

Nick McIntosh – US Election 2012

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Executive Summary

Introduction

I left Australia for the US on 2 October 2012 and arrived back on 27 October 2012. During this time and as part of the program I visited Philadelphia, Chicago, Washington DC, Virginia and New Orleans.

I met with various Democratic Party Officials and key Democratic Party supporters and stakeholders, with a particular focus on organised labour and their role in the campaign as this directly relates to my role as Chief Advisor of the Transport Workers' Union of NSW. Accompanying me for large parts of my trip was ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary Jamie Clements.

The Report

The substantive report is structured in a chronological order. A brief summary of each meeting is provided with the key items which were discussed, along with a list of the people or the main people involved.

In some meetings similar issues were discussed, and as such the summary provided of each meeting tries not to talk about the same issues twice but rather focuses on the unique issues discussed at each meeting.

It is worth mentioning two of the major observations I made in this Executive Summary which many of the people I met touched on and will be further expanded on in the Visit Report.

Persuasion and Turnout

The biggest difference between US and Australian elections is the need to both persuade and to maximise turnout. In Australia turnout is essentially guaranteed because of compulsory voting, whereas in the US the key to winning an election is to both persuade the undecided voters and to maximise the turnout of your core constituencies.

As such, a much more structured approach is required. There are various levels on which the Obama campaign operates:

- Campaign Headquarters – located in Chicago, this is where the top campaign advisers are based along with a staff of, at its peak, 650 people. While they perform many roles, one of their main roles is to direct campaign Headquarters in each major city.
- City Headquarters – responsible for organising logistical arrangements and events when campaign officials visit and to tailor messages as directed by Campaign Headquarters. They also direct the Get Out The Vote (GOTV) and Operation Vote (OpVote) operations in each area.
- Field Offices – there are various Field Offices in each state which are responsible for running GOTV as directed by City Headquarters and forming volunteer networks. In Ohio, before the Republicans had officially nominated a candidate the Obama campaign had established over 800 Field Offices.
- Volunteers – these are the people instructed by the Field Offices to register voters and recruit further volunteers to the campaign.

Competing Interest of Core Constituencies

An interesting parallel with Australian politics is the competing interests of core constituencies. The Democrats' core constituencies include traditional working class voters, unions, African Americans,

Latinos, homosexuals, progressives and women. Often, some of their interests are directly opposed to one another.

One which stands out and where a direct parallel can be drawn is between traditional working class voters and Latinos. Latinos and progressives generally support broad immigration reform, whereas traditional working class voters generally support a strict immigration and border protection policy. The same problem can be seen in Australia between traditional working class voters and progressive voters with regards to their views on immigration and asylum seekers, an issue which the left side of politics has struggled to reconcile.

The Democrats attempt to overcome this issue by ensuring that their messaging is well targeted with each constituency. For instance, rather than focusing on immigration with traditional working class voters they will instead focus on issues which they know such voters will be more supportive of. This is where the data, tracking polls and persuasion polls carried out by Campaign Headquarters in Chicago comes in, as the messaging for each area is specifically targeted to these groups so that volunteers on the ground, and other advertising, is focused on issues they know will persuade such voters.

Overall

The program was extremely rewarding and a once in a lifetime experience. While the Visit Report attempts to provide the reader with a good summary of the trip, there's nothing quite like meeting the people involved or visiting the places they work out of.

In terms of people, having the opportunity to meet Congressman Bob Brady was a real highlight and being able to sit and talk with him for an hour painted a great picture of political life in the US and in Washington DC.

In terms of places, walking into Obama's Campaign Headquarters in Chicago for the first time was an amazing experience and being given a guided tour by the Political Director of the North East was sensational.

It was a privilege to have been given the opportunity to participate in the program and I would recommend it to anyone.

Nick McIntosh – US Election 2012 – Visit Report

Meeting: Obama 4 America Philadelphia HQ (PHQ)

Place – Philadelphia

Dates – 2 – 7 October 2012

People:

- Brendan Cavanagh;
- ALP NSW Branch on secondment to Obama 4 America Philadelphia;
- Pat Millham, Pennsylvania State Political Director;
- Fernando Trevino, Operation Vote; and
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary.

