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## **The RNC's California Experiment: State and National Party Collaboration in Reforms to Minority Outreach**

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### **RNC & CRP: Shared Dilemmas and Linked Fates**

Neither the Republican National Committee (RNC) nor the California Republican Party (CRP) can continue to rely primarily on white voters to win elections. Leadership at both levels of the party has acknowledged the power of demographic changes that favor the Democratic opposition. Shortly after the 2012 general election CRP chairman and former state Senator Jim Brulte spoke to the racial demographic changes, recognizing the implications for state and national Republican candidates.

Brulte said, "The issue is demographics. California is almost totally dominated by Democrats today because Republicans can't figure out how to get votes from anybody that's not white. In 1994, 82 percent of the electorate was white and Pete Wilson carried the white vote, lost the African-American vote, and lost the Latino vote, but was reelected. Meg Whitman runs for governor in 2010, 62 percent of the electorate is white, and she overwhelmingly carries that electorate but still loses by 13 points. The electorate changed. Twenty years ago if Mitt Romney had run for president and rolled up the margins he did in the white communities he would have been overwhelmingly elected president, but the country is changing and Republicans have not reacted to that change."<sup>1</sup>

The Republican national party organization and Chairman Reince Priebus reached a similarly direct and critical conclusion after extensive study of the 2012 election. Much of their 100-page *Growth and Opportunity Project* report<sup>2</sup> assesses and outlines their plan to extend outreach to voters beyond their base. The report introduced an inclusion council that breaks down the new voters of interest, or "demographic partners" (Hispanics, Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, African Americans, woman, and youth), and highlights areas for improving campaign mechanics to better their ground game and remedy their absence from these communities.

The focus of the national-level program is building a permanent presence in minority communities, or as Chairman Priebus put it, "showing up." Speaking at the CRP 2014 spring convention titled, "Rebuild. Renew. Reclaim," Priebus drew parallels between the two party organizations and explained the problem with the party's old model: "Rebuilding and reclaiming our par-

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<sup>1</sup> SoCal Connected (Nov. 2012), "Republican Strategist Jim Brulte on Rethinking the GOP's Tack": <<https://youtu.be/l15ohTBxS4Q>>.

<sup>2</sup> *Growth & Opportunity Project Report*: <[http://growthopp.gop.com/RNC\\_Growth\\_Opportunity\\_Book\\_2013.pdf](http://growthopp.gop.com/RNC_Growth_Opportunity_Book_2013.pdf)>.

ty. That's the theme we're adopting at the national level. Everything atrophies at the national level if we don't show up. We are not going to survive. We have become a U-Haul trailer of cash that simply shows up and hooks up to a presidential nominee. Then we show up again in four years. We can't be successful doing that. We're going to be a year-round party that goes to every single state in America. We are funding a field operation in every single battle ground state for four years straight. We're gonna be in every targeted congressional, senate, governor's race around America, on a year-round basis with a massive emphasis in Asian, Hispanic, and African-American communities, making a case for what it is to be a Republican."<sup>3</sup>

The *Growth and Opportunity Project* reflects the extent of the party's image problem and negative associations. In California the Republican label has worked against candidates seeking election to offices in increasingly diverse constituencies. Scholars (Pantoja et al. 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Bowler et al. 2006) as well as pundits<sup>4</sup> trace the CRP brand's toxicity to the governorship of Pete Wilson and a series of GOP-sponsored racially charged ballot propositions.

The propositions declared undocumented workers ineligible for public services (Prop. 187 in 1994), banned state public affirmative action programs (Prop. 209 in 1996), and effectively ended bilingual education in public schools (Prop. 227 in 1998) (HoSang 2010). This recent history of anti-immigrant policy and catering to a white base via racialized tactics led Brulte to conclude, "What the national Republican Party should do is take a look at what the California Republican Party has done and do absolutely the opposite."<sup>5</sup>

California represents many things to the RNC—a cautionary tale of self-inflicted wounds and plummeting fortunes, but also opportunities to grow with new constituencies. The CRP is a struggling party relegated to minority status in a legislature with a Democratic supermajority. Brulte has noted that Republicans in Sacramento are "irrelevant in the governing process."<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, California represents demographic conditions the party faces nationally. Demographics plus a state party organization with leadership that is more than willing to support and test the RNC's minority outreach strategies make California a fertile testing ground for the *Growth and Opportunity Project*. California is far from turning into a red state, but the RNC has made it clear they are playing a new long game, working an offensive strategy in California and hoping to help the state party rebuild the label in lower-level elections.

The party has made notable changes since the Wilson era, moving from an entirely white male caucus in the legislature to a higher percentage of women in the Assembly than the Democrats, and five minority members of its 28-member caucus.<sup>7</sup> The CRP's Fall 2013 convention featured the party's first ever "Latino Elected Official Roundtable," where both praise for inclu-

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<sup>3</sup> Author's field audio.

<sup>4</sup> "More than two decades have passed since Republican Gov. Pete Wilson aired a television ad showing Mexicans scurrying across the border as an announcer declared, 'They keep coming: two million illegal immigrants in California.' Wilson's short-term gain—he won both reelection and passage of a ballot measure to deny public services to immigrants in the country illegally—was soon outweighed by a devastating Latino backlash that turned California into a Democratic stronghold."

<<http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-0712-trump-california-20150712-story.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> Brulte interview in footnote 1.

<sup>6</sup> Brulte interview in footnote 1.

