

The Organizers' Forum

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“Dialogue on Political Methodology”

-Held April 28-30, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois-

Note: *These notes are for informational purposes only and represent an effort to summarize what presenters presented and some participant discussion. Apologies are offered for any mistakes of fact or nuance, made not out of malice but due to human error.*

Introduction

The title of the dialogue did not say it all, but it was the kind of truth-in-advertising that only organizers could love. If you were going to turn up in Chicago for this discussion, it was clear from the ponderous weight of the title – this was going to be pros talking to pros at level of the intricate and the immediate.

And, that was the real bill of fare for the close to forty-five (45) participants and presenters (the largest dialogue yet for the Organizers' Forum!) who gathered in Chicago near Lincoln Park on the Lake at the Cenacle Retreat Center. The Organizers' Forum had pulled together the complete menu from the best in the field, so that organizers would end up when the dialogue was done with an excellent overview of what was really happening in political organizing and where it was going. This dialogue said something about the distance organizing and organizers have traveled in the last 30 years, and it also said something about the very nature of our times and what politics has come to mean to constituency based organizers in the shadow of the impending 2004 national elections.

For labor organizers, and most of the unions for whom they work, 2004 has come to mark a “do or die” struggle with many labor leaders defining a coming Bush Administration as a threat to the continued viability of the labor movement itself. The labor movement is at least alive now, if not well, and any forecast of continued active resistance and de-unionization by a centralized federal administration could well be the death knell of some institutions that are barely holding on now. In union halls and around conference tables all over the United States politics has become serious business in a way that would have been unknown a generation ago. Politics has gone from being the province of the political junkie and activist to a finely hewn organizing skill that organizers *must* have. Furthermore, politics has become one of the few mass-based activities regularly practiced by unions increasingly around the country. Members are in motion and the tasks have been broken down in the workplace with a total recognition that if the members are spreading the message, then the message is actually heard, and it leads to action, which means votes, and votes count, and organizers are mobilizing to put the numbers where they have to be in 2004. For union organizers the four corners of the fight are no longer on the factory floor – worker vs. boss -- but have spread out to link politics and organizing inextricably, if we are to survive and build power.

For community organizers recognition of the importance of politics represents a sea change in thinking over the last thirty years of work. Organizers often were trained at the old school where electoral politics was seen as divisive for the constituency; dirty because of the depth of the local political machines; and generally a distraction from the “numbers equal power” ideology that was assumed to be more powerful as a threat that one did not want to have to prove. Most organizations were c3 or c4 organizations, and though many organizers had long hours of seat time logged listening to their members and leaders argue about politics, it was not a required skill set except in organizations like ACORN, and few others. The dialogue offered an opportunity for community organizers often accustomed

to looking through the window at political work and its practitioners to come on in and sample the merchandise and ask what was really under the hood and how it all really drove from the showroom.

The 2004 national election was also an instigator behind this interest. The fact that talk of this campaign and its meaning were not simply an easily ignored phenomena this time around as they had been in the past when every 4th year between Labor Day and Thanksgiving something would be happening that many would almost not notice while they were getting the kids back to school and house ready for winter. This campaign followed the heartbreak of 2000 which confronted the very ideology of democracy that lies at the foundation of modern community organizing. Numbers categorically did not count. Democracy did not matter. The loser was the winner, because of an electoral college so arcane that few citizens really could claim to understand exactly how it worked and how it could be possible that you could get the most votes and not win an election. This was a contradiction in terms – and a complete organizing anomaly. Almost equally unsettling for many community organizers was the recognition that lacking majority support, the losers ruled with the arrogance of a mandate, rather than recognizing the reality behind the mirage.

Community organizers were in many cases still working for tax-exempt organizations so attention must be paid and care was kept, but they were reaching out to understand what was really happening. They had not necessarily caught the bug, but they wanted to understand the virus. They wanted to understand the complexity of the new laws on campaigning and financing to make sure of what they could – and could not – do. They wanted to be clearer about how to make sure everyone could vote and where they could get resources to ensure that their people were registered. Nicholas von Hoffman, the current writer and former organizer, has been famously quoted as re-evaluating his career as an organizer after being involved in registering tens of thousands in Chicago's South Side and then feeling like it didn't matter under Daly, but now organizers did not want to be caught with their people unregistered and sitting out in an election that could define the decade as clearly as the words etched out on a tombstone.

In Chicago these two streams of organizers came together and met a third wave that often surprised them, because these were political organizers who took their craft as seriously and thought about the issues and people as deeply, if not more so, than any organizer in the room. There was learning happening here! And, there were some great teachers.

As always, Barbara Bowen's summary notes detail the richness of the presentations, many of which posed hard questions and organizing challenges that will not soon be answered, including this November. Professor Green from Yale might have been singing to the choir in talking about the effectiveness of door-to-door and direct communication in organizing, but he was popping a lot of other bubbles about communication and persuasion and what one can measure that really works, regardless of how long some organizers might have thought of something as a favorite hammer in the toolbox. The discussion and polling on single women confronted many organizers' assumptions about where they hoped to find that the key to this and future elections might be right there where they worked every day in the workplace or community, and at one level it was, but it was bigger, jumped every bound, was multi-racial – including white for godsake – and, worst, still unorganized. Messaging, framing, 527's, McCain-Feingold, GOTV, all mixed up and thrown around hour after hour in a dialogue that would not seem to stop from turning nouns into peculiar verbs.