Summary:

There are a few key functions that the PHQ performs on behalf of the Obama campaign in Pennsylvania, a state which has not voted Republican in a Presidential election since 1988 although is considered to be a key swing state that the Obama Campaign cannot afford to lose.

The Obama campaign considers that the state of Pennsylvania will be won or lost in and around Philadelphia. This is because the outer suburbs and rural areas of Pennsylvania are considered to be strongly Republican, while Philadelphia itself is strongly Democratic, so much so that if the Get Out the Vote (GOTV) operation is successful enough in and around Philadelphia the sheer volume of votes this will garner will outweigh Republican gains elsewhere in the state.

Generally, the PHQ and other Field Offices receive strategic advice from Obama 4 America HQ in Chicago about areas and constituencies they need to focus on. The PHQ is then responsible for targeting such constituencies and running the local GOTV operation. There are then a number of Field Offices around Philadelphia which carry out the GOTV operation.

One of the major functions of the PHQ is to organise events when key campaign officials visit. Generally the PHQ is given notice that a key campaign official will be visiting Philadelphia and their job is to organise a venue and supporters to attend. This involves having contact with key supporters, such as unions, Democratic leaders in the state and Church leaders to ensure that the event is well attended and well covered by the media. For example, a couple of days before I arrived the First Lady visited Philadelphia and the PHQ was responsible for organising all the logistical side of things and getting supporters to attend.

Operation Vote (OpVote) also works out of the PHQ, as it does in most Field Offices. OpVote's main role is to reach out and maximise the vote among key Democratic constituencies such as African Americans, Jews, homosexuals, Asians, Latinos and women. Without the overwhelming support of most, if not all of these constituencies, the Democrats cannot win. OpVote actively pursues each of these groups and will register and ensure they vote by either organising or attending events that these groups will attend. Their job is to then frame the Obama campaign message in a positive manner to each of the above groups. For instance, during my visit, OpVote had organised with the local church an event for African American women which would immediately follow the church service. There was an issue among this particular constituency regarding Obama's support for gay marriage and so the focus of the event was to remind the women that the Democratic Party was a broad church and change the conversation to one about the positive achievements of the Obama Presidency for African Americans.

Meeting: Philadelphia Field Office (PFO)

People:

- Daniel Rogers, PFO Organiser

Summary:

The PFO is responsible for organising grass roots GOTV. This is done through attending events organised through the PHQ and carrying out a voter registration drive, setting up a GOTV stall in a public place or people literally walking off the street to register in the PFO.

Other than registering voters, the PFO is also responsible for organising volunteers and administering the volunteer network. For example, at an event they will ask Obama supporters to volunteer at phone banks or have them set a target of the amount of people they can in turn register to vote.

The volunteer network is, in many ways, similar to a pyramid scheme. PFO Organisers are given a set target of people to register and recruit as volunteers. The volunteers are then given targets of people to recruit to register or volunteer, and they report to the PFO Organiser. The Obama campaign philosophy is that it is much more effective to have volunteers in the community sign up and talk to their own community about the issues rather than a paid Organiser, and as such it is volunteers within the community who are given the responsibility of having conversations with their own community about the Obama campaign. This is adopted from the community Organiser model President Obama used when he was a community organiser in Chicago.

Meeting: Debate Watch Party

People:

- John J. Dougherty, Business Manager of Local 98 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

This was an event attended by various Democrats in Philadelphia as well as organised labour. It was a dinner and viewing of the First Presidential Debate between President Obama and Governor Romney.

Attending this event gave me a good insight into the way Philadelphian politics works. Organised labour is a very powerful force in Philadelphian politics. Unions have an extremely effective fundraising model whereby their members agree to contribute an extra amount into a union political fund. This fund is then used by the union to support candidates who will in turn support organised labour. In Philadelphia itself, this money is most effectively spent on the equivalent of local council elections as many of the real estate and development decisions are made by this level of government. Once elected, the Officials (called Alderman) then support organised labour.

For instance, recently Philadelphia upgraded its three main stadiums which host the local NFL, baseball and ice hockey venues. The local council has to approve such developments and which companies will carry out the upgrades. The local council will only approve companies which the respective unions approve of, meaning they will presumably have a union contract.

