

Transcript of “Democracy Alliance: Colorado as a Model–
Donor Cooperation for Social Change” panel discussion

Democratic Party national convention, Denver, Colorado

August 27, 2008

(transcribed by Josh Jones, James Dellinger, and Matthew Vadum
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DOUG PHELPS, chairman of Colorado Democracy Alliance (CoDA): We’re getting our panelists miked up here, and meanwhile, I’d like to welcome you to this session. It’s going to be a real treat because we have some real experts on building the progressive infrastructure. My name is Doug Phelps. I’ve recently been asked to and agreed to chair the Colorado Democracy Alliance. I grew up here in Colorado. I went to Littleton High School. I was student body president at Colorado State University where Al Yates, one of the founders of CoDA, was the president of the university, as you know, for a number of years.

My job is to simply introduce our panelists. We have Rob Stein, who is the founder of the national Democracy Alliance. We have Kelly Craighead, who is the executive director. We have Laurie Zeller, who is the executive director of the Colorado Democracy Alliance, and we have Frank Smith, who is a all things executive director to a lot of people who do political work and political giving, both organizations and donors. So I’m going to without further ado turn over the program to Rob Stein. Rob, and thank you again, all, for coming.

ROB STEIN, founder of Democracy Alliance: Hi everybody. Welcome. Good morning. We’re not going to do the slide presentation, only because the vast majority of people that are here have seen it at one point or another, and rather than go through 25 minutes of slides, we thought we could have a more intimate conversation, so we’re just going to have a conversation. Let me just say a couple of things to set the tone.

The machinery, had we been here four years ago, at this exact same date, having this conversation, there would have been virtually no credible capabilities that we could talk about that in any way, shape, or form could be seen as fairly competitive with the enormous machinery that the right has built.

What is so remarkable about the last four years is what is represented by the three organizations that are going to be, that are going to make brief comments this morning.

We are not, we do not have the infrastructure that the right has built yet. But there has never, in the history of progressivedom, been a clearer, more strategic, more focused, more disciplined, better financed group of institutions operating at the state and national

level. And that's what these three organizations represent. And of course, it isn't sufficient just to build institutions; you have to build institutions that are promoting a set of values, and a set of policies that are coherent. And so while we, as Democrats and progressives, still are ringing our hands at this very moment in this very city that we don't quite have the message down right, and it feels scary, 'cause we don't have the message down right. We're about to witness the best message that we can possibly muster that will be delivered Thursday night by our nominee. And over the next 70 days, that message is going to be as compelling as any message we've had in a while. And the message that he's going to deliver is built upon the work that these organizations have been doing. It's his own words. It's his own way of crafting it, but it's built on the work that these organizations are supporting.

So what we need to be unbelievably proud and hopeful about, as we enter these next 70 days, and then we begin governing, is that we are getting it together. We're being more businesslike. We're being more professional. We're being more strategic. We're being better financed. That is the good news. I want to have one moment of reality checking though. The machinery that the right has built, the 400-million dollars a year of policy institutions, the 50-million dollars a year of leadership training organizations, the nearly a billion-dollars a year worth of very targeted media, the half a billion dollars a year of civic engagement—the NRA, and the Focus on the Family. This machinery, as depleted, as the leadership and the Republican brand is right this minute—and it is—their office holders are obviously discredited, as depleted as they are, this machinery is alive and well. And it is focused laser like in the next 70 days, on candidates up and down the ballot.

And if Barack Obama becomes our next president, when Barack Obama becomes our next president, they are going to do everything they can to frustrate his ability to govern. So they have not gone away, so win or lose, we can't stop building. We must continue building what we have started. So with that, Laurie Zeller is leading the effort here in Colorado at the staff level. They're a wonderful group of wonderful board members with the effort in Colorado. She's leading the group in Colorado. She'll talk for a few minutes about what's happening in Colorado.

Frank Smith and I co-manage a quiet little project that is helping 18-other states beyond Colorado, try to get up to Colorado's level of sophistication and organizational development. A project called Committee on States. And there are a bunch of states, where over the next couple of years a lot of development is going to happen. And Kelly Craighead, the inimitable Kelly Craighead, is the executive director, managing director, of the Democracy Alliance, and there is no organization in the country that has done more in the last four years to help build the 30 or so organizations that help form the core of what is happening all around the country, and she'll talk about that. So Laurie, why don't you do your thing for a few minutes and then we're going to open this up.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER (Executive Director, Colorado Democracy Alliance): Thank you, Rob. At CoDA we're very proud to be...

ROB STEIN: Oh, you have a lump.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: Yeah, to be the poster child for state based collaboratives. We embrace the progressive label in our giving and in the strategic role that we play in Colorado politics.

Our job is to build a long-term progressive infrastructure in Colorado, while we're conceding nothing in the short term, in terms of progressive goals at the ballot box. We provide services to our members in terms of research, advice on their giving, activating their collective interaction, to help make the progressive sector stronger. But our role is really to harness the financial resources as well as the brains and the energy of the progressive sector. And I want to stress that it's not just individual donors. One of the things that has been crucial in making the work of the Colorado Democracy Alliance effective in Colorado has been our partnership with institutional donors and activists organizations, in labor particularly. That's been a major part of how we get our work done here.

One of the things that I wanted to do today was highlight some examples of the organizations that we support. We have a conceptual map that shows five different areas of activity. One of them is leadership, there is communications, there's research and ideas, there's civic engagement, and there's constituency development. And the groups that we nurture and we sustain and whose interaction we try to enable fall into those categories generally.

