



**DEMOCRATIC VICTORY TASK FORCE**

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## FROM THE TASK FORCE

**“WE BELIEVE THAT THE PEOPLE ARE THE SOURCE OF ALL GOVERNMENTAL POWER; THAT THE AUTHORITY OF THE PEOPLE IS TO BE EXTENDED, NOT RESTRICTED. THIS CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED ONLY BY PROVIDING EACH CITIZEN WITH EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT. THEY MUST HAVE THAT, WE BELIEVE.”**

**- BARBARA JORDAN- “WHO THEN WILL SPEAK FOR THE COMMON GOOD?” NEW YORK, JULY 12, 1976**

As Democrats, we believe in an economy where hard work is rewarded, where everyone pays his or her fair share and plays by the rules. We believe in a government that’s focused on building a stronger and more secure middle class, with good-paying jobs, affordable higher education, and a secure retirement.

The Democratic Party historically has grounded itself with the people—the great majority of hard-working citizens from every background.

As the Great Commoner, Williams Jennings Bryan, said, “There are two ideas of government. There are those who believe that if you just legislate to make the well to do prosperous, that their prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic idea has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous their prosperity will find its way up and through every class that rests upon it.”

Ultimately, safeguarding the prosperity of the vast middle class helps to enrich and encourage those at either end of the economic spectrum. A thriving middle-class creates a vibrant economy that benefits the highest earners. The upper economic tiers can reach the highest rungs of success without pulling up the ladder behind them. And middle-class success opens opportunities and provides a framework for those currently at the bottom of the economic ladder to lift them up.

We believe that the best way to allow and encourage all Americans to participate in economic growth and prosperity is to allow and encourage them to participate in the processes of governing. We are and will continue to be the party that believes our country is strongest when every citizen has a chance to contribute at the grassroots level. Because strong unions provide a path towards middle class prosperity and because working Americans deserve a voice on their jobs and in their communities, we support the rights of workers to organize and bargain collectively.

We are and will always be the party of the people. And we believe that economic and political wellbeing goes hand-in-hand.

Guided by these convictions and commitments, Democrats have promoted economic policies that have equipped empowered growing numbers of Americans to build and benefit from a shared prosperity. Over the past eight decades, Democrats enacted Social Security, Fair Labor Standards, unemployment insurance, workers compensation, the GI Bill, Medicare, Medicaid, college student assistance, and other progressive programs, including, most recently, national healthcare reform.

Now, our country confronts the question that President Obama has posed: “Will we accept an economy where only a few of us do spectacularly well? Or will we commit ourselves to an economy that generates rising incomes and chances for everyone who makes the effort?”

“Once again, as at every moment of economic change throughout our history, Democrats believe this country must take bold action to adapt to new circumstances, ensuring that everyone gets a fair shot. We must offer our citizens opportunities for college education and career training, infrastructure and the internet – tools they needed to go as far as their effort will take them. That’s what middle-class economics is – the idea that this country does best when everyone gets their fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules. We don’t just want everyone to share in America’s success – we want everyone to contribute to our success.”

As we continue on in the 21st century, the focus of the Democratic Party must at every level – from the smallest town’s council to the Presidency of the United States – be to provide every citizen with the opportunity to participate in government and create a national party from the bottom up, rather than top down. We believe that both prosperity and political power thrive best when they grow organically from below instead of being imposed from above.

As President Barack Obama stated in his most recent the State of the Union address...”for all our blind spots and shortcomings, we are a people with the strength and generosity of spirit to bridge divides, to unite in common effort, to help our neighbors, whether down the street or on the other side of the world.

“I want future generations to know that we are a people who see our differences as a great gift, that we’re a people who value the dignity and worth of every citizen -- man and woman, young and old, black and white, Latino, Asian, immigrant, Native American, gay, straight, Americans with mental illness or physical disability. Everybody matters. I want them to grow up in a country that shows the world what we still know to be true: that we are still more than a collection of red states and blue states; that we are the United States of America.”

