



Working Families Party Election 2000

Campaign Summary and Analysis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Working Families Party goal in 2000 was 100,000 Row H votes in the US Senate race, a doubling of the party's 1998 statewide total. It met this goal – getting 102,360 votes – despite an unanticipated trend against minor parties in the 2000 election. The Party's final tally represented 2.7% of Hillary Clinton's total and 1.5% of the total vote.

The WFP strategy had three components: (1) boost overall turnout in African American and Latino neighborhoods; (2) persuade white working class voters in swing areas to vote on the WFP line, and (3) convince ideological progressives to vote WFP as a “message” vote.

Between March and November, the WFP mobilized thousands of volunteers and built grassroots networks to contact voters via door-to-door canvasses, phone banks, Workplace Captains, Dear Neighbor Captains, and Friends and Neighbors networks.

This report describes various aspects of the WFP Program in 2000. Highlights include:

- WFP votes went up from 1998 in every county in the state. In 48 counties, the votes more than doubled, in 23 more than tripled and in 8 more than quadrupled.
 - The ACORN/WFP canvass operation in NYC *increased* the overall turnout in African American and Latino communities at a higher rate than in comparable, non-ACORN/WFP election districts.
 - In 13 WFP targeted upstate counties – Albany, Broome, Chemung, Erie, Niagara, Onondaga, Oneida, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Tioga, Tompkins and Ulster – the WFP got 1.6% of the total vote (and 3.1% of Clinton's total). In the non-targeted upstate counties, the WFP got only 0.7% of the total vote (1.5% of Clinton's total).
 - The distribution of WFP votes compared to 98 changed, with a reduced reliance on both NYC votes generally (60% of the WFP vote in 1998 came from NYC, 55% in 2000), and progressive votes specifically (30.2% of the WFP 1998 vote came from progressive districts, 19.4% in 2000).
 - 102,360 votes make the WFP the 4th biggest vote-getting party in the state, trailing only the Conservatives among minor parties. The 55,774 WFP votes in NYC make it the 3rd biggest party in the city.
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INTRODUCTION

The WFP bills itself as an issues-based, not candidate-centered, party. A vote on the WFP line is a “vote for the issues that matter to New York’s working families”. Party leadership believes this message can appeal to potential voters who stand to the left, right, or directly in front of a given candidate. (Attachment 1, Sample Rap)

The WFP strategy has been to spread this message through pre-existing networks. The assumption is that voters are more likely to trust political recommendations from individuals or institutions they already know and trust. In the Hillary Clinton campaign, voters heard about the WFP from co-workers, friends, neighbors, unions, and community groups. The party has rarely been able to generate much media attention.

The WFP goal in 2000 was 100,000 votes in the U.S. Senate race, a doubling of its 1998 statewide total. The campaign plan to reach that goal followed the WFP’s general strategic approach, namely:

- (1) increase turnout in African American and Latino neighborhoods in New York City;
- (2) persuade white working class voters to vote WFP as a way of overcoming antipathy to the Democratic Party or Mrs. Clinton;
- (3) convince ideological progressives to send a “message” vote by voting on the WFP line.

THE 2000 WORKPLAN

WORKPLACE CAPTAINS

The WFP Workplace Captain strategy utilized one of the central findings driving the AFL-CIO political program – namely that union members who receive fliers at their workplace usually vote for the endorsed candidate. The WFP recruited 676 “Workplace Captains” across the state. Each Captain distributed 3-5 pieces of campaign literature at their work site to their co-workers, briefly explaining the Working Families Party (Attachment 2, Workplace Captain Instructions). A substantial minority of Workplace Captains also submitted a “Friends and Neighbors” list.

Workplace Captains reached out to as many co-workers as they thought they could – the average was just over 100. The WFP estimates that more than 300,000 campaign fliers were distributed in this manner. As least three times that number were also distributed by WFP union affiliates, either via the mail or through political action networks.

“FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS”

Among the obstacles to successful political mail is getting the recipient to actually open the envelope. To counter this, supporters of the WFP message were asked to make a list of their friends, neighbors, family, co-workers, church, synagogue or mosque members – everyone they knew who lived in New York State. The Party sent each person on these Friends and Neighbors lists a “Vote Row H” message that was personalized from the

source. On the outside of the envelope a line identified the source's name: "A special election message from _____".

The WFP gathered 118,244 contacts through the Friends and Neighbors campaign. Although the Friends and Neighbors tactic was developed for mail, it was also used for other types of voter contact. Many Friends and Neighbors lists were called by their source with a Vote Row H message. When the source of a given list was unavailable to make calls, organizers and volunteers called using the source's name as a reference ("Peter Colavito though you'd be interested in the Working Families Party this election...").