One of the organizations that's active at the national level that has a very effective presence here is America Votes, which is, works to coordinate the work of the advocacy organizations here. They, in Colorado there are 37 member organizations – that represents almost a quarter of a million Colorado members and a reach into the activist community that's crucial for achieving both electoral goals and progressive change over time. And most of the organizations that sit at the America Votes table are the same ones that sit in your home states or Colorado affiliates.

But one homegrown group I wanted to focus on particularly was New Era Colorado. They're a youth-vote oriented and focused on really innovative uses of technology, of communications, and different ways of activating youth, particularly non-college youth, who are obviously a transitory population and we have a lot of party activity and candidate activity hasn't really figured out how to reach those folks. They're doing baseline work here that's very innovative and that we're going to be tracking, and nurturing in the future. One of the research organizations is the Bell Policy Center. As you may know, we have an arcane constitutional provision that requires that voters have to approve any increase in taxes and spending. And the Bell has developed an expertise and a communications capacity on those issues that has helped to empower the progressive sector to be able to talk about the funding concerns of the states, and really about the role of government, that it plays. There are 19 measures on the ballot here in Colorado, and the Bell is serving as an information conduit for progressive organizations and progressive leaders.

One of our favorite communications organizations is ProgressNow, which is known for its very edgy, punchy communications capacity. What is lesser known is its ability to enable the progressive sector; to provide progressive organizations with online resources with communications, tools, and with training and methods of working together through RootsCamp, through the Big Tent, if you haven't been to the Big Tent, which is down on Wynkoop Street. It's an amazing structure and it's been a great sort of off-site venue for convention activity.

Progressive Majority is our state based leadership development entity. If you, Colorado has had a conservative leadership organization here, the Leadership Program of the Rockies, which has been responsible for training and recruiting the conservative leadership here for a generation. Progressive Majority, Center for Progressive Leadership, the Colorado Institute for Leadership Training, are working to bring together diffuse leadership resources for the progressive sector. Finally, the Latina Initiative is a 501-C-3 that's working specifically through Latino voters to register voters, to provide citizenship training, through conferences, workshops, special events. They're going to be registering 5,000 new Colorado voters which is a 110% increase in that community from previous years.

CoDA works with all these organizations to foster interaction, to make sure that they have not only the financial resources but also access to best practices, and to the information they need to do their work better. We function as, we are structured as a taxable non-profit corporation, but we function as a membership organization. We're working to build a donor community here; we're working to enable their communications, with organizations and with political entities, and we do so in a structure that provides privacy for members, but also offers us the flexibility to work in relationships with other political entities that gives us some agility and effectiveness.

Our focus is making our investments meaningful for individual donors, both in terms of what they want to achieve individually, but also to provide collective strategic impact, which isn't available otherwise.

I've been struck this week as friends from out of town have come here from the convention that they're pleased to find a sophisticated modern city here. I think they pictured a frontier town, and we were encircling the wagons, surrounded by hostile red conservative populations. And I think the emphasis that we need to send to progressives around the country is that the tents have been struck, and we're building a community here. And there is an irrigation system in place that is going to provide a harvest later this fall, but that's also building a community and building an infrastructure for the long term.

ROB STEIN: And in the absolutely finest form of flattery, the Weekly Standard, which is the most respected conservative-right opinion journal in the country, did a cover story about a month ago, written by Fred Barnes, on the Colorado Model. And it is a warning shot to conservatives in America, that if the Colorado Model is replicated elsewhere,

conservatives have nothing comparable to possibly compete with it and they had better watch out.

[applause]

Yay Colorado, is exactly right. And it really is the model. And you're blessed here with some extraordinary organizations, and some significant wealth to support those organizations. And every place doesn't have all of those assets in place. But as Frank now is going to tell you, there are 18 other states where there are major donors and significant groups that are building, not specifically on the exact model, not building the exact same way because each state is different, but are building.

FRANK SMITH (investment services consultant, Democracy Alliance): Yeah, thanks Rob. I'm an attorney; I also work for the Democracy Alliance in the civic engagement front, and do some of the political work that is necessary to do out of there, and work with Rob.

For the last two decades, I've traveled the country in election years, trying to figure out the best uses of money to elect progressive Democrats, and to get progressive policies done, both in the states and the federal level. I remember the first time I came to Colorado was in the '86 Senate race, and I wandered around Denver and Boulder, trying to find groups that could do some of the work that was necessary to with that Senate race, and ended up winning it very narrowly.

But in a number of ways, the right had a big resurgence here, in the late eighties and early nineties that has now been reversed. And as Rob mentioned, building on the Colorado Model, in other states donors have started really taking ownership of trying to work in states to build the kind of both party structure that could have an impact, as well as NGO sector that could do both the kind of policy work and the kind of civic engagement work that can help persuade voters and win elections.

And it's really heartening, because as you build a local donor network, the donors are able to interact both with the party and with the independent sector. The independent sector can't interact with the party much, unless it's, for the most part. But having donors who are willing to organize themselves, and also vouch for groups in their states, they're able to help validate to out of state donors that investing in this organization in this state is really both a cost effective short term investment but also is going to pay off for changing politics in the state and the country in the long term. So, I could go on and on about...

ROB STEIN: Name some of the states.

FRANK SMITH: New Mexico, Wisconsin, Minnesota, we made some progress in Utah and Wyoming, thanks to Chris, Ohio, we've made a little bit of progress in Michigan, I mean...

ROB STEIN: North Carolina, Maine.

FRANK SMITH: North Carolina, Maine,

ROB STEIN: Donors are forming, and groups are getting support. And we've just, now we have to get it to the next level.

