31st Street Swing Left 2021 Strategy

Overview

Yes, we now have a fantastic, activated new government with Democratic control of the presidency and the Congress,. But we won and now control them by **only a hair's breadth**. Right wing extremism fed by a wealthy few and nativist forces continues to threaten our democracy and ability to address 21st-century needs. Together with like-minded colleagues across the country, we have had a decisive impact. But our only course is continued **sustained, concerted, effective effort.** Our 2021 priorities:

Virginia 2021 Elections. We must keep Virginia Blue, both to continue to advance amazing reforms, but also as inspiration for national Democratic efforts in 2022. Our emphasis is on the **House of Delegates** through a 3-track approach:

1. Highly targeted fundraising, especially **early money for challengers**.
2. **Canvassing** and other voter outreach in the 3 major regions – NOVA, Richmond suburbs, and Hampton Roads supporting a combination of incumbents and challengers.
3. Kickstarting and catalyzing campaign **digital** voter outreach support.

On-the-Ground (OTG) Grassroots Organizing. Successes in Georgia and Wisconsin in 2020 have shown the value of such year-round OTG efforts in building a potent **infrastructure for the long term**. Based on the strategic priority of key US Senate seats and other factors in 2022, we will support effective OTG grassroots groups in Pennsylvania, North Carolina and potentially Georgia. Priority will be enlisting support from the 1/3 of the adult age voting population who did not vote in 2020, via long term **outreach to low propensity voters and voter registration**. We also may find compelling opportunities to support Dem Party OTG organizing in the key states.

Other Opportunities for Action. We will stay alert for high-leverage opportunities such as special elections, and grass root organizing that may present anywhere across the country.

Our approach is to be flexible, nimble, detail-oriented, evidence-based and targeted, so that by banding together we can have the greatest impact.

Virginia 2021 Elections

Virginia's 2021 elections include the governor and other statewide offices, as well as all 100 seats in the House of Delegates (but none in the state Senate). VA will be a bellwether for the

nation, as well as an opportunity for continued enlightened legislation benefiting Virginians and the region. We must **keep Virginia Blue**!

The House of Delegates will be our focus. The statewide races are likely to receive major if not massive support, partly because VA is largely "the only game in town" in 2021. Moreover, based on our "Power Up" or "Reverse Coattails" approach, having vigorous Democratic delegate campaigns will contribute significantly to the statewide races as well. The current make-up is D-55 and R-45. We aim to stay in **close contact with the key campaigns** and the House of Delegates Democratic Caucus to assess where our support is best applied. Our 3 tracks:

1. Fundraising. Incumbents are likely able to generate considerable support. So as is our usual practice, we will focus on the **challenger races**. As a start, it appears 2 seats in the Richmond suburbs and 2 in the Virginia Beach area hold considerable promise. Also there may be 1-2 "Open Hold" seats, which are currently Democratic, but become open if the Dem incumbent does not run. Once it is clear who the Dem nominees are, we aim to **develop a slate** for support. In addition, we will keep a careful eye on fundraising, polling etc. to see where emerging needs may call for support for either challengers or incumbents.

2. Canvassing. Experience in the PA general election and in the GA runoffs showed **canvassing can be done safely**. And we anticipate vaccination levels by the mid-to-late summer will fully open up canvassing opportunities. Our more vulnerable incumbents, as well as the challengers fall into 3 regions: NOVA, Richmond suburbs and Hampton Roads. NOVA is an easy day trip. The Richmond suburbs can also be reasonable day trips. Hampton Roads clearly requires staying over, but we have successfully fielded sizable groups to canvass there in the past.

We aim to **maximize the effectiveness** of our fine cadre of veteran canvassers as well as new ones, through training and mentoring. And we will negotiate with campaigns to make good use of our time, with productive walk lists and priority for reaching low-propensity, supportive voters.

Other Voter Outreach: While canvassing is our preferred approach, we will be alert to other good outreach opportunities using a variety of other modes (e.g. phoning, texting, letters, post cards) at the appropriate time. And we will coordinate with other organizations taking leadership in these.

3. Kickstarting Digital Voter Outreach. We value digital outreach highly, with its low cost and ability to target voters -- including low-propensity voters. And 31st Street has the advantage of close collaboration with a **highly dedicated and professional digital producer** who has strong relationships with about 2 dozen campaigns. We will **kickstart digital support early**, yielding first strike capability and great economies of scale including:

- Conducting early face-to-face taping for multiple candidates in the 3 key regions.
- Addressing key issues based on polling and qualitative research.
- Developing a storehouse of footage to produce a variety of ads to respond flexibly to arising campaign needs.

We anticipate the large majority of the actual digital content production and distribution later on, will be paid for by the campaigns.

