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Changing Course: Reversing the Organizational Trajectory of the Democratic Party from Bill Clinton to Barack Obama

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Abstract

The enthusiasm for organization-building we observe today in the Democratic Party finds its roots in the 1990s. As the Democrats' competitive standing declined, their approach to their party organization began to change. With a newfound desire to recapture the majority, Democratic Party leaders began to make sustained investments in their party organization for the first time in over forty years. However, while new electoral uncertainties created new incentives for party building, translating those incentives into change at an organizational level happened only gradually, in a piecemeal fashion. Tracing the efforts of Democratic Party leaders from Bill Clinton to Barack Obama, this article argues that party building is a collective, cumulative process that takes time, resources, and persistent attention.

KEYWORDS: political parties, Democratic Party, party building, organizational change, Bill Clinton, Terry McAuliffe, Howard Dean, Barack Obama

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In a 2005 *New York Times* op-ed now considered a “classic essay,” former senator Bill Bradley observed a peculiar tradeoff in party politics between charisma and structure.¹ Over the previous 40-plus years, he wrote, each party dealt with this tradeoff differently and met with different degrees of success. Republicans, he argued, gained a competitive advantage over the Democrats by emphasizing structure over charisma. They “consciously, carefully, and single-mindedly” built a “stable pyramid” of money, ideas, organization, and action, where “all you have to do is put a different top on it and it works fine.” Because the structure was stable, the personality of the party’s titular leader was of secondary importance. Charisma was a decidedly second-order concern.

Democrats, meanwhile, were “hypnotized by Jack Kennedy, and the promise of a charismatic leader who can change America by the strength and style of his personality.” While searching for the next JFK, Democrats neglected the less glamorous but ultimately more important work of organization-building. The problem was that “a party based on charisma has no long-term impact,” Bradley wrote. Bill Clinton’s charisma, for example, “didn’t translate into structure,” and while “the president did well,” he wrote, “the party did not.” Now, Democrats found themselves with “no coherent, larger structure that they can rely on” and with a grim outlook for the future.²

From the standpoint of Bradley’s essay, it is no great surprise that the Democratic Party has now, only three years later, nominated arguably “the most charismatic politician since John F. Kennedy.”³ But it *is* somewhat curious that this same charismatic candidate also presents himself as a dedicated party-builder. Sen. Barack Obama, after all, has vowed to wage a “50-state campaign” that will “build grassroots organization” in every state, help “elect Democrats down the ballot,” and register millions of new Democrats.⁴ Indeed, his commitment to

¹ Bill Bradley, “A Party Inverted,” *New York Times*, 3/30/05; Rick Albertson, “Bill Bradley’s ‘A Party Inverted’ Revisited,” 3/5/08, <http://www.johnkerry.com/blog/2008/03/P10/>.

² *Ibid.* The notion that there is a tradeoff between charisma and structure – or, at least, that charisma and structure are not easily reconciled – finds deep roots in social science scholarship (Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Max Weber and S. N. Eisenstadt, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968)). It also fits nicely with a more recent tradition in political science that views the rise of plebiscitary leadership during the 20th century as detrimental to the political parties (James W. Ceaser, *Presidential Selection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Theodore Lowi, *The Personal President* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Jeffrey Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987)). Whether or not Bradley was attuned to these scholarly traditions when he penned his op-ed, his contribution was to observe that the two parties have not suffered in equal proportion from the allure of charismatic leadership.

³ Transcript, “The Big Story with John Gibson,” *Fox News Network*, 3/28/08.

⁴ David Plouffe, “Obama for America” slides:

rebuilding the Democratic Party is not incidental to his candidacy. It is seen as a major selling point, something that attracts Democrats to his campaign.

What, then, explains the Democrats' simultaneous embrace of charisma and structure? Some have suggested that Obama himself is the catalyst: his inspirational leadership has transformed a once-complacent party into a party that now hungers for organization, coordination, and structure.⁵ As he reminds us often, he was a community organizer in Chicago, and for proof of his organizational prowess, we need only recall his impressive wins in caucus states. His faith in the power of organization, he has said, is "not just a gimmick, it's not just a shtick, I actually believe in it" – indeed, it even figures prominently in his policy proposals.⁶ Obama has certainly inspired millions of ordinary Democratic voters to organize in their communities on his behalf. Perhaps it is Obama's candidacy, then, which has prompted Democrats from all corners of the party to carefully consider the benefits of an organized approach to politics.

But upon inspection, Obama-specific factors are not sufficient to explain the Democrats' new collective emphasis on organization. Obama, after all, is not walking on untrodden ground. If his proposed 50-state campaign turns out to be more than a "head fake" to throw McCain off course, it will be thanks in no small part to Howard Dean's 50-state strategy, which made investments in every Democratic state party organization over the past four years.⁷

It will not suffice, however, to give Howard Dean the credit for changing the Democratic Party, either. It was because the state party chairmen wanted a 50-state strategy that Dean gave them one; he owes his chairmanship to that promise. And yet the state chairmen are not the only ones interested in making long-term investments in the party's campaign infrastructure and organizational capacity: the same groundswell for more coordinated, organized activity can be seen in the efforts of extrapartisan "progressive" groups as well. Consider the recent work of ActBlue, Netroots Nation, America Votes, and PowerPAC.org, or the earlier work of MoveOn.org, America Coming Together, and the Media Fund. Change is clearly afoot in the Democratic Party, but none of the usual suspects – the

http://obama.3cdn.net/277bb8792237d562f2_9gm6bnupn.pdf; see also "Obama Camp Will Staff All 50 States," *The Hill Online*, 6/9/08; Jim Rutenberg and Christopher Drew, "National Push by Obama on Ads and Turnout," *The New York Times*, 6/22/08.

⁵ Micah L. Sifry, "Obama's Organization, and the Future of American Politics," *Personal Democracy Forum*, 6/08/2008.

http://www.techpresident.com/blog/entry/26265/obama_s_organization_and_the_future_of_american_politics

⁶ Ibid.; and Serge Kovalski, "Obama's Organizing Years, Guiding Others and Finding Himself," *The New York Times*, 7/7/08.