Meeting: AFL-CIO Meeting

People:

- Liz McElroy, AFL-CIO Philadelphia Secretary
- Pat Eiding, AFL-CIO Philadelphia President
- John Johnson, TWU President Local 234
- Dave Sczcepanski, TWU Political Director Local 234
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

This meeting mainly focused on the labour movements GOTV efforts on behalf of the Obama campaign.

They raise money through the 'Workers Voice' Political Action Committee (PAC). Under US law a PAC can run their own campaign to support their point of view but they are unable to directly contribute to, or liaise with, the campaign of a candidate.

Workers Voice run their own GOTV operation and their main role is to ensure that their own union membership is motivated to vote. As such, they will organise volunteer to call fellow union members and ensure that they are registered and will vote in much the same way the Obama campaign does so with the general public.



Meeting: Congressman Bob Brady

People:

- Congressman Bob Brady, Pennsylvania's First Congressional District
- John Johnson, President TWU Local 234
- Dave Szczepanski, TWU Political Director Local 234
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

Congressman Brady is proudly the only Congressman with a 100 per cent voting record for organised labour, meaning that whenever legislation is introduced that favours organised labour he will support it.

The main focus of the meeting was on the challenges of fundraising in the US system at the federal level. Congressman Brady has to run for office every two years (or effectively twice if there's a primary challenge), meaning he needs to be constantly fundraising. Unions (Congressman Brady's biggest supporters) can only contribute \$5,000, individuals can only contribute \$2,500 and there are no corporate donations. This means he has to broaden his base to include as many individuals as possible.

To do this, he holds a number of events each year, such as the 'Brady Brunch' party at a local establishment where individuals pay \$35 each to attend, which then counts as individual contributions to his campaign. He interacts with local supporters and organised labour in order to have as many individuals attend as possible.

Aside from this, as a respected Philadelphian Congressman Brady plays a prominent role in Philadelphian politics as a mediator who is able to resolve disputes, mainly between unions and companies or government.



Meeting: Lunch with Chicago Consul-General Roger Price

Place – Chicago

Dates – 8 - 12 October 2012

People:

- The Hon. Roger Price, Chicago Consul-General
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

The Consul-General explained his role in Chicago. This is a relatively new role and Roger has only been in the position for around a year. Much of his work focuses on establishing trade relations in Chicago, which is a growing city with massive trade potential for Australia.

Meeting: Obama 4 America HQ (HQ)

People:

- Micah Ragland, Political Director North-East Region
- The Hon. Roger Price, Chicago Consul-General
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

At its peak, there were 650 people working in the HQ although when we visited this was down to 450 as many staffers had been deployed to battleground states.

The HQ is divided into the following departments:

- Data – this is by far the largest section. Their primary role is to look at up to date demographics in each state so that each state is mapped out.
- Social media – targeting messages on Facebook, Twitter, websites to key demographics.
- Policy – developing policies for the Obama campaign.
- Travel – organising logistical arrangements when senior Democratic officials travel.
- Press – liaising with the media.
- Research – researching issues for the Obama campaign.
- Vetting – vet any guests who are scheduled to appear with President Obama or other senior Democratic Officials at events.
- Compliance – ensuring that fundraising and spending complies with the law.
- Voter problems – compliance turns into this as Election Day nears so they can ensure there are no issues with people voting.
- Speechwriting – writing for President Obama and other Democratic Officials.
- Political Hierarchy – Political Director of North-East, South-West, Great Lakes, West Coast and South-East who report to the most senior Campaign Officials each day.

Each of the five regions listed above has a certain number of swing states that they mainly focus on, although they are responsible for each of the states in their region. As North-East Political Director, Micah was in charge of the swing states of Pennsylvania and New Hampshire, with all other states in his region expected to safely vote Democratic.

At the beginning of each day, Micah would meet with the other region Political Directors and the most senior Campaign Officials. They assess the overnight tracking polls which reveals where they are struggling. For instance, the tracking poll might pick up that in one of Micah's states, Pennsylvania, the Obama campaign is struggling among independent women. To counter this, they might decide to send a senior Democrat to Pennsylvania who would appeal to independent women, such as the First Lady and also decide on the messaging. Micah then communicates this to the PHQ and other Obama Headquarters around Pennsylvania, who organise the event for the First Lady. The PHQ will then communicate the message to supporter networks and the Field Offices to ensure maximum attendance, organising opportunity and media coverage.