The national Democratic Party must never allow itself to become a party of Beltway consultants who routinely recommend cookie-cutter campaigns that are detached from the concerns of the people we hope to represent, at the city, state, and federal level. In order to consistently win on every level, we have to reconnect with the reason we want to win—and that reason is the people. The national party must work with and help grow state and local parties, to empower the people to participate in politics, while recruiting and training the next generation of office holders. Democrats must stand for the right of all eligible Americans to be able to register, to vote, and to have their vote counted fairly and accurately.

The Democratic Party must field candidates everywhere to ensure our message is heard everywhere. The national party needs to strengthen our state and local affiliates, revitalize our grassroots allies and broaden our appeal to stakeholders and others who assist us in elections. Our focus is not just on the presidential election cycles, but also elections for the US House and Senate as well as state and local offices, including midterm and special elections.

We need to speak directly, in ways that make sense and move people to action, addressing the broad, diverse group of Americans that are receptive to the Democratic Party’s message of shared opportunity and prosperity for all Americans.

We know that our message is powerful because our opponents are trying to steal it. Income inequality and the resulting middleclass economic stagnation have become so extreme that even the Republicans are giving lip service to economic fairness—even as they advocate policies that would undermine it.

That is one more reason why we as Democrats must remind voters that fighting for advancement and abundance for all the people has always been our core principle.

The Democratic Party is ready for this task ahead.

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# THE DEMOCRATIC VICTORY TASK FORCE

Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, immediately following the November 2014 elections, appointed the Democratic Victory Task Force.

The mission of the task force is simple: Examine the last several election cycles by soliciting actionable ideas from the entire Democratic family as to how we can improve the long-term strength of the national Democratic Party.

The Task Force has been instructed to be as inclusive as possible – to all points of view, constituencies, and approaches – to ensure that the Task Force has a clear set of recommendations as to how we can better define the DNC’s role, strengthen the Party at the national, state, and local levels, and ultimately set Democrats up for electoral successes.

## **The members of the Task Force are:**

- Naomi Aberly, Vice Chair of the DNC’s National Finance Committee and Advisory Board Co-Chair of Organizing for Action
- Donna Brazile, Vice Chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee
- Governor Steve Beshear, Governor of Kentucky
- Maria Cardona, Principal, Dewey Square Group
- Marc Elias, Chair, Perkins Coie Political Law Group
- Teddy Goff, Partner, Precision Strategies
- Maneesh Goyal, President, MKG
- Rick Palacio, Chairman of the Colorado Democratic Party
- Lee Saunders, President, AFSCME
- Eric Schmidt, Chair, Google
- Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Congresswoman, Chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee (Ex-Officio)

The Task Force met consistently between late November and February to look at factors that have contributed to our losses in midterm elections.

During this time, the Task Force met with experts in a variety of categories including message and research development, targeting and voter mobilization, voter advocacy and community building. Together the Task Force has met with hundreds of people involved in politics including elected officials, candidates, campaign managers, general consultants, academics, donors and, probably most importantly, activists and voters across the country.

The Democratic National Committee conducted a post-election poll with 100,000 of its supporters. The Chairwoman met with every Congressional Caucus and members of the Task Force met with groups in their respective fields of expertise. The Association of State Democratic Chairs conducted a survey of its membership and each of the campaign committees – the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Democratic Governors Association and the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee all contributed research and information to this Task Force.

The work spanned the Democratic Party, reaching into all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the territories and Democrats Abroad. The Task Force looked at all the factors that go into building, running and winning political campaigns in America.

# STRENGTHENING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

It is clear that Americans overwhelmingly support the people and issues that the Democratic Party fights for every day. Our work in support of equality in all areas – personal, wage, marriage, justice – was endorsed by Americans when they supported ballot measure after ballot measure that were focused on ensuring that this is a country for all.

