nov. 6 elections also made it apparent that the progressive wing of the party may not be the key to majority status in the House.

While outspoken progressives grabbed the headlines, the Democrats owe much of their actual seat gain to moderate victories in purple suburbs.

Achieving and maintaining the House majority requires party leadership that is willing to forego ideological litmus tests and provide some latitude to moderate members, as Pelosi did with the red-state Democrats who rode Obama's coattails to Washington in 2008.

A "big tent" may not excite liberals who want to see significant change, but that approach is often necessary for a congressional party seeking majority status.

Thus, Nancy Pelosi's experience and savvy make her the right choice for speaker in 2018, and such a pick would not preclude the possibility of fresh Democratic leadership in the future.

As Pelosi herself has indicated, she can navigate the troublesome waters of divided government now, while the party grooms a new class of leaders.

As of this writing, those members who expressed a willingness to vote against Pelosi as speaker have not backed an actual challenger. The 2020 elections have the potential to deliver Democrats unified government and the opportunity to enact a more progressive agenda, but the party does not yet live in such a world.

Matthew T. Harrigan is adjunct lecturer in the Department of Political Science at Santa Clara University.



MATTHEW T. HARRIGAN

CON: Rep. Pelosi bad for Democrats but worse for America

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, Ill. — Rep. Nancy Pelosi has been dreaming of returning to her role as the speaker of the House of Representatives for more than seven years. It appears she's finally going to get her second chance — and Americans everywhere should be nervous.

As speaker, Pelosi presided over some of the worst years in modern American history.

While President George W. Bush often gets most of the blame, and unfairly so, for the 2008 economic crash, few remember Democrats had been running Congress for nearly two years leading up to the recession, when Pelosi was the party's most prominent and vocal leader.

It was Pelosi, along with other Democratic leaders like former Rep. Barney Frank, who routinely called for reducing home lending standards to achieve political goals — directly contributing to the eventual collapse of the financial market.

And according to former Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission member Peter Wallison, Pelosi orchestrated what essentially amounts to a cover-up to hide the government's role in the crash.

Even worse, Pelosi and her Democratic colleagues attempted to fix the disaster they were partially responsible for by wasting billions of taxpayer dollars on a horrible stimulus package.

The Pelosi-backed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act cost more than \$800 billion, and according to analysts at the American Enterprise Institute, George Mason University's Mercatus Center, Congressional Budget Office and many more, it produced few meaningful results, as evidenced by the fact unemployment rose dramatically in the wake of its passage.

Economist Peter Ferrara, my colleague at The Heartland Institute, analyzed every economic crash and recovery over the past century, and found the Obama-Pelosi policies of 2009 and 2010 created the slowest economic recovery since the Great Depression.

Pelosi's failures aren't limited to economics, either. She was also one of the

chief advocates of the Affordable Care Act, perhaps the single worst piece of health care legislation in American history.

Not only did the ACA force millions of Americans out of health insurance policies they liked — after being promised repeatedly that wouldn't happen — it also subjected tens of millions of families to skyrocketing health insurance premiums and deductibles.

Premiums doubled from 2013 to 2017, and HealthPocket reports the average deductible for an Obamacare Bronze family plan is a whopping \$12,186 — well beyond what most people can afford to spend in the midst of a health care crisis.

Even after all of these failures, it appears Nancy Pelosi hasn't learned her lesson. She's still saying the best way to solve America's health care challenges is to repair Obamacare — an impossibility, since it's fundamentally and hopelessly flawed. And she wants to impose costly renewable-energy mandates in a ridiculous

attempt to control the weather and battle climate change.

Pelosi has mocked and ridiculed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, ignorantly referring to the thousands of dollars in extra cash delivered by the tax reform package to millions of American families as "crumbs."

And she's called for raising taxes on job creators to fund her numerous proposals to expand the size and power of government — a strategy that would stunt economic growth and increase unemployment.

Pelosi's policies have failed over and over again, which is why House Democrats took one of the biggest political beatings in U.S. history during the 2010 elections, when Democrats, in a single year, went from enjoying a 79-seat advantage to being stuck with a 49-seat deficit.

Pelosi's policies offer Americans absolutely nothing they haven't already seen and rejected before: more regulations, higher taxes, less freedom, and fewer health care options. It's time for something better.

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