⁷ Ben Smith, Obama's Aim: 14 Bush States and Local Races," *Politico.com*, 6/5/08. Ari Berman, "The Dean Legacy," *The Nation*, 3/17/08; Matt Bai, "The Inside Agitator," *The New York Times*, 10/1/06.

presidential candidate, the party chairman, the state party leaders, or the extrapartisan activist groups – seem to be driving the change.

The reason Democrats have finally begun to emphasize organization-building, I will suggest, is that their party's competitive standing – that is, its standing today as well as its standing in the future – has become profoundly uncertain. Once the comfortable “majority” party, the Democratic Party now faces perennial electoral uncertainty.⁸ Of course, most Democrats believe the 2008 elections offer the best chance to achieve unified Democratic government in 16 years, and they may well be right.⁹ But for over a decade, Democrats have been searching for a way out of the political wilderness – for a way to regain their competitive edge – and this search has had important consequences for their party at an organizational level. What we currently observe as a newfound commitment to organization is, more than anything else, a product of this decade-long search.

As I argue in my forthcoming book, *Presidential Party Building*, the desire to recapture the majority is a powerful party-building incentive, one that can be observed to shape the behavior of every Republican president since Dwight Eisenhower.¹⁰ When party leaders perceive the competitive standing of their party to be weak, they are more likely to be drawn to organizational solutions. The biggest problem they face, after all, is a shortage of elected offices; whatever else they believe they should do to regain their competitive standing, they must win more elections. Turning to their party organization to repair its deficiencies most directly addresses this problem.

But the logic that connects a party's competitive standing to the organization-building impulse is hardly the end of the story. Party building does not automatically or even immediately follow from downward shifts in the party's numerical strength. Party leaders do not always perceive the competitive standing of their party to be as weak as election returns might suggest, and the institutional startup costs of launching new party-building initiatives can be high. Indeed, the major ingredients of party building – investing in physical infrastructure, growing a new “farm team,” attracting new groups of voters – are collective efforts that take time, resources, and persistent attention. A decline in the party's competitive standing produces an incentive to turn to the party organization, but creating change at an organizational level is a decidedly cumulative, piecemeal process.

⁸ Formally, of course, there is no majority or minority party in the United States; read “ostensible” alongside “majority” and “minority.”

⁹ “Six in Ten Democrats Confident of Victory in 2008,” *Gallup*, 5/27/08, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/107524/Six-Democrats-Confident-Victory-2008-Election.aspx>.

¹⁰ Daniel Galvin, *Presidential Party Building* (Princeton University Press), forthcoming in 2009.

Majority Building and Party Building

The notion that competition drives the minority party to adapt, innovate, and rebuild is not new to political science. A long tradition of scholarship has identified the political “losers” as “the desperate ones; they are the ones whose survival is at stake; they are the ones driven by their despair to seek ways to triumph; they are, therefore, the inventors. Defeat is the mother of invention.”¹¹ In the wake of defeat, losing parties are driven to act in an innovative fashion. They develop new policy alternatives, elevate new issues of salience, and co-opt the opposition.¹² They rebuild their structures and strategies, experiment with new techniques, and seek to develop new organizational capacities to regain their competitiveness.

While these assumptions are sound, translating new incentives into durable institutional change is hardly an automatic process. At the level of party organization, the rebuilding process is characterized by gradual, not sudden, change. Parties, after all, are political institutions with their own complex structures, processes, and routines. Like most political institutions, they are somewhat resistant to change. Invariably, there are financial startup costs that must be paid, logistical obstacles that must be overcome, and everyday twists and turns of politics that must be navigated. The negotiation of change in the party organization, in short, requires time and painstaking effort. Parties may be less resistant to change than formal governmental institutions, but they are more intractable than we usually think.

In most standard accounts, institutional change in the parties is viewed as an automatic response to changes occurring elsewhere in the system. In the literature on electoral realignments and more recent work in the rational choice tradition,

¹¹ Kenneth A. Shepsle, “Losers in Politics (and How They Sometimes Become Winners): William Riker’s Heresthetic,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 2 (2003): 310.

¹² Classic works examining the efforts of “out” parties to regain political competitiveness in two-party systems include Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties, Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Wiley, 1954); Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957); E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist’s View of Democracy in America* (Holt: Rinehart and Winston, 1960); William H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Robert A. Dahl, ed., *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Theodore Lowi, “Toward Functionalism in Political Science: The Case of Innovation in Party Systems,” *American Political Science Review* 57, no. 3 (1963). Contemporary works include: Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Clyde P. Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform: The Republican Party During the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Kenneth Finegold and Elaine K. Swift, “What Works? Competitive Strategies of Major Parties out of Power,” *British Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 1 (2001).

for example, change in party structures and strategies is seen to occur during “critical eras” where “exogenous shocks” prompt “concentrated bursts of change.”¹³ In these moments of “punctuated equilibria,” the forms and functions of the parties change in response to the changed preferences of party actors: virtually all institutional possibilities are on the table, so long as they solve the actors’ most pressing current problems. The main challenge is the alignment of actors’ preferences around a new institutional solution, not the negotiation of preexisting institutional arrangements.¹⁴

Other approaches tend to view party change as a gradual process of adaptation, where social or economic changes are reflected in new party forms. From this perspective, party is but a “passive channel... basically a container, composer, and cumulator” that provides “a window through which to view and assess the political consequences of social change.”¹⁵ Parties are seen as “much more *acted upon* than *acting upon*.”¹⁶

These assumptions have spawned a great deal of productive and rewarding research, but for our purposes they do not suffice. The Democratic Party organization did not change reflexively in response to changes in its socio-economic environment, nor did it change in lockstep with changes in actor preferences. New electoral conditions created new incentives for party building, but translating the actors’ new motives and purposes into durable organizational change happened only gradually, over the course of many years. Indeed, in the Democratic Party’s journey from its deep and durable majorities of the post-New Deal period to its great uncertainty in the 21st century, we can observe the emergence of the party-building impulse as well as the challenges involved in changing the course of party history.