<sup>7</sup> <<http://www.latimes.com/local/politics/la-me-pol-california-politics-trump-20150719-story.html>>.

sion and critiques of the party's former hesitance to embrace its elected Hispanic members were common.<sup>8</sup>

The decision to provide preprimary support to Neel Kashkari in the 2014 governor's race was another major shift by the leadership. As an Indian American he fulfilled both state and national party goals to deepen the diversity of their candidate bench. Kashkari's candidacy also informed the core strategy of the national reform program, one that features more diverse candidates while maintaining much the same platform and message, highlighting areas of commonality with new voters on economic issues and downplaying points of contention.

A close look at the CRP's Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 conventions reveals significant coordination to reform CRP operations, strategy, and candidate selection. Given the national party's hopes to replicate a winning model tested in states like California, much of what occurred at the CRP conventions and Kashkari's candidacy could be seen as a preview of the 2016 presidential campaign.

The following sections illustrate how elements of the RNC national project relate to strategic investments in California. This includes the ongoing presence and activity of national party actors at CRP conventions, the investment in new minority engagement staff, and the development of voter mobilization technology. Kashkari represented this strategy by becoming the Republican nominee for governor while lacking a base of support by way of a series of formal and informal moves by party leadership.

## **The RNC's Growth & Opportunity Project in California**

Relying on Fenno-style participant observation, I attended CRP conventions to gain access and insights well beyond the campaign curtain of convention and press-pass access (Fenno 2003; Flick 2009). In 2013 and 2014, I gained access to planning sessions, training workshops,<sup>9</sup> meetings of county chairs, the board of directors, and general session voting and debate. These arenas allowed for observation of RNC activists coaching state and county level actors on the national *Growth and Opportunity Project* and access to discussions between tiers of the party organization regarding party strategy and reform-relevant topics.

The six convention days offered opportunities to observe national, state, and county leaders discussing the importance of reform, how to go about it, and what they have done in the name of outreach. Political directors presented new technology for more effective voter contact and elected Republican Latino and Asian-American roundtables discussed outreach challenges and issues of importance to their communities.

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<sup>8</sup> Rod Pacheco, who created the Hispanic Assembly Caucus, said that even after he won his first election many Republicans "wouldn't shake his hand," and he was called a "RINO" [Republican in name only] by the *Orange County Register*. In 1998 he told the party organization it needed more Latinos, and he is glad the party is coming around now.

<sup>9</sup> Titles: Women of the Right Unite, Building Persuasive Messages, Party Base Building Committee, Getting Out the Vote in 2014, The Wonderful World of Data, Anatomy of a Win: San Diego Mayor's Race, Everything You Wanted to Know about the CRP (But Were Afraid to Ask) [closed to press], Party Base Building Committee, GROW ELECT: Connecting with the Latino Community, Using Technology in Our Ground Game, New Candidates—New Communities, Practical Tech: Surveying the Landscape of New Innovation.

## Reforming Campaign Mechanics

### Party Organization

RNC reform efforts emphasized state and local (county and metro-based) party staff and permanent organizations. The RNC hired an unprecedented amount of staff, the “most diverse in party history”<sup>10</sup> with specific focus on regional and racial communities. At the 2014 spring CRP convention RNC Political Director Chris McNulty and Deputy Political Director and National Director for Hispanic Initiatives Jennifer Korn hosted a workshop on “Getting Out the Vote in 2014.”

The workshop was closed to press and featured county chairs and staff from across California. Organizational reforms repeatedly emphasized the local, the long-term, and the racially descriptive. Speaking to this change, McNulty said, “Because of the *Growth and Opportunity Project*, we put staff on the ground earlier and found individuals from that area. We are not sending a bunch of 20-somethings from DC and dropping them into districts in California. That means showing up early and staying there. We have 173 staffers across the country, right now, working with the campaign, the earliest and largest investment in the history of the RNC.”

The RNC’s Director of Hispanic Initiatives for California, Francis Barraza, told the CRP’s first Latino Elected Official Roundtable the RNC was making major investments in the Latino community to bring Latino candidates and voters into the GOP. He said 85 percent of the new staff hires were in the field. The RNC political director said the RNC identified around thirty thousand “targeted precincts,” recruited in just under twelve thousand of them, and aimed to have thirty thousand by June or July.<sup>11</sup>

McNulty noted that while many of the staff investments and targeted precincts are in California, they are long-term investments as part of the RNC’s “strategic offense,” rather than an RNC “strategic defense” such as Texas, where they are trying to *maintain* their hold.<sup>12</sup> McNulty said, “Our strategic plan is investing in states like California that will not be an immediate place where we can compete for presidential elections. But you have to start somewhere.”

Much of the praise from RNC actors noted the CRP’s shared emphasis on local organization and matching national party resources with bottom-up financing. Brulte stressed the importance of county parties doing their own fundraising in local and national contests and compared state party fundraising efforts to icing on the cake.

The RNC is aiding national-state-county coordination and collaboration and seeking to increase local-level compliance with reform via online discussion boards to exchange best practices in rural, urban, and suburban settings, and creating “nuts and bolts” training manuals. Speaking to 30 county chairs from around the country, McNulty said, “We hadn’t done a county manual in 12 years.” The manual is a downloadable pdf that can be updated. Local fundraising and mobilizing efforts are aided by the development of a voter-information database that county-level leaders and staff can draw on and contribute to.

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<sup>10</sup> Author’s field audio.

<sup>11</sup> Author’s field audio.

<sup>12</sup> RNC’s McNulty on the Democratic Party aiming to “flip” Texas to blue: “Demographic trends among Asians, Hispanics, and African Americans are such that support for the Republican Party in the last two elections for sure, is on a such a downward trend [...] if we lose Texas we can’t win a national election” (author’s field audio).