Meeting: Chicago Board of Ethics

People:

- Steven Berlin, Chicago Board of Ethics Executive Director
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

Newly elected Mayor of Chicago Rahm Emanuel recently appointed an Independent Board to oversee the Board of Ethics, which acts as an advisory institution for public officials. They see themselves as an advisory, rather than a punitive, organisation. Any matters which may become criminal are referred to the relevant authorities.

Meeting: Fundraising

People:

- Scott Cisek, Cook County Democrats Political Director
- Mia Phifer, Democrats Fundraiser
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

Mia explained that the best form of fundraising is through building a network and having them expand the network, in much the same way as the Obama GOTV system works. The best way to do this is through holding events and getting on the phone and asking people to donate. Other than President Obama, online fundraising has never worked and building a network and personally contacting them is the best way to raise money.

Meeting: Illinois State Senate Campaign Headquarters

People:

- Liz Nicholls, Illinois State Senate Campaign Director

- Scott Cisek, Cook County Democrats Political Director
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

One of the major differences between elections at the federal and state level in the US is fundraising. At the state level, politicians can accept donations from unions and corporations.

Each State Senator is given a targeted amount of money to raise in order to get re-elected. Liz runs the campaign for the state centrally.

Meeting: Illinois State Representative

People:

- Rob Martwick, State Representative of Illinois 19th District
- Scott Cisek, Cook County Democrats Political Director
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

Representative Martwick explained that he considered the old Chicago machine, based on patronage and traditional Democratic constituencies, to be a thing of the past. He explained that many of the older Alderman and Representatives were being beaten by younger opponents in primary challenges because the older Alderman and Representatives did not have a GOTV campaign, they simply believed that the old constituencies would continue to back them.

Representative Martwick explained that the new Democratic majority in Cook County was based on what at times could be an uneasy alliance between unions, progressives and ethnic groups. A successful GOTV campaign needed to rely on garnering the support of all of these groups by ensuring that the message to each of these groups focused on different things that would appeal to each of them.

The power of the Cook County Democrats was illustrated during the 2010 Illinois gubernatorial race. The 2010 elections generally were very negative for Democrats across the country, with the Democrats losing control of the US House of Representatives and losing many State Houses and Governorships around the country. In Illinois, the incumbent Governor Pat Quinn (who came into office after the jailing of his predecessor for fraud less than two years earlier) managed to win re-election in spite of losing 99 out of 102 counties in Illinois. This was because the GOTV campaign that the Democrats ran in Cook County managed to outweigh all other Republican gains in the rest of Illinois.

Meeting: Teamsters Local 777 Headquarters, First Student bus yard

People:

- Jim Glimco, President Local 777
- Greg Glimco, Organiser Local 777
- Liz Gonzalez, Organiser Local 777
- Sean O'Neil, International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)
- Treme Johnson, IBT
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

Teamsters Local 777 has been participating in the IBT ‘school bus’ campaign over the last couple of years. This campaign aims to unionise school bus drivers, which have traditionally not been unionised, have experienced poor conditions in the workplace and many of which are uneducated and belong to minority groups.

In order to become unionised in Chicago, a workplace must vote 50 + 1 per cent in favour of the union, and then the whole workplace must join the union. The issue is that prior to this point the union has no access to a workplace, meaning that a lot of the organising has to be done outside of work hours. The teamsters identify the issues that matter in the workplace and workplace leaders and opponents of the union. This process involves comprehensive mapping of every worksite so that every person can be identified as either a leader, supporter, neutral or opponent of the teamsters.

They then develop a network whereby they have workplace leaders talk to neutral or undecided voters to convince them to vote for the union. Like the Obama campaign, the Teamsters believe that it is much more effective to have fellow workmates talk to these voters about the issues rather than a paid official.



Meeting: Clerk of Chicago’s Office

People:

- Susana Mendoza, Clerk of Chicago
- Mia Phifer, Democratic Fundraiser
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

The Clerk confirmed that she believed the old-style Chicago politics, reliant on patronage, was a thing of the past as it was impossible for a Democrat to win without a broad coalition and GOTV machine.

The Clerk is also the highest Latino Office-holder in Chicago and talked about the importance of the Democratic Party in reaching out to this key constituency, particularly on a national level as many Southern States will experience large amounts of growth in this demographic, putting them into swing state territory.