The Prodigality of the Majority Party: The Democratic Party through 1996

From the New Deal through the mid-1990s, Democrats controlled both houses of Congress 87 percent of the time, led in partisan identification in the electorate by a comfortable margin, and controlled most state houses and governors’ mansions the vast majority of the time. Despite losing more presidential elections than they

¹³ Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970), 6, 27; John Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*, 283-287.

¹⁵ Everett Carl Ladd and Charles D. Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System: Political Coalitions from the New Deal to the 1970s*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 23; Theodore Lowi, “Party, Policy, and Constitution in America,” in *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development*, ed. William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 264.

¹⁶ Ladd and Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System*, 23.

won, the competitive advantage of the Democrats at the local, state, and congressional levels was strong and stable. With such comfortable majorities, Democrats tended to perceive no pressing need to make long-term investments in their party organization.

The fact that their strength lay in state-level elections was extremely significant. Because Democratic presidential candidates usually came equipped with their own independent campaign organizations, the investment of resources across the party organization in preparation for a national campaign never became a top priority. At the congressional, state, and local levels, the need for party organization to recruit, train, fund, and assist candidates was minimal; incumbents could be left to run their own re-election campaigns. In most elections, Democrats outsourced electoral operations to a reliable network of partners that included organized labor, urban machines, and liberal interest groups, all of whom benefited from, and sought to perpetuate, Democratic majorities. In other words, Democrats had the luxury of searching for charisma while neglecting structure because their majorities were secure and their campaign routines were sound. There was simply no urgent need to make “in-house” investments in the Democratic Party apparatus.

While a particularly motivated “out-party” DNC chairman would occasionally get an organization-building initiative off the ground, the more typical approach, going back at least to the 1950s, was to broker compromises over policy and internal procedure, not to make investments in the party organization.¹⁷ When a Democratic president occupied the White House, the condition of the party apparatus assumed no greater importance. Democratic presidents worked assiduously to personalize their parties, but they took few steps, if any, to leave behind a more robust party organization able to persevere over the long term. With deep and durable majorities, Democratic presidents had little reason to believe that their exploitation of the party apparatus in the short-run would make much of a difference in the long-run. They were not out to build a new majority, but to make use of the one they had.¹⁸

The Old Way, 1993-1996

In Bill Clinton’s first term, he played to type. In an effort to promote his health care reform proposal in the 103rd Congress, Clinton foisted upon the DNC responsibility for running a large portion of his public relations campaign. But rather than pour resources into his party and turn the experience into a party-

¹⁷ This is demonstrated in Philip Klinkner’s masterful study *The Losing Parties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹⁸ This pattern is elaborated in my forthcoming *Presidential Party Building* (Princeton University Press).

building affair, the health care campaign swamped normal operations at the DNC and supplanted electoral operations in many state and local party organizations. Rather than prepare for the 1994 midterm elections by developing programs to register voters, enlist volunteers, recruit candidates, raise money, and draw up campaign plans, Democratic Party organizations were told to focus their efforts on selling the president's agenda. Reportedly, "all 150 employees contribute[d] to the effort" at the DNC, and the executive directors and state party chairmen in more than 20 states were relied upon to carry out the day-to-day public relations activities. DNC Chairman David Wilhelm, who had served as Clinton's campaign manager in 1992, admitted that "Health care is our No. 1 priority. It is what we are spending the vast majority of our time and resources on."¹⁹

But when an allied "independent coalition" working on behalf of health care reform was shown to be outperforming the DNC, Clinton's political team decided to shut the party operation down. They gutted the DNC's programs, fired its field staff, and slashed its budget; remaining party resources were diverted to a "fourth-quarter [television] advertising blitz."²⁰ Whatever the party might have gained from its involvement in the health care campaign was discarded as the 1994 elections loomed. Kent Markus, the DNC executive director who helped coordinate the effort, remarked that "there was not a sufficient appreciation (by the White House) of the type of resource the DNC was and could be for them."²¹

Of course, Clinton had no idea that the 1994 midterm elections would hand Republicans control of both houses of Congress and a majority of statehouses for the first time in 40 years. Warnings of a potentially large Democratic defeat did not come until the fall. With seemingly permanent Democratic majorities, Clinton's attention was focused on the legislative process and on his volatile poll numbers during his first two years, not on his party's organizational capacities.²²

Had the Democrats' majorities not been so deep and so durable for so long, perhaps Clinton and other party leaders would have responded to the debacle of 1994 by calling for a thorough reexamination of the party's electoral operations and for the development of a new approach. But faith in their old, tried-and-true electoral strategies was not shaken so easily. Despite their historic defeat, Clinton and other party leaders acted as if the Democratic Party were still the majority party, temporarily dislocated. Rather than commence a broad-scale effort to

¹⁹ Ceci Connolly, "Developing the Sales Pitch for the Overhaul Plan," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 7/10/93; Ceci Connolly, "DNC Aims to Approach Hill From Ground Up," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 10/16/93; James A. Barnes, "Politics: Double Identity," *National Journal*, 11/27/93.

²⁰ Julie Kosterlitz, "Health: The Democratic Steamroller that Wasn't," *National Journal*, 5/14/94.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Bob Woodward, *The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

rebuild the party organization and invest in operational capacities, they looked to tweak their message, hone their communications strategy, and try again.

In Clinton's view, the problem was that he had failed to communicate his policy agenda clearly and counter the arguments of incoming House Speaker Newt Gingrich effectively. He wrote in his memoirs that "we probably would not have lost either the House or the Senate" if he had made different policy choices on taxes, assault weapons, deficit reduction, welfare reform, and of course health care. Clinton believed his biggest misstep was that he had not "forced the Democrats to adopt an effective national counter-message" to the Republicans' Contract with America.²³ But Clinton also believed his party's misfortunes were temporary: "time was on my side," he wrote, because the Republicans were sure to overreach.²⁴ Voters would soon return home to the Democratic Party. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton wrote that in the aftermath of the election losses, "Bill counseled patience."²⁵ Evidently, no consideration was given to the state of the party organization and its operational difficulties. The focus was on sharpening the administration's policy agenda and retooling its communications strategies.

