



WINNING BACK WISCONSIN: BIGGER, BOLDER, STRONGER!

A Blueprint for Democratic Victories
in 2018 and Beyond

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WINNING BACK WISCONSIN

Dear Wisconsin Democrats:

The Democratic Party of Wisconsin is at a pivotal moment in the organization's fight to survive and thrive. For years we have used a playbook that gave us victories in presidential elections and sometimes allowed us to win in off-year elections.

That model no longer works. We need massive change. We need to be bigger, bolder and stronger.

After the 2014 election loss, the Democratic Party of Wisconsin commissioned a "post mortem" study to see what went wrong and what needed to be done to fix it. Sadly, very little of that study has been pursued or implemented. In 2016, we chalked up our worst defeat since 1984.

Democrats need to completely reinvent the party and how it operates if we are to become the governing party in Wisconsin once again. I have prepared this blueprint as a guide for what I will do, if elected as your State Chair, to win elections again.

- Recruiting ward captains in every voting ward of the state
- Massive statewide organizing canvass starting in 2017
- 150 Town Hall meetings in small towns, suburbs, and big cities THIS YEAR



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- Rebrand the party by talking to people outside of the party
- Streamlined and active online/social media presence
- Organized and consistent DAILY press presence
- Candidate recruitment

For a decade, I have been winning elections at the local level—both my own races and candidates that I have recruited and supported. Many of the ideas here have been tried in local races and they were successful.

I am running for State Chair of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin because we have to WIN again. I ask for your vote on Saturday, June 3 at the State Convention.

In solidarity and community,

Bryan Kennedy, Ph.D.
Mayor, City of Glendale
Candidate for DPW State Chair



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LAY OF THE LAND

Wisconsin has gone from a purple state to a deeply red state. In 2010, Democrats controlled the Governor's Mansion and both houses of the legislature. The Assembly was 53-46 and the State Senate was 18-15. After a massive Republican and third party effort, Republicans emerged victorious in the 2010 elections. Scott Walker was elected Governor and the Republicans swept to control in the Assembly 61-38 and the Senate 19-14.

That marked the beginning of a Republican assault on Wisconsin's progressive tradition. We saw the passage of Act 10, stripping most public sector workers of nearly all collective bargaining rights. They then went after private sector union workers with so-called "right-to-work" legislation and attacks on prevailing wage. Walker introduced the most austere budget in years, eliminating hundreds of millions of dollars from public K-12 and higher education. Republicans gerrymandered the state in an unconstitutional power grab. They passed a voter ID bill, shortened early voting and implemented reforms that challenged Wisconsin's democratic traditions.

The next three election cycles saw losses of additional Assembly and State Senate seats each time. We have been unable to capture the Governorship in the 2012 recall and the 2014 general election. We now stand at the smallest



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minority we have had since Eisenhower was President, 64-35 in the Assembly and 20-13 in the State Senate.

The only bright spots electorally in the last seven years were in 2012 when we carried the state for Barack Obama and elevated Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin to the US Senate. As a result of massive recall efforts, we also managed to take control of the State Senate for a few months in the summer of 2012, but promptly lost control again in November, 2012 when newly drawn hyperpartisan districts were implemented.

Democrats have been relegated to a regional party status, operating primarily in southeastern and south-central Wisconsin, with a smattering of additional seats around the state.

Democrats enter the 2018 election cycle woefully unprepared to mount aggressive efforts to win the Governorship, Attorney General, gain seats in the Assembly and State Senate, and retain US Senator Tammy Baldwin's seat.

In fact, it can actually get WORSE. Democrats hold two Assembly seats and three State Senate seats that Donald Trump and Ron Johnson won in 2016. Two of those Senate seats are up in 2018. Both of those incumbents have less than \$10k in the bank. They have prominent Republican Assembly reps in their Senate districts with over six figures



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in the bank and they pose a significant threat to two Democratic Senators next year.

In 2016, Democrats were not prepared with a message or a ground game to win. We lost the state for the first time in 32 years in a Presidential election. It appears that the state party has no written plan or agenda to win. It is as if they are throwing spaghetti against the wall to see what sticks. We need to be organized, focused, and determined.