FRANK SMITH: And there's some tension, obviously, you know we had a big meeting in Ohio, with the governor and the state party. And in some ways, money in their view is scarce, so there's going to be some tension in these states. But in other states, people understand the reason to invest both in the state party and the independent sector. The law is different in every state about taking, some states have limits of what you can give them. So in some states you're going to have to build much stronger NGO sectors than the party. And unfortunately, in many, many states that I've been into the state party structures are just notoriously and historically weak.

ROB STEIN: There are three states that are head and shoulders above all the other states in terms of building a healthy sustainable progressive infrastructure. They are Colorado, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. And in all three of those states, they have structured donor alliances, 15 or 20 or 25 individual and institutional donors, aggregating their money, and putting it out in a strategic and coordinated way. In about another 10 states, there are very serious donors who have just in the last six to 12 months come to the table, they've got political operatives working with them, and they are going to begin building in a very serious way in 2009 and beyond. And as we know, 2010 is redistricting, there are 35 governors' races, so it's going to be a critically important year, and we hope that there's going to be progressive infrastructure that is advanced, modern, more professional in about 12 or 15 states by 2010.

Kelly Craighead, Democracy Alliance...

KELLY CRAIGHEAD (managing director, Democracy Alliance): Well, I should say, Rob and Frank, and so many people in this room should take a lot of credit for all of those donor networks that are organizing in each of those different states, it is so much to your foresight and your leadership, and Al Yates, and those, so many of the founders of the Democracy Alliance, are also the founders of Committee on States and the Colorado Democracy Alliance. And so, so many of you are in this room. So I feel humbled to be up here, thanks Frank, because all of you know all of this much better than I do. Both what Committee on States is trying to do and the Colorado Democracy Alliance is trying to do, and what the Democracy Alliance is trying to do is twofold: One is to build infrastructure, both at the national level and at the state level, but also to build the sustainable progressive majorities.

And I guess my part of this is to say "why?" You know, for the Democracy Alliance, we really struggled, is it infrastructure, is it about a sustainable majority, and in the end we've decided it's both. Because we have a vision of America, that is progressive, that have progressive values and have progressive policies, and how do you do that? You

know, we failed for 40 years, and in that Power Point that we're not seeing Rob Stein diagrams why that happened, and shows us a path for how we can change that. And part of that is building institutional capacity. But it's also really about getting clear about what we're trying to do and why we're doing it. So like the Colorado Democracy Alliance, we are also a not-for profit corporation. We are organized as a membership organization, we have two parts to that membership: one of the funders who provide really important patient capital that the movement has not had for a very long time, if ever, Rob. Because all of this is new, and the other half, our Alliance partner organizations who really should be up here, because they're the ones that are doing the work. And what we're trying to do for our members is to provide an investment framework for they can think about what we're trying to build, what is this machine, what is this infrastructure and how are we then going use it. And we do it across four sectors also. We recommend organizations that are developing public policy solutions for our ideas sector, training the next generation of leaders through our leadership sector, organizing and mobilizing—I skipped right over media—we have a media sector where we are trying to do three things: One we're trying to reform the media, which hopefully if we get to 60 votes this year we'll be a lot closer to making an impact on some of the things that we care about in terms of the free press and how we really strengthen democracy, through media monitoring, and how do we actually push the right back and how do we create the space, so in our third area media content generation: how can we move our messages out.

And so you see we're starting to build a machine, generating ideas, moving those messages out to messengers, having leadership cut across the whole thing, and then ultimately civic engagement: how do we get people out to the polls to vote for people who are going to enact the legislation that we think is important to have a real progressive America. So we're honored to have 30 groups in our portfolio, our partners are very diverse, they come from every part of the country, we have over 100 members who are participating as financial partners —our chairman Rob McKay is in the room— who really has provided some terrific leadership that helps us then provide services at the national level that connect with each of these different states so that there is a synergy. So, one of the hallmarks of the Democracy Alliance is how do you foster coordination and collaboration amongst the groups.

We're also trying to do that amongst the donors at every level. And we're having some real success at it. And I do agree with you, Rob, I don't think we could be in this moment in time had we not had the movement leaders doing the work they do, and the funders who are in this room, doing the work they do, and trying to both build community, but also professionalize the movement, which will make us more effective and more efficient. So I think we should probably just go to [inaudible].

ROB STEIN: Yeah let's just open it up. Let me just make one more synergistic point which is this: So the Democracy Alliance over the last 30 months has put about 110-million dollars into 30 groups. I think it's eight of those groups, I'm not sure exactly but something like eight, are on the ground here in Colorado, and are part of the Colorado system. So what is being built nationally is really supporting a lot of multistate organizations that are effecting progressive majority change at the state level. So this is

all connected. What you see up here is all getting connected. Is it perfect? No. Is it infinitely better than anything we've ever had before? Yes. Is it hopeful for the future? Yes. Let's open up to questions.

KELLY CRAIGHEAD: Nate?

NATE LOEWENTHEIL (Roosevelt Institution): I'm just talking about the youth element of all this. I'm a young person. It strikes me that a huge amount of money is being put into get out the vote work right now to reach young people, but very little thought about how we're going to keep them civically simply engaged and active in the movement right after the election, and it's so easy for people to crash right after they voted and not stay engaged. So I'm wondering what are some of the best programs happening right now that are focusing on what happens on November 5th?

KELLY CRAIGHEAD: Do you want to talk a little bit about your program, Nate?

NATE LOEWENTHEIL: Oh, I wasn't trying to make a pitch

KELLY CRAIGHEAD: I know, I know.