## Technology and Data

The RNC chairman told the spring 2014 CRP convention, “We got about a \$35 million dollar digital and data platform that we need to rebuild for this party.” The RNC tapped private sector talent, hiring ex-Google,<sup>13</sup> Facebook, and LinkedIn engineers to develop a national, locally collaborative voter-data ecosystem<sup>14</sup> and “Walk” app for door-to-door mobilization, smartphone, and tablet use. The RNC hired its first chief technology officer, a former Google engineer and a team of full-time techies to keep their technology up to date.

The Walk app tracks local-level data in real-time. At a convention workshop on technology the RNC political director noted that one of the Walk app’s first field tests was the election of San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer. Both CRP conventions featured training sessions on the new software. Field testing the technology and coordinating with the state party in coaching county leaders to contribute data tracking for national party efforts illustrates the level of collaboration across national, state, and county organizations.

The national party discussed the importance of obtaining more voting data, as well as more quality data to facilitate better messaging. The data is structured (e.g., numerical scores for likelihood of voting) and unstructured (e.g., comments and unique notes by party field staff). Previous voter data was largely structured and quantifiable. Allowing for unstructured, qualitative data, such as comments from voters, allows for more nuanced messaging within precincts.

## Community Contact

Brulte noted that reform is centered on a call for “Republicans to leave their comfort zones, and for leaders and volunteers to reach out to voters in communities that tend to vote Democratic.”<sup>15</sup> In contacting new communities of interest the national and California party organizations have organized communities along racial, gender, and generational lines. Their reform actions, commitment of resources, and discussions show the RNC and CRP are prioritizing communities in that order, though not all racial groups are given as much emphasis as others. Perhaps speaking to Paul Frymer’s thesis of African-American voters being captured by the Democratic Party, the CRP convention held workshops specifically for Hispanic and Asian-American voters but not African Americans.

Brulte emphasized that he had long wanted to see the CRP embrace reforms such as the RNC project. He told the Latino Elected Official Roundtable, “For 20 years I have argued that the Republican Party must blow its doors off and invite everyone in. We haven’t recognized that not only are the neighborhoods of California changing, they’ve already changed, and we didn’t blow the doors off quickly enough. So we are doing it now. Not only do we want to blow the doors off. We want to make you messengers.”<sup>16</sup>

RNC leadership presented several examples illustrating the goal of increasing the quantity and quality of contact, emphasizing the latter. Reaching a lot of people via better technology, more staff, permanent presence, and year-round activity is important as the party’s image prob-

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<sup>13</sup> <<http://www.sfgate.com/politics/joegarofoli/article/GOP-hires-Andy-Barkett-to-leap-into-digital-fray-4848296.php>>; Andy Barkett and data-driven method: <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/30/andy-barkett-rnc\\_n\\_5228921.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/30/andy-barkett-rnc_n_5228921.html)>.

<sup>14</sup> RNC’s Data & Phone App. <<http://www.gopvictory365.com/>>.

<sup>15</sup> <<http://cagop.org.nerdydata.com/>>.

<sup>16</sup> Author’s field audio.

lems with these communities are largely due to their historical absence. Given this, the RNC stressed having not just more frequent contact but contact that is personal and not always political. The RNC chair told the CRP Spring 2014 convention, “You are going to get to know these people. And we are not going to talk about fracking all the time. We are going to bring in bands. We are going to have pizza parties. We’re going to talk about politics, we are going to bring in a few V.I.P.s, but you are going to get to know these voters.”

Emphasizing quality of contact, individuals from national and state party organizations stressed showing up, a recurring theme of the national project that has found traction in California given its diversity and the CRP’s history of not engaging Hispanic, Asian and African-American communities. The RNC political director said, “One of the things Mayor Faulconer talked about is the fact that they showed up and organized on the ground in a variety of communities all across San Diego.”

A noted exception to the new communities’ strategy related to the Faulconer campaign is the national and state parties’ continued struggle to reach out to LGBTQ communities. When Faulconer as mayor elect thanked “LGBT groups” among his coalition that helped get him elected, there were visible negative reactions from guests at the CRP dinner. Further discomfort was on display at the Fall 2013 convention in Anaheim during “Gay Days” at Disneyland where participants were encouraged to “not forget to wear red.”

A CRP county chair at the Central Valley regional meeting said, “I was going to bring family and go to Disney but a friend told me about the gay pride event. I didn’t believe him at first. It’s unfortunate but it is what it is.”<sup>17</sup> The CRP is not alone in leaving LGBTQ groups and individuals out of reform discussions. The RNC’s project report only mentioned gay or gay Americans four times compared to nearly a 96 mentions of Hispanic or Latino voters, and there are no LGBTQ groups on the RNC list of demographic partners.

The RNC political director told CRP chairs and staff how the new quality of contact initiative<sup>18</sup> compared to the old model, highlighting the old model’s deficiencies.

Think about how we’ve done this previously. You get a phone bank, and you call the heck out of it. It collects data, and when we put that data in the file we get better information about who you are. That’s a very impersonal approach. One person comes through one day, and a new person comes through another. You don’t have any quality of contact. It was all about volume. Volume’s important but you lost quality of contact in that interaction, so what if I’m your precinct captain. I was recruited and I live there, so it’s likely our kids go to school together or I’ve seen you at the store. I’m a relatively common face. I start going door-to-door, introducing myself, taking basic information. Maybe the first time you think I’m crazy, but I come back. You see me more often, and there is a greater comfort level.<sup>19</sup>

Political science research corroborates much of the logic underlying this new strategy. The comments from RNC and CRP leaders about mobilization being more effective when face-to-face, more personable, coming from peers, and taking place in social networks, all have long been known to political scientists studying mobilization and the effectiveness of various forms of contact (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Gerber and Green 2000). Overall, the quality of contact reforms and the national-state party coaching of county chairs aim to provide (1) better data

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<sup>17</sup> Author’s field audio.

