

Don Boyajian Stump Speech

As many of you know, my name is Don Boyajian, and I'm running to be the next representative for New York's 21st Congressional District. The reason I'm here, is to talk to you about the state of our country and our district—our focus moving forward as Democrats. Because although the last eight months have been exhausting, we've learned a lot from our fight. We've become aware of things that were only just coming into view during the 2016 election: forces that we are able to confront now. And they will become more clear the further we get into this presidency; there is a major problem that we need to address.

Right now, America is in a crisis that threatens our fundamental way of living. We are in a crisis whose consequences have been felt by every person in this room. And its effects have permeated to every aspect of our politics: our political parties reflect the status of our country. Because not only is America in crisis, but Democrats are in crisis. Republicans are in crisis. Now, being good Democrats, we strive to recognize the problem; we want to fix it. So we start with obvious questions like "What happened here? Why did it happen? What can we do to fix it?" and then we graduate to the more difficult ones: "If we solve the problem, how do we stop it from reoccurring?" After a while, it becomes natural to assign blame—first we criticize one another, then we condemn the other side. This is what allows us to briefly forget about our problems: there isn't any acrimony in watching the other ship sink.

But Republicans didn't cause our national crisis. They enabled it, but they didn't cause it. In fact, what we call our national crisis isn't what faces us every morning on the news or on social media. It isn't the man in the Oval Office—he's evidence of the crisis, but not its cause. No, the crisis we are suffering through is about us and the people who represent us. It's about the fact that the citizens in our district, and citizens across the country, are struggling, and it's about the fact that the men and women who are *supposed* to represent us are instead representing special interest groups and corporations—bodies of people that have no heads to hear us and no feet to let us know where they stand. The crisis that America faces right now, is that our politicians are working to ensure that we don't have an opportunity to stand for ourselves, no matter how hard we try.

The Democratic Party hasn't figured out how to address this crisis yet. They're trying. They're trying to give us better candidates and better talking points. They're giving these better candidates better slogans and better topics to focus on in speeches like this one: telling them to talk about the economy, about jobs. They're instructing our better candidates on how they should better talk to voters, how they should address organizations—the people in this room. But what we need isn't better communication; what we need is better action from our leaders, better solutions from our Party and our elected officials. We are spending too much time focusing on evidence of a crisis and not the actual crisis itself.

Here's an example of what I mean. The United States House of Representatives has 435 members, and only 27 of those members are from New York. This means is that more than 90 percent of our representatives have no ties to our state. Now normally, this would be fine—we *want* a diverse set of interests from our representatives. But this has become a problem in the era of big business. It's a problem when lobbyists have the ear of career politicians in Kentucky, and Wisconsin, and Texas. It's a problem that they can push our representatives to enact policy that affects you and me. It's a problem that politicians who have never met us, can determine whether the people in our district can work, where we can work, and how much we can earn. These politicians don't represent us. *They've never even taken a step past Manhattan.*

So the question that remains, is what can we do to fix this problem. Our side hasn't found the answer yet, but it hasn't been through lack of trying. It seems like everyone in the Democratic Party is looking for the solution to our economic concerns—the big idea that's going to fix everything. But what we haven't realized yet is that what we need isn't the *immaculate* idea. What we need is the simple solution, the elegant solution.

Because those are the solutions that actually change things.

When I was working as a legislative assistant in Congress, I saw these solutions up close. I worked with the people who crafted the Affordable Care Act, Climate Change Legislation, Wall Street Reform. And as exciting as those pieces of legislation were and continue to be, what we forget is how those bills were grounded in simple ideas: everyone should have healthcare, we should protect and preserve our planet, big companies and big banks are screwing the little guy. My time in Congress was marked by legislators and their assistants turning simple ideas into policy that transformed the lives of people around the country and the Democratic Party. And there is absolutely no reason why we can't do the same thing for our district.

We shouldn't have to suffer through sewage spills in Lake George. We shouldn't have to drive on deteriorating roads like The St. Lawrence highway, and we shouldn't have to continue enduring a widespread lack of cell phone coverage. We should be able work good jobs with good wages, and we should have fair shot of taking care of our families. These are simple ideas that will lead to solutions that will fix our infrastructure and our economy. They're going to help us continue to build our community. These are the sorts of ideas that will help us bring businesses back to the area, and they're going to give us the opportunity to do things the right way.

But this only works if we have someone in Congress fighting for us. Someone who knows this district and wants to see it succeed. I don't believe that what improves districts like ours are career politicians telling us what we need—we can see the effects of those kinds of politicians around us every day. The people in this district are aware of what's happening around us; more importantly, we can speak for ourselves. I believe that our community is going to be thriving again when we have someone in Congress who wants to work for our district. Who knows our citizens and is proud to be from our community. A representative who wants nothing more than to walk into the House Chamber and start putting pressure on those institutions that aren't working for us *now*. A representative who is ready to get to work on making our lives better.

My name is Don Boyajian, and I am running to fight for this district. I'm running to fight for you.

Thank you.