

Tenth Dems Interns Planned, Organized, Worked, and Learned

by Mary Van Houten

For the fourth consecutive summer, the Tenth Congressional District Democrats offered internships to eight daring high school and college-aged students. I was very fortunate to be chosen as an intern this summer, and I am sure that I speak on behalf of all the interns when I say that this internship was one of the most edifying and rewarding experiences that we ever could have had in our budding political careers. This summer's interns included Nikhil Bhatia, a junior at the University of Illinois studying political science; Adam Didech, a freshman at Drake University; AJ Fabianczyk, a senior at Rolling Meadows High School; Scott Mason, a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison studying political science; Kevin Pietrick, a senior at Rolling Meadows High School; Ira Ulrich, a senior at the University of Kansas studying political science; and me, Mary Van Houten, a freshman at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Ben Struhl, a junior at Brown University majoring in writing, served as Intern Coordinator.

Devoting about 15 to 20 hours per week to Tenth Dems, my fellow interns and I helped plan and organize many different projects and events over the past few months. We engaged in fundraising, event planning, marketing, publicity, and many other administrative tasks. We worked at phone banks, marched in parades, met and worked with elected officials, wrote e-mails and made calls concerning fundraising and volunteers, researched and compiled newspaper clippings pertaining to Mark Kirk, passed out Tenth Dems fliers and brochures at farmers markets and sidewalk sales, explored legal concerns, introduced and enrolled in Tenth Dems University classes, sold hats, buttons, and other fundraising items, attended and assisted with several documentary viewings and discussions, and, of course, helped plan and run our annual fundraiser featuring George McGovern.

To make the most out of our experience, each intern was encouraged to work on projects he or she found enjoyable and also to explore new and different aspects of grassroots political organizing. We attended many informative meetings, learned about upcoming technological changes, gave our input on marketing ideas, operations, and TDU courses, helped arrange and organize volunteers, updated lists of events and lists of contacts, and worked at several different festivals and fundraisers for elected officials. We even successfully helped moved a Democratic township organization's office from one building to another.

Listing the projects and events we've assisted with does not adequately convey the wealth of knowledge and awareness that we have attained through our internships. Working in practical politics is completely different from simply learning about politics, and we have all learned first-hand the hard work and craziness that goes into true



grassroots politics. It is also gratifying to know that as the program is still improving each year, many of our individual projects and ideas will contribute to creating an even more effective program for future interns.

Although this was an unpaid internship, the experiences we've shared and relationships we've established with one another and our Tenth Dems mentors have made this internship priceless. We've earned much more than any summer job could have paid. Working with intelligent and accessible mentors such as Lauren Beth Gash, John

Hmurovic, Muriel Lazar, Stan Lester, Allen Wagner, and others has been truly inspirational, and their dedication and passion for politics has been highly contagious. I am very grateful to have been involved in such an educational and enjoyable internship this summer and am confident that the skills and lessons learned here will help carry me through wherever my future endeavors in politics may lead.

Top: The 2007 Tenth Dems interns, from left to right, Scott Mason, Adam Didech, AJ Fabianczyk (seated), Ira Ulrich, Mary Van Houten, Kevin Pietrick, Ben Struhl (Intern Coordinator), and Nikhil Bhatia. Center: Interns gather around Dan Seals at a Karen May event. Bottom: Adam Didech, Scott Mason, AJ Fabianczyk, and Mary Van Houten ham it up for the camera.

Polarization not for Dems

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known, special interests) can best be controlled by multiplication and division. That is, large numbers of competing special interests will do battle and cancel each other out, since in an era before the development of two dominant political parties only a coalition of legislators could control a majority. Representatives would be able to play one faction against another to do "the

people's business." It is a pity that this scheme was never allowed to develop.

So is turnout fair play? Should Democrats act like Republicans when they are in power? Does the evil of power depend on whose ox is gored? Should the AFL-CIO and AFT receive the federal largess recently showered on their counterparts on Wall Street and in the NAM? Do consultants from the Brookings Institute and People for the American Way replace those from the Hoover Institute and Focus on the Family?

The present crop of presidential candidates raises many questions in this regard. The history of Hillary Clinton is disturbing. She has been associated with the Washington establishment and K Street lobbyists for almost 20 years. Since 2002 she has been responsible for \$2.2 billion in earmarks. Her success in New York has been based on the model of Alfonse Damato, "Senator Pothole," a man known nationwide for bringing home the bacon (read pork). John Edwards' entire career has been funded by the trial lawyers bar; 15 of his top 20 donors in 2006 were lawyers associated with large firms. And questions revolve around Barack Obama's financial dealings with local wheeler-dealer Antoin "Tony" Rezko, an equal opportunity palm greaser.

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