Nonetheless this was just what the organizers had ordered from this Forum – a way to turn an election into an action verb everyone could and find a right way to participate. At the

end of the dialogue we all knew we had been involved in something important where there was a lot learned. There was also an energy that found no outlet – organizers wanted to keep talking, but we had run out of time!

We are moving into new ground, and there is going to have to be a lot more said in the future by all of us about this. We were delighted to find the hunger, even if we could not fill it all at one sitting. The notes will give the reader a sense of the richness of the feast.

Let us know what you do with all of this and what questions we need to look at more closely in the future.

1. Cathy Duvall, “Independent Political Action”

-National Organizing Director, America Votes, Washington D.C.

America Votes—a newly formed 527 for the purpose of increasing voter registration, education and participation in electoral politics—brings together organizations working on a broad range of issues including the environment, civil and human rights, choice, education and labor. (a 527 is an organization exempt from tax under Section 527 of the IRS code as a “political organization”). By combining resources and research, these organizations will develop more targeted methods to reach out to voters on issues that they care deeply about in order to encourage greater voter participation.

Cathy began by saying that all we are doing is very important and crucial in this election year—there is so much at stake. It is a hopeful sign that there is such a united effort to fight for important issues and protect those things that we all care about. Cathy is optimistic about our efforts to prevail with our positive Agenda given a number of factors:

- Even though Bush has recently spent \$50 million in ads and publicity, he and Kerry are still tied in the battleground states.
- It is clear that our base is very motivated. The turnout was much higher than previous years for the Democratic primaries, there are numerous anti-Bush events continually happening, and our base is giving money. Progressives are giving to Kerry but they are also giving to progressive organizations.
- We are seeing in the polls what appears to be a stronger urge to participate within our constituency, which indicates that our efforts are getting a bigger bang for our buck. This highly motivated electorate has produced both money and people.
- In the wake of the new McCain Feingold law, progressive organizations have stepped up to the plate and are doing a large part of what the Democratic Party used to do, especially in the field.
- There is a new level of coordination and collaboration on the national and state level. Groups are sharing their technology and other resources. Polling is being done jointly. It is believed that this combining of efforts will prove to be greater than the sum of each of the different pieces.

Cathy explained that America Votes was created in July 2003 as a 527 when a number of non-partisan and non-profit groups and organizations came together to coordinate and cooperate on their voter contact work for this election year. These efforts are happening on both the national and state level under the banner of America Votes.

America Votes began its work with the assumption that this election is competitive, and also winnable. We see evidence of Bush’s favorable ratings fluctuating daily. The polls indicate that if the election were held today Bush would be at 51% and Kerry would be at 46% nationally, but in the 17 battleground states the race is even tighter (not including Nader). Here it is a dead heat or at most a 2 % point spread. Indications are that there is a

strong urge for change in the battleground states, especially on economic issues.

There is no denying that thousands and thousands of jobs have been lost on Bush's watch and this is to his disadvantage. He has a number of advantages, however. He can easily get on TV and he easily raises money and is saving it. We know that to be competitive we will need money in the first three months after the contested primaries. The Media Fund, MoveOn and the AFL-CIO are all considering media buys with similar messages in this post-primary season. The Democrats—because of the timing of the Primaries and also the National Convention—will have a longer campaign. This year the calendar benefits Bush. The spending will also benefit Bush as he raises millions more than Kerry.

It is important to focus on what it will take to win—that is, 270 electoral votes. The contested electoral votes in the 17 battleground states are 180 electoral votes. Some states that are unclear at this time include: Louisiana, Arkansas and Washington. The race is very tight in so many states which suggests that this year “field matters” more than ever.

We know from the last Presidential election with Karl Rove and the implementation of the Republican's “72 Hour Plan” that they are doing *our* playbook and that we have gotten rusty. They are relying more on issues, they are making more personal contacts, and they are trusting organizations that have credibility with potential voters to utilize the “credible messenger” approach to turn out votes. Massive and concerted door-to-door canvassing has traditionally been the hallmark of the Democrats but the Republicans are using these same tactics.

America Votes—which is now some 30 organizations representing 20 million members from labor, community and environmental organizations—meets every other week in Washington to assist in this ground operation. America Votes is working to consolidate and enhance the sharing of lists from all these organizations, and matching lists on shared files. America Votes has also been doing activist trainings, including focus groups, polling, messaging research, voter targeting and most recently “micro targeting” which compares polling data and market research to discover demographic factors such as age, gender, consumer information, etc. Work is also being done on communications. There will be an effort to combine efforts on billboards, cable TV, websites, door-to-door efforts, mail, etc. with an effort to deliver the same messages and therefore have greater impact.

America Votes has hired State Directors and is also coordinating State plans with the same organizations working on the national level. The goal is to work together on media and mail, hoping to reduce duplication and improve coordination. In the case of targeting immigrant voters, for example, there is an effort to be precise and make approaches not just to “Latino voters” for instance in Florida, but to also target the constituencies of Indian voters, Caribbean voters, Asian voters, etc.

What America Votes is doing in conjunction with ACT and other 527's is to figure out who is the best messenger for which potential voters. MoveOn, for example, has a constituency of 2.1 million, one-quarter of whom are in the battleground states. Of these, only 50-60% of them are registered to vote. It may be difficult logistically for them to actually register this one-quarter so Move-On may be ready to share their lists and have others on the ground take the lead in actually registering them because that is likely to be the most productive. MoveOn—with no office, no meetings, no democratic structure, and no staff—have shown themselves, however, to be very effective in moving their base in significant ways. Recently, in only a few days using email recruitment, they were able to raise \$ 750,000 in one weekend through a bake sale where some 15,000 participated

contributing baked goods and/or selling them.