To paraphrase Einstein, we would be insane to continue to do the same things we have done and expect different results.

We need a new vision and a detailed game plan. Democrats can win again, if we massively overhaul our party model, message and field effort to conform to changing times and trends.

We need to engage our friends and neighbors in ways that we have not done before. Democrats must implement a new model—a statewide organizing model that extends our reach into every voting ward in the state and engages Wisconsin residents in year-round canvassing. We need to get into small towns and big cities with at least 150 Town Hall meetings in 2017. We need to develop new messaging. The party must grow its social media presence and online information hub. Without a Democratic Governor, the State Chair must serve as the spokesperson for the party, doing



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daily press and media outreach, connecting Democratic elected officials with media outlets around the state. We must recruit strong candidates in all 99 Assembly districts and all 17 State Senate seats that are up for election in 2018. We must also look to partisan county courthouse races to build a bench of progressives ready to advance our Democratic agenda.

WE MUST BE BIGGER, BOLDER AND STRONGER!

This document details what we can and should do in each of those areas. This is the blueprint that Bryan Kennedy will use as DPW State Chair to Win Back Wisconsin.



ORGANIZING MODEL

- Ward captains in over 3,600 voting wards
- Statewide canvass starting in 2017, focusing on issues first and then on candidates
- Outreach to progressive/grassroots organizations that are not affiliated with the Democratic Party
- Study restructuring toward a State Senate District or Congressional District model

The DPW currently operates as 71 county parties (in northern Wisconsin two counties have merged into one organization), 8 congressional district parties and a centralized state party. Most of the party funding is concentrated at the state level and is utilized for staffing. DPW staff work for the state party and provide outreach, public relations, membership, leadership training, financial, legal and strategic services to the state organization and to the county/CD parties.

Every other fall, in even numbered years, we organize a “coordinated campaign” to carryout electoral activities. After the November general election, we shut the campaign down again for a year and half. We essentially reinvent the wheel in our ground game every two years.

We don’t engage our membership or Wisconsin residents around issues, just electoral politics, and we only do it in the



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Fall when we have candidates that we want people to support at the ballot box.

This model is failing.

It is time to employ a statewide organizing model. The party must recruit a ward captain for each of the over 3,600 voting wards in the state.

Ward captains will be responsible for engaging their neighbors in regular canvasses throughout the year around issues. Voters having regular contact with Democratic neighbors around issues will create a dialogue and allow voters to see Democrats as people concerned about making our communities safer, more prosperous and more equitable. When we later approach them with candidates for partisan office, they will be prepared to hear about the candidates because they will already be familiar with important political issues.

Canvassing can also encompass discussions around local issues during the Spring elections. The party apparatus can (and should) be available to assist like-minded nonpartisan candidates in getting elected to local office.

There are large unaffiliated “progressive” or “grassroots” organizations being formed all over the state. They want to be engaged and involved. Many members of these organizations have not joined the Democratic Party. They



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could be recruited to be ward captains or to assist with issues-based canvassing. It will give them constructive activities to channel their passion and energy into meaningful work.

Ultimately, the ongoing canvass will increase party membership, encourage repeat small-dollar donations, and help us foster a greater sense of community within (and outside) of the party family.

For those familiar with union models, the state party would function like a union state federation, the county parties would serve as “locals” and the ward captains would be like union stewards, who are responsible for reaching the people in their neighborhoods, towns or villages.

There are some that state that all of this outreach will not help us win because the districts are gerrymandered. In 2010, Democrats held a majority in both chambers. Districts were Democratic-leaning. The Republicans worked to craft a message that helped flip a dozen seats.

We can win in a Republican-leaning district just like they won in Democratic-leaning districts seven years ago. We just have to talk to neighbors over and over and deliver to them a message and candidates that speak to their needs and desires.



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We currently focus on county parties and congressional districts. Is that the best model for the party? Would we be better served bringing party regions into State Senate districts instead?