<sup>18</sup> For additional comments by the RNC political director: <<http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2014/10/31/how-the-new-rnc-ground-game-works/>>.

<sup>19</sup> Author’s field audio.

(structured and unstructured) made possible by better technology accessible by more staff, (2) better timing—permanent presence (year-round activity vs. few months before an election), and (3) better recruiting with staff from the racial communities of interest and the neighborhood (i.e., “familiar faces from the block”).

## Descriptive Representation

If the problem is demographics, the leadership answer has largely been to increase the descriptive representation of the staff precinct captains and the candidate pool. Jane Mansbridge (1999) noted: “In descriptive representation, representatives are in their own persons and lives in some sense typical of the larger class of persons whom they represent. Black legislators represent black constituents, women legislators represent women constituents, and so on” (Mansbridge 1999, 629).

Whether descriptive representation leads to substantive representation (results in policy preferred by a group) is a debate with history (Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 1999; Preuhs 2007; Burden 2007), and largely beyond this project. From RNC and CRP comments to convention participants and the press, it appears Republicans believe broadly that to win elections they can keep the same platform but have the message carried by “new messengers.”<sup>20</sup>

RNC Committeeman for California Shawn Steel noted the need for new messengers at the Asian Pacific American Elected Official Roundtable, “Most of you got elected without any Republican Party help, and you’re still Republicans. I consider that a miracle. We need to learn from you. We want this to become a regular thing. This is something our party is taking seriously on the national level and the state level because the demographics are changing, and we need a whole new set of warriors in communities we haven’t had before. In 2010, 10 percent of the registered voters in California were Asian. Asian Americans are rapidly immigrating to America and open minded to our message. Asian Americans have values that are *essentially* Republican: strong families, middle-class values, strong schools, respect for elders, intact multigenerational families, hard work. The kind of things Republicans have been talking about for 150 years. Here’s the key to the party, now it’s your job. I’d like to see messengers from the Asian-American community takeover”<sup>21</sup>

The emphasis on messengers was repeated in a survey of county chairs, where only seven percent of the Republican chairs reporting defined reform as primarily about substantive change to party message and policy positions vs. changing the messengers and diversifying the racial background of candidates and party representatives. Twenty-eight percent of GOP chairs reported reform as primarily about changing messengers vs. policy positions. This is corroborated by GOP fieldwork in California, where discussions are largely about how to sell the current platform rather than how the platform can change to attract the new voters and build a more racially diverse coalition.

Whether descriptive representation is enough to reverse minority-party-identification trends

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<sup>20</sup> A stark example of the same message with different messenger mattering—the CRP Fall 2013 Convention featured this video of Louisiana State Senator Elbert Guillory comparing welfare to slavery, a “government plantation”—[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n\\_YQ8560E1w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_YQ8560E1w)—while other Republicans have apologized after being criticized heavily for making similar comparisons (see: [http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/03/arizona\\_republican\\_jim\\_brown\\_apologizes\\_for\\_comparing\\_government\\_spending.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/03/arizona_republican_jim_brown_apologizes_for_comparing_government_spending.html)) this was not commented on by press or those in attendance.

<sup>21</sup> Author’s field audio.



in California and beyond is yet to be seen. What is clear is that both the RNC and the CRP leadership appear to believe it is a major part of the solution to winning national and state elections. The RNC political director told county chairs this is why they are particularly interested in California where racial demographic change is most significant in rapidity and magnitude:

If we don't improve there, we are gonna have a long-term problem. You won't be able to win a national election. We want to make sure we're not only investing in a new ground game in old places, but in new places. We want to organize in minority communities across the country. It's the front line, and the minority population is significant. There is no way to win in these districts if you're not engaging these communities.<sup>22</sup>

At the CRP's Asian Pacific American Elected Roundtable,<sup>23</sup> Brulte thanked the elected officials for representing their communities saying the CRP has not done enough to prop them up as spokespersons for the party. Now, with the national party reforms focused on building a more racially representative party, the CRP appears more likely to do so.

Beyond seeking precinct captains with familiar faces in minority communities, creating an inclusion council and hiring staff of racially descriptive backgrounds to serve as Hispanic, African-American, and Asian and Pacific Islander field directors, the RNC is looking to have more racially diverse candidates. The CRP chairman supported reform to candidate recruitment, and expressed the logic behind it at the Latino Roundtable:

The candidate who most looks like, sounds like, has the shared values and shared experiences of the majority of people in the neighborhood tends to win. Paul Cook, retired Marine Corps colonel got elected to Congress this year from my area. There's a lot of retired military there. He looked like them. He sounded like them. He had shared values and experiences. So the military folks said, "he's our guy." We want to make you messengers. We want to help make you the spokesmen for our party, our principles, our philosophy. I hope the next convention won't be asking me questions, they'll be asking you questions, because you are the future of this party. I know how hard it is to get elected as a Republican. I look forward to being full partners as we move to rebuild this party from the ground up.<sup>24</sup>

In a television interview Brulte spoke even more forthrightly about needing more racially descriptive candidates:

Republicans have a growing bench but the bench isn't long enough and it's not deep enough and Republican leadership has to get serious about reaching out to people to run for office people who don't look like me. There's no reason in the world that Republicans can't reach out to people of color. We have to figure out how to talk to them in a language, not one that we're necessarily

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<sup>22</sup> Author's field audio.