Looking at the state of Ohio is illustrative of how a coordinated approach by progressive groups could make a real impact in the upcoming national election. The first step is to start with the number of votes needed to win the state--that would be 2.4 million. Beginning with labor, there was a 1.1 million turnout last time. If the democratic labor turnout could be increased by 6% that could mean 1.7 million votes from labor. Other constituencies become very important as well: it will be key to increase the non-union African-American vote by 297,000; it is assumed that the non-union Hispanic vote will stay the same, and it is hoped to increase the vote in white liberal precincts by 632,000. For Ohio, the messages will be strongest on jobs and education. The focus will be to look at targeted precincts, figure out who is not registered, and go to their homes and get them registered. In Southern Ohio there are plans to use a homemade video done by the Steelworkers which has proved to be a powerful persuasion tool.

Plans are proceeding for May 8th to be the Kick-Off day on Voter Registration—our goal will be to register 250,000 new voters through both volunteer phone banking and other voter contact work. An interesting new arena for volunteers has been the hosted cell phone housemeetings where volunteers gather at one person's house, bring their cell phone, and at the housemeeting use targeted lists of non-voters.

Sharing lists is a big part of what America Votes and the other 527's are doing and contributing to this effort. (Our work and our sharing is done with 501 (C) 4 organizations, not 501 (C) 3's). There are now four states up and running with operating files and lists that are being shared: Florida, Ohio, Minnesota, and Missouri.

It is exciting to see various groups stepping forward to take leadership in this overall effort to increase the progressive vote. Howard Dean's new organization—Democrats for America—has recently joined with America Votes and MoveOn, ACORN, and many others are stepping up to the plate to share and cross pollinate their work.

2. "The Legal Framework Under McCain-Feingold"

-Orrin Baird, Deputy General Counsel, SEIU Legal Dept., Washington D.C.

Orrin began by saying that the practical effect of the McCain-Feingold legislation is that it has virtually banned soft money from the major political parties. The Democrats and Republicans will continue to fundraise but it virtually will all be for hard money. This will mean that grassroots political activities by non-party organizations will be much more important to this election year's outcome than what we have seen in the past.

Setting the spending limits and parameters of what parties cannot do in accepting monies from organizations, corporations, and individuals are three sets of laws:

-The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) for federal elections

-State Election laws for State and Local elections

-Internal Revenue Code for both (sections 501 (C) and section 527)

What is most determinative is the federal law and there is a big difference—depending on the tax status of your organization—as to what kinds of activities you can undertake in elections. That is, if you are a 501 (C) 3 you are much more limited than a 501 (C) 4 (labor unions are in this latter category). For purposes of the law, what is addressed includes grassroots political activity that has to do with an organization and its various means of communicating with the public. The law regulates the money you spend to communicate in these and other ways: leaflets, pickets, radio & TV ads, newsletters, phone calling, GOTV and voter registration. It is important to always ask yourself three

questions to help determine if you are abiding by the law:

1. Who am I communicating with?
2. What am I saying?
3. How am I paying for it?

Determining who and what audience you are attempting to communicate with is very important. If you are communicating with your members (as opposed to the general public) you have much more leeway to spend and say what you want. If you are communicating with your members you may communicate on any topic or advocate the election or defeat of a candidate and you may use your treasury's soft money.

When you are communicating with the general public or groups other than your members, you need to ask these questions about your message:

1. Is it only about an issue?
2. Does it name a candidate?
3. Does it advocate the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate?

This helps to determine if you are into the area of "express advocacy" which clearly advocates the election or defeat of a candidate. Words that convey "express advocacy" include *vote for, defeat, and Kerry in 04*. If conveying "express advocacy" then this must always be paid for with hard money in federal elections.

Another kind of advocating might be in the form of general campaign activity whereby your organization advocates voting for a particular political party, but not a specific candidate. When this is the case, you must allocate your spending between hard and soft money based on previous activity. If you are giving money to the Democratic Party, however, there is a limit at every party level. That is, you are limited to \$ 10,000 to be given to your *local* Democratic Party, to your *state* Democratic Party, and to your *county* Democratic Party and of course each of these entities must be structured separately.

With 527 communications—as with America Votes, America Coming Together (ACT), The Media Fund and others—these entities can name a particular candidate in connection with an election and can pay for this with soft PAC money. The exception to this is if this is considered "electioneering communications" which includes only broadcast TV and Radio, cable and satellite but excludes direct mail, leaflets, phone banks, websites, e-mail and newspaper ads. In this case the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) prohibits referring to federal candidates within 30 days of a primary or 60 days of a general federal election. These "electioneering communications" must be paid for with hard money by unions, corporations and non-profits and for a 527 organization soft money can be used that did not come from unions or corporations. If you are doing purely issue ads that do not "expressly advocate" for a candidate, you may pay for this with your regular treasury monies.

As your organization considers how to pay for voter registration and GOTV and you are a 501 (C) 4, you may use treasury soft money provided that your activity is non-partisan. You may not target your population based on a candidate or Party preference. Using other demographic or geographic criteria is allowed, such as targeting single women, or African Americans, or those in a specific precinct. Note that for 501 (C) 3's this provision is more limited. (this area of the law is under review and may be changed)

If you are a 501 (C) 4 organization and issuing Voter Guides to the public that are comparing Candidates' positions on issues, this may be paid for with soft money if certain rules are followed. (again, 501 (C) 3's are more limited) Guides cannot be coordinated with any political party, they may look at specific issues, you may not indicate a right or wrong position on the issues addressed, you may not endorse or advocate for a particular candidate, no one candidate can predominate, and you must indicate a check or a grade to indicate a chosen candidate.