NATE LOEWENTHEIL: Yeah, I run an organization called the Roosevelt Institution, which is a national student policy organization, so we're helping college students get active in the progressive movement by giving them an outlet for their ideas on college campuses. Helping support local and state elected officials with sound research while also encouraging them to get involved in policy organizations after they graduate.

KELLY CRAIGHEAD: Why don't you follow up on that, Rob.

ROB STEIN: Well, why don't one of you do the youth project that's getting funded, the coordinated youth project.

FRANK SMITH: Well we were funding, as you mentioned, a coordinated youth project; it's heavy on the election right now. But it's hopefully by bringing all these youth groups together in both a C-3 table and a C-4 table that we're going to be able to keep those groups together as a force after the election. I mean it's some of the usual suspects that have the ability on college campuses and in community colleges and in other areas to try and both reach, mobilize and turn out youth.

ROB STEIN: Name them. Name a few of them.

FRANK SMITH: Rock the Vote, League of Young Voters, Young Democrats of America.

ROB STEIN: And so here's what they're doing, in addition to executing on their programs, they're now coordinating, they're carving up turf, and they're all putting their

data into a central database. So there is a whole new infrastructure support here, that allows for long-term institution building because there's shared information.

FRANK SMITH: And we should note, that one of the signature D-A projects that was started in 2005, Catalist, is now being used by both the Obama campaign and all the organizations that are involved so there's information sharing, which is perfectly legal. It's an amazing improvement to the way we used to do outreach, particularly in areas where, so-called red areas where precincts would just be ignored, and we wouldn't get to those voters there because we didn't know who they were.

KELLY CRAIGHEAD: So let me say just one other thing about that, Nate, to your question, so I think there is a big focus on registration and G-O-T-V of youth because obviously the trends, and the demographics show that that is going to be the next big voting block, so all of us focus on that obviously because we want to win, whatever that means. It's an important constituency to focus on. I think the next steps after actually getting people into the movement is where we focus on leadership development, and where our ideas groups, like Roosevelt, like Truman, there a number of groups that are focused, not only on young people, and developing young leaders, but also you'll see through the think tanks how they're dealing with issues that will play out 20 or 30 years from now, that will impact that constituency most. So I think you're seeing a thread woven throughout the entire movement, but I think it starts by getting them in, and that's why you see a focus on that right now.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: Here in Colorado, there's New Era Colorado, which I mentioned is forming itself to be a year-round advocacy portal. It's not just about registering to vote and G-O-T-V, it's about finding ways of reaching younger voters. If you have a moment to go onto YouTube today, go, put in "vote naked," and you will find a Boulder city council video that they did, which you can imagine the pictures. But it is very compelling and it was a great example of using the media creatively. The other thing that's exciting here in Colorado is that the student "PIRGs," are activating and expanding to a number of different campuses in Colorado. Do you want to talk about that, Doug?

DOUG PHELPS: We have a question.

MALE QUESTIONER: Yeah, I have a question for the benefit of individuals who are here might be interested in affiliating with one of the three organizations. If one of you could describe a little more how they—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE PANELIST: Or all three.

MALE QUESTIONER: Or all three— how they actually, operate. Rob, you made reference to aggregating funds. We don't actually aggregate people's funds, so I think it's important to mention that and just so you can tell how it works.

KELLY CRAIGHEAD: I'll go first. So, it actually, we get, we use a lot of shorthand, for us, from the Democracy Alliance, we talk about the Democracy Alliance has done a

hundred-five million dollars. Alliance partners have funded up to 105 million dollars to groups we've recommended. So we lay out our framework, we have a commitment from our members that they are going to reach a certain level and provide that support to the groups we recommend, but we're not a pass-through. The funders actually decide themselves where they're going write their check, and that's how the Alliance operates.

ROB STEIN: And that's how all of these operate. Yeah.

KELLY CRAIGHEAD: Yes.

JEFF BLUM (USAction, Campaign to Defend America): I had a comment and question, the question I'll start with [inaudible], how do we grow this donor base, and I'm interested, Laurie, whether you all in Colorado have specifically addressed this. Rob, I'm Jeff Blum and I had the privilege to run one of the groups that is the beneficiary of the Alliance's generosity, and we do have one of these groups in Colorado here that is the [inaudible] coalition.

Sitting at a Democracy Alliance meeting a couple years ago, a number of us who ran large membership organizations, Karl Pope from Sierra and [inaudible] Steve Kester of ACORN and I were brought together by sitting at the Alliance, said well it's great that we're hopefully going to get this money from this tiny pool of very generous people, but that's not the way we're going to be able fund ourselves over the long run, and honestly that's not the vision of democracy. It's a wonderful vision of generosity, but it's not democracy. Democracy is the funding of groups by their members. And so we, Sierra, ACORN, ourselves, USAction, Planned Parenthood, and MoveOn, have formed a little consortium, which Rob has very generously helped us do some research on to study, who are our donors, and then how do we travel our donors up the scale to the point where they become, for example, Colorado Democracy Alliance donors. What's the interaction? Because in between people of enormous wealth and people giving five dollars, is a whole spectrum of people who've made some money, who've made a lot of money, who are more generous than their money maybe would suggest. And all those pieces have to be part of how we fund our movement. And obviously Barack has sort of broken this open in a whole new way. So Laurie, is this something that you all have talked about, specifically, and do you have ideas, about how to get past the [inaudible] in Colorado.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: Yeah, we haven't focused on small or medium donors, not to date. We are very firmly focused on trying to grow our membership base. And for anyone who read the Colorado Model article, there are a lot more than four members in CoDA, but in addition to that, we are very focused on trying to leverage the relationships that CoDA members have and some of our institutional donors have to make sure that while we are reaching out to members who are also using the CoDA brand and the CoDA communications networks, to reach out to folks who might not be ready to be members, but who are appreciative of the privileged access to information that we can provide because of the research that we're doing, and trying to make sure that there is an opportunity to get the word out that way. It's been a tricky sort of middle line to run, because to remain effective and agile, we have had to try to and be discreet about our

efforts. There's a playbook here that you don't want to leave on the table in a Starbucks. But programs like today are sort of a bold new face that we're trying to put on CoDA, to reach out to donors who are potential members, also to reach out to donors who are potential investors. And use the infrastructure that the organizations that we recommend provide the donor base that they have to make sure that there's a validation there that can be helpful to them as well.

