

**ED KILGORE,  
MANAGING EDITOR:**

The **Democratic Strategist** has three editorial goals—(1) to provide an explicitly and unapologetically partisan platform for the discussion of Democratic political strategy, (2) to insist upon greater use of data and greater reliance on empirical evidence in strategic thinking and (3) to act as a neutral forum and center of discussion for all sectors of the Democratic community.

As **The Democratic Strategists'** editorial philosophy states, the publication will be "proudly partisan, firmly and insistently based on facts and data and emphatically open to all sectors and currents of opinion within the Democratic community".

A  
DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST  
STRATEGY MEMO

HOW THE GOP CAN WIN IN 2016

BY  
PAUL BOOTH

**A TDS STRATEGY MEMO:  
HOW THE GOP CAN WIN IN 2016**

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*After an election it is always a good idea for Democrats to take a moment and try to see the contest through the eyes of their opponents. In particular, it's important to try and imagine how the real, "hard as nails" guiding lights of the GOP would evaluate the success or failure of the various "hardball" strategies they tried in this election when they talk among themselves behind closed doors.*

*The following is an attempt to put myself in the shoes of a tough, no-nonsense Republican who invested heavily in the Grand Old Party's 2012 efforts and to try to imagine how I would evaluate the election from his point of view.*

**2012 and 2016: "What Did We Do Wrong and How Can we Win Next Time?"**

**Crippling the Democrats**

Our strategies aimed at diminishing Democrat capacity this cycle were well-intentioned but weren't the "magic bullet" some expected.

What they call "voter suppression"—energetic enforcement of the requirements for exercising the suffrage, both voter identification and the rules for third-party solicitation of voter registration, plus decisions allocating scarce election-day resources to prevent long lines at reliably Republican polling places—failed to make a difference in key states where we had control of all the machinery. True, we were blocked by the Justice Department and state courts in many states. Hopefully we can count on our Judges at the Supreme Court to provide a remedy in deciding *Shelby County v. Holder* this term, as reliably as our four votes on the Wisconsin Supreme Court proved when they upheld the legislature's passage of the union reform law in the face of the alleged violation of the Open Meetings Act. But these tactics only work well when the electorate isn't aroused to overcome them; voters stood in line for as long as five hours in Florida on Election Day. A study for the *Orlando Sentinel* concluded that 49,000 voters gave up and went home, too few to deny the state to Obama. Voter ID laws are not a magic bullet, but, as we saw in Florida in 2000, every vote counts. George Bush would not have become President if Republicans hadn't fought over every single ballot.

We pushed as hard as we could, in all the states we captured in 2010, to cripple Organized Labor, the Democrats' mainstay. We made Labor our number one target in the 2011 state legislatures because we know its resources (though far less than those we can deploy) do

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tend to counterbalance our natural financial advantage in elections. And we succeeded in Wisconsin. But that didn't get us the big prizes we needed on November 6. Merely three months after Scott Walker's magnificent win over the Recall, we lost the state (even with Paul Ryan on the ticket), and our Senate candidate who had previously been the most popular politician in the state was beaten by the openly lesbian Congresswoman from Madison. We passed Right to Work in Indiana in 2012, yet we lost that GOP Senate seat in November. Now we've passed it in Michigan. I challenge my readers: do you believe a Republican can win Michigan's electoral votes in 2016? These union-busting exercises make our business base feel good, real good. In the long run, they will make a big difference. But they don't change the electoral equation in the immediate sense.

The biggest disappointment has to be the failure to follow up on our success in driving ACORN out of business, with nothing to show for all the investigative resources we acquired in 2010, both in the states and particular in the US House of Representatives. The attack on Planned Parenthood was no match for the determined resistance it stirred up; our ally inside the Susan B. Komen Race for the Cure was driven out, and Planned Parenthood is stronger than ever. Meanwhile, Rep. Darrell Issa's committee launched plenty of inquiries, but came up with nothing consequential. One has to wonder whether any strategic plan is guiding his work. It's inconceivable that ACORN was the only entity on the Left with any legal vulnerabilities. We know the Obama camp, and the President himself, is deeply rooted in the social movements that emerged in the Sixties. From all indications, the mechanisms on the Democrat side outperformed those on our side, and are in a position to do so again, if left unchecked.

We haven't found a way to fully Defund the Left. We can be pleased with the rules that are in place that prevent the Administration from turning taxpayer-funded resources into political weapons. But the Left has more than made up for that with grass-roots funding. Mechanisms like Emily's List and MoveOn, and, of course, the huge small-dollar effort of the Obama campaign and the DNC, far exceed what we've done on the Right, even though it was the Right that brought direct-mail fundraising to its finest levels. For the third time, we put a proposition on the California ballot to cripple Labor's ability to put funds into political activity, and for the third time we were defeated. (One could even make the case that putting the question on the ballot backfires as Labor redoubles its mobilization; the Democrats' achievement of veto-proof legislative majorities was in no small part due to Labor's campaign against Prop 32.)