The issue of coordinating with a candidate or a political party becomes a question of finances. McCain-Feingold legislation dictates that if you coordinate your electoral activity with a candidate or a party, then it becomes in effect an in-kind contribution to them. Under the old rules, coordinating with the Party was acceptable as long as a candidate wasn't involved. If you do coordinate with a candidate, it will be subject to your organization's contributions limitations and must be reported. State laws are similar but do vary. Coordination among organizations—as we have seen with America Votes and others—is acceptable as long as no organization is coordinating with a party or candidate.

If you are not coordinating with others but you do wish to make an independent expenditure that calls for the election or defeat of a candidate, this must be done with hard money, must be reported as an independent expenditure, and must contain sponsorship disclosure.

Tax law mandates certain considerations depending on your tax status. As a 501 (C) 3 you may not become involved in elections, all your activities must be strictly non-partisan, you may not endorse candidates, and you may not engage in express advocacy. You may distribute Voter Guides but they must be unbiased, include all candidates, address a wide range of issues, and can't suggest the organization's position on an issue. When involved in voter registration and GOTV, your targeting must be based on your own charitable purpose, not political considerations. A 501 (C) 3 cannot sponsor a PAC or a 527 but can set up a 501 (C) 4.

A union may operate using the same rules as a 501 (C) 4. That is, a union may engage politically if this is not its "primary purpose" and can endorse candidates, engage in #527 communications, and publish selective Voter Guides. Unions may also target voter registration and GOTV according to political considerations like demographics and may sponsor PACs and 527 organizations. Nonprofits under section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code will be taxed on the lesser of their investment income or 527 expenditures at a tax rate of 34%. (You would pay zero if you have no investment income.) 527 expenditures would include: contributions to Candidates, independent expenditures, and public communications.

It is important to note that volunteers can do what organizations cannot do. That is, as volunteers, a staff person or a member can work for a candidate, and can advocate for issues, parties and candidates. (MoveOn, for example, is very much volunteer activity.) If involved in volunteering, it cannot be done on work time and you cannot use an employers' phone, Xerox, car, etc in conjunction with your "volunteer" work.

In this election year—as we saw in Florida in 2000—there will be attempts throughout the country to deny legitimate voters their voting rights. There will be purging of voter lists, there will be long waits and long lines at polling places, and other obstacles erected to deny the vote. Look into these possibilities now. Remember, Karl Rove has a vision that this will someday be a one-party country!

3. “Demographics that Matter—Single Women!”

-Caitlin Murphy, Women’s Voices, Women’s Vote, Washington D.C.

The Women’s Voices, Women’s Vote Project is directed at under-registered and not registered unmarried women. Single women are a large constituency of under-represented potential voters. This Project has identified this constituency and tried to discover some of reasons they don’t vote as well as the issues that appeal to them. Research has been done through a series of national surveys and focus groups, especially in Florida, Missouri, and Washington State. One of their goals has been to develop new messages that will motivate single women to become more involved in the political process. To this end, they are now developing in twelve states lists, messages, print ads, and radio scripts targeted to this constituency. The goal is to distribute and share these lists and communication aids to other organizations.

It is important to look at the numbers. Single women are the single largest group of non-voters and if motivated to vote even at the same levels as other constituencies, this would have a dramatic effect on the upcoming Presidential election and on the political landscape for years to come. Single women are 24% of the population, 22% of all registered voters and were 20% of the 2000 electorate. This is dramatically larger than the 6% who are NASCAR dads. Single women have the largest potential for growth in registration and turnout. They are:

- 46% of all voting age women
- 56% of all unregistered women
- 16 million unmarried, unregistered women in 2000
- 22 million unmarried, but not voting in 2000

If this constituency in 2000 had voted at the same rate as married women, this would have added some 6 million more voters.

There are clearly challenges in appealing to a very diverse group of 22 million women but the Project’s research shows that there are some real commonalities within this group as well:

- These are to a large degree women who are struggling economically and worrying about their ability to care for themselves and their families. These are often women on the edge who have a concern for health care, prescription drugs, retirement and a range of issues that relate to care of their families.
- They want the country moving in a different direction and greatly desire change.
- They are economic populists with deep concerns about health care and the economy.
- They have progressive views about a woman’s role and the right to privacy.

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Demographically single women are racially slightly less white than the general electorate. Nearly half earn less than \$30,000 and 29% earned less than \$16,000. As a group they long for change and a new direction for our country. The Project’s research shows that 50% of the general electorate feel that the country is on the “wrong track” and yet for this constituency of single, unregistered and non-voting women, 67% of these potential voters feel that the country is on the “wrong track”. This same research names some of the top

worries and issues of unmarried women:

- Children learning values and respect
- Affordable healthcare and retirement
- Income keeping up with rising prices
- Prescription drug costs

When compared to the electorate at large, this constituency feels more strongly that the government should play a role and take a stand on these issues. They have a cynical and negative reaction to the role played by the Federal government. Some of their other issue leanings when compared with the general electorate include: they are more socially progressive, they are largely pro-life, they are largely positive regarding the issue of gay marriage, they are favorable to labor unions and skeptical of large corporations, they are opposed to the war in Iraq, and they are very skeptical of politicians.