On-the-Ground (OTG) Grass Roots Organization

Why Support Grassroots Organization? The 2020 wins in Georgia and Wisconsin attest to the value of year-round OTG organizing. A healthy mix of paid and volunteer organizers with strong roots in the community, can provide unmatched ongoing insight, links, networking and mobilizing of those communities for **long term impact**. This approach is especially effective for the key activities of **voter registration and mobilizing low-propensity supportive voters**.

Priority for PA, NC and Potentially GA. All have **pivotal US Senate** and state legislature races in 2022. PA and GA will also be electing governors and other statewide offices in 2022. And depending on redistricting, there may be opportunities for US House seats. We have experience and contacts in all 3 states. And we have close proximity to PA and to some extent NC. Though we will actively look for opportunities for funding in GA, it already has a very rich ecosystem of grassroots groups. Because the GA successes have been so well appreciated, GA is highly likely to receive major support nationally. While we are limiting the number of states at the outset, so as to focus our resources for an extended time, we will be alert to other situations where grassroots support may be worthwhile.

Criteria for Grassroots Group Selection. Without not expecting all criteria will be met by an organization, we are looking for good fits based on the following criteria:

- Year-round OTG activity.
- Active voter registration.
- Conduct of deep canvassing especially to low propensity voters.
- Good balance of election-related and other activities.
- “Multi-racial” approach (versus just one community).
- Good size and leverage (large enough for impact, sizable enough for good connection)
- Strong “bootstrap” local roots.
- Good leadership, training, organizational development and coordination with other groups.
- Good track record.
- Good accountability.
- Zig, not Zag (i.e. organization not getting or likely to get plenty of support from elsewhere)
- ActBlue donation accessibility.

Democratic Party OTG efforts. The experience in Wisconsin has also shown an effective **Democratic Party** model for intensive year-round voter engagement. It may be possible to support, encourage and leverage invigorating state party efforts.

Other Good Opportunities for Action

Experience has shown that unexpected opportunities, notably special elections, do arise from time to time. As always, we will be **very selective** about where our support might provide **significant leverage**. That might include races such as nearby local races or pivotal state attorney general or judgeship races, or referenda that might not get much attention, but can be very pivotal for our goals.

Some Underlying Precepts and Findings That Guide Our Strategy and Efforts

More Strategic

- **Elect Democrats**: Our primary aim is electing Democrats, pure and simple, who may hold some diverse issue views, but consistent with Democratic values.

- **Stay Opportunistic, Nimble and Informed**: We look for less-appreciated but potent **targets of opportunity**, being flexible, detail-oriented and evidence-based.
- **Beware Right Wing Tactics**: The danger on the right stems largely from **economic inequality**, such that the super-rich pursue their interests in opposition to those of the general population. They undermine our democratic processes though **divisive maneuvers** and are often successful in persuading many working and middle class voters to vote against those voters' economic interest.
- **Stress Economic Common Ground Across Race and Class Lines** The key communication strategy is to bring working and middle class people together **across race and class lines**, to understand common values and economic common interest.
- **Enlist White Non-College-Educated Voters.** In concert with communities of color, we need to enlist white non-college educated voters. They make up over **40% of the electorate** nationally, are pivotal in any election, and often have progressive views on economic issues. The **race-class narrative** approach offers an attractive approach.
- **Engage Non-Voters.** 1/3+ of the voting age population did not vote even in 2020. And infrequent voters often switch in or out of each election. Active **voter registration and outreach to low-propensity voters** are major priorities.
- **Focus on State Legislatures**. State legislature races are somewhat overlooked but are particularly important because of legislatures' domains including **voting laws**, quality of life within those states, regional influences and **building the bench** for higher office.
- **Work for the Long Term:** While supporting elections in election years is well worthwhile**,** our party has too long neglected the longer-term investment we desperately need to be successful**.** Thus, 2021 allows us to focus on supporting infrastructure for the long term.

<u>More Tactical</u>

- **Provide Early Money.** Vital for campaigns and much more effective than money coming later.
- **Avoid Primary Contests**. Unless one candidate is clearly very far ahead
- **Leverage Power Up Impact:** Supporting down-ballot campaigns has the potent effect of supporting up-ballot races as well via the **"**Power Up" or "Reverse Coattail" effect.

- **Return to In-Person Canvassing**. We fully expect safe canvassing to be in full swing by at least the summer of 2021.
- **Invest in Digital Voter Outreach.** Television is overrated, expensive, poorly targeted, with declining viewership, focuses on persuasion of marginal value and is often deployed too late to penetrate and communicate to voters well. Digital voter outreach, which is relatively inexpensive, well-targeted and flexible can offer much better value.
- **Respond to Early Right-Wing Attacks**. The right-wing playbook typically deploys such attack ads. Our campaigns need to be ready, willing and able to respond appropriately including going on the offensive.