The DPW should engage in a study of potentially moving toward State Senate regions. In the areas where we have a Democratic State Senator, they could become the regional party leader and would work closely with their local party members. In areas where the Senator is Republican but we have one or more Democratic Assembly Reps, one of the Assembly Reps could serve as party leader. Where we have no elected Senator/Reps, the party could hold an election for a leader or chair.

Our elected representatives must become more engaged in party building. We cannot continue a model that has them at arms length from the volunteer base of party activists that works to get them elected. We need our State Senators and Assembly Reps to become far more engaged in party leadership, messaging, activist and leadership training, and membership recruitment.

Our local parties must become more engaged in their communities. Democrats should be holding food drives, working in homeless and animal shelters, engaging the local religious community, organizing block parties. We need to all follow President Obama's lead and become community organizers.



150 TOWN HALLS AND REBRANDING THE PARTY

- At least 150 Town Hall meetings in every corner of the state in 2017.
- Listening sessions opened to the public, and held statewide
- Developing an overarching message that is less focused on identity politics
- Urban outreach, rural outreach, constituency outreach to racial and ethnic communities

What do Democrats stand for? Our message cannot continue to be “We are not Scott Walker. Republicans are bad.”

We have become the party that supports the key issue(s) of our constituency groups, instead of crafting a message about how ALL of those issues combine to foster an inclusive and equitable society. Many Wisconsinites have not been able to see themselves in the Democratic Party. How do we tie all of it together into a narrative and message? What is our theme? And more importantly, what are we missing?

It is time to ask the citizens of Wisconsin!

We need to rebrand the party with a message that resonates with everyone. In order to do that, we need to hold a minimum of 150 Town Hall meetings in every corner of the state. Republicans are afraid of their constituents right now.



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They are hiding from them. Democrats are not afraid to take to the streets. It's time that take over coffee shops, taverns, libraries, diners, municipal buildings and homes to meet with Wisconsinites.

The DPW should hold Town Hall meetings and listening sessions around the state that are advertised and promoted to the general public, not just a core group of Democrats. For example, we need to ask the folks that voted for David Obey for 40 years, "Why did you stop voting for Democrats?" Twenty-four counties voted for Obama and then voted for Trump. What did we do wrong? Why did they leave us? We need to talk to farmers, hunters and conservationists, urban and rural low-wage workers, persons of color, community groups, immigration rights activists, regular churchgoers, and others. We need to get outside our protective bubble echo chamber and listen to Wisconsin voters.

The sessions need to be facilitated by the State Party Chair. People will be more likely to show up and speak out if the leader of the party is conducting the Town Halls and listening sessions. The chair needs to understand the messages that people deliver and then work with elected officials, local party leaders and others to craft a cohesive "Democratic message" that speaks—not to specific areas and needs, but instead—to the Wisconsin electorate as a whole.

Our party is diverse. Urban and rural voters have some different concerns and needs. White voters are different



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than African-American, Latino, or Hmong voters on some issues. All voters share the common values of wanting to be financially secure, physically healthy and a part of a caring community. Identity politics does not cross demographic lines but big picture messages do.



DIGITAL OUTREACH

- Centralized website hosting, webpage interconnectivity and templates for county and CD parties
- Facebook pages for all county and CD parties and have those Facebook pages linked to the county/CD websites
- Focus on recruiting young voters by constantly updating digital content and increasing our use of social media

In June 2015, roughly half of our county parties had Facebook pages and/or county party websites. In February 2017, those numbers are virtually unchanged. The way in which social media and digital content is utilized has changed, as well, in just two short years.

We need an extensive and uniform digital outreach and social media agenda.

The state party must become the hub of digital information for the county and CD parties. Centralized and interconnected webhosting will allow all of the county, CD and state party web pages to be linked. The state can push out daily material to county and CD party pages to keep the information fresh and new, while not requiring significant efforts by local party officials.



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The American Federation of Teachers provides webhosting to its state and local affiliates. All of the local sites have newsfeeds from the national union. New material pops up daily on local websites without the local leaders having to do anything. It allows local members to learn what is happening without having to search for it.