In addition, the WFP used email in a similar manner. During the months leading up to the election, every WFP email message ended with an appeal to forward the message to the recipient's email list and copy the WFP, so a final election day reminder note could be sent. Approximately 9000 email addresses were added to the list serve this way, producing a total of 16,000 New York State email addresses.

AFFILIATE PHONE BANKING

WFP affiliate phone banking varied widely in quantity and quality. Anecdotally, these calls were enormously successful. It was common for a registered Democrat or Republican to agree to vote row H for HRC upon hearing of the local union's view, but there are no consistent data on the affiliate phone banks.

DEAR NEIGHBOR LETTERS

In New York City, the Southern Tier, Westchester and Albany, volunteers and activists slid WFP "Dear Neighbor" letters under about 178,000 doors, each signed by one or more resident(s) of the building or street. These letters were personal appeals to vote on Row H for HRC and were designed to reinforce a "WFP buzz" in targeted election districts.

NYC CANVASS

The Coordinated Campaign assigned 379 election districts to the ACORN/WFP canvass. These election districts were considered Tier 1 districts – high Democratic Party performance, low turnout. The canvass focused on contacting occasional voters (people who have voted in only one of the last four elections). 23,500 voters were contacted, with 10,000 identified as supporters of Hillary Clinton. In the campaign's final days the canvass made a concerted push to get those 10,000 voters to the polls.

ELECTION RESULTS

The Working Families Party got 102,360 votes on Row H – 2.7% of Hillary Clinton’s total vote and 1.5 % of the total vote. This is higher than the combined total of the Independence, Green and Right to Life parties (in the U.S. Senate race), and is almost an exact doubling of the WFP 1998 total (51,325 votes).

The WFP performance was stark in comparison to other minor parties. The Conservative Party decreased to 55% of their 1998 vote (from 348,727 votes for Governor in 1998 to 191,141 for U.S. Senator in 2000). The Independence Party got about 12% of its ’98 vote (from 364,256 to only 43,181 votes in 2000). The Liberal Party went up only slightly (from 77,915 to 82,801). (Attachments 2 and 3, Minor Party Votes)

WFP votes went up from the 1998 totals in every county in the state. In 48 counties, the votes more than doubled, in 23 more than tripled and in 8 more than quadrupled.

In 1998, 26 % of the WFP total votes came from Upstate New York. This year, 32% of the WFP total vote came from upstate (Attachment 5, Geographic Distribution of Votes). New York City provided 55% of the 102,000 votes, and the metro suburbs produced 13%.

NEW YORK CITY

In New York City, 55,774 people voted on the WFP line, more votes than any other minor party. In five Assembly Districts in Brooklyn the WFP was the second biggest vote-getter, receiving more votes on Row H than the Republicans received for Rick Lazio¹. The WFP was 3.5% of Hillary Clinton’s NYC vote, and 2.5% of the overall NYC vote.

The distribution of the NYC votes changed from ’98, just as it did statewide: WFP votes in white working class neighborhoods doubled from ’98, and nearly tripled in African American and Latino neighborhoods. Support in liberal/progressive neighborhoods – Park Slope, Upper West Side, and Greenwich Village – increased only slightly from ’98.²

The increase in WFP support from African-American and Latino voters was dramatic. AD 54 in Bushwick and Bedford Stuyvesant (Townsend) and AD 40 in East New York (Griffith) produced six times more votes in 2000 than in 1998 (AD 54, 134 to 825 votes; AD 40, 280 to 1723). ADs 55 (Boylston) and 32 (Cook) both quadrupled their vote (259 and 188 in 1998, to 897 and 727 this year). Overall in the city the WFP almost doubled from ’98 – with 57% of that increase in of-color districts (Attachment 6, Changing Demographic Distribution of Votes).

¹ Assembly Districts numbered 40, 55, 56, 57 and 58.

² For instance, the Assembly District that covers the Upper West Side (AD 67) was the AD with the least amount of improvement, gaining only 92 votes on its 1998 showing.

The WFP has argued that a focus on issues and fieldwork can actually boost the overall vote in low turnout, high Democratic performance districts.³ The unofficial ED returns from the ACORN/WFP base vote operation show that the organized door-knocking operation did increase turnout, while simultaneously increasing the votes on Row H. Turnout was higher than expected all over the city and especially in black and brown districts, but the ACORN/WFP base vote canvass districts showed a still higher increase in turnout. Election districts worked by the ACORN/WFP saw a 10.26% increase over the predicted turnout⁴. Similar election districts in the same area (worked by other organizations) registered a 4.54% increase over the predicted turnout.