<sup>23</sup> Recall this is the CRP's first Latino roundtable. This is noteworthy given that the Hispanic population is much larger than the AAPI population in California, yet Hispanics received a table of focus much later than the AAPI community. This too is another sign of how recent and significant the shift is from the Pete Wilson antagonism (i.e., using these communities to rouse up a base with anti-immigrant sentiment and policy) to today's attempts at courting Hispanic voters.

<sup>24</sup> Author's field audio.

comfortable with, but one they're comfortable with. Republicans have not yet figured out how to do that.<sup>25</sup>

Comments like these may appear to imply changes to the substance of messaging, though the conversations of strategy largely focused on messengers and avoiding areas of conflict. “Don’t offend”—was the answer given at the Connecting with the Latino Community workshop when one elected official was asked how to discuss an affirmative action policy (SCA 5) that many Hispanic voters favored but many Asian Americans opposed.

The primary issue areas noted at both the Latino and Asian Pacific American roundtables included jobs, education, and family values. Just as there is a risk of tokenism when seeking descriptive representation as strategy, there is a risk in perpetuating a caricature when seeking to engage communities outside the base. These growing pains were present throughout the convention but most apparent at discussions of minority engagement.

Here comments often illustrated the difficulty of speaking to and about these communities without engaging in stereotyping and caricaturing their traits and concerns. This included benign racism or benevolent prejudice as outlined by scholars theorizing and describing the relative valorization of Asian Americans (Kim 1990; Chou 2008). For example, holding up Asian Americans as hardworking and perpetuating the “model minority” myth.

The CRP Spring 2013 convention featured a Lincoln Club and Republican Party of Orange County sponsored “Grassroots 101: Latino Engagement” event. It featured a mariachi band<sup>26</sup> and posters in Spanish and English detailing why the Republican Party is better on immigration, jobs, education, and family values. The posters featured images of Eisenhower, Reagan, George W. Bush, and Marco Rubio, highlighting their work on immigration reform. The messages belied an earlier comment at the Latino Elected Official Roundtable claiming that the Hispanic community does not care that much about immigration. The posters and Hispanic engagement conversations often addressed immigration, though they focused on whether and how to discuss it, rather than what the party’s policy should be.

The RNC is looking to California to see whether its reforms, including “change the messengers, keep the message” will work. If it appears to reverse trends and pick up elections, the RNC will replicate the field-tested strategies in other diverse communities. If successful, the strategies could well inform the RNC’s national strategy in presidential elections.

The CRP is signaling change beyond its relatively high compliance with the RNC project and collaboration with the national party organization. The CRP leadership signaled change internally to local party leadership and externally to voters by embracing more moderate candidates and using institutional power to support a most-preferred candidate preprimary. The 2014 California gubernatorial race illustrated this.

### **California’s 2014 Gubernatorial Election— CRP Leadership Signals Change**

While the RNC is using institutional power to deter infighting and factionalism, for example by shortening the primary, the CRP has used institutional power to make undesirable outcomes less likely. This included working toward nominating a gubernatorial candidate who embodied

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<sup>25</sup> SoCal Connected (Nov. 2012), “Republican Strategist Jim Brulte on Rethinking the GOP’s Tack”: <<https://youtu.be/115ohTBxS4Q>>.

<sup>26</sup> Author’s field video.

the RNC project of broadening appeal and becoming a more racially representative party. Tim Donnelly, as an ex-Minuteman, Tea Party favorite, and descriptively status quo white male, was certainly not the candidate to signal this change.

With immigrant parents, a focus on economic vs. social issues, and less polarizing rhetoric, Kashkari represented the GOP reform project in California. Prominent Republicans outside of California saw it as important for a candidate like Kashkari to run, even if he lost, because he serves as a signal that the party is not hostile to immigrant, minority, and more ideologically moderate populations, and Republicans are not strictly a party of social conservatives. Karl Rove said, “If Republicans have to pick someone to lose to Jerry Brown, they’d be stupid not to pick Kashkari.”<sup>27</sup>

Before focusing on the formal and informal powers of party organization in the convention, it is necessary to illustrate how the candidates differed, allowing the labeling of one as “the reform candidate” and the other as more typical of the old CRP form (à la Pete Wilson).

The speeches of the two main Republican gubernatorial candidates at CRP conventions, as well as statements made to the press preceding the election, made it clear they differed significantly in style and substance. Kashkari’s speeches were similar to those of the CRP leadership, while Donnelly distanced himself from the GOP country club establishment.<sup>28</sup> Asked to respond to the endorsements his opponent was garnering from Mitt Romney, Jeb Bush, Condoleezza Rice, and Darrell Issa, Donnelly said they “represent the party establishment circling the wagons to protect their power.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, at the CRP’s Spring 2014 County Chair Associations meeting, with Brulte and former county chair and large donor Charles Munger in attendance, Donnelly said he was “not having help from the politically connected, and that’s ok because they really haven’t won anything in 20 years that’s of any significance.”

Donnelly’s comments recalled those described by scholars as the antistatist rhetoric of contemporary conservatism (Omi and Winant 1994, 126). Donnelly’s comments were more polemic and partisan, referring only to Democrats in the negative, referring to “fascists in Sacramento,” and calling Brown, “a Marxist progressive parading as a Democrat.”<sup>30</sup> His comments revealed a view very much in congruence with the Tea Party’s limited government message: “I just want to be left alone. I loved my life but the government became the greatest threat to my success by regulating me out of business, by driving my customers out of the state. The governor just can’t say no. He [Brown] signed 805 new laws in a state where the greatest complaint is over-regulation.”<sup>31</sup>

Kashkari not only recognized the good that both federal and state government can achieve, but talked of the necessity for bipartisan efforts in a general sense and for securing the economy during financial crisis: “I spent three years in DC battling a terrible economic crisis. We got Republicans and Democrats to work together and protected taxpayers. That experience taught me that you can do things in the government for the good of the people if you get everyone focused together.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> <<http://blog.sfgate.com/nov05election/2014/04/07/rove-says-ca-republicans-would-be-stupid-not-to-pick-kashkari/>>.

