



DEMOCRATIC PARTY *of* WISCONSIN

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To: Interested Parties
From: Mike Tate, Democratic Party of Wisconsin
Date: July 24, 2012
Re: Wisconsin Recall Exit Memo

There's no way to sugarcoat the fact that the outcome of the recall effort wasn't what we all hoped.

But we at the Democratic Party of Wisconsin are proud of what this grassroots movement accomplished and we are ready to learn from what went wrong, keep what went right, and work side-by-side with you again to continue the fight for Wisconsin.

Two weeks ago we sent out a survey because we wanted to hear from you. Your feedback is invaluable to us as we move forward to re-elect Barack Obama, put Tammy Baldwin in the Senate, protect our new senate majority and work to elect progressives up and down the ticket.

More than 10,000 people made their voices heard – and some of those voices were pretty loud.

We heard kind words of support from all over the world, frustration from people who felt like the Party could have done better, anger from folks who feel like our democracy has been bought and sold to the highest bidder, and, most often and most importantly, dedication to not dwell on defeat, but to keep working for change.

Some things you agreed on, and some you disagreed on. For every message we received saying there was not enough emphasis placed on collective bargaining or the John Doe investigation or education, there was one saying we focused too much on it.

But overall there was a pretty clear consensus when it came to the top messages and questions we received. Here's how the Party is working to address these issues.

Big Money

This was the number one message we heard – a full 73% of you mentioned Big Money – that Scott Walker enjoyed a nearly 10-1 cash advantage and it made a difference.

Money can't vote, it's true, but the Republicans have seemingly infinite amounts of undisclosed cash at their disposal to spend on dishonest attack ads. They have billionaires like the Koch Brothers and Sheldon Adelson, while our candidates rely mostly on in-state donations of \$50 or less. It's frustrating, it's sad and it's wrong that money has the possibility to become more powerful than people in our electoral process.

That's why it's imperative that we elect Tammy Baldwin to the Senate where she will work to pass the DISCLOSE Act, which will keep special interest billionaires from buying our elections in secret.

Messaging

We heard a lot about message discipline, and how the Republicans are great at enforcing a top-down dictate, with simple taglines where no one deviates from the message – EVER.

That's not quite how it works for our Party, because we value and welcome input, feedback and even challenges to our message, but we recognize the opportunity to have a more clearly defined message that is widely available to all who care to share it.

In the coming days and weeks, we'll be revamping our website, www.wisdems.org. There you'll be able to more easily access the top messages of the week, and we'll even be launching a new Letters to the Editor toolset. With that, you'll be able to enter your zip code, choose the papers nearest you, and send your letter right from your computer. We'll even have available our latest talking points on everything from education to tax fairness to women's issues.

Our Communications and Research team works constantly to keep up-to-date on what's happening, and what's important to you. If you feel like there's a message we're missing, please send it to us at research@wisdems.org.

You can also keep current by 'liking' us on Facebook, following us on Twitter and/or joining our text club by texting WISDEMS to 40679.

Field Program/Voter Contact

Largely, we heard great things about what the boots on the ground were able to do. We knocked more than 2 million doors and contacted more than 2 million voters by phone.

It was a great accomplishment and we plan on building off of the information we gathered during the recall process so that we can refine our voter contact file. That way in November we can be confident that we are targeting our resources in the smartest possible way to turn out the most voters we can.

Another positive that came out of our robust field program – an infrastructure for the fall. Our offices are open all over the state, earlier than usual, and they are manned by experienced staff and volunteers. Having these offices open also allows DPW staff more opportunity to travel the state and hear from you. Some of the best input we received during the recall election came from listening sessions far, far from Madison or Milwaukee. Our staff will continue to travel the state to attend County Party functions, work with our grassroots partners and to hold our own listening sessions.

We'll be opening more offices as we get closer to November, but for now you can find the office closest to you at <http://www.wisdems.org/offices>.

Growing the Bench

Something else we heard a lot was that Wisconsin Democrats need to grow our bench of candidates.

And we agree. We're fortunate to have great leaders like Senate Majority Leader Mark Miller and Assembly Democratic Leader Peter Barca, but one of the best takeaways from the recall process was the new class of Democratic leaders who emerged to join them.

Going forward you'll continue to hear from people like Senator Kathleen Vinehout and Mahlon Mitchell, and our political department will keep working out in our communities and with grassroots organizations like Wisconsin Progress and Emerge Wisconsin to identify the next generation of leaders and help equip them with the tools they'll need to be successful.

And What We Can't Change

We're committed to working hard to change everything we can, but there are some things we just can't do.

Here are the things we heard that we can't change:

1. Too many groups were duplicating efforts (e.g., "My door got knocked by DPW and We Are Wisconsin. In the future you guys should work together so you're not hitting the same people over and over again.")

Here's why we can't change it – Wisconsin campaign finance law prevents the Party and/or its candidates from working with certain groups during an election period.

2. Too many messages a day (e.g., "In one day I got an email from you guys, Obama, Nancy Pelosi, MoveOn.org and my local party. Can't you spread these out a little bit more?")

Here's why we can't change it – just like with the duplication of efforts mentioned above, there are some groups that we can't work with. And even if we could work with all these other groups, they have their own message strategies and their own causes. They might have a different take on an issue, or something new to add to a conversation that we didn't get to.

So while it can be frustrating to clear your inbox at the end of a fundraising quarter, where every progressive group under the sun has hit you up for that last \$5, I hope that you'll continue to give our messages a chance with the knowledge that we're all working towards the same goal.

3. There shouldn't have been a Democratic primary.

As much as this would've been an easy question to ignore, because feelings are still pretty intense in some cases, we felt like this was an important one to address.

Specifically, we got a lot of comments that the Party should have chosen a candidate. Let me be clear that the Democratic Party of Wisconsin is not in the business of choosing Democratic candidates. You are. There are no smoke-filled back rooms or shady deals – we aren't the Party where the 'bosses' pick the candidates. We take democracy seriously and will do everything in our power to protect and defend it.

There was no “consensus” candidate or “preferred” candidate – all of our Democratic candidates for Governor added to the conversation, helped shape our message and offered a clear alternative to Scott Walker’s wrong-handed approach to governing. And DPW would’ve been proud to go to bat for any single one of them. That there was no clear favorite prior to the primary is precisely why we had one.

How We Move Forward

Now that we’ve had our time to reflect on the past 17 months, its time to take what we’ve learned and move on to the next fight.

We have to keep building our grassroots movement, and we need your help. The Republicans are going to continue to fight dirty with their piles of unregulated cash and we have to be able to fight back hard.

Please continue to help us by giving what you can – we need time, money and support. Visit <http://www.wisdems.org/contribute> to make a donation or www.wisdems.org/volunteer to find out where you can get involved.

In solidarity,

Mike Tate