Votes on the WFP line went up along with the total turnout in these districts. In the Election Districts assigned to the ACORN/WFP canvass by the Coordinated Campaign, a total of 2,462 voters pulled the Row H lever, 6% of the total votes⁵. That is more than double the proportion the WFP received citywide. It seems fair to conclude that the ACORN/WFP canvassing operation (1) increases absolute turnout and (2) produces votes for WFP endorsed candidates.

The WFP got more votes than any other minor party in New York City despite having the lowest number of registrants. The total count of eligible WFP registrants in NYC in November was 3,620⁶. There were 15 times more WFP votes in NYC than registrants. As most races in the city are decided in September primaries, the WFP's ability to boost turnout among core Democrats and provide a signal to progressive Democrats with its endorsement could prove significant in Democratic primaries. (Attachment 7)

In white working class districts like AD 38 (Seminario), WFP votes went from 130 in 1998 to 428 in 2000. All three Staten Island Assembly Districts more than doubled in WFP votes from '98. The Party tripled its vote in Cathy Nolan's district in Queens (AD 57), beating the Conservative Party as well. In 1998, that district gave the Conservative Party 764 votes on its line for Pataki, while the WFP got 178 votes for Vallone. In 2000, the Conservative Party received 476 votes on its line and the WFP received 539. On Staten Island, the Conservative Party outpolled the WFP 13 to 1 in 1998. This year, that ratio declined to 3 to 1.

In other words, the WFP is demonstrating appeal not only to liberal and minority NYC voters, but in "swing" areas of the city as well.

UPSTATE

³ The WFP showed this on a smaller scale in the March 1999 Special Election for State Senate in the Far Rockaways (District 10) by canvassing in five election districts for Malcolm Smith. In those election districts, voter turnout was triple that of the rest of the district.

⁴ According to NCEC predictions.

⁵ The Coordinated Campaign assigned "Tier 1" districts to the Base Vote Operation – districts with high Democrat performing voters but low voter turnout. The analysis here uses a sample of the results from Tier 1 election districts within the same Assembly Districts. It compares the turnout in EDs the WFP was assigned with the comparable districts assigned to other organizations.

⁶ Statewide WFP had 7,855 registrants on November 1, 2000, according to the State Board of Elections.

Upstate counties provided 32% of the WFP vote, up 6 points from 1998 total. The WFP growth was evident in counties with relatively high numbers of “swing voters.” WFP leadership argues that the WFP message holds a special appeal to “Reagan Democrats” or “Forgotten Majority” voters. They argue that the reliance on issues – “if you care about affordable health care and good jobs, vote Row H” – is a useful influence on a persuadable voter, who may be wavering or uncertain about a particular candidate. The data from this election are promising, but not conclusive.

In Erie County, for example, the NCEC calculates that 26% of county voters are “swing voters,” making it one of the counties with the highest ratio of persuadables in the state. Erie, with 7,849 WFP votes, was the Party’s fourth best showing in absolute numbers. At 1.82% of the total vote, it was the county with the fifth highest WFP percentage statewide. Logic suggests that some number of the WFP voters were swing voters, and the fact the WFP did so well there means that it was able to persuade them to support HRC in some measure because of the WFP endorsement.⁷

Broome County also has a high proportion of swing voters (20%). The WFP votes were 2.1% of the total Broome County vote – substantially higher than the state average. The WFP vote increased 670% over its 1998 showing, and more than doubled in Saratoga and Oswego –two other counties with high percentages of persuadable voters. Republicans outpolled Democrats in all of these counties – but not by much. This demonstrates an increasing WFP appeal in counties that are not Democratic strongholds.

In three of the four biggest upstate counties – Albany, Erie, and Onondaga - the WFP got 3.15%, 3.3%, and 3.0%, respectively, of Clinton’s vote, suggesting that the WFP may be poised to provide the margin of victory in close races in these counties. Both Onondaga and Albany tripled their votes from ’98 (Onondaga went from 939 votes to 3,232, Albany went from 746 to 2,579).

SUBURBS

The WFP performance in the NYC suburbs was under its statewide average. Of the four suburban counties – Nassau, Suffolk, Rockland and Westchester – only Rockland had a WFP vote that was more than 1% of the county’s total (1.3%). Rockland tripled its vote from ’98 (from 519 to 1565) and Suffolk doubled (1932 to 4650).

The WFP’s relatively weak performance in the NYC suburbs is a decline from numbers garnered by the WFP in local town and village elections in all four counties in 1999 and 2000. It suggests that the Party’s success in these lower turnout elections does not immediately translate to success in higher turnout elections.

⁷ The May 2000 WFP poll by Global Strategies provides additional support for this view.