<sup>28</sup> <<http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/Tim-Donnelly-I-m-a-threat-to-the-GOP-country-5478654.php>>.

<sup>29</sup> <<http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-kashkari-donnelly-20140429-story.html>>.

<sup>30</sup> <<http://www.mantecabulletin.com/archives/100730/>>.

<sup>31</sup> Author’s field audio.

<sup>32</sup> Author’s field audio.

The candidates also varied in how they discussed race. Even when aiming to tailor his message to the RNC's goals of reforming technology, minority engagement, and bottom-up fundraising, Donnelly employed anecdotes that might turn off minority voters as the party continues to struggle with talking about race with sincerity and respect: "The Asian community is up for grabs if you will become their champion. I wrote a letter. I got complete strangers in whose language I can't say a single word—yet, but I will. They just gave me a Chinese name by the way, they put it on one of my donation envelopes. It's got a nice sound to it. Don-L-Lee Don-L-Lee. When they say it," he laughed. "They are going to digitally send it to me, and completely communicate. A lot of them are in the tech industry on Facebook, Twitter, and all that other stuff. So if you get behind my campaign. You're going to reach communities that Republicans have not been able to penetrate, certainly have not been able to win."

Comments like this that feature an "othering" tone and essentialist language may have made the CRP leadership feel justified with their motion to remove press. The media referred to Donnelly as a "quotable conservative—who is tone-deaf on race,"<sup>33</sup> making remarks<sup>34</sup> that the CRP know will hurt them in seeking more racial inclusion and broader appeal. Kashkari kept his references to minority groups to mentions and expressed the need for change: "I've traveled all across the state to small businesses, and farms, Latino households, African-American households, Asian communities, Caucasian communities, all walks of life. We have to rebuild, re-energize the Republican Party. We have to bring everyone back into the party. They cast our party as though we are the party of 'no.' They cast our party as though we're the party of hate. They cast our party as though we're the party of the rich. That's not why I'm a Republican."<sup>35</sup>

In a press interview on the convention floor Kashkari viewed his candidacy as a change for the party and setting a positive precedent even if he loses the election, as he did:

I'm a Republican nominee for governor, a social libertarian, focused on economic issues. Contrast this to the party four years ago. This is a transformational moment for our party. That's the big picture. I've set an example. If I win in November then it's actually solidified. But I've now set an example for other candidates to follow.<sup>36</sup>

As a Republican reform candidate running not just on change for the state but for the party as a whole, Kashkari made comments indicating he was aware that not everyone was on board with his vision and top-down calls for change. He was more open about his socially liberal (or as he said—libertarian) views and more inclusive in his rhetoric (referencing LGBT communities) when speaking to the Log Cabin Republicans, telling them, "The new Republican Party I want to build is a diverse Republican Party. Every ethnicity, every sexual orientation, every lifestyle, everyone is welcome. The biggest tent you've ever seen in your life."<sup>37</sup> Still, he stayed away from social issues almost entirely beyond small gatherings and interviews. He knew they were at odds with many at the convention.

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<sup>33</sup> <<http://rightwingnews.com/column-2/what-do-the-california-gop-and-the-alamo-share/>>.

<sup>34</sup> "In 2006, as an unknown California Minuteman, Donnelly went to the border and declared: "I am a descendant of Jim Bowie, who died at the Alamo. It is rumored that he took a dozen Mexican soldiers to their deaths before they finally killed him. How many of you will rise up and take his place on that wall?":<<http://rightwingnews.com/column-2/what-do-the-california-gop-and-the-alamo-share/>>.

<sup>35</sup> Author's field audio.

<sup>36</sup> Kashkari interview: <<https://youtu.be/Q-3saW5dqxs>>.

<sup>37</sup> <<http://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/california-republican-governor-race>>.

While Kashkari avoided social issues, Donnelly was quick to address them, starting with comments on AB1266 and SCA 5 before getting into more general comments on regulation and water. AB1266, California’s “School Success and Opportunity Act,” aims to protect transgender individuals by allowing students to use bathrooms they view as congruent to their gender identity.<sup>38</sup> In his speech to the county chairs, Donnelly said:

Brown signed laws that are an affront to our values. We are circling the drain in K-12 education, and he thinks it’s a good idea to put the boys in girls’ locker rooms. As I travel around the state, I talk about that issue, AB1266, because it is one of the stupidest government overreaches we have ever seen. This law is going to put our kids’ privacy at risk.<sup>39</sup>

SCA 5,<sup>40</sup> a California Senate Constitutional Amendment, seeks to effectively repeal a ban on affirmative action in college admissions. Donnelly discussed his opposition to the affirmative action policy and said it was an appeal to Asian voters. While he largely stayed off the topic of immigration, as did most substantive discussions at the convention, his comments revealed he did not want to discuss immigration reform. During his speech to the general session at the 2014 convention, he said, “The only immigration I want to talk about is the U-Hauls leaving [Rick] Perry’s Texas.”<sup>41</sup>

Kashkari stayed on economic issues and did not discuss AB1266 and transgender rights or SCA5 and affirmative action. His slogan “Education and Jobs: that’s it!” aligned with both the RNC’s reform project and the suggestions from the CRP and RNC leadership to not highlight differences, but focus on the economy, where common ground can be found with minority communities. Kashkari stayed on economic issues to move attention from his positions on social issues that are atypical for the Republican Party at large (pro-marriage equality, and pro-choice), and especially so at a convention of party faithful.