ROB STEIN: I want to thank Jeff for raising this. And Jeff and I have talked a good bit about this. There cannot be a sustainable progressive movement in America that brings about progressive change without new cultivation of millions of small and medium size contributions. It just can't happen, 'cause there are not enough super wealthy people to write 50,000 or 2 million dollar checks to groups and sustain them over time, there just aren't. I want to put the numbers in perspective, though, a little bit. The reason we're progressives, and we're trying to bring about progressive change is because we have a vision for this country, on all of the issues that we know are of concern to us. In order to bring about progressive change, you need progressive control of government. In order to get progressive control of government, and sustain it, you need an infrastructure; you need organizations to support them.

Political organizations and movement organizations. The reason it is so important to control government is because government is the source of enormous power. One president in this country, when he or she takes office, appoints 2 million people, I mean I'm sorry, appoints 5,000 people to run a bureaucracy, non-military non-postal service of 2 million people, who hire 10 million outside outsource contractors, a workforce of 12 million people, that spends 3 trillion dollars a year.

That number is larger than the gross domestic product of all but four countries on the face of the earth. So the reason we're doing what we're doing and reason and the way we get progressive change, is to control government. That's what this is about. It's about more than that because it's really about progressive change, it's about what we believe, and what we want for our children and for our grandchildren. But in order to get there, we've got to control government. In order to have the infrastructure, I'm going to go over the numbers again about the infrastructure that the right has built, so that we put this in perspective. It's about a billion and a half dollars a year that they're spending in a coordinated way so that they can maximize their ability to control three trillion dollars a year of expenditure. They have a four-hundred million dollar policy institute consortium. They have a 50 million dollar leadership training capability. They have about a 700 million dollar every two years, so about 350 or 400 million dollars a year in the NRA, Focus on the Family, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, that's their mobilization arm, spends about 700 million dollars every two years. And then they have this incredible array of media properties, one of which is focused exclusively on the Christian community, basically in America, particularly the evangelicals, one of which is focused on gun owners, another which is focused exclusively on white men, that's talk radio, talk radio isn't for everybody, not for most of us in this room, and it isn't for most women. It is for white men, and they have 350 hours a week. That's all paid for in the commercial market, it's paid for by advertisers. And it serves their purposes everyday. So

it costs about a billion dollars, and we can do it cheaper. So let's say that it cost us, you know, 7, 800, 900 million a year. We're much more efficient than they are. Because we've got the Internet, we've got all kinds of things. But it's big bucks.

If we are going to change America and promote a progressive agenda, in order to do that we have got to figure out ways of effectively generating, mobilizing small and medium donors. Barack Obama, Howard Dean four years ago, Barack Obama now, have figured out ways for candidates to do it on the Internet, very few, I mean MoveOn does a pretty good job of raising money online, some other organizations are getting there, but we haven't really built a machinery that is generating huge amounts of money, but we've got to do it.

I'm sorry for the long-windedness, but it's a very important question. Yes?

FEMALE QUESTIONER: Yes, hi, my husband and I, this is the first time we've been exposed to all this with the exception of a private meeting with Laurie, the Alliance, and you keep referring to the progressive agenda, but I don't know exactly what you mean by that, and there's quite a large spectrum between the liberal Dems, the moderate Dems and so forth, and some of us fall more moderately or liberally or vice versa. What is the progressive agenda?

ROB STEIN: I'm only hesitating because I could show you three slides that would sort of capture it.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: Do it, Rob, do it.

ROB STEIN: Should I do it?

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: I'll take the bullet in the short term. Just for Colorado. And Rutt and I have had an argument about this off and on, because he wants to always stress the point that we're a very moderate state, we tend to elect moderates statewide, and you're certainly right about that. But 60% of Colorado voters identify themselves as pro-choice, 73% identify themselves as conservationist. More than 80% will tell you that they think that there should be more state funding for the public schools. Those are all progressive values. And I think we share all of those. And I think that CoDA's relationships among members is willing to say "we have these values, we're not going to let issues, as in a particular ballot measure, or something divisive, have an impact on the alliance that we've built and the achievements that have come out of that." Fair assessment?

MALE QUESTIONER: Yeah, just to follow up on that a little bit. You know, if you want people in office, want someone in office that exactly meets all of your criteria, that fits all of your values, that mirrors what you deeply believe, then run for office.

(laughter)

But the reality of it is that you have to find ways to elect people who will support most of what you care about, and you have to be a little forgiving. It has to be a larger tent. You can't have a whole string of litmus tests about what it means to be a progressive. But there are some things that we all share as progressives. I think the fact that we see the world as larger than ourselves. That we have a sense of community that really involves bringing a lot of people together and working through issues together. And I think that to me at least that's a lot of what it means. But we've got a man here with three slides, and I think we ought to let him speak.