Meeting: Transport Workers' Union of America (TWU)

Place: Washington, DC

Dates: 15 – 20 October 2012 (including a day in Virginia)

People:

- Harry Lombardo, Executive Vice-President TWU
- Terry Daniels, Committee on Political Education (COPE) Assistant Director
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

The TWU's PAC, COPE, was discussed in great detail. TWU members voluntarily contribute to COPE and COPE then donates to political candidates on behalf of TWU members.

If a particular candidate wants COPE funding, they are required to visit their state conference and explain what they would do if elected and make commitments to support certain policies as voted by the state conference.

COPE is very careful to avoid issues which divide TWU members, such as social issues like abortion or gay marriage, and focuses purely on industrial issues. As such, they produce paraphernalia and advertisements which highlight particular candidates' positions with regards to industrial issues. They are also very careful not to 'tell' members how to vote; rather they simply focus on highlighting positions on industrial issues.

Essentially, COPE is the vehicle whereby members make voluntary contributions to a fund that they know will be used directly for political lobbying. No general union money is used in campaigning and this allows the TWU to be explicit about what they are using COPE money for and dividing the TWU and COPE functions up.

Meeting: AFL-CIO Transportation Division**People:**

- Frank and Greg (unsure of last names), AFL-CIO Transportation Division
- Harry Lombardo, Executive Vice-President TWU
- Terry Daniels, Committee on Political Education (COPE) Assistant Director
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

The AFL-CIO representatives explained that they can only take a side of an issue by the consensus of all affiliates. While this is good in the sense that all affiliates will fight together, it also means there

are many issues they cannot advocate a position on, such as free trade which affects different unions and union members differently.

Politically, the AFL-CIO feels like they often don't have a real choice come election time. This is because the Democrats know that they have to support them because most Republican positions directly oppose them, which in turn means that Democrats feel that they don't need to support all union positions or use political capital lobbying on behalf of them.

Meeting: International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)

People:

- Jeff Farmer, Director IBT Organising Department
- Jamie Clements, ALP NSW Branch Assistant Secretary

Summary:

We discussed the IBT's PAC, Democrat Republican Independent Voter Education (DRIVE). There needs to be a greater awareness among the IBT's membership of the benefits of the program in order to make it a greater success.



Meeting: Service Employees International Union (SEIU) - Virginia

People:

- Mike Duffy, SEIU Official
- SEIU Volunteers

Summary:

I went out canvassing in Virginia with volunteers from the SEIU. The level of detail that the SEIU have about their area (Northern Virginia) was extraordinary. Each team has a phone application which has

a list of registered Democrat voters and voters who voted for President Obama at the last election. This phone application is able to pinpoint exactly where the people live and they are then visited by SEIU volunteers to get them to support President Obama again. If they agree that they will support the President, the information is put into the phone and sent back to the Virginian Obama Office so that the potential voters can be followed up to ensure they vote on election day. On Election Day itself all supporters will be visited by volunteers ensuring that they've voted and taking them to the polls if need be.

Until 2008 Virginia had not voted Democrat since 1964. The Obama campaign was able to reverse this in 2008 due to targeting the suburbs of Northern Virginia, which had increasingly been populated by minority groups and traditional Democratic voters from some of the more Democratic states to the north. On election night, Governor Romney was ahead for most of the night until the northern suburb results came through, which gave Obama the narrow edge to hold the state.



Place: New Orleans

Date: 20 – 25 October 2012

Meeting: TWU of America Conference

People:

- James C. Little, President TWU of America
- Harry Lombardo, Executive Vice-President TWU of America
- John Conley, Vice-President TWU of America
- Tony Sheldon, National Secretary TWU of Australia
- Jim McGiveron, National President TWU of Australia
- John Berger, Victorian Assistant Secretary TWU of Australia

Summary:

I attended the TWU Conference where we discussed common issues that we were facing and how to address them. These included:

- The outsourcing of work in the airline division.
- The rise of conservative, anti-worker laws (such as WorkChoices in Australia and the banning of collective bargaining in many States in the US).
- The challenges faced in a deregulated workplace.
- Fundraising challenges following the ban on union donations in certain States of both countries.

Both unions signed a Charter of Co-operation to tackle these issues.