No, our efforts to change the rules of the game, to tilt the playing field, have not been well-conceived, or well-executed. Because every vote counts, they should be refined and pursued.

But, we need a bolder strategy.

### **Spending Big Dollars Wisely**

Campaign finance law has made it possible for anyone with substantial resources to run their own campaigns, and there are now too many on our side who are sure they know better than the party professionals, and are prepared to spend big bucks to prove it.

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And when they do that in our primaries, the results speak for themselves. Weak candidates nominated, including some true nut cases; winnable seats lost. Or, when the stronger candidate survives the primary process (Romney, Tommy Thompson), it's only after the process has forced them to say things that end up defeating them in the general election ("self-deportation", "who better than me...to do away with Medicare and Medicaid").

Unless our strong-willed independent spenders exercise much more self-restraint, we could miss our third chance in a row to retake the US Senate, and we'll lose the White House again.

### **Electoral Votes**

If we didn't know it before, it's clear now that the Democrats have more paths to 270 electoral votes than the Republicans.

That would change if six key states switched from winner-take-all to the system used in Maine and Nebraska, under which the Presidential winner in each Congressional District gets one electoral vote.

That would have switched a net of 63 electoral votes in Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia and Florida.

Add 63 to Romney's 206. The total is 269. A tie.

We had the opportunity to make the switch, in 2011, in Pennsylvania, where State Sen. Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi was sponsoring the proposal. But Republicans got cold feet, and decided to concentrate on the Voter ID law. House Majority Leader Mike Turzai even proclaimed "Voter ID, which is gonna allow Governor Romney to win the state of Pennsylvania, done." How wrong he was.

Though Sen. Pileggi is now promoting a less-radical option (allocate the electoral votes according to the proportions of the popular vote) which would hypothetically have yielded a move of 48 electoral votes, the original idea is under consideration in Michigan and Wisconsin.

If the rules of the game have to be changed, in order to make us competitive, let's suck it up and do it.

Sure, there will be whining from the goo-goos, nasty editorials, and the like.

When those come on, let's just remind them that this was a Democrat idea, that the switch in Maine was pushed by a Democrat front group. Our researchers can supply all the old news reports (isn't Google wonderful?)

### **Data and Polling**

Obviously our pollsters had defective likely-voter models. It's a poorly-kept secret that pollsters can produce instruments that meet various needs of campaigns; sometimes a campaign wants to know the truth, and other times it needs a rosier picture it can share with potential backers or leak to the press.

Perhaps we've fallen into the trap of believing our own BS.

As business people, that's inexcusable. The same goes for defective voter-data operations. We don't tolerate second-rate data for marketing, when it's all about making a profit, and we shouldn't tolerate it when it's all about controlling the government.

If the Obama data operation was superior in 2012 (and that appears to have been the case), it certainly benefited from the accumulation of information and insights over the entire six-year period of his candidacies. The lesson here is not just to have a central data bank, but to make it live by the discipline of Continuous Improvement, just like we do in our companies. Hire the best talent, insulate them from political crosswinds and cronyism, and make them accountable to the Party, the instrumentality that continues from one campaign to the next.

### **Wedge Issues**

Once this was our forte. In their day, issues like Affirmative Action, the Second Amendment, Abortion and Gay Marriage worked wonders for Republicans. This cycle, most of our wedges were blunt. Contraception looked promising, with the Catholic hierarchy resisting the Obamacare regulations and holding a "Fortnight for Freedom" in late June, early July. But the exit polls show that the Catholic vote didn't change much from 2008.

Seniors moved slightly toward the GOP ticket, rewarding the heavy investment in drawing attention to the \$716 billion in projected savings on Medicare, leading many senior voters to believe that Obama was financing Obamacare by cuts in Medicare. But a 3-point shift among senior voters is less than the 4.5-point shift by which Romney narrowed the Obama margin from 2008.

Actually only the Israel issue seems to have proven a successful wedge. Jewish voters went for Obama 69-30, a big drop from his 78-21 margin over McCain.

The more our candidates focus on talking to our base, convincing it that they're faithful, the less they can try out issues that might detach voters from the other side. We have to free up our candidates and state parties to test a wide range of issues, and then scale up the best ideas for maximum impact.

### **Conclusion: What Democrats Should Expect in The Future**

*If the discussion above is a reasonably accurate picture of what Republican strategists are thinking "behind closed doors" (As Mitt Romney would say), then what should Democrats be preparing for in 2014 and 2016?*

*Democrats should prepare for the following:*

- *Continued and expanded efforts to suppress Democratic votes and voting groups.*
- *Continued and expanded efforts to defund groups and organizations that support Democratic candidates.*

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- *Continued and expanded efforts to reassert Party control over independent right-wing mega-buck candidate funders.*
  - *Continued and expanded efforts to change the electoral college in ways that benefit the GOP*
  - *Continued and expanded efforts to make Republican polling less biased by preconceived conservative ideas*
  - *Continued and expanded efforts to find new wedge issues that will work better than those employed in 2012.*