

Building the Power to Govern: Winning in 2010 & Beyond

Minnesotans will elect a new governor in 2010. At stake is a chance to break a 24 year losing streak. More even than the chance to elect a progressive as governor, we have a chance to chart a different course for our state and change people's lives for the better. This will require a governor who is committed to governing with a broad movement of community and organizational leaders that share a common set of progressive beliefs. TakeAction Minnesota is serious about winning the 2010 race for governor and building governing power with our movement. We have launched an innovative project meant to align a massive base of individuals and organizations that can achieve both of these goals.

The Cost of 24 Years of Electoral Failure and the Reasons Behind It

The failure to elect a progressive governor has come at a great cost to our state. Once a national economic leader, Minnesota's economy for the first time in decades is now underperforming the national average. Minnesota's ranking in state funding for higher education dropped from 12th in 2001 to 35th in 2006. The disparity in educational achievement between white students and students of color is one of the worst in the country. Our physical infrastructure is literally collapsing. We are experiencing high unemployment and wage stagnation.

If the quality of life in Minnesota is eroding, then why have we failed to capitalize on the voter discontent? Some blame rests with candidates who have failed to inspire voters or committed gaffes late in the campaign and third party candidates that have pulled votes away from Democrats. While these are important factors, they do not explain a string of five consecutive defeats. We believe much responsibility lies within us as a community of leaders and progressive organizations. There are three main reasons:

- 1- *No Clear and Compelling Vision.*** While we want candidates to offer an inspiring vision, we have not communicated what inspires us. We, as leaders and activists, know better than any body what it takes to compel people to act. We cannot sit by passively while the election heats up, but must instead assert what convictions resonate as true, what issues are compelling and what we hope the future will bring.
- 2- *Fragmentation.*** We dilute our power when we endorse candidates based only on candidate features – money, name recognition, other endorsements – instead of governing style and core convictions. The race to be king or queen makers means key constituencies, especially communities of color, are ignored until the very end, treating them more as GOTV margins, rather than a core base of early support. This fragmentation leads to fights over narrow interests and bloody intra-party schisms that can last until the September primary or beyond, making it near impossible to unite and win in November.
- 3- *A Diminished Base of Activists.*** We are the proud inheritors of the Farmer and Labor movements. Yet today we struggle to turn out activists and mobilize voters. We can all do more to engage our rank-in-file in meaningful ways and have not invested enough in developing new volunteers and leaders. We must correct this trend if we are to win the 2010 election and maintain the political space necessary for progressive ideas to become policy solutions.

IT'S TIME TO CHANGE: A NEW ELECTORAL ORGANIZING MODEL

Electoral success requires a different approach to electoral politics. We believe we must change our approach to this election in three fundamental ways:

- 1- We need to develop a clear and motivating vision of what progressive beliefs really mean, and use this vision as the driving force behind a powerful endorsement process and electoral campaign that can usher the progressive movement into the governor's office and state legislature.**
- 2- A focus on what unites us versus what divides us.** We need a stronger alignment between progressive organizations and individual activists to bridge our differences and find the strongest points of common interest
- 3- We must build a base of grassroots activists and leaders that is much larger and more meaningfully engaged than ever before, and then keep this base engaged long-term.**

Tactical electoral successes don't always lead to broader victories for our state. Not since Rudy Perpich's election as Governor in 1986 – 24 years ago – has a Democrat led our state. Nonetheless, while Governor Perpich's populism did some great things for Minnesota, it didn't always translate to progressive governing. His decision to call out the National Guard against the Hormel workers strike is a powerful reminder that even with a Democrat in office the progressive agenda did not become the state's agenda.

TakeAction believes it will take **four phases** to achieve a progressive governing majority and build a broad, deep, and lasting progressive movement:

Phase 1: Building the Progressive Base: The caucus and convention process is a powerful central organizing vehicle for empowering Minnesotans to take on important new leadership roles so they will be prepared to work in the primary and general elections and then help hold our elected officials accountable in 2011 and beyond. We will ask activists to make specific commitments of time, money and electoral participation – including the central commitment of holding together as a unified bloc to support the candidate that best meets the core beliefs we all share.

Phase 2: Shaping a Vision That Will Also Shape The Candidates: As we begin to build a broad base of support over the summer and fall, we will engage that base and gubernatorial candidates in meaningful two-way conversations where candidates become clear about our progressive beliefs and we become clear about the belief systems of our candidates. Before a formal endorsement decision is made, we want to shape how candidates think of the progressive base and our beliefs. Over the course of the summer, participants will begin to craft a vision for Minnesota, facilitated by TakeAction Minnesota, including compelling messaging to communicate this vision. By late September we plan to hold a public meeting to unveil this vision and messaging with those that have committed to be part of this process.

Phase 3: Endorsement & Election: We plan to construct a people-driven endorsement process that is built on the progressive beliefs shaped with our base and the candidates. TakeAction Minnesota will hold a public candidate screening and endorsement process early in 2010 in order to endorse and rally around a single candidate for Governor. We will then put the thousands of leaders who we have engaged in this process to work in the primary and general election, and give these leaders the training and tools they'll need to help our endorsed candidate become our next Governor. We will remain flexible and ready to pivot our support to other candidates as the pool is winnowed down.

Phase 4: Governing: Following the general election, we will work with our new governor to implement a shared agenda. This will include ongoing organizing, policy development, coalition building, communications, and meetings with policymakers, including the Governor as well as top advisors, commissioners and legislators.

TakeAction Minnesota's Role

TakeAction Minnesota is uniquely positioned in the political landscape to drive this effort. We are both an electoral force and a movement leader. We unite and work to coordinate powerful member-based organizations who wield considerable political power. Our model of relational organizing – deeper and more effective than a mobilization model – has paved the way for an innovative process that is already uniting powerful progressive actors and discovering new ones, including those progressive activists who don't yet have a home. If we succeed, we will have built a base of engaged Minnesotans that can help a new progressive governor and legislature lead our state, beginning in 2011.