

## **Vision for the DNC**

This memo was originally prepared for the Association of State Democratic Party Chairs in response to their Democratic Party Chair candidate questionnaire in January of 2005.

### **Vision for the DNC: A Response to the ASDC Plan for 2005-2008**

This is no ordinary time for Democrats. Our country faces new and daunting economic and foreign policy challenges. Our party faces a Republican Party better organized and more powerful than it's been in 70 years. And our people face a government controlled by a cadre of right-wing Republicans whose policies have made America less prosperous, less safe, and less free.

As the challenge before us is unprecedented, so must be our response. If we continue doing what we've been doing over the past decades, we will not win. If we do not win elections, those people who do the hard, noble work of making our country run will have no champion. America will continue on its current path of drift and decline.

I applaud the ASDC for putting together a comprehensive agenda for the next DNC Chairman. Your members are on the frontlines of this fight and in the trenches of our party, building coalitions and winning elections. Like you, I believe deeply that we need to reform how the Democratic Party works in Washington and with the parties in the states and territories so that we can build a modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century political organization.

My number one priority as DNC Chair will be to create a Democratic Party that fights – and wins – in 50 states and six territories every day not just three months before an election. This new partnership will take changes within the Democratic National Committee itself and in its relationship with state and local parties as well in its relationship with the millions of Democrats all across the nation. My almost twenty years in politics and the media business has prepared me well for the hard things we need to do in the coming years, and I am excited to offer you my thoughts on your well-crafted plan.

I also want to make sure you know that I have a proud history with the ASDC itself. As Ann Fishman will attest, in 1992 while running the national grassroots program for the Clinton/Gore campaign, I launched a well-funded joint Clinton/ASDC national neighbor-to-neighbor, house party and volunteer sign-up campaign. It was designed by the longtime AFSCME consultant Johnny Allem, and helped bring hundreds of thousands of names and thousands of new donors into our joint database. It showed me – and others -- what could get done when the national campaigns and the state parties work together.

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For more information, please go to [www.SimonforChair.org](http://www.SimonforChair.org), or feel free to call me at 202-842-7217. I look forward to talking with each and every one of you – and working with you to restore the greatness of our Party in the years ahead.

## **Vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Party**

As Chairman, I want to lead Democrats in meeting the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century head on, and build a winning party again in all regions of the country. Winning again will require that we have the courage to do the hard things needed to win, including creating:

**A New 21<sup>st</sup> Century Agenda.** We need a bold, modern, optimistic agenda that will put our traditional Democratic values into action to respond to the challenges America faces today. I look forward to the day when a majority of our nation sees us as the Party that will make our country more prosperous, more secure, and more free, and sees the word Democrat as something we can run to in all fifty states and not run from.

**A New Political Infrastructure.** Through investing billions of dollars over many years, the Republicans have built a far better political machine than what Democrats have today. In the years ahead, the task of matching their investments with strategic investments of our own is an urgent one, and it must start with a substantial commitment to rebuilding the state parties right away.

**A New Passion for the Grassroots.** The last two years saw the explosion of grassroots activism in our politics, with millions of Americans passionately participating in making their country better. It is essential that we channel this passion into our politics, and see these new activists as partners in our fight and not just donors to our cause. New technology has allowed us to organize vast numbers of people in new and better ways, and if harnessed correctly, these people can revitalize our parties. My hope is that at the end of my four years as DNC Chair, when one thinks of the Democratic Party, they don't think of a building in Washington, D.C. but they think of millions of committed Americans going to work each day in their own way to make America better.

## **Guiding Principles**

All my life I've been a builder, an entrepreneur, someone who could create new things and make them work. In my twenties, I helped start a successful television production company; in 1992 I helped create the modern way the Clinton campaign ran which culminated in my helping build and run the famous War Room; in 1996, I created NDN and have turned it into a powerful promoter of our Democratic values; in 2003, I created NDN's unprecedented 9-state, multimillion dollar Hispanic Project; and last year, working with former Ron Brown aide Rob Stein, I helped launch the Democracy Alliance, a group of Democratic investors committed to building our progressive/Democratic infrastructure in the years ahead.