In viewing themselves, these women consider themselves as independent, working women, and on their own. They are very proud of their own accomplishments. When asked why they don't vote. They reveal that they are cynical about the government, politicians, and the role of the federal government. They are politically alienated and also ignorant about the voting process, including how to register, how to vote, etc.

They respond well, however, to their potential collective power and to the message that there is a large group—22 million—like themselves who could invoke change on issues that are very important to them. Research has shown that some of the best messengers to these women are women elected officials—especially women in Congress—who they perceive as having “walked in their shoes.”

The goal of the Women's Voices, Women's Vote Project is to reach out to these non-voters in a number of ways. The Project is developing a voter registration program and an early vote, vote-by-mail, and election day turnout program. These plans are being developed in twelve states, but already in Florida, Washington State, South Carolina and Missouri lists are being developed and shared with other organizations. They are developing print ads, interactive automated calls, live outbound calls, radio scripts and other media and message developments. There has been a pilot program in Florida to register women over the phone. In a test with a targeted population of 15,000, where women are talked to by phone, the voter registration form is filled out over the phone and then sent to the caller for her signature, there has been a 31.5% success rate. Testing has been done with automated calls, finding that celebrity calls are much more successful in generating returns than unknown voices. The cost for registering in this way has been in the range of \$7.50--\$8.50 per registrant.

Other research findings of the Women's Voices, Women's Vote Project suggest that unmarried women lean politically more Democratic. In April among this constituency Kerry was at 60 % points and Bush was at 23 % points.

4. “Get Out the Vote!: What Works”

-Don Green, Director, Institution for Social and Policy Studies, Yale University, New Haven, CT

(note: Professor Green's remarks were in part based on his new book, “Get Out the Vote!: How to Increase Voter Turnout, by Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, Brookings Institution Press, 2004, which all participants received)

Professor Green began by saying that the studies that he and the Institution for Social and Policy Studies have conducted regarding voter mobilization are done as randomized field experiments which gauge voter impact of each mobilization method as it happens. They operate with treatment and control groups, which is very different from non-experimental findings that often come from survey studies that ask people why they don't vote, or why they don't register and depends on the memory of the participants. Professor Green and his colleagues have tried to bring new rigor to this field of study.

In 1998 they began to study get-out-the-vote (GOTV) tactics and since that time have results from experiments from door knocking in relevant low and medium salience elections (which are the majority of elections in the U.S.), as well as phone banks, direct mail, leafleting, email, TV public service announcements, etc.

In a study done with ACORN's door-to-door canvassing of Latino surnames in Phoenix in 2003, results were gained from a process of two face-to-face encounters with phased ID/GOTV voter mobilization. It is estimated that face-to-face canvassing produces an increase of 7-12% points. These results were found when the voter contact is done in the last two weeks before the election. Results also show a spillover effect to other voting members of a household resulting in a 60% bonus. This suggests that in doorknocking it does not make sense to ignore low turnout voters in the household. There seemed to also be a 32% carry over to turnout in the next election

Regarding phone banks, Professor Green's studies found that commercial phone banks with brief scripts were not statistically significant. Non-commercial scripts that used longer/interactive scripts were found to raise turnout by approximately 3 percentage points. Robotic calls had no effect on turnout. Even robotic calls with voices of Latino celebrities were shown to have no effect on voter turnout. The lessons are that volunteers who are doorknocking are most effective when chatty and using an unhurried script of at least 1-1 1/2 minutes

Based on only one experiment, partisan door-hangers seemed to raise turnout by about 1% point. Partisan direct mail seemed to have negligible effects unless directed at base and something like 1/2 % pt for base per mailer. Non-partisan direct mail seemed not to have more than 1/2 % point effect per mailer.

Based on the numerous studies that Professor Green and his colleagues have conducted, he suggests several bottom lines:

- Quality matters and personal contact is also key.
- There is little evidence of "synergy" effect with various election tools and strategies. If anything the evidence suggests the opposite: multiple approaches actually burn folks out.
- Contact is key but message matters less than one might suppose. It was found that a percentage point was gained when commitments to vote were taken at the door; that is, when a signed pledge was secured.

There is much more to know and study. A number of GOTV tactics have yet to be studied and include: TV and effect of paid advertisements; radio paid advertisements; billboards; event based mobilizations, and friends and neighbor mobilization. There has been no study of the effectiveness of mass communications. President Bush has spent some 17 million on mass communications and it is hard to know its effectiveness.

Looking at the effect of gender of the canvasser, it seems to be zero. When canvassers are ethnically matched to potential voters, those results are mixed. An important aspect of

these various approaches is the issue of cost-effectiveness. It is important to note that calculating cost effectiveness presupposes certain goals. Calculations focus on marginal—not fixed—costs, and both capital or labor costs may be more/less expensive for certain campaigns. Per vote costs estimated for various approaches are as follows:

- Canvassing: \$19 per vote + overhead (calculated with costs of \$16 per hour, 10 contacts per hour, 12 contacts per vote)
- Door hangers: \$14 per vote + overhead (calculated \$ 10 per hour 45 leaflets per hour, 10 cents per leaflet)
- Direct mail: \$67 per vote (calculated at 50 cents per piece)
- Commercial phone banks with long scripts, last week of the campaign: \$45 per vote (calculated \$ 1.50 per complete)
- Commercial phone banks with brief scripts, last week of campaign: \$200 per vote (calculated at 50 cents per complete)
- Robotic calls & email: infinite? (no detectable effect in either case)

Study is underway looking at partisan and issue advocacy GOTV activities, especially by candidates. This includes Election Day mobilizations, voter ID campaigns, and variations on timing & frequency of contact. The jury is out on “supertreatments” (e.g. voting seminars for high school students) and when looking at voter registration, we can’t really tell who would have registered anyway, or voted, or how many of those we register and count are really re-registering previous voters.

