

What is happening in the Iowa Democratic Party...

by Tim Winter - Candidate for Iowa Democratic Party Chair

I recently reread the Hart Vision for IDP, which lists Chair Rita Hart's Mandate For Change when she ran for Chair in January of 2023. It reminded me of why I voted for her to be Chair when I was on the SCC at the time. She actually had a plan that listed what was to be done and how we were going to do it.

Unfortunately, much of what she had in her plan didn't come to fruition or wasn't addressed and implemented. To her credit, she has admitted these shortcomings. This week, Chair Rita Hart has submitted her updated Mandate for victory in 2026.

It is a fascinating read. There are parts of it I agree with and other parts that are difficult to follow. I learned a few new phrases, like "Capacity Building", "Persuasion Universe", "Metric Outputs", "Ecosystem Objectives" and "Model Target Universe". If you google the phrases, they are used in websites that sell analytical tools to Democratic campaigns. Whoever came up with these terms must love elaborate catch phrases.

I also see the trend when a difficult subject comes up or there is no plan to address the problem, terms such as "flesh out" or "having conversations" have a unique way to sound like you are correcting the issue, but in reality, is not going to be addressed.

What is the Coordinated Campaign?

The term, Coordinated Campaign, is often used. It is a term that if you ask 10 different people what it means you will receive 10 different answers. In general, in Iowa the coordinated campaign is the coordination between IDP and campaigns that are identified and targeted as the most important and likely to win by the DNC and our legislative minority leaders.

The two campaigns already identified for 2026 are U.S. House seats in Congressional Districts 1 & 3. There are a few Iowa Legislature seats that are coordinated, however, they are primarily in the major metropolitan areas. If you are a candidate in a rural area of the state, it is unlikely that your campaign has

been coordinated with the IDP to any great level. The point being is that often IDP staff is working hard and coordinating on particular campaigns, however, the rest of the state's campaigns or county parties will be hard pressed to even get a call returned. It's not that the staff isn't working hard on what they have been told to do, it is that there is not enough staff to do what needs to be done across the entire state. I agree with Chair Hart's statement; "A dozen staff on Fleur cannot run an organization in all 99 counties".

The coordinated campaign is also used by our most organized metropolitan county parties in coordination with campaigns being conducted in their counties. It is only effective in their counties and if the candidate's district runs into a rural, unsupported area, the candidate is more likely to lose. We have about 8 counties out of 99 that can effectively run a successful coordinated campaign.

If none of this seems fair to you it is because it is not. If you are a rural candidate and you are purchasing VAN, the proceeds go to the coordinated campaign, which is used to help fund someone else's targeted campaign. Chair Hart says it is time to discuss buy-ins. I believe we have discussed this enough and need to make VAN available and free to all campaigns and county parties. Bob Ward needs to teach every volunteer how to effectively use VAN.

The Ambassador Program:

In the new Mandate you will read about the Ambassador Program. Chair Hart says we need to continue to develop the ideas behind the Ambassador Program. I agree the ideas need to continue, however, through the District Chairs. Having a duplication which ticked off core leaders was an insult and not an idea that worked. The program is currently on life support and needs to be discontinued.

Steering Committee issues:

As an active member of the SCC, I spent a considerable amount of time with other SCC members going over the specifics of what the Steering Committee would be and how it would perform and report. After attending almost every Steering Committee meeting, I will report that the Steering Committee was never used as intended. There was little raising or sharing of ideas, rarely saw staff participate, and seldom was attended by our legislative leaders. It was used to

shorten meetings and control the agenda by Chair Hart. In that regard, it was quite effective and I understand why Chair Hart wants to continue it for her benefit. I believe the Steering Committee should end, because it decreased participation of the SCC when greater participation is what is needed.

What you feed grows, what you starve dies:

Chair Hart is quite fond of the saying; “Never starve the profit center”. I understand why we need to fundraise. What successful organizations have is a finance department and a trained sales force to sell their product. The sales force sells the product and the finance department handles the money. Our product is our brand. We have no Iowa organizing sales force and Chair Hart says they are way too expensive to employ. The Republican Party has since taken the lead and branded us with misinformation and turned our name into a national slur. Chair Rita Hart even admits that over the past two election cycles, county parties and volunteers have experienced quite a shock from a dramatically reduced organizing footprint from IDP. We have starved the organizing sales force and county party system.

What happens when you add an organizing force?

In red states, like Wisconsin and North Carolina where Democrats have made progress, their plans have been to increase fundraising, to have a strong, accountable staff and an organizing force to work with the staff to reach out to all parts of their states. There has been a strong emphasis to organize in rural areas outside the Madison, WI and Raleigh, NC democratic strongholds to obtain their goals. Their efforts are being rewarded.