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Having run a successful Democratic institution for eight years, I know that what's important in managing a large organization is having bedrock principles to guide your efforts. These are my guiding principles:

## **A New Partnership**

The single biggest priority for Democrats in the next four years is to create vibrant, dynamic and modern state and territorial parties that can fight and win every single day, not just in the three months before the election. To do this, we will need a new partnership between the national and state parties that will create one national party working in all 50 states and 6 territories. As part of that, I will consult with the state party chairs in making DNC committee appointments -- including the Presidential Convention Site Selection Committee -- and will welcome ASDC staffers into the DNC building and fund the ASDC as proposed.

## *A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Coordinated Campaign*

At the core of my vision for a winning Party is a new way of viewing the coordinated campaigns. I want to begin implementing two-year plans in all 56 state and territories in the spring of the odd year, not in the summer of the election year. The new expanded coordinated campaign should be guided by the idea that "locals know best" and should include:

**Common Goals.** The parties should agree on joint goals in all major areas of common concern - federal and non-federal elections, vote goals throughout the state and with groups, data acquisition, ballot initiatives and redistricting, voter registration, e-mail activists, fundraising, and institutional management and compliance.

**Joint Market Research.** The DNC and state parties will jointly conduct in-depth market research to develop demographic/socio-economic/attitudinal/media use benchmarks for each state and across the country. We will help develop jointly agreed upon message and demographic targets, and help inform the coordinated campaign process. These surveys will have common questionnaires, tailored to each state to help us begin to fashion common benchmarks that can be measured year to year in and among the states.

**Issue Advocacy.** A new emphasis will be placed on turning the state parties into more aggressive communicators of our ideas and values by investing in modern communications infrastructure, personnel and techniques. Among the areas of joint cooperation will be plans for aggressive use of Internet, blog and Meetup/house parties, free media strategies including a vastly stepped up surrogate operation and paid media strategies -- and where applicable, Spanish-language communications.

**A New Table.** The stakeholders in each state coordinated campaign will begin meeting regularly in February of this year, and plan to meet at least monthly throughout the

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election. We will expand the traditional definition of stakeholder from those progressive groups who pay into the campaign to also include emerging grassroots groups, bloggers, partisan academics and thought-leaders and private sector leadership.

**A Strategic Review.** I plan on conducting an immediate and comprehensive strategic review of the DNC to aid in our spring planning efforts. If a state party is interested in having one conducted in their states, the DNC would assist in finding and funding the right team to conduct the review.

**Investing in people.** Implicit in each of these coordinated campaigns is a major commitment to helping each party raise the skill levels of its leaders and staff. Investment in training will tailored to the specific needs in each state, and will be further augmented throughout the cycle as required.

**Constituency Strategy Centers.** A major reform of mine will be to turn the political desks into strategy centers. Modeled on NDN's successful Hispanic Project, we will move beyond outreach into strategy: setting vote, political, registration, communications, paid and free media goals for each constituency. We will also add to the existing groups, so by the spring of this year will have working strategy centers with sufficient budgets which target Hispanics, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, women, the GLBT community, rural and exurban voters, veterans and military families, people of faith and young voters. Given our particularly hard time in the South in recent years, I will also propose a special Southern Project. In all these cases, the project will have a board of the DNC members concerned about these issues, and successful strategists, politicians, and activists working with them to help set and guide the long-term strategy in each of these communities.

The creation of and maintenance of these plans will become the primary mission of the DNC's political department and will be overseen by a senior staff member directly reporting to the Chairman. Veterans of state parties will be given preferential treatment in hiring for all political positions.

### *A New Culture of Investment*

We must create a new culture of investment in our Party that sees the DNC and the state parties as institutions and not campaigns. Campaigns come and go. Institutions live on beyond any one election, and must have both long-term and short-term planning to be successful. While I have been involved in hundreds of campaigns in almost all 50 states, I also have built and run a successful Democratic institution and understand the differences between the two.