Professor Green will tackle for his next book the experimental study of “persuasion” effects. The results of at least six experiments will be incorporated in this book and at least one result is sure—it is very expensive to change minds!

5. A Panel on the Best of Methodology for Voter Registration , Chaired by Zach Polett, Project Vote

A. Greg Naylor, America Coming Together (ACT), Philadelphia

Greg, working in Pennsylvania under the banner of “Partners for America’s Families”, was involved in a major effort to register 86,000 new voters located in 910 wards. Greg explained what it took to make that happen. The Project involved paid canvassers who worked seven days a week—Monday thru Friday from 4- 9 pm, Saturday 11-9 pm, & Sunday noon to 8 pm.—and were paid from \$8-\$10 an hour initially and after 60 days were raised to \$14 per hour.

Tools used by the canvassers in this operation included palm pilots. They were used to record all data and make updates, proving highly effective, especially when you consider that 2.7% of this population moves each year. Information was entered first on status of the household, and then on the status of the voter(s) in the house. Canvassers went in groups and it was expected that each canvasser would complete at least 2 registration forms per hour. Data entry was used to ensure that the registrant wasn’t already registered.

This successful registration drive was the foundation for what is now the Pennsylvania operation of the statewide 527, America Coming Together (ACT).

B. Jeremiah Baumann, PIRG, Denver

Jeremiah presented the PIRG’s “New Voters Project” which is focused on voter

registration of ages 18-24 years in six states. Some of the factors that persuaded PIRG to work with this constituency and this age group were:

- It was a natural progression for the organization since PIRG was founded on college campuses.
- In the last Presidential election, barely half of the eligible voters in this group actually went to the polls.
- Part of this group—known also as Generation X—is actually larger than the generation of baby boomers which is 10% of the population. This suggests the potential for dramatic impact on election results if a much greater number of 18-24 year olds were to vote.

Jeremiah explained some characteristics of this constituency which pose challenges to greatly increasing registration:

- This block of potential voters is largely unengaged in the political process, is cynical, and often angry at the status quo.
- They also know that they and their issues are largely ignored in the political debate. When the political debate is so often about issues like social security and prescription drugs, they know that politicians are not focusing on the issues that are important to young voters.
- The members of Generation X are fairly conservative and yet the younger bracket of this block of voters is increasingly more progressive. They are tolerant of racial diversity and issues like same sex marriage.
- Top issues for these potential voters are education, economics defined in terms of jobs not stocks, the war, and healthcare, especially affordability and access.
- This group does not look to government necessarily to solve their problems; they are as likely to consider the problem of their own making and think in terms of solving it for themselves.
- Mobilization is difficult for many reasons. Lists are bad and some voter lists don't have this group on them. Few in this age group have land phones and cell phone numbers are not listed. They are hard to reach face-to-face because they are working, or out socially with friends.

To locate students within this age group, outreach is done in college campus classrooms, in parking lots, and in student centers. For non-students it is harder. They are found at sporting events, malls, concerts, at the sites of large employers, or perhaps at places like Planned Parenthood, Temp Agencies, Call centers, and at Technical schools.

Moving for this constituency is continual—at least twice a year and mostly in June which adds to the challenge of finding them. Students move at least once a year and mostly in September. With students, the project depends largely on peer to peer strategies such as having students knock on dorm room doors.

C. Sarah Buecher, Working Assets, San Francisco

Working Assets, the phone service that typically contributes 1% of its revenues to funding progressive nonprofits, has dedicated an additional 1% of revenues to a campaign to register 1 million new voters prior to the 2004 election. Working Assets has accomplished their work in part through grants to nonprofit organizations such as USAction, the NAACP, Center for Community Change, Project Vote and others. Using the website—YourVoteMatters.org—voter registration can be accomplished for individuals and is used by organizations as well to conduct online voter registration campaigns. These voter education grants were given to the above non-profits as unrestricted funds and this year they are focusing these funds in large part on voter registration projects.

Working Assets is doing a database as well to which will compare voting files, will monitor registration progress, and will communicate deadlines online. Sarah also distributed application forms for those who are interesting in applying for this year's Voter Education grants.

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6. Case Study: “Chicago—Barak Obama Campaign”

-Madeline Talbott, Illinois ACORN

Madeline spoke about the U. S. Senate Primary Campaign of Barak Obama and his astounding victory on March 16th of this year. ACORN's initial assessment was that the key to his victory would be the African American vote which put ACORN in a good position to make a real contribution in both voter registration and GOTV. Therefore last summer some 450 block leaders were chosen, resulting in 12,984 new registrants.

This was done as a coalition effort through the Chicago-based Grassroots Collaborative which brought a number of very active and energized community and labor groups to the joint effort. From a seven-person field in the Democratic Primary, Obama received a

remarkable 53% of the vote. Among the Democratic challengers to Obama, probably the most prominent was Dan Hines who, among other things, split labor's vote. The AFL-CIO endorsed Hines while SEIU, AFSCME, HERE, UNITE & the Teachers all endorsed Obama.

There were some real surprises in this race—even with all his Democratic challengers, Obama received twice the votes of all the Republicans put together. He carried all of the Chicago Metropolitan area, and took five downstate counties. In total he received 650,000 votes.

