

A report on the Libertarian Party's National Headquarters
as prepared by
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(Willis)
11/26/93

1. Transition Report

A. Bridging the Gap Between Stuart Reges and Gene Cisewski

Stuart Reges was leaving the office of National Director on October 7, and Gene Cisewski was scheduled to arrive on about the same date. There was no time for a transition. Therefore, Stephen Dasbach asked me if I would go to Washington, DC for a couple of months to serve as a bridge between the outgoing and incoming Directors. I said that I would.

Stuart and I were to have only three weeks together and everybody agreed that that wasn't enough. But as some transition was better than no transition, we decided to move forward. Writing a procedure manual was added to my job description as a potential short term aid to the change-over, and as a definite long term benefit to future HQ managers.

B. Getting to know Stuart Reges

In our three weeks together I learned more from Stuart Reges about how to think like a manager than from all the management books I had ever read. His ideas added much to what my personal experience had already taught me.

Stuart impressed me. He was always in motion, always questioning and double checking, and always planning for what to do if things went wrong, which they always did. His resignation was a great loss for the Party -- one we would do well to learn from.

Stuart and I tried valiantly to stuff my head full of all the required National Director knowledge, but it was too much in too short a time. Still, I learned a great deal which has aided me in my work since then, and I also arrived at a few conclusions which I will share later in this report.

During this phase there was no time to write procedures; only time for scribbled notes, and then on to the next task. We were always behind schedule. The computer network kept crashing, the laser printer broke, and everything that could go wrong did go wrong. We just laughed and kept on plugging. Morale was good.

C. Gene Cisewski arrives

Gene came into the office for his first day of work on Stuart's last day -- October 7. Gene had spent the previous

two days driving from Wisconsin to DC, but he seemed refreshed and ready to go.

I, by comparison, was a little ragged. I had been sleeping on a flabby futon with my feet hanging off onto the dirty hard wood floors and taking showers in cold water (the only option available at our HQ). I was also working 70 to 80 hour weeks and had only occasionally managed to take a few hours off to see a movie or catch up on sleep. In addition, there was no TV available and no newspaper. I had practically forgotten the rest of the planet and had absorbed myself in the little world of the LP headquarters.

During this period even Stuart put in extra hours, despite his previous claim that he would only work 34 hours a week (which was all he was being paid for). But on the night of October 7 we all knew that we would have to work even longer hours than usual.

Why? Because John Famularo and I were going to debrief Stuart. It was our last chance to learn where all the landmines were buried. The process began at 3:00 in the afternoon. Gene participated for a little while, but his eyes quickly glazed over and I kept having to bring him back to attention, saying: "Did you get that Gene? Do you have any questions about what Stuart just said?" Gene would wake-up and lean forward for a few minutes, listening to the debriefing, but before long he was "somewhere else" again.

At about 6PM Gene left, but John and Stuart and I kept going, racing against the clock until 1:30 or 2:00 in the morning. Stuart didn't have to put in that extra effort and John certainly didn't. But I did and Gene did. It was our responsibility. Gene didn't seem to realize that.

This was the second serious Gene-problem that had surfaced in the last week. The first occurred before his arrival when we received a batch of Gene's writing samples from CUNA Mutual. I had to resist looking at these samples very closely because I had already seen two of Gene's previous attempts at writing LP fundraising letters. They had been bad and I was afraid these would be bad too. I just gave the letters to Bill Winter and hoped for the best.

Bill read them and showed them to Stuart and they both agreed that they were horrible -- embarrassing even. I had to look then, and because I looked I had to agree. They were embarrassing. (How a major corporation could have used them was beyond me, though I subsequently developed a few theories about this.)

Later that day Gene's third attempt at writing an LP fundraising letter came through on the fax. It too was horrible -- too embarrassing to mail, and too far wrong to

fix. Bill Winter captured Gene's strange writing style in one clever phrase: Japanese English. If you can remember when Japanese manufacturers first started translating their product manuals into English then you'll have a good idea of the style. The strategic ideas in the letters were just as bad or worse.

Alas, I had just written a fundraising letter of my own praising Gene's talents and now I knew that we couldn't send it. Steve Dasbach and Sharon Ayres were consulted and they agreed. I had written the letter thinking it was true, but now we knew that it wasn't.