The Iowa Democratic Party hasn't done this. Yes, these efforts are described in Chair Hart's plan, but for the most part, have not been instituted. Chair Hart's emphasis has been on fundraising, in which, as the Chair of the SCC Small Dollar Donor Work Group, I worked to help make us solvent.

What are donors and volunteers across the state saying about us?

While serving as the Chair of the Small Dollar Donor Work Group, it was a great opportunity to visit with donors and democratic leaders across the entire state and listen to them about where they felt we were as a party, what was working and what needed to change. The feedback was dramatically different from those who live in red rural communities as compared to those who lived in blue urban areas, like the Des Moines metropolitan area. In general, the metropolitan areas were happy with the party and how IDP staff would interact with them and supported their candidates. The people I visited with in rural areas are on the other side of the spectrum. They, in general, are not happy with the party, the party leadership, or the IDP staff. They feel ignored, disrespected and lied to.

The differences between Urban and Rural areas:

Rural supporters reach out for help and their calls are often unanswered. When I contacted them to fundraise for the HOF events, they were thrilled that someone from IDP was reaching out to them. They often were looking for help with the most basic of things to help them in their county parties. Some wanted to know how to run their meetings, others wanted to start social media sites, learn how to get younger people involved, fundraise, get media attention, how to knock on doors, use VAN, develop proper messaging techniques, recruit candidates, who to call at IDP for help and phone numbers, etc. Mostly, they wanted to help and volunteer, just didn't know how to go about it or who to contact.

Many urban counties are much further along in their development, using more sophisticated tech and practices only to lose campaigns because of districts crossing county lines into rural areas. In these urban counties, using apps like REACH makes sense. They already have a county organizing force to capitalize on the technology available. The rural counties would struggle to utilize this software when basic plans and organization are still needed for implementation.

It is clear to me that the Iowa Democratic Party has completely gotten away from having meaningful structural field organization and continues to not address this issue. This is especially true in rural areas of Iowa. This is a crucial step in how some state parties have been successful.

So why hasn't IDP adapted?

I asked Chair Rita Hart this before I stepped down from the SCC and her response was that “hiring field organizers is a colossal waste of money”. I pushed to see what her plan was for field organizers over the next two election cycles and she has no plan to implement or hire anyone for this task. Her concentration is to hire more financial people to help with fundraising and office support staff. Her updated Mandate vividly paints all the reasons why she is against hiring any organizational staff. Chair Hart is even against hiring one staffer to be an Organizing Director because there would be just too much work to do for one person. Sounds like a core need to me.

Chair Rita Hart is running the SCC like a campaign when it really needs to be run as a non-profit organization.

I reminded Chair Hart that she lists hiring up to a half dozen field organizers and a Statewide Organizing Director on her Hart Vision for IDP Mandate, however, she has changed her view on this issue. My response to this was to point out to her that rural county parties are dying without the needed intervention of training, guidance and support of IDP. She agreed with my assessment. As a representative of the Fourth Congressional District, my main goal was to bring more support and organizational structure to our district. The Fourth has more rural counties than any other congressional district in Iowa and Chair Rita Hart informed me that there will be no field organizers for the foreseeable future.

I sent her my SCC resignation letter the next day.

So, what now?

If we continue to do what we are doing, we will not win. This emphasis on fundraising alone is not sustainable. Since the election in November, major donors to IDP are signalling that without a change in leadership and direction, pocket books will be tightened. They see the amount of money being donated and how it is being spent. If the election results had been more favorable the

expenditures would have been considered valid. However, November's election results were devastating. They also now know that much of the money was spent on salaries and not on an organizational structure that coordinates staff and volunteers. They have been understandably asking; Why are we not supporting the rebuilding of a foundational structure of our party at the county level?

We need strategic party building across the entire state:

There are many great, hard-working Democrats in all 99 Iowa counties. We must implement a strategy to focus on our entire county party system. These loyal Democrats are asking for leadership to focus on training, tools, tactics, messaging and to teach them how to be more successful. They are proud people who are not asking for a handout, but rather a hand up to build their counties into powerhouses that can recruit candidates, volunteers and win campaigns. Not just campaigns for Washington DC and Des Moines, but also in their county courthouses and public schools.

If we don't have the money, how do we do this?

We change the structure of state-wide party building by following and implementing the actual duties of State Central Committee Members put forward in:

Article II, Section 4 of the IDP SCC Bylaws.

Section 4: Duties.

The membership of the State Central Committee shall be responsible for the following duties:

- Provide the leadership and framework to elect Democrats to all levels of government.
- Attend meetings of the Committee and their assigned Subcommittee(s).
- Provide a conduit for information flow between the State Central Committee and the Congressional District Central Committees.
- Review and approve an annual budget.
- Develop, review and approve a Strategic Plan to meet the organizational goals.
- Assist with the successful completion of fundraising projects.