So, as we look forward to building our parties, I support and endorse the ASDC's proposal for the DNC to fund each State Party to the minimum level of at least two hundred thousand dollars per calendar year, payable 50% in January and 50% in July of each calendar year. Selected

states may receive more than this amount, but no state shall receive less than this amount. In addition to the budgeting of the above amounts, I would also endorse a by-law amendment providing for the same, subject only to cash availability.

In principle, the projects our party funds must have sound plans. I don't think it is fair to the millions of people who fund our party if we fund things that do not have detailed strategies behind them. We can and must develop plans for each state respectful of their needs and relevant to their circumstances.

During my tenure, I want to use the at-large appointments – however many there are – to gain access to the remarkable expertise of many prominent national Democrats and successful elected officials in the work of the DNC. I cannot, however, support the Fowler amendment that specifies election by the regional caucuses of 50 of the 75 at-large appointed DNC member slots, because I believe that it will adversely and unacceptably affect the diversity of the DNC membership. I do commit to working with the ASDC to help make the future membership of the DNC more reflective of the true makeup of our national political party, bringing in more elected officials, policy experts, thought-leaders, technologists, media executive and business leaders to help us as we work to make our Party as strong as it can be.

Electing four of the at-large DNC Executive Committee from the regional caucuses is a good idea.

### **More Accountability and Transparency**

Fueled by the passion of average Americans, the DNC has evolved into what could be a billion dollar business over the next four years. Because of its unique role, it is even more important than at a private sector firm that the people who work in the organization and for it must be held accountable for results, and that the DNC's operations must be transparent to its stakeholders.

That is why instead of creating new management entities, I want to empower the DNC Executive Committee, giving it a more active management, compliance, planning, and oversight role. I will bring in experienced management experts to conduct a quick, but in-depth strategic review that will help us guide our planning for the next four years. As DNC Chair, I will immediately review every outside contract within the first 90 days of taking office to make sure that we have the right people at the right price aiding our cause effectively. In addition, I will demand the immediate disclosure of potential conflicts of interest between DNC officers, members, and employees and DNC vendors, and within 180 days, devise a Code of Conduct detailing what constitutes a conflict of interest and how they should be disclosed or prohibited.

Secondly, I want to create more competition for DNC and state party work to ensure that a diverse set of advisers from all over the country are part of guiding the party. Thirdly, we need

to hold the consulting profession accountable not just for results, but also for our values. Consultants that are not labor-friendly or work to elect Republicans will not get our business.

## **A New Commitment to Persuasion, Advocacy, and Mobilization**

One of the greatest tasks in the next four years will be to move all the parties into the 21<sup>st</sup> century communications era. My background as a successful television writer and producer, veteran of the Clinton War Room, manager of the 31 state Clinton communications operations in 1992, technologist, often-quoted spokesperson, and seasoned message-crafter makes me uniquely qualified among the candidates for Chair to take on this challenge. I come from the successful Clinton school that built our politics around a powerful, optimistic vision for our nation, and believe that we must make modern advocacy a more important core competency of our parties in the years ahead.

At the core of the new politics of advocacy are changes in media and technology. We are leaving a 50 year-long run of the broadcast era of political communications, where the model was a single message centrally managed and broadcast out to many. The new era we are entering requires a much more distributed, real time, personal, and intimate type of communications. The vital investment by Terry McAuliffe in the DNC Datamart has given all of us the opportunity to build a new politics for a new era of communication that will require us putting people once again at the very center of our Party.

To facilitate our adoption of new techniques and learning, I will create a New Politics Institute at the DNC. The NPI will be charged with bringing in some of the top technologists, social networkers, netroots and community activists and media executives to help us together imagine and implement a new 21<sup>st</sup> century politics built up from people and databases using the very latest technology.

In the years ahead, succeeding at the new politics and countering the conservative machine also will require the party's willingness to partner with think tanks, policy shops, commentator/bloggers, interested academics, and governments that Democrats control. Having worked at a think tank, and as a veteran of the successful Clinton policy years, I can bring concrete expertise in forging these vital national and state links. For more details on how I plan to utilize the "blogosphere," please visit my web site at [www.simonforchair.org](http://www.simonforchair.org).