On economic issues there were observable differences between the two candidates. Kashkari recognized class, made repeated use of the “middle-class fight,” and noted that encouraging growth was about education rather than just removing regulations, and California did not need to be the cheapest place to do business as it had “other things to offer.”<sup>42</sup>

Lastly, a question came up implying that some of the minority communities Kashkari mentioned in his speech had a culture of dependency. Kashkari respectfully disagreed, while answering in a way that revealed he caught the county chair’s racial code. Kashkari followed with an anecdote about visiting a church in South Central Los Angeles, saying that black communities want to work as much as any other community, showing his willingness to challenge notions regarding minority group culture and welfare.

### **The Invisible Primary—CRP Leadership Minimize the Tea Party & its Candidate**

The dynamics of the gubernatorial campaign at CRP conventions spoke to the larger reform challenge of balancing the preferences of a conservative base with those of new voters.

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<sup>38</sup> AB1266 in full: <[http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201320140AB1266](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB1266)>.

<sup>39</sup> Author’s field audio and notes.

<sup>40</sup> SCA 5 in full: <[http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/13-14/bill/sen/sb\\_0001-0050/sca\\_5\\_cfa\\_20130816\\_110047\\_sen\\_comm.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/13-14/bill/sen/sb_0001-0050/sca_5_cfa_20130816_110047_sen_comm.html)>.

<sup>41</sup> Author’s field audio.

<sup>42</sup> Author’s field audio and notes.

Donnelly focused on the concerns of a white base in an increasingly diverse state, choosing to rile conservative activists by unabashedly showcasing his conservative values and views on social issues. Kashkari often started on the defensive explaining his work with George Bush and the Obama administration on TARP, an unpopular policy among the base, as well as working against his admission that he voted for Obama in 2008.<sup>43</sup> This may explain why Kashkari often trailed in polls not only behind Donnelly but also behind Democratic incumbent Jerry Brown.<sup>44</sup>

Several media outlets noted the differences in crowd response to the two speeches at the general sessions and on the convention floor as Donnelly received the CRP's "unofficial endorsement."<sup>45</sup> How did Kashkari then beat out Donnelly to become the Republican nominee? Reporters ignored the dynamics at the convention, dynamics more subtle than the roar of a crowd. This included the actions of the state party organization to support Kashkari while marginalizing Donnelly and his Tea Party support.

These moves often existed outside the public meetings such as the general session. While Donnelly was popular at the convention and received a better crowd response than Kashkari at the general session, there were noticeable differences between the measured response of top *leaders* and that of activists and county chairs. Beyond the variation in response the CRP leaders showed their preference and the institutional power to support one candidate over the other.

The idea that party organizations can effectively pick nominees before voters do in a primary is informed by the work of Cohen in *The Party Decides* (Cohen et al. 2008). They argue that party organizations hold important formal and informal tools to shape candidate selection, platform, and overall party direction, often at stages in the process preceding the electorate casting the primary vote. This has led to the concept of the "invisible primary," described by media as the "behind-the-scenes competition for the support of elected officials, donors, party leaders, and political operatives,"<sup>46</sup> and by scholars as "the principal institutional means by which party members decide the person they want to be their nominee—the equivalent of bargaining at party conventions in the old system" (Cohen et al. 2008, 187).

This notion of significant party power runs counter to the idea of increasingly candidate-centered campaigns (Arbour 2014) and party decline (Wattenberg 1996). Kashkari won the invisible primary long before voters cast their ballots. One could see this in a series of formal and informal moves by the CRP leadership.

Asked whether he thought the GOP was hijacked in 2012 by extremists, Brulte replied, "Some elements of the Tea Party have not been helpful. But extremism sometimes grabs political

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<sup>43</sup> "The vast majority of Republicans do not want to be represented by somebody who voted for Obama, who ran TARP instead of a business," Donnelly continued, referring to Kashkari, who cast a vote for Obama in 2008 and ran the taxpayer-funded bank bailout." <<http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-kashkari-donnelly-20140429-story.html>>.

<sup>44</sup> <[http://www.mercurynews.com/california/ci\\_25526879/field-poll-gops-hope-california-governors-race-leaning](http://www.mercurynews.com/california/ci_25526879/field-poll-gops-hope-california-governors-race-leaning)>, and <[http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S\\_314MBS.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_314MBS.pdf)>.

<sup>45</sup> "The audience reaction told the story: For Neel Kashkari, polite applause; for his GOP gubernatorial rival, Tim Donnelly, a prolonged roar of cheers." <<http://www.latimes.com/local/political/la-me-pc-tim-donnelly-gets-unofficial-endorsement-at-gop-convention-20140316-story.html>>. "A conservative state assemblyman and gun rights enthusiast was the crowd favorite among the party faithful on Sunday as the Republican candidates" <<http://www.mantecabulletin.com/archives/100730/>> ; and <<http://www.rawstory.com/2014/03/california-republicans-strongly-back-tea-party-candidate-at-state-gop-convention/>>.

<sup>46</sup> <[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/10/upshot/start-paying-attention-whats-happening-now-in-gop-matters-for-2016.html?\\_r=0&abt=0002&abg=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/10/upshot/start-paying-attention-whats-happening-now-in-gop-matters-for-2016.html?_r=0&abt=0002&abg=0)>.

parties. George McGovern grabbed the Democratic Party in 1972, and they managed to lose a whole series of elections. When they got tired of losing elections they picked a moderate named Bill Clinton and won.”<sup>47</sup>

Brulte not only associated the Tea Party with extremism, he suggested picking more moderate candidates might be the solution. These comments bring on new relevance when considering the treatment of Donnelly and the Tea Party at the CRP conventions. Brulte’s actions and those of CRP leaders revealed a view of the Tea Party and Donnelly as representing a more extreme, less electable element of the party, and a force that should not be encouraged in the convention setting.