- Develop, implement, and assist with trainings, including but not limited to, staff, district and county central committee members, caucus trainings, Absentee Ballot training, GOTV and other appropriate trainings.
- Work to develop and implement programs to build the party.

SCC Bylaws, Article V, Section 1: Subcommittees

The State Central Committee shall organize into subcommittees. At least one of the subcommittees must be an Operations Committee. There is no other limit to what subcommittees can be installed for according to Article V, Section 2.

SCC Bylaws, Article V, Section 2: Duties

Listed are all the different topics that can be covered in subcommittees plus providing appropriate services to candidates, County Party Committees and Strategic Planning. “ Other duties may be assigned at the discretion of the State Chair with the advice and consent of the State Central Committee.”

If it is in the SCC Bylaws, why hasn't this been happening?

Many of the SCC members are working hard and donating a ton of time in their local communities and volunteering for the party or their constituency. Some are even giving hard-earned money on a monthly basis to help pay staff. It's just not strategically coordinated to be effective on a large scale.

For example, currently, the SCC has 8 working groups. They are listed but general in nature, without any description, little direction with no accountability. Having been a Chair for one of these work groups, I am quite aware of how loosely they were formed and how unsuccessful they were as a whole. This is in spite of the fact that many SCC members worked very hard in their groups. There were several SCC members that took these duties seriously and came up with innovative ways for their groups to have a positive impact. However, if we are honest, they were not successful in their current, unguided structure. They never got close to reaching their potential and many SCC members and leadership quickly discounted the groups.

This organizational structure was a priority for Democrats in the 1970's and 1980's. In the mid 1990's our party started pulling away from the organizing structure. The Republicans adopted a similar structure we were using and have

been gaining ground ever since. There is a reason these duties are listed in the bylaws. It is unfortunate that they have been mostly ignored.

What am I proposing?

A role change of the current duties of the State Central Committee members. The State Central Committee, along with input from the Chair, will come up with a breakdown of activities that are needed for the Iowa Democratic Party to turn things around and start winning elections. In these identified activities we will develop and implement a series of subcommittees that will be chaired by State Central Committee Members. These subcommittees will have defined descriptions, goals and be accountable to the SCC. The members of the subcommittees do not have to be on the State Central Committee. The members will come from all four Congressional Districts.

The subcommittees will be focused on strategically organizing throughout the entire state, including rural areas. Subcommittees will also cover areas and topics that include IDP Staff and their duties. There will be subcommittees for, but not limited to, planning rallies, phonebanking, text banking, training for SCC members, training for District Chairs, training for County Chairs, training for county parties, organize door to door canvassing, voter assistance hotline, volunteer hotline, precinct development, diversity and outreach, quick-response coordinator, absentee ballot requests, county and district convention, parade coordinator, county and state fair coordinator, database development, teach voter outreach methods, marketing coordinator, direct mail, messaging training, set up social media accounts, maximize earned media and owned media, website development, county party handbook, events coordinator, legislative forum coordinator, candidate recruiting and development, teach VAN, REACH and how to fundraise and recruit volunteers.

Subcommittees will be named, outlined and formed by the end of the 1st quarter SCC meeting (March) 2025. Subcommittees will meet as often as needed during the time when the activity is needed. For example, the parade subcommittee will meet prior and during parade season. The subcommittee will compile a database of parades in all counties. The subcommittee will coordinate with county parties, county fair subcommittee, database subcommittee and IDP staff.

This coordination is to supply or make available signs, banners, noise makers, bubble machines, floats, candy, balloons, walkers, pull tractors, trucks, trailers and handouts. Our goal is to facilitate the County Parties in having a successful turnout and showing during their parades.

Train the subcommittees and they will train our County Parties.

Training workshops will be conducted throughout the four Congressional Districts by the SCC Subcommittees and District Chairs. When appropriate, professionals can be brought in to enhance training. Multiple training workshops will be held at multiple sites within each congressional district. There will be breakout sessions within each workshop to have focused discussions on topics most suitable for individual attendees. The SCC Subcommittees will be our Organizing Directors. We will also continue to follow our responsibilities and duties outlined in our Constitution and By-laws.

In the more recent past, we have relied on IDP staff to do much of this work. We no longer have this luxury and we can't employ enough people to do it effectively. Our current staff is already overwhelmed and it is clear to me, they are unable to do everything that needs to be done for us to win. This is also why I no longer support the idea of the Steering Committee. We need to get more people involved and engaged and the Steering Committee does neither. I would much rather spend our time organizing. Having the subcommittees Chaired by SCC members and staffed by volunteers from across the state will facilitate the decentralization of activity based now only in Des Moines. This will dramatically increase the number of people with a personal stake in organizing our party out of the abyss.