What were the factors that brought about this victory? Madeline's assessment was that the grassroots efforts at voter registration and GOTV were part of an already existing wave of deep support for Obama. (It is hard to do a district by district comparison because the districts have been redrawn since the last election.)

As part of the Collaborative's efforts, a canvass was done for GOTV two weeks before the election. As a result, a return of 39% was gained with the canvass, and only 19% was gained without the canvass. ACORN's strategy involved paid canvassers and aggressive leaders in their strongest precincts. Madeline believes the leadership efforts provided a certain synergy effect in the successful results. Events and activities within the Obama campaign also had some very positive effect. Where he did major TV buys, he mostly won. It was great timing for the campaign when Paul Simon's daughter endorsed Obama. Madeline noted that clearly Obama's history as a community organizer with both the Gamaliel Foundation and Project Vote developed his political skills which combined with his smarts, charisma and ambition helped bring this election victory home.

7. "Voter Turn-Out: Setting up the Machinery and Making it Work"

-Charles Lester, Political Director, Los Angeles County AFL-CIO

In describing the LA County Fed as an effective player in Los Angeles politics, Charles spoke to the recent defeat of a new Walmart in Inglewood, CA. Partnering with labor unions and community organizations, the LA Fed provided great leadership in this ballot Initiative defeat by a margin of 2 to 1. Other partners in this fight were the LA Alliance, IAF, Clergy and Laity Concerned, and a number of unions including UFCW, the Teamsters, the Hotel Workers, SEIU and others. As a labor federation, the LA Fed has continually shown it's strength as a political machine and demonstrates repeatedly that it may well have built labor's best GOTV operation in the country.

Looking at the history of this fight, Charles talked about characteristics of the Inglewood community. With a total population of approximately 122,000, there are 95% people of color of which 50% are Latino and 50% are black; the rest are Anglo, and there are approximately 43,000 registered voters. Knowing for three years that Walmart was interested in this location, labor and others had worked hard to make some changes on the City Council to blunt support for Walmart. Having targeted and won in several City Council races the year prior to the election, sentiment on the City Council was solidly against the Walmart plan. The Mayor, however, was convinced that if the City denied their permit, they would be sued. In this proposal for a Walmart Supercenter in Inglewood, the ballot initiative became the first attempt by the corporation to be proactive and get the 6,000 signatures needed to qualify to put this question on the ballot. (In Contra Costa County in Northern California—where Walmart was successful in their bid to build a new store after taking the issue to the voters in the county—their money was spent to *overturn* action already taken by the County).

Prior to the election, the coalition of churches and neighborhood groups began holding community forums on the issue. The four council members opposed to Walmart were also holding meetings in their districts. Through this process of talking to the community and assessing the Walmart proposal, it was discovered that Measure 4A—the Walmart Supercenter—was to be built as large as seventeen football fields and would really be a city within a city. One of the most egregious aspects to the proposal was that the Supercenter without County oversight would be built exempt from all environmental impact considerations.

Several months before the vote, a poll was taken showing that the forces against Walmart were 26% points down. The Coalition knew they needed to get to the electorate and talk about the following issues: “no regulation, no oversight”; the fact that Walmart sells guns and ammunition; and that Walmart is known to discriminate against workers of color. One month out, the Coalition spent some \$750,000 trying to get these messages out. Three weeks before the election, labor leaders were brought in, and a massive field campaign was initiated. Letters and phonecalling in massive numbers began. Twenty-four full-time canvassers were dispatched into Inglewood from 9 am to 8:30 pm daily. Out of 43,000 registered voters, the effort targeted some 22,000 voters, many of whom would have been designated “less than likely to vote”. There were 25 contacts per hour per team. 15,000 voters were i.d.’d prior to the election. In the last four days before the election there were 150 people in the office on a daily basis. On the day of the election, by 6 pm, the Coalition confirmed that 60% of their targeted voters had voted. By 10:30 pm the City Clerk declared that Walmart had been defeated.

This ballot victory was due in large part to the LA County Fed’s history in the city as a real political player, their focus on this issue for three years—not just the short window which was the initiative election—and the strength and work of the Coalition. Walmart attempted with 36 mailings, \$300,000 in donations locally, massive media buys, free cab rides, vouchers & groceries, concerts, and more to persuade this community. They failed. The Coalition is poised to take on bigger issues in the upcoming November election.

8. “The Power of Fusion Politics: The New York Working Families Party”

-Dan Cantor, Executive Director, N.Y. Working Families Party

Dan began by noting that the idea for working people to have their own political party is not a new idea but that other attempts have been met with failure. The popular wisdom has seen third party votes as “wasting votes” or in the case of Nader, “spoiler votes.” The Working Families Party (WFP) strategically has employed cross endorsement or “fusion voting” which distinguishes itself from many other third party efforts.

Fusion voting occurs when a minor party “cross endorses” a major party candidate, allowing candidates to run on more than one line in an election. The votes from different parties are tallied separately, but then are combined for that candidate’s total. For example, Hilary Clinton was endorsed by the WFP in 2000 and she received 102,000 votes distinctly on the WFP line. A notable victory also occurred for the WFP in November 2003 when Leticia James ran solely on the WFP line for NY City council member. She won with 77% of the vote and became the first council member elected only on a third party line in 30 years.

Dan talked about the history to fusion voting. In the country’s first 100 years, only 7 states outlawed fusion. It was in 1896 that the Republicans outlawed this tool of the populists & fusion parties. In New York state fusion has been maintained as a viable political tool and it is just starting to be utilized in other states like Connecticut.