The Democratic Party of Wisconsin must move webhosting into one central location and provide the service to all of its party affiliates at the county and congressional district level. The state party should make template models for the county and CD parties that replicate branding on all the connected web pages. Whether someone visits the 3rd CD page or the Kenosha County Dems page, they see Democratic branding and have a similar browsing experience. Then, when press releases are posted, they can be pushed out to 72 counties and 8 congressional districts.

Young voters are far less likely to show up at a county party meeting than they are to engage in social media “meetings.” In addition to webpages, every county and CD party needs a Facebook group page connected to their webpages. Content that is posted to the website can also flow onto Facebook, and vice versa. County party members can join in online discussions around issues and share content more easily over social media and tag the party when posts or pictures are displayed. County parties can livestream their meetings over Facebook live.



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The DPW Chair has a Twitter account. There should be multiple tweets everyday to Twitter. Interconnected webpages and Facebook pages can also have Twitter feeds from the state party.

None of this is difficult. It is already being done elsewhere. We just need to have a party that prioritizes it and works to make it happen.



DAILY PRESS

- Daily press outreach by the Chair
- Regular conference calls with reporters statewide on issues
- Party serving as media outlet for all Democratic elected officials and candidates

The Governor of Wisconsin is not a Democrat. Without a Democratic Governor to be the de facto leader of the party and address issues in the press everyday, it becomes the responsibility of the state party to push out to voters the Democratic message.

The State Chair should be in daily contact with reporters, either offering the party perspective on issues or connecting reporters with Democratic elected officials or experts on certain issues. Currently, the DPW has press releases coming out almost daily. They are posted on the DPW website and the Facebook page and are submitted to Wispolitics. There is very little outreach to media outlets all over the state.

With Democrats in such a minority, the media is not going to seek out Democratic viewpoints. The party must be proactive and engaged daily in making sure that the press gets the Democratic viewpoint on the issues of the day. Regular conference calls with reporters, regular interviews on radio and TV, and regularly stopping by newspaper



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editorial boards to discuss pertinent topics will build the Democratic media presence.

Wisconsin Public Radio is always looking for material. The Chair could be a regular on Joy Cardin or Kathleen Dunn. There are rural radio stations all over the state that desire guests on a daily basis. The chair can regularly pop-in to rural radio, and the party can train local party officials on how to do radio interviews, and how to develop talking points.

The party should explore an active YouTube channel with regular updates of new content.

We have bloggers all over the state. Because the party has failed to engage them, there are some progressive bloggers that see the Democratic Party as no different than the Republican Party. We need to foster relationships and bring progressive voices into the fold, not alienate them further.



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CANDIDATE RECRUITMENT

“If we build it, they will come....”

There are many good progressives that would like to run for partisan and nonpartisan office. They need to see a dedicated and able Democratic Party that they can look to as an ally to help them win.

One of the reasons no judicial candidate stepped up to challenge State Supreme Court Justice Annette Zeigler is that there is not a strong and vibrant Democratic Party to support and back a potential challenger. It is also why we have several thousand local offices statewide that are uncontested this Spring.

Candidate recruitment and training needs to become focused—not on getting a warm body to put their name on the ballot, but rather—on effective messaging and running to win. We need 99 Assembly candidates in 2018. There are 17 State Senate seats up for election next year and we need 17 candidates to run.

County and CD leaders should work with the State Chair to identify and encourage potential candidates.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

There are, of course, many other items that the State Chair directs or supports. There are certainly other items that I am considering. Imagine an Upper Midwest Democratic Consortium, where Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio share ideas and build programs and strategies together. If elected Chair, I will have those conversations with neighboring State Chairs.

This blueprint represents a “big picture.” Organizing and Canvassing, Town Halls, Messaging and Branding, Digital Strategies, Press and Media, and Candidate Recruitment are areas that need a new direction.

What we choose to do as a state party in 2017 will determine whether we win or lose in 2018, 2020 and beyond.