

# OUR ONE-PART DEMOCRACY

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Watching both the health care and climate/energy debates in Congress, it is hard not to draw the following conclusion: There is only one thing worse than one-party autocracy, and that is one-party democracy, which is what we have in America today.

One-party autocracy certainly has its drawbacks. But when it is led by a reasonably enlightened group of people, as China is today, it can also have great advantages. That one party can just impose the politically difficult but critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the 21st century. It is not an accident that China is committed to overtaking us in electric cars, solar power, energy efficiency, batteries, nuclear power and wind power. China's leaders understand that in a world of exploding populations and rising emerging-market middle classes, demand for clean power and energy efficiency is going to soar. Beijing wants to make sure that it owns that industry and is ordering the policies to do that, including boosting gasoline prices, from the top down.

Our one-party democracy is worse. The fact is, on both the energy/climate legislation and health care legislation, only the Democrats are really playing. With a few notable exceptions, the Republican Party is standing, arms folded and saying "no." Many of them just want President Obama to fail. Such a waste. Mr. Obama is not a socialist; he's a centrist. But if he's forced to depend entirely on his own party to pass legislation, he will be whipsawed by its different factions.

Look at the climate/energy bill that came out of the House. Its sponsors had to work twice as hard to produce this breakthrough cap-and-trade legislation. Why? Because with basically no G.O.P. representatives willing to vote for any price on carbon that would stimulate investments in clean energy and energy efficiency, the sponsors had to rely entirely on Democrats — and that meant paying off coal-state and agriculture Democrats with pork. Thank goodness, it is still a bill worth passing. But it could have been much better — and can be in the Senate. Just give me 8 to 10 Republicans ready to impose some price on carbon, and they can be leveraged against Democrats who want to water down the bill...

The only way for us to match them is by legislating a rising carbon price along with efficiency and renewable standards that will stimulate massive private investment in clean-tech. Hard to do with a one-party democracy.

The same is true on health care....

The G.O.P. used to be the party of business. Well, to compete and win in a globalized world, no one needs the burden of health insurance shifted from business to government more than American business. No one needs immigration reform — so the world's best brainpower can come here without restrictions — more than American business. No one needs a push for clean-tech — the world's next great global manufacturing industry — more than American business. Yet the G.O.P. today resists national health care, immigration reform and wants to just drill, baby, drill....

