

A Blue Dot, *the story of Nebraska's Electoral Vote for Barack Obama*

By Maureen K. Monahan, First Associate Chair, NDP

I've been to many rock concerts and events, but I've never seen an audience respond the way they did to Barack Obama at Omaha's Civic Auditorium in February 2008. A serious candidate for President campaigned in Nebraska's 2nd District. The hard work that volunteers had poured into organizing the caucus was paying off. For the first time in 40 years, Nebraska mattered in a national election.

Paid staffers and grassroots volunteers capitalized on Obama's appearance. New Democrats were registered and trained. Two days later at the caucus, energy exploded across gyms and auditoriums throughout the 2nd District (and onto the highways of Sarpy County). On a cold Saturday morning, two sides clapped, stomped their feet, and whooped and hollered for their candidate – Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton. Obama won.

As Nebraska Democrats jockeyed for spots at County, State and National Conventions, political pundits started talking. If only four states which went for President Bush in 2004 switched to Obama, an electoral tie would occur. A 269 – 269 tie broken by . . . Omaha. Could it be? Outside of football and Warren Buffett, Nebraska doesn't usually make the national news. In a state that splits its electoral votes, in an ethnically diverse district with a surge of Democratic voter registrations, the spotlight turned to Nebraska.

A State Director was hired along with 16 paid staffers. The opening of the official Obama for President office brought 1,000 people, young and old, white and black, wealthy and not so wealthy, to an overwhelmed strip mall. People who never did more than vote, some who had never even voted, volunteered to go door to door, make phone calls and register voters. Hundreds more people helped spread the

message through grassroots organizations and the Douglas and Sarpy County Democratic Parties. Paid staffers directed an army of volunteers using a model pioneered in the cities and farming communities of New Hampshire and Iowa. Call, or show up at the door of every registered Democrat or persuadable Independent. Tell the voter about the candidate. Rate the support level from 1 to 5. Encourage the identified supporters to vote early by mail or at the Election Commissioner's office. The week before Election Day, all efforts turned to making sure that every identified supporter voted.

Three Obama offices worked across Nebraska's 2nd District executing this plan. Volunteers came from all over Nebraska to deliver an electoral vote for Obama. Anytime of the day, the offices buzzed with volunteers sitting at table after table making phone calls to voters. At the entrance, walk lists and maps were handed out to people waiting to go door to door. On the wall of the main office was a quotation by superstar volunteer Peg O'Dea Lippert, "I don't want to wake up the day after the election thinking I could have made just one more phone call." "Obamamania" was in full swing.

As Election Day neared, the news was announced. In one year, Douglas County registered over 10,000 new Democrats, overtaking the number of registered Republicans. Early voting became a marathon event – 2, 3, 4 hours in line to make sure that your vote counted. The Douglas County Democratic Party handed out hot chocolate and donuts while encouraging people to stay in line. Omaha was starting to look like "Obamaha."

Election Day finally arrived. The army of volunteers started showing up before dawn. Each collected his or her assignment and went out to the neighborhoods,

to the polls, to other offices. They made phone calls, gave rides to the polls, observed the voting process to ensure that every voter who showed up was allowed to vote. Voters lined up hours before the polls opened in heavily Democratic areas. The lines persisted all day in an unusually warm November. Anyone in line at 8:00 p.m. was ensured of voting.

On election night, Omaha's Hilton Hotel was packed. State after state was announced. Georgia for McCain, New York for Obama, Colorado -- too close to call . . . At 10:00 p.m., history was made. Barack Obama was declared the 44th President of the United States of America. Elation filled the room. People hugged strangers, danced on stage, ran into the streets to declare the news to the world. It took a little bit longer to find out if the 2nd District went to Obama. That night, McCain was ahead by 529 votes. But the Obama campaign and the local county parties worked hard on early voters and in educating voters about casting provisional ballots. After all the votes were counted, Obama won the 2nd District and the electoral vote.

On the map it's a blue dot. But, just like a TV or computer image, it's really made up of hundreds, if not thousands, of little blue dots: an army of blue. Obama reminded us of how Democrats win elections. It's on the ground. Paid staffers guide a volunteer army going door to door, making phone calls, registering voters, educating voters, identifying supporters, chasing early ballots and getting voters to the polls. "Barack" the vote. Let's do it again!