Other party leaders agreed with Clinton that their losses were temporary and relatively easily remedied. According to DNC chairman Donald Fowler:

I think the psychology clearly was that this is an aberration and it was going to pass off pretty soon. That was particularly true in the House. I remember that some of those guys in the House who were the ranking members of those committees – their committee members would call them Mr. Chairman in anticipation of 'The Restoration.'²⁶

The same sentiment was echoed at the state level of the party. In the fall of 1994, the Association of State Democratic Chairs met to discuss what went wrong and to make plans for moving forward. At the meeting, the prevailing sentiment was that the Democrats' new minority status was likely to be brief. Reversing the Republicans' recent successes, Democratic leaders declared, "can be achieved in the next two years."²⁷ The only question, going forward, was how to do a better job conveying the party's ideas to the public. They argued that regaining the majority would depend on Clinton's ability to "return to his basic economic message of 1992 and stick to it."²⁸

²³ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 631.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 632.

²⁵ Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 288.

²⁶ Personal Interview with former DNC Chairman Donald Fowler, 6/14/07, Columbia, SC.

²⁷ Edward Walsh, "State Democrats Retreat In Search of Answers," *The Washington Post*, 11/19/94.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

This same non-organizational response could be heard from all corners of the party: leaders of the Democratic Leadership Council wrote that the election returns were the result of “fickle” independent voters who had briefly taken refuge in the Republican Party. But they were certain to remain a “swing bloc” in the future. In order to get back to Democratic dominance, the DLC suggested that Clinton offer the American people a new bundle of policies that reflected “the New Democrat formula of progressive ideas, mainstream values, and innovative, nonbureaucratic ways of governing.”²⁹ In other words, the Democrats’ problem was not organizational, it was ideological and policy-related – and it could be fixed with a different emphasis of priorities.

Consequently, during the two years leading up to the 1996 elections, Clinton adopted his now-famous strategy of “triangulation,” to “create a third position, not just in between the old positions of the two parties but above them as well,” as Clinton’s private consultant Dick Morris suggested.³⁰ Clinton followed Morris’ advice and waged an “aerial war” of speaking directly to the people over the television airwaves, rather than a “ground war” of rebuilding his party’s infrastructure and equipping it to mobilize the troops and turn out the voters.³¹

From the standpoint of most state party organizations, this was a fateful decision. After the 1994 elections, many state parties found themselves deep in debt and unable to raise the funds needed to rebuild their operations, recruit new candidates, and prepare for the campaigns of 1996. The Democratic Party of New York, for example, “existed in little more than a name, with only a telephone and a desk in some borrowed space,” and was about \$400,000 in debt. The Pennsylvania party was in debt approximately \$200,000, and Illinois owed at least \$175,000. In Texas, the party was still in debt from the mid-1980s, and had at least \$700,000 to repay. New Jersey, for its part, was reportedly living “month to month.” In none of these rich electoral vote states was there a Democratic governor to help the state committee get out of debt; 28 states also found themselves with brand new state chairmen.³² The state parties looked to Clinton for help.

But Clinton did not attempt to redress these obvious signs of disrepair at the state and local level. Instead, his primary interaction with state parties during 1995 and 1996 involved a scheme to funnel “soft money” through state party

²⁹ Al From and Will Marshall, “Editorial,” *The New Democrat*, January/February 1995, 5.

³⁰ Dick Morris, *Behind the Oval Office* (New York: Random House, 1997), 34-41, 80-85; Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 660; George Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human: A Political Education* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 334-6.

³¹ George C. Edwards III, “Campaigning Is Not Governing: Bill Clinton’s Rhetorical Presidency,” in *The Clinton Legacy*, ed. Colin Campbell and Bert A. Rockman (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 2000), 40-48.

³² Barnes, “Politics: States of Repair,” *National Journal*, 9/16/95.

committees to pay for the Clinton campaign's television advertisements.³³ "In the two years leading up to the presidential [campaign]," Clinton White House Political Director Craig Smith recalled, "state parties essentially became vehicles or additional arms of the presidential campaign."³⁴ Through an elaborate process of soft-money fundraising, fund-transfers to state party committees, and closely-monitored expenditures for television advertisements (produced by Clinton's team and used for Clinton's reelection purposes), Clinton interacted with his party organization frequently but in a wholly instrumentally fashion: resources were dedicated exclusively to campaign advertisements.

Understandably, Clinton's reelection was the primary concern of the campaign and of many party leaders who assumed that Clinton's success would redound to the benefit of the party. But according to Fowler, it was not a zero-sum game: "My only argument was there were a lot of other things we could have done because we had financial capacity to help state parties that would have resulted in party building." Sufficient resources were available to help build state parties – "to do the voter files, to have field people, to have better media relations" – but such efforts simply were not made.³⁵ Old habits, evidently, die hard.

Clinton's victory in 1996 seemed to validate his strategy; but it also served notice that the party's newfound minority status was not going to be as easy to reverse as party leaders might initially have thought. Clinton's coattails were virtually nonexistent: Democrats lost three seats in the Senate, gained only two seats in the House, and lost a net of 53 state legislative seats. Republicans maintained a nearly two-to-one advantage in governorships, and the Democratic gain among partisan identifiers in the electorate was marginal. While the Republican Party had yet to achieve political dominance of the sort the Democrats once enjoyed, the 1996 election results made it clear that 1994 was no mere aberration.

Building Momentum for Change: 1996-1997

With the Democratic Party evidently stuck in the minority, the mentality of the president and other party leaders finally began to change. At the DNC meeting in January of 1997, Clinton expressed his newfound interest in repairing the party's organizational capacities. He charged his new DNC chairman, Steve Grossman,

³³ The story of Clinton's 1996 campaign strategy is now well-known. See, for example, Alison Mitchell, "The Fund Machine: A Special Report," *The New York Times*, 12/27/96; Bob Woodward, *The Choice* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Morris, *Behind the Oval Office*.

³⁴ Personal Interview with former White House Political Director Craig Smith, 6/25/07, Washington, D.C.