I will also employ the spirit of the War Room to develop a communications strategy that both provides on-message talking points and guidance tailored to the media market and/or media outlet, but also utilizes our Senators, Governors, Members of Congress, state and legislative leaders, mayors, and party officials to carry our message out into the country. Matching the right person to the right media outlet and media market is a critical first step in countering the Republican message machine.

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Next, we cannot ignore specialty media; rather, we must integrate it into our overall communications strategy, while tailoring our message to individual constituencies. Specialty press outlets – from Jewish or Asian community newspapers and outdoor magazines to urban radio and Spanish-language TV – will receive constant attention, not just notice three weeks before Election Day.

At the end of my four years, I want to see a Party that can mobilize millions in all states against issues such as Bush's Social Security plan. I want to see a Party that can speak in Spanish competently to immigrant voters in Los Angeles with paid television, compelling spokespeople and mail. I want to see a Party with 10 million people connected via email to the national and state parties working side by side with us each day. I want to see a Party well-schooled in the vastly changing media and technology environment, committed each and every day not just to defeating the Republicans but also to defeating their ideas with better arguments and better tools to communicate them.

### **Renewing Our Democracy**

As we have learned these past two presidential elections, there is a fundamental difference between the two parties: Republicans do not want every American to vote; Democrats do. To fulfill our commitment to democracy, I will support the Voting Rights Institute in its review of the Ohio 2004 election, ask it to monitor HAVA compliance around the country, and use it to lobby for HAVA reauthorization in 2007. I will work with state parties to fight voter suppression and intimidation and seek improvements in the administration of elections in every state and territory.

In addition, I will advocate for reform of election laws to make it easier to vote, especially vote-by-mail, making the extension of that nationally a major priority. In addition, I look forward to working with the Price-Herman Commission in modernizing our presidential selection process, opening it up so more states in regions across the country have a relevant role to play.

### **A New Common Purpose for our Party**

I want to improve the culture of our Party and the DNC. I want to work hard with all of you to make sure that in the years ahead, we all recognize that no matter our differences, we are all in this together and we are all on the same team. I want to work to create more common ground, more common space, more time for us to be together as a family, focusing on the things that unite us, not just the things that push us apart. We must literally create **one national party** again that fights and wins in all 50 states and 6 territories. Our Party must be our common home, the place that brings us together, the place that fights each day for the aspirations of all Americans, the place that strives each day to restore the promise of this great nation.

To this end, I propose two new national programs for this year. First, I will launch a campaign called "Why I am Democrat" which will challenge all Democrats to submit a brief statement to

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the DNC explaining why they feel so passionately about being a Democrat. The best submissions will be picked by a blue ribbon set of judges and then published on the DNC's website and excerpted in major newspapers across the country.

Second, I will undertake a national drive, jointly run by the DNC and the state parties, to ask all Democrats to sign up with the DNC and join our fight. Our goal will be to get 10 million people to sign up for our cause, tripling the number in our database today.

### **Additional Items**

**(Please note this section refers to specific items requested by the ASDC questionnaire)**

I agree with items 1A and 1B on the role of the Chair and Vice-Chairs. Would like a little more info on 1C3, but if it ends up making it easier for us to open primaries to more voters I'm for it. Agree to 4H about the Convention. ASDC will be free to consult and recommend people for all DNC positions but will not have veto power.

### **Conclusion**

I believe that we Democrats are at a critical moment in our history. If we make the right decisions today and decide to pull together and move our party forward, we can stop the rising Republican tide, win elections, and put America back on the path to progress. If we do not stand up to the Republican machine, I fear for what would happen to our party – and our country.

But I am optimistic. I know that we have the vision, ideas, and people to rejuvenate the Democratic Party and our democracy. With the right leadership, I know that we can reinvigorate our state and local parties, win back seats in 2006, and take the White House in 2008.

I am eager to work with you to make this happen.