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Are you a Democratic activist? Pg.3

See Story on Vic Covalt and NDP in
Lincoln Journal-Star Dec. 6 .

The 2008 Election Showed the Way of the Future by NDP Chair Vic Covalt

Nebraska had a lot to do with the election of President Obama. Remember that our Nebraska Caucus was the first of ten consecutive wins which helped Obama gain the Democratic nomination. And then Obama paid us back by returning to Omaha to pursue and win an Electoral Vote in the Second Congressional District. In doing so, he gave us a positive example of how we Nebraska Democrats can organize and deliver effective, efficient government for our state.

I wish to thank all the people who worked hard on all the 2008 presidential, senatorial, congressional and local campaigns. The efforts of the NDP and county volunteers made a huge difference. The Campaign for Change in Omaha was an awesome example of what organized volunteers can do. Douglas County Democrats, Sarpy County Activists and volunteers from all over the state made the difference.

The same effort was evident elsewhere. The diligent all-volunteer effort of the Lancaster County Democratic Party helped to produce county-wide wins for Obama and Scott Kleeb.

Other Democrats proved we can win anywhere in Nebraska with good candidates and hard work. Carol Blood's election to the "at-large" seat for the Bellevue City Council proves that walking and door-knocking is the way to do it. Ken Haar's success in the LD21 Legislature race proves that we can win in areas which have traditionally been Republican.

But there is no easy way to change. It requires commitment and hard work. Knocking on doors, Making calls. Providing information. Touching people. And, maybe most importantly, listening to what they know and what they think. We need to build a Nebraska Democratic Party which puts the people first, one person at a time.

We need to concentrate on neighbor-to-neighbor campaigning. We need people who will take on being a leader in their neighborhood or community. We need people who will commit to helping us get the message out for good candidates for better government at all levels of Nebraska government.

We don't need more people at more meetings. We need to get an organized volunteer network of people set up in the traditions of rural volunteer fire departments. Ready, trained, and willing to show up when called upon. We need people who, when the time comes, help candidates meet their neighbors. We need people to make calls and canvass in their neighborhood before elections. We need people to help with early voting. We need people willing to give their neighbor a ride to the polls. We need a lot of people doing a little to help in their neighborhood when we need the help.

This is the lesson from the Nebraska 2008 election. There are no short cuts. It takes hard work and dedication. We need our volunteers to mobilize now and work hard to help with the Lincoln and Omaha city races in 2009. And we need to immediately start building and improving a sound volunteer network for the statewide elections in 2010.

People-to-people contact is the way to win elections. We know what we have to do. And we know how to do it. So let's get it done.

Another Blue Dot, By John & Christa Yoakum

The opportunity to caucus for Democratic presidential candidates this election cycle gave Lancaster County a wealth of excited new volunteers and provided an energy that carried into the general election. In a state where voters often feel overlooked in a national election, both Michelle Obama and Chelsea Clinton made appearances before the caucus. When Barack Obama was nominated as the candidate, Nebraska became important on the national scene. It also became increasingly clear that, as resources were prioritized, Lancaster County would need to rely on volunteer power.

The caucuses were organized and run with volunteers. Using a database created by Ted Kessler (a volunteer on the executive board), the party could locate voters in each precinct with good voting records and then,

using filters for previous volunteerism and demographics, contact them to participate. Voters who have a history of involvement were called on first, then volunteers began cold-calling in several precincts for caucus leaders.

While it was daunting to find sites throughout the county to hold caucuses for 224 precincts, the benefit was that now neighbors were talking to one another and volunteering side by side. In the end, 53 sites were found, with many locations holding several precincts. Leaders emerged from among the participants.

Caucus night proved to be one huge voter registration drive. 2,400 people registered as new voters, changed their party affiliation, or updated their names or addresses. We received over \$3000 in donations just by passing the hat.

The Lancaster County Convention had more than 700 participants. All candidates had the opportunity to set up a literature table, address the convention, and meet voters. Participants met in their respective legislative districts and voted for their representatives to the state convention, the county central committee, each legislative team and the executive board. These interactions have led to friendships and networking among the participants. Before this exciting year, a typical convention had only about 200 participants.