³⁵ Personal Interview with former DNC Chairman Donald Fowler, 6/14/07, Columbia, SC.

with implementing the core party-building tasks of “mobilizing our state parties, of recruiting good, new candidates, of getting people to show up when you have these meetings back home, and of making people proud to be Democrats and of making people believe that they ought to send a small check to the Democratic Party on a regular basis.”³⁶ Echoing the president’s sentiments, Vice President Al Gore told a meeting of the Association of State Democratic Chairs that he and the president wanted to rebuild the party organization: “The only way we’ll be successful is if we win the ground war,” he said. “President Clinton and I will help you at the local and state level in any way we can.”³⁷ Following up on Clinton and Gore’s new enthusiasm for party building, the DNC political team drew up a full-fledged party-building plan to invest in new technologies, build state party infrastructures, and run new training programs.³⁸

The president and his team finally discovered the will to begin party building, but the imprudent practices of the past made launching new party-building programs more difficult than Clinton and his DNC leaders had anticipated. Years of organizational neglect and exploitation left few ongoing organizational initiatives to build on. What is more, Clinton’s strategy in 1995-1996 – the most recent manifestation of the “old” approach – left the party deep in debt and facing a constant stream of legal bills relating to the Republican-led congressional investigation into alleged campaign finance abuses in 1996. While Clinton and his team seemed to have become committed, at long last, to making investments in the party organization, these financial liabilities proved to be prohibitive.

Whether motivated by selfless concern for his fellow partisans or by the desire not to be remembered as the president who sacrificed his party at the altar of his personal interests, Clinton decided to take it upon himself to replenish his party’s coffers. Despite the high probability that he would be branded a hypocrite, he set out on an ambitious campaign to raise large sums of soft money to help his party get back on its feet – even as he called for campaign finance reforms to curtail the use of soft money.³⁹ Whereas the typical approach of Democratic presidents since Kennedy was to hoard the proceeds from lucrative fundraisers in presidential rainy-day funds, Clinton directed that 85 percent go toward helping Democratic candidates with their campaigns in 1998 and 15 percent go toward DNC debt relief. This new formula reflected a radically different set of priorities for the

³⁶ Public Papers of President Clinton, “Remarks to a Democratic National Committee Meeting,” 1/21/97.

³⁷ Arthur H. Rotstein, “Vice President Urges Democratic Chairmen to Build Party’s Base,” *The Associated Press*, 12/6/96.

³⁸ Personal Interview with former DNC Chairman Steve Grossman, 6/11/07, Boston, MA.

³⁹ Richard L. Berke, “Debate Aside, Fund-Raising Doesn’t Stop,” *The New York Times*, 10/3/97; “Inside Washington: No Tricks Please,” *National Journal*, 10/11/97; James A. Barnes, “Administration: No Rest for the Fund Raiser in Chief,” *National Journal*, 11/22/97; Personal Interview with former White House Political Director Craig Smith, 6/25/07, Washington, D.C.

Democratic Party that included, for the first time in over 40 years, giving a lift to the party organization.⁴⁰

By the end of 1997, Clinton had made significant gains in reducing the party's debt, but still had a ways to go. The costs of changing the party's course of history were proving to be extremely high. In January of 1998, however, the Monica Lewinsky revelations broke. The scandal, somewhat ironically, proved to be a windfall for the party. Democrats showed their support for Clinton by donating large sums of money, and by July of 1998, the DNC had reduced its debt to \$3.24 million and had \$3.66 million in cash on hand. It raised approximately \$24 million during the first six months of 1998 alone.⁴¹

But facing impeachment and possible removal from office, Clinton became increasingly concerned with maintaining the support of those congressional Democrats on whose support his presidency would depend. He directed the DNC to go \$3 million further into debt and distribute the funds to the two congressional campaign committees; throughout the fall of 1998, Clinton focused almost exclusively on raising money for congressional campaigns.⁴² Thus, despite coming tantalizingly close to party-building readiness at the DNC, Clinton again shifted course. While his efforts may have helped congressional Democrats gain several seats in the midterm elections, Clinton temporarily put the DNC deeper into debt and prevented it from undertaking new, constructive party-building programs. Grossman continued to emphasize the importance of making long-term investments in party organization, but with Clinton's presidency on the line, the DNC's party-building plans were put on hold.⁴³

Nevertheless, in many ways the events of 1997-1998 built the momentum that was needed for the next two years. Clinton's prodigious fundraising and Grossman's rhetorical emphasis on party building helped to pay the startup costs – financial and psychological – associated with reversing the Democrats' history of organizational neglect. As 1999 began, the party was nearly out of debt, Clinton's impeachment trial was over, and the party was finally prepared to chart a new course forward.

⁴⁰ Katharine Q. Seelye, "Clinton Follows the Money from Boston to New York," *The New York Times*, 7/1/97.

⁴¹ James A. Barnes, "Politics: Campaign Circuit," *National Journal*, 7/18/98.

⁴² Alexis Simendinger, Peter H. Stone and Richard E. Cohen, "Presidency: Impeachment Improv," *National Journal*, 10/10/98; Peter H. Stone, "Politics: The Politics of Survival," *National Journal*, 10/24/98.

⁴³ Personal Interview with former DNC Chairman Steve Grossman, 6/11/07, Boston, MA.

The Great Reversal: 1999-2000

When Joe Andrew took the reins of the DNC from Grossman in early 1999, he found “a tremendous malaise in the party.” After four years of minority status in Congress and a long and turbulent year of scandal and impeachment, he said, Democrats were “worried that there was just no chance we could win.”⁴⁴ The party’s future prospects looked grim. Such sentiments represented a historic reversal in the outlook of Democratic Party leaders and activists. No matter how organized (or disorganized) Democrats might have been around election time, there was an assumption that the party would remain in the majority. With such expectations, there was never an obvious incentive for the Democrats’ diverse, heterogeneous coalition to work together in concert. Elected officials, the national committee, state parties, organized labor, civil rights groups, and special interest groups were free to go their separate ways with minimal institutionalized coordination or long-term strategic planning.