Increasing in-person activity and digital social media output.

Having successful SCC Subcommittees working with County Parties will greatly enhance in-person activity. We will also facilitate the buildup of social media programs at the state, county party, district and constituency caucuses which will pump up the volume on messaging. We must go where our customers are and they are on facebook, TikTok, Bluesky, Instagram, YouTube and other social networks. There are about 35-40 current social media platforms available to us to use. The social media subcommittee will assist in setting up and training. IDP,

Iowa Senate, Iowa House and appropriate subcommittees will assist in providing content on a daily basis. We will pump up the activity and volume.

It is ok to ask for help:

IDP also needs to work with other like-minded organizations throughout the state. In the past, IDP has resisted working with them feeling they are competition for fundraising and volunteers. Many of these organizations are better at what they do than what IDP has shown and we should be asking them for their help. Plus, we already have relationships since the dysfunction of the SCC has led many members to leave for these same organizations.

It's time!

It is time to get our SCC house in order. If we don't, the money will stop flowing in and we will sink even lower than we have been. In conversations that I have had with large and medium dollar donors, unless we can produce an organizing force to utilize the donations effectively, the wallets will start to close. If this happens, staff may need to be let go. I do not want that. This donor base knows that Chair Rita Hart has not provided an organizing team and the results were horrible. This means we need to continue fundraising while developing an organizing team that we currently can't employ. I am not proposing that we lay off staffers in Des Moines so we can employ field organizers. We need both.

We need leadership that believes in the strategic organizational plan and will implement it effectively.

The national funding for an employed organizing team and staff has ended. Chair Hart explains we have an opportunity for an argument for investment when the new DNC Chair is elected. I believe there may be that opportunity in obtaining help in the two US House seats previously identified. If we are able to show that we now have an organizational force to implement and maximize national support, we will be in a much better place to argue for additional assistance.

For these reasons, I am running for Chair of the Iowa Democratic Party.

We will develop the organizing structure needed from our State Central Committee Members and District Chairs. We will also continue to fundraise to provide for an effective staff that works with a volunteer state-wide organization. As opportunities and fundraising allows us, we will hire full-time, year-round organizers that will assist District Chairs, the SCC, County Parties and other community activists, organizers and leaders. These field organizers should come from local communities and serve the general areas in which they live. They need to be Iowans who have a deep-seated interest in electing local Democrats.

I am well aware that I am asking for votes to be elected Chair from the same people I am asking for help to make this plan successful. I believe most of you have been waiting for this opportunity to work a strategic plan for organizing, and to rebuild our party statewide. I believe many of you are just as frustrated as I had been when I served on the SCC. A strong feeling there has been a lot of time spent on activities that have little to do with electing Democrats into office. If you believe that being on the SCC is about attending four meetings a year and that is it, then this plan is not for you.

Who am I? What experience do I have?

Many of you on the SCC already know who I am from being on the SCC, being the Chair of the State Arrangements Committee, Chair of the SCC Small Dollar Donor Work Group, Chair of ProIowa 24 and as the former Chair of the Boone County Democrats. What you may not know is that I used to be a corporate executive with a major agribusiness company. In fact, I have actually worked for several in various positions. After graduating from Iowa State University I became an agronomist with a local Iowa cooperative system and then a field sales representative for a large agribusiness company. I transferred and was promoted a few times and then relocated to their headquarters in Research Triangle Park in North Carolina where I became the Senior Technical Services

Representative and then Claims Manager for Efficacy Claims for the contiguous USA. A large part of my position was to fly to other parts of the country and train sales personnel on how to talk to farmers, share technical expertise on products and services and to build solid relationships with our customers. I specialized in going into hostile situations and coming out with a loyal customer. I also trained sales representatives on how to become a secondary supplier to customers. Much like we need to do with the unhappy Republican and No-Party voter that will appear in a few months from now. I also worked with budgets and managed staff that were considerably larger than the IDP. After being relocated back to Iowa, I became a Sales & Marketing Manager for the state.

Does this mean I am a corporate Democrat? No, I am well aware of the pitfalls of the corporate world. I experienced mass layoffs for myself and others and have had health care claims denied. I now own and operate a landscape business and specialty crop farm. Been in business for about 20 years mainly from word of mouth marketing. My wife, Kellie, is a molecular microbiologist. We have two children, Jacob, who was just accepted into ISU and Arianna, who will be a junior in public high school.

My name is Tim Winter, and I am running for Chair of the Iowa Democratic Party.

What this means to you is that you have this opportunity to be at the beginning of the greatest turnaround in Iowa politics. We have the vision. We have a plan. We have the people, if you agree to join me.

Let's get to work!