The WFP in New York began in 1998 and since that time it has backed 1430 candidates—1300 have been fused with the Democrats, 70 with Republicans, and some 20-30 candidates have stood alone against the major parties. As a Party, the WFP tries to endorse early in the process. Interviews of candidates are always done. The political effect of the WFP endorsement is often to yank the Democrats to the left and therefore is greatly valued by the progressive forces within the Democratic Party. It's important to note that the WFP is not an exclusive party—that is, a voter need not leave the Democratic Party, for instance, to be in the WFP.

Dan talked about the structural advantages to the ballot line and the fusion strategy:

- It makes elected officials attentive. We have greater access to them and there is much more stroke.
- It brings about much more discipline among your Coalition partners. In New York our partners like Dennis Rivera, SEIU #1199, are much more durable because the ballot line is so valuable.
- The Party is very valuable as a home for activists—we are 85 unions, groups like ACORN, and many more.
- This is a way for non-activists to participate—it is low cost and a low hassle way for some with little time to participate politically.

Looking beyond New York, there are a number of other states where fusion is possible: Connecticut, Vermont, South Carolina, South Dakota, Delaware and Mississippi. In forty-three states fusion is illegal and to change that would take a ballot initiative, a legal challenge, or a legislative change. It is expected that between now and 2008 there will be additional states where fusion will be legal.

Financially the WFP budget is 2.5 million with half of the total contributed in small amounts—many party members contribute \$5 a month. The rest of the budget is contributed in the following ways: \$200,000 from the wealthy, \$180,000 from unions, and there are a number of consulting contracts made with elected officials which contributes to the overall budget. Dan's assessment is that a desirable budget for WFP statewide would be \$7-8 million.

Dan asserts that another advantage of the WFP is that everyone understands political parties as opposed to “collaboratives”, “alliances”, “coalitions” and the like. It is a political structure that has an accepted legitimacy. The WFP also exists as a trusted voice in a political landscape where there is intense cynicism about politicians. We can help to increase turnout not just in statewide elections, but also in State Rep races and below. To continue to qualify and to secure the ballot line, you must get 50,000 votes on the WFP line every four years in the gubernatorial election. (The WFP can engage in all partisan elections but not school boards, etc.) Dan noted that the WFP doesn't confine itself to electoral tactics, but at times does actions as well. Their focus is to keep politicians accountable, however best they can.

One of the next big efforts of the WFP is a statewide minimum wage campaign to increase the current state minimum of \$5.15 to \$7.10.

9. “Communicating Your Message this Year & Beyond”

-Holly Minch, SPIN Project, San Francisco

Holly spoke of the SPIN Project as a capacity-building consulting firm that recognizes communication as a tool to be used to complement your organization. The kinds of methods and services offered by SPIN include:

- Strategy consultations
- Trainings
- 5-Day SPIN Academy
- Communication coaching
- a “help desk” feature for their clients
- a website which contains ten online tutorials
- several books, including SPIN Works and their newest, Loud & Clear in An Election Year

Holly emphasized that organizations need to plan and prepare for how communication will dovetail with their organizing work, especially in light of how fractured and unused traditional communication tools are by the public. Research shows that only 40% of the population are receiving their news by reading newspapers and that many non-traditional sources are replacing the written word. For example, 20% of Americans are getting their news from Jon Stewart’s The Daily Show on TV. Many are also getting what they know about current events from the internet.

Holly noted that as organizers we need to recognize that there are segments of the population that have been part of a progressive base that are slipping away. She used the example of Nascar dads—seen as 6% of the electorate—and a constituency she says that her own father greatly identifies with. Although a teamster and union member for 30 years of his life and is very concerned with issues like healthcare, he is now more likely to prioritize his social values rather than economic issues when he votes. Holly asserts that her father’s shift in how he votes is indicative of the reality of “framing” which influences how our messages are communicated and understood. If “framing” is about recognizing the values your audience already holds and “framing” your message in that context, then it is important for organizers to understand the values their constituents already hold.

Holly reminded the participants of values strongly held by the American electorate that must be recognized when progressives plan political communications and messages. We are a nation with strong religious and moral convictions where some 40% of the population considers themselves to be born again Christians.

The electorate believes a President and a leader should be firm and consistent in his policies and actions. Polls have shown that the Bush forces have effectively painted Kerry in the eyes of the voters as someone who “flip-flops” and is indecisive in his views.

Looking at your organization’s communications, Holly suggests that the following should be considered:

- Conflict
- Principles and morals
- the use of sympathetic characters to carry your message
- Show, don’t tell
- Offer vision
- Stress policy over politics

It is important to note that people reject the facts if they don’t accept the “frame” or overriding context to the message.

Holly concluded her presentation with a discussion of the Election year news cycle and the need to prepare your communication with this timetable in mind. Note on your calendar and recognize the focus of the electorate on holidays, when the election season for primaries is, your own state legislative session, the national Democratic and Republican Conventions, large campaign events, Labor Day, deadlines for absentee ballots, and Election Day. Communication tools to consider using within the framework of these calendar events include:

- Candidate scorecards & report cards
- Research & reports
- Polling
- Op-eds and letters to the Editor by your members
- Media events
- Candidate forums
- Bird dogging
- Advertising
- Internet strategies
- Direct voter contact

Holly stressed that there is a cumulative effect when these various approaches are used and the same message is repeated in different ways.