But with newfound uncertainty about the party’s future competitiveness, the coalition finally came together. According to Andrew, this had nothing to do with his, or even Clinton’s, efforts to bring people together – it was simply a result of the changed electoral context:

We didn’t have all these guys around a table—for example organized labor—to do something for years. Literally, it wasn’t because of me, I did nothing. I just invited them all to come to talk. They did it because of the fact that they were so concerned that we weren’t going to win! There was no secret sauce here. People were willing to work harder together. People were willing to come together and talk and coordinate the way they had not been, because – what choice did they have?⁴⁵

Inside the DNC, Andrew backed up this new party-wide commitment to coordination and strategic planning with “America 2000,” a plan to make significant investments in the party’s national and state organizational capacities.⁴⁶

The objective was to equip the party organization to win more elections up and down the line, both now and in the future: “from dogcatcher to the United States Presidency...not just in 1999 and 2000, but in 2009 and 2010” as well.⁴⁷ Backed by the fundraising star-power of President Clinton and the strategic and

⁴⁴ Personal Interview with former DNC Chairman Joe Andrew, 6/26/07, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “America 2000,” *Democratic National Committee*, March 1999.

⁴⁷ “DNC National Chair-Designate Joe Andrew, Keynote Address, DNC Full Committee Meeting, Washington D.C., March 19, 1999,” in “America 2000,” *Democratic National Committee*, March 1999.

administrative support of the White House political team, the DNC began in the spring of 1999 to make investments in the party's human capital, in its campaign services, and in its technology.

To build the party's human capital, the DNC launched a series of campaign management training seminars and activist-enrollment efforts. In all, twelve national campaign training programs were successfully completed in 1999-2000 and over one million volunteers were enlisted by the party to help in the 2000 election.⁴⁸ To enhance the party's campaign service capacities, the DNC expanded its field program, established a "campaign store" for candidates to purchase campaign products at a discount, and developed with state parties new plans for coordinated voter registration, donor identification, and voter mobilization drives.⁴⁹

Investments in technology, however, constituted the centerpiece of America 2000. With Clinton's help, the DNC raised and spent more than \$1 million to upgrade and standardize the voter file software and hardware used by state parties, create a new website for the party, and build new communication links between state and national party committees. The expanded field team systematically analyzed state party infrastructures, tailored technological investments to fit each state's needs, and offered individualized support.⁵⁰ These new investments in technology were warmly welcomed by state party chairs, one of whom exclaimed: "Joe Andrew has been a shot of adrenaline."⁵¹

Time and resources were limited, however, and party leaders soon became consumed with planning for the 2000 elections. Clinton's team had managed to get a number of significant initiatives off the ground, but rebuilding the party organization required more than a handful of targeted investments over the course of two years. These early party-building efforts did, however, plant the seeds of the party's future organizational development. For the first time in over 40 years, the Democratic Party was moving along a different organizational trajectory.

Unfinished Business: Piecemeal Change since Clinton

Party building is an incremental process of cumulative change. While Clinton's team could claim a number of party-building accomplishments, it also left much unfinished business. In particular, two integral components of the America 2000 plan – creating a national voter file and constructing a new DNC headquarters –

⁴⁸ Personal Interview with former DNC Chairman Joe Andrew, 6/26/07, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁹ "America 2000," *Democratic National Committee*, March 1999.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Melinda Henneberger, "Democratic Chairman Plays Humble Hoosier Effortlessly," *New York Times*, 8/14/00.

were not accomplished by the time Terry McAuliffe assumed the chairmanship in 2001.

The national voter file – a centralized database with detailed individual-level information for use in voter mobilization campaigns – was one of the innovations that Clinton, in particular, “personally pushed for,” Andrew noted. “He got convinced that having a national voter file was a very important part of the party.”⁵² Logistically, however, it proved to be extremely difficult to assemble. Most state parties had their own voter files, and the quality and format of the data varied widely from state to state. What’s more, many state parties were reluctant to share their data, as these were their “crown jewels, the key asset that they have” for fundraising and all other local party operations.⁵³ First steps were taken to work out data-sharing agreements and to construct a new database at the DNC, but the project was only in its early stages when the Clinton team departed in early 2001.

The difficulty of building the national voter file, perhaps the most important tool of modern party politics, offers a particularly good illustration of how hard it is to orchestrate significant change in a large and complex organization like the Democratic Party. Not only did state party chairs need to be convinced of the benefits of a national voter file, but the software needed to be made compatible, the data needed to be integrated, and the output needed to be user-friendly. Creating durable organizational change, in other words, takes time, resources, and the sustained motivation of many actors working in concert. The headquarters construction project is an equally good illustration. On the back cover of the America 2000 plan is a blueprint sketch of a new DNC headquarters; but by the time Clinton and his team left office, the project had not yet been contracted. Time had simply run out.

McAuliffe set four main goals for his chairmanship. The first two involved completing Clinton’s unfinished business: building a new “state-of-the-art” headquarters and constructing the national voter file. The third was to “strengthen state parties,” and the fourth goal – or set of goals – was financial: to provide direct assistance to candidates, to create email and direct-mail lists which could be used to expand the party’s donor base, and to make the party financially “self-sufficient” in the years ahead.⁵⁴

Over the course of his term, McAuliffe’s fundraising efforts were an unqualified success. With his uncanny knack for raising enormous amounts of soft money quickly, McAuliffe managed to erase the DNC’s post-2000 election

⁵² Personal Interview with former DNC Chairman Joe Andrew, 6/26/07, Washington, D.C.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Terry McAuliffe and Steve Kettmann, *What a Party!: My Life among Democrats: Presidents, Candidates, Donors, Activists, Alligators, and Other Wild Animals* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007), 281, 285, 385.

legal debts and raise the \$20 million needed to build a new DNC headquarters before the McCain-Feingold ban on soft money went into effect. By 2004, the DNC's email and donor lists had grown exponentially, and sufficient funds were available to provide direct assistance to Democratic candidates and spend \$348 million in conjunction with the Kerry campaign, shattering all previous records.⁵⁵ Another clear success story was the new DNC headquarters, which opened in the spring of 2004 fully equipped with modern facilities, the latest in computer technology, and even a television studio.