We worried that voters would not turn out for the routinely scheduled primary after the caucus fever. Capitalizing on the new volunteer base and enthusiasm, volunteers walked precincts with 15,000 slate cards for use in the voting booth. Volunteers telephoned voters to ask them to vote by mail and to vote early. In a primary that turned out 26% of the registered voters, nearly 1,000 more Democrats voted than Republicans.

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At every gathering of Lancaster County Democrats, there was a donation bucket, as well as sign-in sheets and volunteer sign-up forms. These events, planned as fundraisers, financed the caucuses, phone lines, slate cards, robo-calls and other candidate support efforts. Information from sign-in sheets and volunteer sign-up lists was entered into the database. During the general election, the county party was able to use this database to contact volunteers by email to ask them to make phone calls and to walk precincts. Email saved the cost of expensive mailings or advertising and reserved valuable volunteer time for its most effective use.

Fundraising efforts allowed the party to hire one half-time employee and to rent an office. Having a central location with open office hours for voters and volunteers was key to the organization. Sometimes seven phone lines were going, volunteers were entering data on the donated computers, and people were walking in off the street to offer their help.

Throughout the election cycle, voter registration was a priority. Volunteers walked precincts which had transient populations. Registration cards were placed in coffee shops. Registration cards were available at every community event where Lancaster County Democrats had a booth. Volunteers were trained as registrars. They worked at community sites along with volunteers with other party affiliations.

Volunteers called voters to encourage them to Vote By Mail and Get Out The Vote. Volunteers called voters to place yard signs for local candidates on main streets throughout the city. Training sessions were held so that volunteers were more comfortable approaching people in person or by phone.

The Young Democrats were helpful walking in neighborhoods with slate cards and registering voters. They covered both UNL and Wesleyan campuses. Many volunteered to make phone calls for Get Out the Vote and Vote by Mail.

Union members donated generously to the county party's efforts with monetary donations and volunteer power. Retired citizens gave their time to walk precincts and make phone calls. One woman walked seven precincts putting out over 700 slate cards and candidate brochures.

Lancaster county volunteers delivered 22,000 slate cards reaching an average of 100 voters in each precinct, including the rural areas of the county. Approximately 6,000 more voters received the slate card by e-mail. This is a feat never before achieved in Lancaster County.

On November 4, Obama and Kleeb both carried Lancaster County. Obama had 52% of the votes in Lancaster County. This was accomplished because we had a candidate who excited voters and because we had a very well-planned organization and volunteer workforce.

By John Yoakum, First Associate Chair,
Christa Yoakum, Secretary,
Lancaster County Democratic Party

You Know You're a Democratic Activist when you....

Have a car that looks like a combination filing cabinet, laundry basket, and storage unit.
Dine on cold pizza, boxed wine, and leftover donuts.

Speak in acronyms like VBM, GOTV, CD, and LD and regret having to translate for others.
Think the office floor looks comfy.

Know you can stream election returns in real time on the Secretary of State's website.

Drive a car covered in political bumper stickers from three different election cycles.

Know which houses on which streets belong to Democrats.

Can quote campaign speeches, and know who wrote them.

Watch every moment of both the Democratic and Republican National Conventions.

Know the poll numbers before the media.

Remember the point spread from the Congressional race four years ago.

Have mapped your precinct for the fastest walking route.

Know which bars and restaurants are owned by Democrats.

Tivo'd the debates.

Know all of the precincts in your city.

Stockpile blue Kool-Aid, just in case.

Have TV Station phone number on speed dial.

Display yard signs for every Democratic candidate on the ticket.

Know the battleground counties across the U.S.

Boast a social calendar looks like this: meeting, meeting, political rally, fundraiser, trip to the Election Commissioner's office, voter registration drive, meeting, debate party, and walking a parade route with a candidate.

Wear a wardrobe of T-Shirts from previous campaigns.

Critique the opposition's campaign literature.

Snack on cold pizza, coffee, and skittles.

Can name all political donors in your zip code.

Check your physician's voting record before your appointment.

Keep the television tuned to CSPAN.

Perpetually have blue teeth from blue popcorn.

Watch the political ads from across the country.

Rewrite stump speeches before going to sleep.

Mark time by election cycles.

Get excited after a candidate gives you a new campaign shirt.

Eat a breakfast of cold pizza, Diet Coke, and leftover donuts.

