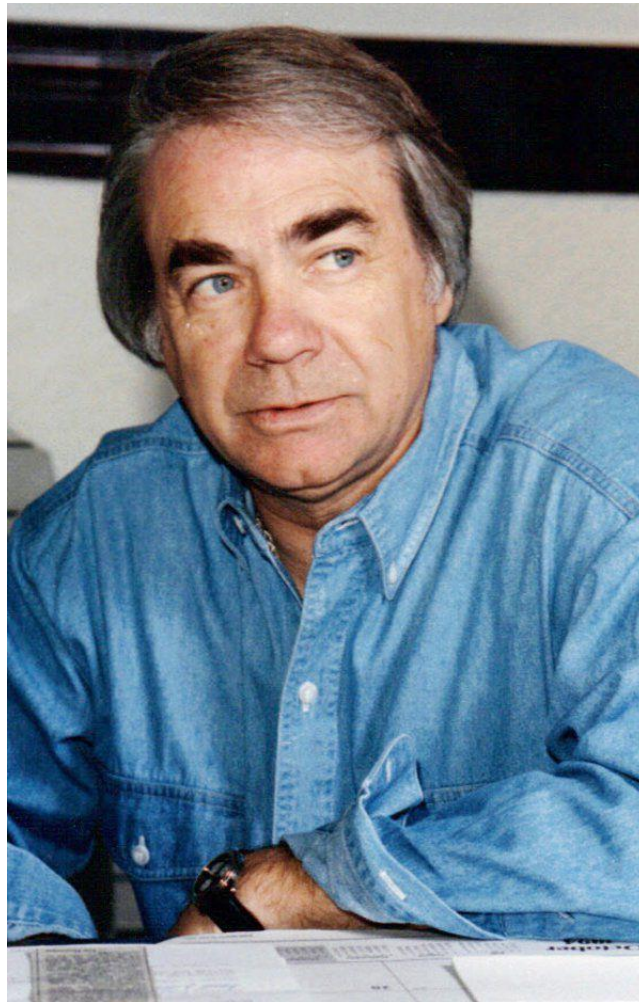


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Carl Golden: The Green New delusion

Daily Citizen-News Feb 12, 2019



Carl Golden

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What began as a slow but steady drift to the left has become a headlong and dangerous stampede to the ideological fringe as many high-profile Democrats — including several presidential candidates — embrace multi-trillion-dollar government programs with no way to pay for them while currying favor with the party's vocal progressive wing and its demands for a vast new social welfare agenda.

The relatively small band of activists behind the drive to the left has coalesced around a manifesto called the Green New Deal, an idea developed and promoted as a response to climate change, but which reaches well beyond weaning the nation off dependence on fossil fuels over the next decade.

While the plan with its bold and wide-ranging initiatives — government health care insurance for all, job and employee benefits guarantees, affordable housing, free higher education, among many other similar items — was designed to capture the imagination of the American people, its rollout was badly botched and embarrassing to those involved.

The presentation was so riddled with errors and conflicting points that its leaders spent days clarifying, correcting, explaining and engaging in damage control to restore credibility.

More harmful, though, was the depiction of the group as ill-prepared amateurs either unaware of the provisions of their own plan or baffled as to how to explain it.

Ridicule rained down on it and critics dismissed the entire venture as repeating wearisome far left-wing dogma, a mashup of impractical and unworkable ideas whose cost is so prohibitive as to be fantasy.

Led by freshman Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, supporters have designated the Green New Deal a litmus test for those seeking the presidential nomination. They make up with fervor what they lack in political insight and wisdom.

The odds of the platform winning approval in Congress are nonexistent, but House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, perhaps the shrewdest political mind in her party, quickly recognized the danger in the rush to embrace it.

Allowing the party to be defined as an out-of-control band of spendthrift socialists intent on massive tax increases and bankrupting the nation imperils both the chances of regaining the White House and the Senate, and retaining the majority in the House.

Pelosi was careful in her response, praising the "enthusiasm" of the plan's supporters and welcoming many of the ideas as apt subjects for discussion.

It was not an outright dismissal, but the subtext in her response couldn't have been more clear: Proceed at your own peril and without leadership support.

Because many elements of the plan are so vaguely presented — described in few words — while others are wildly out of the mainstream, they are open to definition in the worst possible light.

Handing President Donald Trump and Republican congressional candidates an opportunity to campaign on preserving and protecting American values and tradition while portraying Democrats as hellbent on destroying those values and tradition is potentially disastrous to Democrats in 2020.

Trump's Twitter account will overheat under a torrent of his customary sarcasm and derision while he seizes every opportunity to repeat his State of the Union speech pledge: "We will never become a socialist country."

Pelosi understands that Trump will drive the Democrats into a defensive corner, demanding its candidates justify spending hundreds of trillions of dollars on ill-considered and ill-defined social programs which go against the grain of American governance.

Climate change — a legitimate and worthwhile subject for political debate — will be overshadowed by an onslaught of criticism of such proposals as government-funded employment for anyone, complete with health insurance, vacation and pension rights, or phase out of internal combustion engine vehicles, or government guarantee of healthy food and adequate housing.

Large swaths of the electorate — potentially enough to swing partisan control of the Congress — will find the ideas indefensible and respond negatively to candidates who support them.

It won't matter that none of it was enacted or will ever be. Convincing voters that it is what the Democratic Party stands for will be sufficient, particularly if the party foolishly includes it in the 2020 platform.

Pelosi wants the 2020 election fought on friendlier terrain — a referendum on Trump and a political environment which led to her return to the speakership.

Should it become a contest between Trump with all his foibles and flaws and a Democratic Party comprised of wild-eyed radicals who will settle for nothing less than replacing capitalism with socialism, Pelosi is in line to become minority leader.

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