But McAuliffe's other two goals – building a national voter file and strengthening state parties – remained unfinished as his term came to an end. The voter file again proved to be more of a challenge than McAuliffe had anticipated. Few states agreed to share their data, despite McAuliffe's assurances that the DNC would keep their voter lists continually updated. For those that did participate, the DNC claimed to have “corrected more than 27 million addresses and phone numbers.”⁵⁶ But by the end of 2004, the voter file was nowhere near complete. According to one party activist, the system McAuliffe invested in had no “front end, no user interface.” It “didn't do what a field organizer needs it to do...You weren't going to get walk lists or other tools out of it. It doesn't do bupkus.”⁵⁷

McAuliffe dedicated \$10 million to help state parties gear up for redistricting in 2001 and another \$65 million to help with the 2004 elections, but their organizations were in “sorry shape” when Howard Dean assumed the DNC chairmanship in 2005.⁵⁸ A thorough assessment of state party structures and operations revealed widespread organizational deficiencies. Most needed financial resources and more staff, and some also needed legal assistance, technological upgrades, public relations support, and campaign expertise.⁵⁹

While McAuliffe's attempt to build a voter file was stymied by logistical difficulties and his failure to build state parties was a missed opportunity, it is important to observe that just like Clinton's second term, McAuliffe's tenure was filled with unexpected twists and turns that set his party-building projects back. First, there was McCain-Feingold, which undercut McAuliffe's primary area of expertise, the raising of soft money. Then there was 9/11, which temporarily shut down party-building efforts at the DNC: “I was like a caged rat,” McAuliffe

⁵⁵ Ibid., 374

⁵⁶ Ibid., 285.

⁵⁷ Brian Reich, “Please standby...The DNC Is Still Experiencing Technical Difficulties,” *Personal Democracy Forum*, 4/18/05, <http://www.personaldemocracy.com/node/536>.

⁵⁸ McAuliffe and Kettmann, *What a Party!*, 298, 374; Elaine C. Kamarck, “Assessing Howard Dean's Fifty State Strategy and the 2006 Midterm Elections,” *The Forum*, 4, 3 (2006); Matt Bai, “The Inside Agitator,” *The New York Times*, 10/1/06.

⁵⁹ Kamarck, “Assessing Howard Dean's Fifty State Strategy and the 2006 Midterm Elections”; Bai, “The Inside Agitator.”

wrote. “I couldn’t travel. I couldn’t make political calls. I couldn’t make money calls. I couldn’t do anything.”⁶⁰ Third, while the new headquarters was being built, the DNC had to move into a temporary location for almost a year and a half, with all the disruption such a move invariably entails. Finally, the Kerry campaign kept the DNC largely on the sidelines and refused to use the opportunity of the national campaign to make further investments in the party’s organizational capacities.

To be sure, Democrats had come a long way from 1994. The mentality of party leaders had changed, the party’s lingering debt was finally erased, and critical investments were made in the party’s physical infrastructure, in its technological capacities, and in its human capital. Yet none of this had translated into electoral success. By the end of 2004, after yet another round of heartbreaking losses at the national and local levels, the Democrats appeared stuck in the minority for the foreseeable future. Democratic leaders began desperately to search for new solutions. Some consulted with cognitive linguistic experts and sought out new metaphors;⁶¹ some designed new policy proposals;⁶² some launched a progressive talk radio station;⁶³ and others redoubled their commitment to invest in the party’s organizational capacities.

The more we learn about Howard Dean’s DNC chairmanship, the more his contributions appear to mark a significant step forward in the party’s organizational development. His accomplishments have been many. First and foremost, between 2005 and 2008, the Dean team at the DNC finally managed to build a functional national voter file. By investing \$8 million in the program and running several pilot projects to test its effectiveness in grassroots campaigns, the new system, called VoteBuilder, hopes to be a major factor in local and national Democratic campaigns in 2008.⁶⁴ When used in conjunction with a new “Neighborhood Volunteer” online tool, the voter file aims to help grassroots canvassers organize in their communities and then feed back information on individual voters directly into the centralized system.⁶⁵

In an effort to cultivate the “foot soldiers” of future campaigns, Dean’s team has also run multiple training programs for campaign professionals, volunteers, and state party operatives. The DNC has also introduced several new innovations, including customizable online tools for local organizing, such as “PartyBuilder,”

⁶⁰ McAuliffe and Kettmann, *What a Party!*, 303.

⁶¹ Matt Bai, “The Framing Wars,” *The New York Times*, 7/17/05.

⁶² Kathy Kiely, “‘New Direction’ is new theme for Democratic plan,” *USA Today*, 6/14/06.

⁶³ Howard Kurtz, “Making A Left at The Mike,” *The Washington Post*, 3/21/04.

⁶⁴ David Paul Kuhn, “DNC Blunts GOP Voter Targeting Efforts,” *Politico.com*, 5/23/08; “On the Download: DNC Launches Vote Builder,” *The Hotline*, 5/3/07.

⁶⁵ Ibid.; Press Release, “DNC Launches McCain Ad and New National Field Organizing Effort,” *Democratic National Committee*, 4/21/08, http://www.democrats.org/a/2008/04/for_immediate_r_5.php.

and new mechanisms for generating a steady stream of contributions, including “Democracy Bonds.” Last but not least, Dean’s much-discussed 50-state strategy, the centerpiece of his party-building program, has funded at least four coordinators in every state to help rebuild state party operations, and has generated rave reviews from state leaders and local activists.⁶⁶

Yet Dean, too, has encountered serious challenges to his party-building programs. His challenges have not been financial like Clinton’s or technological like McAuliffe’s. They have been mostly strategic and personal. Dean’s ambitious efforts were greeted with hostility from party “insiders” who strongly disagreed with his allocation of party resources to “red” states that seemed to offer little chance of helping Democrats win back congressional majorities in 2006.⁶⁷ In a widely-reported conflict, Congressman Rahm Emanuel, chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, forcefully argued that the DNC should transfer \$10 million to help marginal races in 2006 instead.⁶⁸ Dean held firm, but ultimately did allocate an additional \$2.6 million into field operations while continuing to fund the 50-state strategy.⁶⁹

The dispute indicated that many in the party establishment either disagreed with, or did not understand, the notion that organizational party building is fundamentally an incremental process of cumulative growth. To them, the future was now, and Dean’s highly-publicized commitment to a long-term strategy for the party seemed quixotic at best. Paul Begala, a former adviser to Bill Clinton, said:

[Dean] has raised \$74 million and spent \$64 million. He says it’s a long-term strategy. But what he has spent it on, apparently, is just hiring a bunch of staff people to wander around Utah and Mississippi and pick their nose. That’s not how you build a party. You win elections. That’s how you build a party.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Kamarck, “Assessing Howard Dean’s Fifty State Strategy and the 2006 Midterm Elections”; and see: http://www.democrats.org/a/party/a_50_state_strategy/.