ROB STEIN: And I feel very deeply about this, so I'm going to actually.....

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: Can people see over our heads? (inaudible)

ROB STEIN: So, these 87 words are the foundation of our country. This is what our Founders, the blessing that they gave us. These words define, they're the fundamental basis of human dignity, they're the unifying spirit of a free people, and they're the rationale for self governance. These three values that flow directly out of the preamble and the Declaration of Independence, are values that conservatives and progressives share. They're deeply important American values about freedom and we share them. We may think differently a little bit about them than conservatives do, progressives may, some progressives may, think differently, it's not, for progressives every freedom isn't a freedom from intrusion from the government, but we believe in these core values.

These three values you will never see in a conservative statement of their core values. You'll never see them. And you'll barely ever hear them. And what is so remarkable about the progressive ideal is that we deeply understand the tension between freedom and justice. And we are willing to live with it and struggle with it every single day. You also will not see these in a recitation of conservative values, because they don't think of government as promoting human happiness or of engaging in mutual responsibility.

So these values, core values, inspire a progressive ideal that need to be translated into a set of policies. And are we perfect in articulating these policies? We've come far in health care; I think we know what we're talking about in terms of education. Are we as good yet- and I think we know as progressives what a humane immigration policy are, is, are we good yet – in terms of 21st century progressive economics? No. In my judgment, no. We don't have the language, we don't have the framework, we still need to work on it.

There is a phenomenal article, the cover story in the New York Times Magazine last Sunday, it was on Obamanomics. And it is as nuanced, as analytic a piece on how Barack is struggling with markets, versus the role of government. And it isn't easy, we're in a new economic era, lots of things are happening, and he's struggling with them.

So these are the issues that these values that we have – freedom, and equality, mutual responsibility, consent of the governed, which is about democracy and how democracy works, these are the issues that must be infused with those values. This is the progressive

agenda. So, and the work that we're doing, in all of these organizations, and the template, the screen, that gets applied, are, are these organizations promoting these values, working on these issues. That's how we think about it.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE PANELIST: Joe.

MALE QUESTIONER: Hello. Thank you first for all the work that you're doing. I'm just so personally thrilled to be able to take this in and know that this work is going on and I have a fantastic 30-year vision for my son now that he's two and a half, so...

(laughter)

One of the things that's obviously really bothered me is G-O-T-V but [inaudible] election integrity [inaudible] in the election integrity movement.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: Thanks just here in Colorado, this is where the relationships with the different organizations and some donor activism is just really crucial. There is a, there are a number of different 5-0-1-C-3s working on these issues. P-FAW [People for the American Way] has a national effort that has a local presence. Through the America Votes table here in Colorado is working on these issues. Common Cause has a program called "Just Vote, which builds on the fairvoteColorado.com and they're collaborating on making sure that the administration of the election is going to be competent to begin with, but also that there is voter protection elements that ensure that people's rights are protected. Could I just throw that to Rutt for a minute, because he's got some background on this...

RUTT BRIDGES (former CoDA chairman): Some issue we've been working a long time something, and we saw what happened two years ago here in Denver, we had a lot of people that were denied the right to vote, mostly because of just very poor administration of the elections, problems related to that. And so the problem isn't so much in Colorado that we have devious people that are trying to discourage different elements from showing up and voting. That really doesn't happen so much here, but things can happen, just in terms of election administration that prevent people from being able to exercise their right to vote. So there are a lot of different challenges. We're monitoring, for example, who the new county clerks are, the ones with less experience, we're meeting with those people and talking with them about potential issues that we've seen in other places, and we've had a continuous change of election laws in Colorado. And that's created some real problems, and we have another set of election laws to deal with in this election. And so we're looking at how people are addressing those and how they're administering them. But we're also pushing hard on absentee ballots. In Colorado, we now have permanent absentee ballots. And so the more people that we can get to sit and vote at their kitchen table, a couple of things about that. One is they're more likely to vote if they have an absentee ballot in their hand. The other thing is they're more likely to vote down the ticket, and we have so many initiatives on the ballot this year that people really need the opportunity to be thoughtful about how they vote on those

initiatives because frankly some of them sound real good, but they are absolute disasters for the state.

FRANK SMITH: And I'll mention one more thing, at the Democracy Alliance we've got an election, a multi-million dollar election administration program, funding organizations like the Lawyers' Committee, the Brennan Center (NYU), we're funding a national voter hotline. We're also funding an organization that sued the governor and the secretary of state of New Mexico last time. And as a result of discovering that lawsuit, ended up throwing out all their computerized machines. It then led to the new secretary of state in California, because they proved how easily these machines could be manipulated, throwing out the machines, and it's resulting in discovery against Diebold in Ohio, not right now, but it's very, very, I mean they're suing now in Ohio to get back all the money that they paid for these machines because the...

RUTT BRIDGES: [inaudible] it's just thank you, thank you [inaudible].

[crosstalk]

RUTT BRIDGES: I want to ask a secretary of state question.

[crosstalk]

RUTT BRIDGES: Listen, I wanted to add one quick follow up to that because you mentioned the [inaudible] premier but to me [inaudible] I don't mean to get into a policy-particular thing, but the whole idea that our elections have been privatized is one of the fundamental problems that we've got.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: Exactly.

RUTT BRIDGES: I don't know whether that's on your radar but that would be [inaudible].

FRANK SMITH: It is.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: There's a progressive value.

RUTT BRIDGES: Yeah.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: Chris, wanted to jump in here?