Beyond the lack of enthusiasm for their candidate, the Tea Party as an organization was pushed to the fringes of the convention. While the Tea Party enjoyed vocal support throughout the convention, the conference room provided for its caucus was not on the main floor and half the size of the ballrooms for the Latino and Asian American roundtables. CRP leadership was nowhere to be seen at Tea Party and Donnelly campaign events at both conventions leading up to the gubernatorial race.

The highest members of the state party organization frequently appeared at Kashkari events and in discussion with the reform candidate on the convention floor. This informal support by association represents the subtle influence of the CRP to endorse their candidate. Treatment of the two candidates at the County Chair Associations meeting illustrates a more direct and blatant use of power and preferential treatment for the reform candidate.

At this meeting Kashkari not only received a warmer introduction<sup>48</sup> by the CRP leadership, but also better placement, more time to speak, time for questions following his speech, and perhaps more importantly, press coverage. Just before Donnelly addressed the CRP county chairs, the state chairman, and several members of the board of directors, there was a motion by leadership to remove press from the room. The motion received a quick second, and was swiftly passed by voice vote. One person who voted against it asked, “Why was it open for Kashkari and closed for Donnelly?”

A Donnelly supporter said, “It’s because they are threatened by him. They were saying ‘you’re not our guy.’ They don’t want that heard because it was a great speech.” Immediately after Donnelly’s speech there was a motion to withdraw the motion to remove press, but the following candidate said they would speak more candidly if the press were not in the room, so the motion was kept in place for the remainder of the meeting. The leadership did not call for questions to be asked of Donnelly and quickly moved the meeting along to allow another candidate for another office to speak. The selective use of formal power and informal power clearly signaled Kashkari was the preferred candidate.

News coverage following the convention revealed that Donnelly recognized the difference in treatment. “Donnelly sat in his RV, smoldering. The Republican candidate for governor had just addressed a group of officials at the California Republican Party’s convention outside San Francisco in March. But reporters were excluded from the room, and Donnelly was convinced it was to deprive him of publicity. He called his wife and told her “Charles Munger was up there in the

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<sup>47</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>48</sup> “He will tell us who he is. Why he’s running, and why he WILL beat Jerry Brown.” (Brulte and Munger starts applause). Compare to Donnelly’s straightforward introduction, “I believe Mr. Donnelly will now speak.”

front row just staring at me, just eyeballing me. The establishment was preparing for us. They had all their ducks lined up, and they are going to play games all weekend.”<sup>49</sup>

Munger, a former Santa Clara County Republican Party chairman and current chair of the CRP Initiatives Committee, was similarly active for Kashkari during the convention. More importantly, he contributed \$350,000 to Kashkari’s campaign via creation of an independent political action committee.<sup>50</sup> Though not listed on the conventions’ banquet placards, Munger was thanked by Brulte as the top donor at the Spring 2014 convention, outdoing the Gold, Silver, and Bronze sponsors with a \$100,000 donation to the state party.

The use of donation and fundraising power by CRP leadership to back moderate candidates has been acknowledged and critiqued by lower levels of the party. An article in the *L.A. Times* said that while Munger was being thanked by the highest levels of the state party, he was making “enemies within his own party by bankrolling moderates in primaries against conservatives.”<sup>51</sup> An editorial by the Napa Republican Party chairman defending his support of Donnelly over Kashkari asserted, “They [CRP leadership] like that Neel is wealthy enough to fund his own campaign (with a little help from Silicon Valley power broker Charles Munger).”<sup>52</sup> The state party leadership and its power can be as simple and subtle as association at conventions (face time with the candidate), or as blatant as large sums of money and cutting off access to the press in official meetings.

## Conclusion

The national party organization (RNC) has found in the California Republican Party a state organization with leadership that wants to embrace the goals of the reform program and a party organization in a diverse racial and ethnic demographic setting that is ideal for testing new minority outreach strategies. The RNC is testing major reforms to technology, data, staff, and minority outreach strategy in California. Through collaboration with the CRP leadership, the RNC is working to increase the likelihood that their reform efforts are taken seriously and carried out on the state and local level, all in an effort to build a long-term “ground game,” and to become competitive nationally in the face of changing voter demographics.

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<sup>49</sup> <<http://remember1986.com/california-republican-candidate-for-governor-donnelly-gives-voice-to-conservative-anxieties/>>.

<sup>50</sup> <<http://www.latimes.com/local/political/la-me-pc-munger-tries-to-boost-kashkaris-bid-with-350000-effort-20140521-story.html>>.

<sup>51</sup> <<http://www.latimes.com/local/politics/la-me-adv-munger-20150304-story.html#page=1>>, and <<http://www.sfgate.com/politics/joegarofoli/article/GOP-infighting-centers-on-anonymous-blog-4937603.php#photo-5387952>>.

<sup>52</sup> <[http://napavalleyregister.com/news/opinion/mailbag/napa-republican-party-defends-tim-donnelly-endorsement/article\\_7ee6df28-4da6-5bec-9422-4e78c32953d7.html](http://napavalleyregister.com/news/opinion/mailbag/napa-republican-party-defends-tim-donnelly-endorsement/article_7ee6df28-4da6-5bec-9422-4e78c32953d7.html)>.



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