⁶⁷ Bai, “The Inside Agitator.”

⁶⁸ See, for example, Adam Nagourney, “Dean and Party Leaders in a Money Dispute,” *The New York Times*, 5/11/06; Dan Gilgoff, “Dean’s List,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 7/24/06; Kamarck, “Assessing Howard Dean’s Fifty State Strategy and the 2006 Midterm Elections”; and Daniel Galvin, “How to Grow a Democratic Majority,” *The New York Times*, 6/3/06.

⁶⁹ Bai, “The Inside Agitator.”

⁷⁰ Transcript, “The Situation Room,” *CNN*, 5/11/06.

Begala later apologized,⁷¹ but even after the Democrats won back control of Congress, former Clinton campaign strategist James Carville mocked Dean's leadership as "Rumsfeldian in its incompetence" and called for his ouster.⁷²

Once it became clear to the press and the blogosphere that Dean was strongly supported by the state chairmen and was not about to resign his post – and after Elaine Kamarck's excellent study was published in *The Forum* demonstrating the positive impact of the 50-state strategy on House elections – the debate over Dean's party-building strategy quieted for a time.⁷³ But as the DNC began to fall behind the RNC in fundraising receipts in the summer of 2008, new doubts began to be raised about the wisdom of Dean's approach.⁷⁴

Despite having to face down these vocal skeptics, Dean appears to have made major gains in constructing a national voter file and in strengthening state parties, the two biggest pieces of unfinished business he inherited from his predecessors, and has introduced a number of innovations as well. To be sure, he has not had an easy time of it. But it is worth pointing out that the party-building challenges Dean has faced have been less formidable than those faced by his predecessors. The further along the party-building path the Democrats have traveled, the less susceptible to the twists and turns of politics their new trajectory of organizational development has become. As Dean prepares to step down, the Democrats' party-building project seems to have generated a momentum all of its own.

Future Prospects

All of which brings us to Obama's campaign, which has promised to build upon Dean's 50-state strategy by putting "its massive volunteer and technological resources into states which won't necessarily produce electoral votes" in 2008. It aims to help down-ticket Democratic candidates this year while laying the groundwork for future contests and upcoming redistricting battles.⁷⁵ If Obama wins in November, he could very well carry these goals forward. Indeed, we may be witness to the first Democratic party-building presidency in modern times: Democrats might finally be able to leverage the unique resources and capabilities of the presidency on behalf of party building.

⁷¹ Paul Begala, *Bringing a Knife to a Gunfight*, *HuffingtonPost.com*, 5/19/06, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-begala/bringing-a-knife-to-a-gun_b_21275.html.

⁷² John Dickerson, "The Doctor Is In: Howard Dean isn't getting tossed from the DNC," *Slate.com*, <http://www.slate.com/id/2154259/>.

⁷³ Kamarck, "Assessing Howard Dean's Fifty State Strategy and the 2006 Midterm Elections".

⁷⁴ Jay Cost, "Evaluating Obama's Campaign Finance Decision," *Realclearpolitics.com*, 7/1/08, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/horseraceblog/2008/07/evaluating_obamas_campaign_finance_decision.html.

⁷⁵ Ben Smith, "Obama's Aim: 14 Bush States and Local Races," *Politico.com*, 6/5/08.

It is an open question, however, whether a President Obama and his fellow party leaders would perceive a need for further party building in 2009 and beyond. If the Democrats manage to bring strong majorities into Congress and make significant gains at the local level, as some are predicting – if Obama succeeds in building the “new majority” about which he speaks⁷⁶ – will the Democrats’ collective commitment to organizational development survive? As discussed, the party-building impulse is intimately related to the desire to build a new majority, and the more comfortable the party’s competitive standing, the less motivation we should expect for party building.

Yet there is some reason to believe that a President Obama would continue to sponsor organization-building programs irrespective of his party’s new competitive standing or even his personal interest in organization. Party building, as we have seen over the last decade, is a cumulative process with significant downstream effects. Once the party’s infrastructure is built, its personnel are mobilized, and its party-building programs are in operation, the costs associated with making additional investments, incremental improvements, and new innovations are significantly reduced. And because the gains are cumulative, each successive round makes it increasingly likely that subsequent party leaders will find it in their interest to continue party building.

As we have seen, the high financial startup costs paid by Bill Clinton in 1996-1997 created a historic opportunity for party building in 1999-2000. Early investments made by Joe Andrew at the DNC in software and hardware, human capital, and campaign services gave Terry McAuliffe and his team a head start on further investments in those areas, and McAuliffe’s new headquarters, new donor lists, and his initial work on the national voter file laid the groundwork for Howard Dean’s subsequent efforts. Each new round of party building not only built upon the prior round, but also moved the whole project forward with new innovations at each stage. This additive process could very well have an impact on an Obama presidency, if only by providing Obama and his team with an active and technologically equipped party organization that appears useful to them and is primed for further growth.

Yet the usual caveats apply, as prognostication is a treacherous business. From what we can glean from the past, this much is clear: changing the organizational trajectory of the Democratic Party has not happened quickly or easily, and it certainly has not followed automatically from changes in the political environment. Party leaders have been motivated by the decline in the competitive standing of their party to make long-term investments in party organization, but their changes have been incremental and their gains have been cumulative. If Democrats are to heed Bradley’s advice and continue to “build a

⁷⁶ Transcript, “Barack Obama’s New Hampshire Primary Speech,” *The New York Times*, 1/8/08, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/us/politics/08text-obama.html?_r=1&oref=slogin.

stable pyramid from the base up,” then they should plan to look past the results of the 2008 election – whatever they may be – keep up the momentum, and continue building upon the gains made over the last decade.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Bradley, “A Party Inverted.”