

COMMUNITY VOICES

Obscure word in Democrats' lexicon

By PAUL CROCE

Eyes blink, and from the citadel of Democrats' souls lurks an air of disbelief. "Pinch me" they seem to say: "Is this real — or just a dream?"

The party faithful have been elated with the victories of Barack Obama and fellow Democrats across the country. But beneath the cheers, there is the hint of surprise. The land of Democrats had heard this odd little word used since Nov. 4. "We are not familiar with it in our land," I imagine them saying. "This word, so strange, so cheerful — the word 'w-i-n.'"

"It is so short. And it begins with W — we do not trust these kinds of words. And it does not explain much. In our land, we use words like 'ambivalent,' 'discourse,' and even 'rhetorical agenda.' But win? This is very difficult to understand."

Democrats have been more frank than Republicans in recognizing problems: in social injustices, in the economy, in the cruelties of war, in the environment. For years that made Democrats look depressing.

Republicans generally possessed an unquestioning enthusiasm for America's global military reach, an insistence on traditional morality, and an exuberance for free-market remedies for environmental and other social problems. This made Republicans seem certain and strong.

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Democrats counter not by opposing this enthusiasm (despite charges of socialism) but by turning down the full dose of Republican ideology. That moderation gave the Democrats a reputation for hesitancy and weakness — like the only spectators who keep their seats when the team scores. What often did not come through was that Democrats' moderation was true to the scope of the problems: the powerful scored the points while most of us remained spectators.

Republicans could inspire, but their very confidence gave them a knack for artful leadership, which sometimes slipped into mak-

ing us feel that we do not have problems. That seemed exciting — for a little while.

Even among Democrats, problems became things to complain about but not to expect that solutions ever could be achieved. That sometimes felt good — for a little while. It put them on the defensive, and did not inspire many victories. Democrats remember when their party would point to problems and still win. Democratic presidents from Franklin Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson used the tools of the presidency to persuade and the tools of government to create powerful agencies. They inspired hope using the tools of the time. These were the heroes, but most party members had come to assume that those days are long gone.

And now, back to "win." It was no dream. The Democrats really did win — and win big. They need to make it more than the thrill of the month, as exciting and historic as were the recent victories. Now the real-life challenge is to direct attention to problems without blinking, and still keep hopeful. The best, most enduring hope will come from the hope that tackles the problems, without distraction from them; and the key for making that win more than a fluke will emerge from translating the energies of complaints into the energy of action.

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