UNIDENTIFIED MAN (possibly FRANK SMITH): Well there's also an organization, one of the D-A partners, Democracy Alliance partners, decided that there was a window and that started a thing called S-O-S, Secretary of State Project, and they're focused on replacing the secretary of state in every state in the United States. And they actually take credit for a couple that they've done so far.

(Crosstalk, laughter)

ROB STEIN: Mike, Mike, and then the lady in the black dress. [inaudible]

QUESTIONER: If you're like me, I'm getting to that stage in the four-year cycle where I'm like, spend most of my days muttering about how do we win, how do we win. And I can't see how we don't get there without white working class voters in a few key states and you all have done a great job talking about all the great things that you all did but talk a little bit more about the groups that are doing that work, where they're doing it, what they're investing in in terms of [inaudible].

FRANK SMITH: Well, Jeff's gone but USAction has chapters and they've a got membership in places like Wisconsin that is that white working class vote. We've also had a couple of other projects that grew out of D-A work this year, that we're funding organizations like Working America, which has got a door to door membership canvass in states like Colorado, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, in those states where we've got to get to those constituencies on economic issues and to convince them that four more years of Republican ruin is going to, what, what that's going to mean for their lives. So there is a big program in these crucial states, it's just under-funded at this point.

ROB STEIN: And here's the reason why Mike's question is so important. In 2004, 27 million white men voted for George Bush, and 16 and a half million men voted for John Kerry. And so, and they have been maintaining a conversation through Fox News and Rush Limbaugh and Michael Savage and all of their media, with those 27 million white men, and so it is a huge challenge.

LAURIE HIRSCHFELD ZELLER: It seems to me that white men are the problem here.

ROB STEIN: White men are a huge problem.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Present company notwithstanding.

[crosstalk, laughter]

ROB STEIN: First this lady and then you sir.

FEMALE QUESTIONER: First of all I'm really enjoying some point/counterpoint between the national strategy and also the state strategy, I want to preface this with, I'm a stone throw from Regent university and CBN and obviously live in Virginia, a southern state. What, if anything, have we done, and are we doing, to sort of pursue a southern strategy? With so many electoral votes have such a deep bench in the conservative movement, it just seems like there's a lot of work to be done. And how do we put a foothold in there?

ROB STEIN: I'll start this. The truth is, we haven't. I mean, that's the truth. Barack has begun to, right? He's very serious about Georgia, he's very serious about North Carolina, he's very serious about Virginia, and maybe one or two other states. But the truth is, while we have funded a couple of projects, push...

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Push Back.

ROB STEIN: Push Back is organizing in some states, in some southern states, and that's really long term. We as a group of organizations have not focused on in a really big way. It's a heavy lift. It's very important.

FRANK SMITH: Mention North Carolina, though.

ROB STEIN: Well North Carolina- I mean, huh, it's very exciting, because a group of major donors have now gotten together. And they're doing some funding this cycle but they're sort of waiting till after the hullabaloo of the presidential. And they're ready to go and they've got a good C-3 C-4 that's been operational for a long time, but they need a lot of the other pieces. They're bringing in folks from Colorado to help train them and teach them how to do it. We're going to have a great capacity in North Carolina by 2010.

FRANK SMITH: But Virginia's a perfect state to try and organize something like this though.

ROB STEIN: Right. Yes, and then yes sir.

RON STIEF (Faith in Public Life): Ron Stief at Faith in Public Life, and Rob we've talked a little bit about this, and I came in late, I'm actually here sussing this out because we have a panel of faith voters at 3 o'clock, with Celinda Lake and Jim Wallace and others in here. And there's this whole movement and emergence of the national faith community that's happening here at this convention, and I think I might have missed if you said anything earlier about trying to do some sort of a sectoral analysis in 2009 and beyond, where we really start to bring in some of the emerging sectors that are getting it, around trying to do policy, and also taking advantage of the infrastructure that you're building.

Our work in Colorado through [inaudible] Colorado Progressives Coalition [inaudible] it's so important that this infrastructure is being built and we have our faith partners [inaudible] now and so I was wondering if there's some sort of sectoral analysis that you're thinking of. It's hard to imagine any [inaudible] for the next eight weeks, but I'm trying to think ahead.

[crosstalk]

RON STIEF: Could you address that, Rob? Does the...

[crosstalk]

RON STIEF: ...energy that is with the emerging sectors, you, faith, groups that are coming of age in the next steps of this election cycle.

ROB STEIN: Well, we have just gone through, because we recommend to our partners on a two year cycle, the groups that we're now supporting are recommended to them in the spring of 2007. So they've been funded by our partners, 2007, 2008. So we use 2008 at the staff level and at the partner level to do a zero base analysis of everything we've done to date and to look at the major trends, including faith, and youth, and racial trends, and unmarried women, the big constituencies that are critically important. And so now, all of that is coming to a [inaudible] strategy meeting to the board, and decisions are being made about our portfolio going forward, which should include some capabilities that touch some of these [inaudible].

So Al is going to get the last, well this gentleman had a question, and then Al is going to get the last question, and then I'm going to show you one last slide.

[laughter]

MALE QUESTIONER: I'm [inaudible]. What's the process by which you decide what, who are your partners, and what resources they get and you didn't mention any health care related organizations. Are there any partners for the health care related organizations at a national level or at a [inaudible] state level?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE PANELIST: How sad is Jeff Blum that he left?

FRANK SMITH: Well yeah, USAction is the A-P-O that we're working with who's probably most intimately involved in the health care fight. They also have a big grant from Atlantic Philanthropy. There's a big coalition with unions and citizen groups to try and push the next Congress for health care legislation. And we know one thing for sure, is that there is going to be increased margins in the House and Senate for Democrats, and if Barack Obama is elected, health care is going to be at the top of the agenda. So we've got to be prepared to help fight against the forces that want to keep the status quo on health care in the next Congress.