We have suffered devastating losses at all levels of government since 2008 including:

- 69 House Seats
- 13 Senate Seats
- 910 State Legislative Seats
- 30 State Legislative Chambers
- 11 Governorships

Yet we know how to win elections. Elections in 2006, 2008, 2012 and ballot initiatives and other races this last cycle demonstrate that our issues and candidates resonate with voters. Through its examination of the last several election cycles, the Democratic Victory Task Force has identified areas for the DNC to strengthen its work and win elections in both presidential and midterm elections including:

- Having a clear, values-based narrative that unites us as Democrats and engages and appeals to the broadest swath possible of the American electorate.
- Creating strong accountable partnerships with active Democrats and all those who share our values in all 57 states and territories and Democrats Abroad.
- Proactively protecting and expanding every American's right to vote.
- Building a three-election strategy for redistricting – at the state and federal level.
- Identifying and promoting the next generation of Democratic leaders, including citizen activists from a cross-section of backgrounds and walks of life.

Over the next three months, the Task Force will continue to meet on a regular basis and it will commission additional research in each of these areas and develop action plans with the goal of having several pilot programs in place for the 2015 elections.

The Task Force will also take an in-depth look at other areas including how we:

- Build relationships with Americans that motivate them – and mobilize them – to vote.
- Resource the tools and tactics needed to communicate in the 21st Century in every community—speaking and fighting for their values year-in and year-out.
- Build an accessible and open party where all are – and feel – welcome, and where their voices are heard, their values are respected, and their experiences are understood.

In May of 2015 the Task Force – in partnership with the Democratic National Committee – will release a strategic plan to guide the Party's efforts through the 2022 elections.

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# DEMOCRATIC VICTORY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force has identified several areas where it is clear that the DNC has a strong role and responsibility and where it must start work today.

## CREATE A VALUES BASED NARRATIVE

No area of this review caused more debate or solicited more ideas than the belief that there is no single narrative that unites all of our work and the issues that we care about as a community of Democrats. It is strongly believed that the Democratic Party is loosely understood as a long list of policy statements and not as people with a common set of core values (fairness, equality, opportunity). This lack of cohesive narrative impedes the party's ability to develop and maintain a lifelong dialogue and partnership with voters.

**The Task Force recommends creating a National Narrative Project to work with party leaders, activists, and messaging and narrative experts to create a strong values-based national narrative that will engage, inspire and motivate voters to identify with and support Democrats.**

## STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH STATE PARTIES

The Task Force recognizes that the Democratic Party and the DNC are only as strong as state and local Democratic organizations. We want each individual state party – including all 57 states, territories and the District of Columbia and Democrats Abroad – to be effective, productive, inclusive and exciting organizations. This is the only way to build a powerful and successful national party. The Task Force also recognizes that in presidential cycles the focus of time, resources and talent has been in key battleground states. The DNC must recommit to efforts to strengthen all state parties to ensure wins at local, state and federal level across election cycles.

**The Task Force recommends working with State Parties to build partnership agreements that include training, evaluation, metrics, and incentives and that are focused on ensuring that every State Party is on a pathway to self-sustainability. It is imperative that these partnerships be rooted in a commonly understood set of standards and that there is transparency and accountability related to shared resources that are dedicated to professionalizing state parties and designing and implementing winning campaigns at the state, local and federal levels.**

## PROTECTING AND EXPANDING THE RIGHT VOTE

In the last several years the Republicans have implemented an aggressive strategy to make it more difficult to register and exercise the right to vote. These barriers have been erected via legislation, administrative rules, and litigation. Democrats must stand for the right of all eligible Americans to be able to register to vote, cast their ballot and have their ballot counted, without exception.

**The Task Force recommends the development of an aggressive, multi-faceted legislative and legal strategy to ensure every eligible American is registered to vote, has access to the polls and has their ballot counted. It should feature building support for an explicit right to vote in the U.S. Constitution and a new law to revive the preclearance powers of the Voting Rights Act. It also should include fighting for full implementation of existing registration and voting laws, including the VRA, NVRA and HAVA and developing a strategy to pass federal, state and local laws to modernize voter registration modernization, expand access to the polls, eliminate long lines; and ensure that all eligible voters have their ballots counted. Finally, it requires the expansion of professionalized election protection legal teams across the country and development of a plan in conjunction with our allies to register voters across the country within the current boundaries that exist today.**

## THREE-CYCLE REDISTRICTING PLAN

The current GOP stranglehold on state houses, governorships and congressional seats is a by-product of more than 30 years of organizing, fostering talent and significant financial investments at the state and local level. The DNC must develop – and accelerate – programs at the state and local level to ensure that the next redistricting and reapportionment projects encourage Democratic growth.