Have no plans on your calendar after the first Tuesday in November.

By Missy Wigley, 2nd Associate Chair,
Lancaster County Democratic Party

Reminders

SEC members send photos (head shots) & short bios to mbahensky@msn.com by Jan. 20 for newsletter
SEC teleconferences December 15 and January 19, 5 p.m.
Inauguration Parties January 20.
Nat'l Federation of Democratic Women regional meeting Omaha Feb. 27-March 1
Patriots' Dinner Lincoln February 28
Next SCC meeting March 7 in Madison County

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Still Too Few Blue Dots in our Red Sea

Only 204 weeks to increase the vote for Barack Obama!

County	Registered Voters	Obama 08Vote	Kleeb 08 Vote	County	Registered Voters	Obama 08Vote	Kleeb 08 Vote	County	Registered Voters	Obama 08 Vote	Kleeb 08 Vote
Douglas	306,877	52%	43%	Keith	6,358	25%	28%	Webster	2,665	31%	53%
Lncster	172,472	52%	51%	Knox	6,207	31%	35%	Nance	2,589	33%	44%
Sarpy	84,555	42%	34%	Cuming	5,997	32%	29%	Harlan	2,564	23%	42%
Hall	32,015	38%	45%	Dawes	5,749	35%	33%	Brown	2,415	20%	33%
Buffalo	26,802	29%	37%	Jefferson	5,743	42%	47%	Franklin	2,402	29%	52%
Lincoln	24,976	32%	41%	Merrick	5,548	29%	40%	Sherman	2,251	38%	61%
SctsBlff	22,789	33%	36%	Wayne	5,496	33%	29%	Perkins	2,085	22%	25%
Dodge	22,106	44%	38%	Burt	5,474	43%	38%	Frontier	2,083	25%	22%
Madison	21,537	30%	32%	Colfax	5,430	36%	34%	Hitchcock	2,006	26%	32%
Platte	20,051	29%	30%	Nemaha	5,092	37%	38%	Pawnee	1,995	36%	43%
Adams	19,976	36%	52%	Pierce	4,912	26%	27%	Greeley	1,800	39%	56%
Cass	17,630	40%	36%	Antelope	4,700	24%	32%	Garden	1,633	25%	23%
Gage	16,750	45%	51%	Clay	4,650	26%	40%	Gosper	1,575	25%	38%
Snders	14,397	38%	37%	Kearney	4,650	28%	39%	Boyd	1,562	23%	39%
Washtn	13,585	36%	33%	Howard	4,629	34%	48%	Deuel	1,473	25%	23%
Dawson	13,253	30%	39%	Cherry	4,618	20%	27%	Dundy	1,421	27%	21%
Seward	11,468	37%	42%	Thurston	4,535	54%	39%	Garfield	1,307	21%	44%
Otoe	11,266	42%	25%	Sheridan	4,426	19%	21%	Rock	1,105	18%	40%
York	10,870	25%	34%	Fillmore	4,399	33%	45%	Sioux	943	16%	26%
Dakota	10,673	48%	41%	Dixon	4,083	35%	30%	Hayes	783	16%	34%
Custer	8,665	22%	39%	Stanton	4,037	27%	26%	KevaPaha	740	22%	36%
Saline	8,636	52%	59%	Boone	4,026	27%	39%	Wheeler	601	22%	42%
Holt	7,942	23%	32%	Thayer	3,880	33%	44%	Hooker	598	17%	31%
BxButte	7,805	36%	37%	Polk	3,715	27%	37%	Logan	573	20%	33%
RdWilow	7,703	24%	34%	Furnas	3,555	24%	37%	Banner	543	15%	25%
Cheyenne	7,118	24%	23%	Morrill	3,501	24%	25%	Thomas	543	13%	37%
Hamilton	6,778	28%	39%	Nuckolls	3,479	23%	43%	Loup	519	22%	44%
Phelps	6,641	24%	31%	Valley	3,388	30%	44%	Grant	504	11%	26%
Richdson	6,604	39%	35%	Johnson	3,198	34%	49%	McPherson	388	16%	28%
Butler	6,457	32%	38%	Kimball	2900	24%	27%	Blaine	377	14%	39%
Cedar	6,415	29%	27%	Chase	2839	10%	27%	Arthur	343	15%	25%