

## To my fellow Democrats, Progressives, and others Concerned with our Future:

In the year 2004, one of the Democratic candidates for President of the United States was then Vermont Governor Howard Dean. From the get-go he ran his campaign in a way that was different from what people were used to. Instead of running everything in a top-down manner, he used the then-new platform of Meetup to encourage local groups of people who supported him to form local groups and coordinate with his national campaign. And most of all - unlike so many other candidates that would rarely reach out to their supporters except to ask for funds, he actually listened to his supporters and potential supporters to learn what was important for them. Even the name of his campaign organization defied convention. Instead of calling it "Dean for President", he called it "Dean for America".

This unconventional method of campaign garnered him a lot of ardent supporters. Unfortunately, this was not enough for him to secure the nomination - but when he finally realized that it was time for him to withdraw from the race, he did something that changed politics for a decade to come. Instead of disbanding his campaign, he repurposed it. No longer was its purpose to elect him President, but now, to elect any progressive candidate who had a chance. The core idea was: Give progressive Democrats a chance to get involved politically on the ground level and to train activists to spread awareness on important public policy issues - an opportunity that was sorely lacking.

As a result local chapters of this organization now renamed "Democracy for America" ("DFA" for short) were formed. Local meetings to lay and discuss important issues and follow up actions were held on a weekly basis - *not* on ZOOM, but rather, in *person*. By meeting in person rather than online, we didn't just discuss and organize. We formed communities of people who became not just fellow activists, but friends. And this made a difference - not just for our personal lives, but for the momentum of causes we were there to promote. Come election season, we would get together and phone bank, organize canvassing, and invite the public to events at our homes or other venues. We also organized town halls at the local shopping mall. The local Democratic headquarters often were pop-up spaces provided by local businesses or civic groups - but most of the work there was done by members of the local DFA chapter. We showed up in city, county, or village fairs with leaflets and volunteered to answer questions from any one interested. While ZOOM can be a very useful tool (especially for connecting people who live far apart) it does not replace the personal approach for local meetings like the ones we held.

DFA was a major factor behind many important Democratic Party victories including Obama's ability to be elected as the 44th President of the United States - to two consecutive terms. Unfortunately, though, DFA eventually died down. The last shell of its former glorious self finally closed down in 2022.

Campaigns are now run with little if any input from constituents, let alone opportunity for them to get involved in a meaningful way. (Note: This may be different in college campuses where social networking differs significantly from other areas of our society).

Campaign web-sites today reflect little interest in us, the constituents/voters, other than asking us for money. Donation buttons have their place on campaign web-sites. But, they should be secondary to stating the candidates positions. The campaign web site needs to foster engagement which is so often thoroughly missed. (This is also true with the barrage of emails requesting donations.)

We must do everything to defeat the complete megalomaniac dictator wannabe who is now occupying the Whitehouse. The Federal Legislature has aligned itself with him - and even the Supreme Court has a supermajority in his favor. Rights of women, LGBTQ+ folk, and racial

and religious minorities, are all being rolled back on a regular basis - as well as social programs that benefit all but the wealthiest of even the most vanilla of folk. It is a scary time to be an American or live in the United States - and something needs to be done about this.

We can't just sit by and wait for leaders of the Democratic party to make the move and start a new organization to do what the DFA once did. We, the people on the ground, need to take initiative. We must start by forming local teams and solicit the support of local Democratic leaders (on the ward level if necessary) and organize/create local groups. Once we are successful on the local level we may be able to attract the attention that we need to apply our activism to statewide, or even national scenes.

And there are Democrats in positions of prominence who, I am confident, will work with us. I have been personally encouraged by Beto O'Rourke to work on exactly the kind of initiative that I am describing. Getting such a group working will not be easy - but it is possible.

Now, should this group try to do exactly what DFA did? No - these are different times. We need strategies to combat ground-level apathy and fatigue. You might be thinking: *"Yes - someone needs to set up such an organization. But I can't. I'm too small. I should just hope a more prominent Democrat starts something like this. Maybe I can call them up and hope they hear me - but I can't do anything myself."* But it is clear that we can no longer just sit and wait for them to act - not even while begging them to do so. We have to take the initiative. And we can learn from DFA - both from its successes and failures.

Yes, we need to strategize big-time. The fact that this group would not just be driven by, but even founded by small, local people should not be ignored. But instead of treating that as a reason to give up before we even begin - we should instead see this as a reason to strategize very carefully so as to maximize the chances of us, however small, being able to make a difference. For that reason, I ask you to join me in my efforts to form local groups here in and around Philadelphia to do our part in fighting for the very soul of our nation. Our first task is to recruit the help of the most local of Democratic leaders. But we can not ask them to work with us unless there is an us for them to work with. Let us not allow fear and pessimism from preventing that us from being a thing.

Sincerely,

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July 23, 2025