**The Task Force recommends that the DNC – along with the Democratic family of organizations, state parties and allied organizations – create and resource a three-cycle plan that targets and wins back legislative chambers in order to prepare for redistricting efforts. This long-term effort must be aggressive and focused on winning elections at the state and local level. It must also support efforts to take back the House of Representatives.**

## BUILD THE DEMOCRATIC BENCH

The Party needs to increase the number of Democrats running and winning their elections at all levels. In order to do this we need to get people – in all communities – excited about the opportunities present when you get deeply involved in your community and prepare them for the challenges of running for office.

**The Task Force recommends that the DNC play a proactive role in helping identify, train and foster the next generation of Democratic leaders, especially at the state level. This includes potential candidates, campaign staff and advisors, and activists and volunteers with ties to different communities.**

## AREAS FOR FURTHER REVIEW

**The Task Force will continue to meet through May 2015. As part of its ongoing work, the Task Force will oversee the implementation of its initial recommendations and initiate additional listening sessions, outreach to key constituencies and initiate research into several additional areas.**

## ENGAGE, MOTIVATE AND MOBILIZE THE VOTE

Throughout the review, the DNC heard that it – and all of the party committees – need to do a better job of communicating with voters over the long term and not just in the weeks leading up to the election. The Task Force recommends a comprehensive study of voter contact programs to ensure that consultants and campaign staff are developing balanced voter education and mobilization programs that focus on the highest quality communications and interactions with the largest number of voters.

## CREATING AN ACCESSIBLE AND OPEN PARTY

Throughout the process, the Task Force has heard – from the very people who work for and vote for Democratic candidates – that the Democratic National Committee (as well as campaign committees and state parties) is not as open or as accessible to all members and voters as it should be. This focus area – identified in the member survey, regional meetings and individual interviews – requires a thorough review of staffing structures, contracting policies and party policies and procedures. The Task Force recommends the DNC conduct this review to ensure that the DNC's staffing, policies and procedures result in a national party that is reflective of the people and views it represents.

## COMMUNICATING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

For several cycles, the DNC has lacked the necessary resources to make significant investments in paid communications in states, specialty media or digital communications. Immediately following the 2014 elections, the DNC has hired new communications staff and is developing new strategies to reach diverse communities. Working with these staff and marketing and media experts, the Task Force recommends the development of strategic communications plans that cover national, state and specialty markets. The

Task Force also recommends the development of digital communications strategies and tools that will help reach voters that aren't accessible through traditional channels.

## **BUILDING A BROAD COALITION OF VOTERS**

In order to win elections, the Democratic Party must reclaim voters that we've lost including white Southern voters, excite key constituencies such as African American women and Latinas, and mobilize the broadest coalition of voters possible to not only recapture state houses but also Congress. In order to better understand how to bring this large coalition together, the Task Force recommends - in tandem with the National Narrative Project - that the DNC's research delve more deeply into the barriers that keep people from identifying with, and supporting, Democratic candidates. This also includes working to better understand drop off and independent voters.

## **CONCLUSION**

The circumstances that led to the series of devastating electoral losses did not develop overnight. Instead they have been building over decades as the political system has been irrevocably changed by the passage of McCain-Feingold and the Citizens United decision. Republicans, in many cases, have been quick to respond to these changes and take advantage of this new moneyed and murky environment.

In just under twelve weeks, the Democratic Victory Task Force has examined all aspects of the recent election cycles and identified a number of areas for further study. This Task Force's work is only just beginning and a full action plan - including additional research, pilot programs, narrative development and collaboration with our allies - will be in place by May 2015.

This plan marks the start of our fight to reclaim state houses, win governorships, take back the House and Senate and protect the White House. Our work has only just begun!





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