KELLY CRAIGHEAD: But can I just say one thing about that? Laurie had said it during her presentation; it's true for both of us, we really do stay away from funding single issue entities, but we provide support and recommendations for groups, multi issue groups, all of whom are doing some piece of health care. I think it's just USAction who's really taken kind of a leading role in coordinating the groups.

FRANK SMITH: CAP, I mean ideas groups are all doing the policy work on it too.

ROB STEIN: And there's an affinity group of the partners in the Alliance, who are health care funders, health care policy funders, and they've gotten together, they meet at everyone of our conferences, they share information, they have pushed the board and the

strategy committee to focus till they're sure that we're funding groups that focus on health care, so it's a very vibrant issue. The same thing is true for the education within the alliance. A group of partners who care deeply about education, a group of partners who care deeply about environment, and while we don't go out and fund individual groups in each of those sectors, we fund multi issue groups that are working with those individual focus groups, those single issue groups, in coordination and collaboration. We're trying to bring a greater cohesion to the work of the progressive movement.

MALE QUESTIONER: Rob, the question I have and a question I have for all of you, I wanted to ask it as a simple question. If we look past November, what do we see as the most significant challenges in continuing to be effective as a progressive movement? But then when I think about that question, I wanted to be more specific about it because in listening to this presentation and this conversation, one gets the impression, to some extent, that progressive is synonymous with or is just a euphemism for Democrats, or the Democratic Party. And all that would suggest that there is harmony here, that progressives and Democrats are the same. But if you look at the demographics across the country, we see something interesting happening and that is that increasingly we have an awful lot of people who do not regard themselves as partisan. What they really want is a better country. What they want are the things that are mentioned here. They want better policies. And so, in framing the question that I have for you, then how do we define the challenge here, and how do we ensure that the Democratic Party, if that's our party, or the Republican Party, are such that they do indeed represent us. Another way of saying this is, Where is politics going?

KELLY CRAIGHEAD: I was going to such a different place, Al. And all of those people that you mentioned, the non-partisan progressives, they're all in the Democracy Alliance. That, I mean for us it has been one of the challenges, a majority of our partners are partisan. The majority of whom are Democrats. We do have some Republicans: they are all progressives. I think that's where, we're three and a half years old, we've had some struggling because we do have a civic engagement portfolio that does have some focus on voter registration and G-O-T-V efforts and one of the big things on the horizon, which is where I thought you were going, is re-districting. It is going to impact power for the next 30 years, it is how we are thinking beyond this election.

But I think, you know, part of our challenge is, and Rob, someone said that, everyone said it in their presentation- is about power, and government, and controlling government, and how do you then shape those policies and those outcomes to meet our vision of a progressive America?

And I think what we try to do at the Democracy Alliance is help provide some structure and understanding; you know, what is the role of a candidate? What are the roles of committees? What are the roles of state parties and national parties, and where do independent expenditures fit in? And where do independent expenditures fit in for a single election cycle? Or what we do, which is much broader and much more long term, and I think part of how we get to this place where I don't think there's going to be total harmony, but at least maybe there could be some understanding of what each of us is

trying to do so that we can reduce some of the duplication and actually get more effective and efficient, is by providing that structure and talking about it, and making sure everyone knows what role they can and should play and for our funders, you know we encourage them.

What we're trying to do by providing these public utilities for the movement is lift up all progressive candidates and causes. And so I think over time the more organized we get, and the more efficient and effective we become, I think you'll see a lot more progressives who will then vote mostly Democratic and those Democrats will be more progressive that will have the policies that we want to create the kind of world we want to live in. So that's the long answer, but that's what I think

[Crosstalk]

FRANK SMITH: Well, in terms of partisan politics, I think that what you're seeing across the country and you've seen it in the last few cycles, is efforts by groups like the Club for Growth to just purge the Republican Party of moderates. They bring enormous sums of money to primaries and they've knocked off moderate Republicans in the Northeast and the Midwest and when they get into a race, they get in with a lot of money and run a very negative campaign, usually against the incumbent moderate Republican.

ROB STEIN: So, let me just say that we in the Democracy Alliance, I think that I speak for most of if not all of the Democracy Alliance partners and most of the work that's going on at the local level, at the state level, we don't believe that one president, or one party, can make that happen, can promote our values. We believe that in the American political system, you need two parties and you need lots of leaders. And so while progressive leadership right now is likely to emerge more assuredly in the Democratic Party that progressive leadership is going to need Republicans if it wants to achieve that agenda, and we understand that. And so the organizations we're funding, they're going to be there whether Barack Obama or John McCain are elected president. And they're going to push as hard as they can to promote a progressive agenda for America. They're in for the long term. So this is not about a party.

While the organization we're supporting are out mobilizing to support Democrats for the most part right now, they have a long term agenda to bring about significant progressive change. And if you don't believe us, or you're still skeptical about some of the things we've said, which would it be fair because it's this complicated thing that we're all learning together here, then I will share with you what the leader, but I want to do it the right way, what our leader has said. [inaudible] He gets it. He gets it, he gets that we must build, not, we must focus, not just on the next election, on this election, and when we do we should not just be focusing on building capacity to win this election. We have to think long term. And if we think long term, then it's possible to re-imagine a better America for our kids. So thank you all very, very much and I'm sorry that we got a little screwed up with questions. [laughter] We appreciate it. [applause]

-end of transcript-