Suddenly we went from being ahead of schedule with our fundraising mailings to being seriously behind schedule. It was at this point that Bill Winter conceived the Project Healthy Choice letter. He wrote a great first draft in four hours and over the next two days Bill and Stuart and I nit-picked it until it was ready to go to the printer. Bill's letter saved the day -- it may even set a new record.

D. Trying to make a few points

By the time Gene arrived it was clear to me that his salvation would have to come from his ability to manage the office (if it was to come at all). Therefore, I made every effort to steer our attention away from development and toward the hard task of learning how to run the office.

I was pleased to report to the Executive Committee that Gene was learning his tasks quickly and well, but unfortunately there continued to be problems relating to his deficient areas. Gene's attention turned again and again to development, which created many personal difficulties for me. I tried to avoid the subject because I didn't want to hurt his feelings, but it wasn't always possible. Steve Dasbach intervened and told him where to focus his attention, but Gene didn't get the point. Then I too had a firm discussion with Gene, and once again he didn't seem to understand. He kept producing letters and making development suggestions that were laughably bad.

By this point our working relationship had become so difficult that I tried to focus on the procedure manual, avoiding Gene as much as I could while still getting the job done. It didn't matter. The conflict just shifted from me and Gene to Gene and Bill.

Then other problems moved to the fore. Gene thought the HQ could be straightened out in a couple of weeks if we just put our minds to it. He didn't seem to notice the inhuman hours I was working in a futile attempt to keep all of my many balls in the air -- learning new tasks, teaching those I already knew, writing the procedure manual, keeping

projects moving. Meanwhile, the computer network was crashing constantly and Gene had taken over the Director's work station (leaving me no place to work) despite my specific request that he do so only on those occasions when I had something new to teach him. I had one month in which to train him and finish the procedure manual, and I had to balance those considerations with the simultaneous need to get the work done. To make that happen I needed his complete cooperation with my transition program. I didn't get it. There was no way to get through to him short of a fight, and even when I told him something in the firmest and clearest possible fashion, it had little or no effect.

Meanwhile, Steve Dasbach and Bill Winter were having similar communications problems with Gene. Gene just didn't get it. He was oblivious to what was going on around him, to what people were telling him, and to the nature of the beast that he would have to tame as National Director. He begrudged his occasional ten hour days and seemed to take little note of the fact that I was working twelve hours or more almost every day -- though I made a point of telling him about it constantly. He must have thought I was a real sour puss.

Amazingly, Gene was seriously looking forward to working straight 40 hour weeks in the near future. He always took every weekend off except when he had a call scheduled with the Chair or the Executive Committee, and even these he grumbled about. Meanwhile, I was wondering if I would ever have another day off in this lifetime.

Something had to give, and it did.

E. Aftermath

Our house could not remain divided. Either the Executive Committee and the staff would have to go, or Gene would. Gene did.

Afterwards, I was left with piles of paper and a choking backlog of work. The combination of the transition, the procedure manual, and "the piece that didn't fit the machine," had made the un-doable job that broke Stuart Reges, even harder. And yours truly was standing amidst the rubble.

I must admit that I started to crack a little bit. Steve Dasbach and Hugh Butler can testify that I wasn't a very pleasant person. Things were so bad that when Kiana and I finally took the time to go grocery shopping we actually had to abandon a full cart in the middle of Safeway: the checkout lines had grown too long and I couldn't take the time to wait. I had to get back to work

and Kiana had to come with me -- she couldn't go home by herself in the dark in that neighborhood.

It was at this point that a four-day hold on funds that I hadn't known about reared its head -- our bank account was overdrawn. I also discovered that accounting mistakes made by someone (either me or Gene), and/or our ignorance of DacEasy, were making it impossible to reconcile our records with those of the bank. Fortunately, the discrepancy was in our favor.

Money was flowing in and I got the overdraft waved (because we really had several thousand dollars in the bank if you didn't count the hold). Careful management of our funds soon put our available balance back in the black, and the Executive Committee agreed that I could hire a DacEasy expert to straighten out the accounting.

With things stabilized, I then set about the hard task of discerning how a final cure might be achieved.

F. Why Director's fail -- diagnosis and prescription

Things were a mess. Could I un-mess them?

Maybe so, but first the problem had to be defined, and to do that I had to find out what was in those piles of paper on Gene's desk, and in those files in the Director's drawers. I couldn't get control of the office until I knew where everything was. So I sorted and filed and made notes and I paid close attention to how long it took to do certain things and how often things went wrong, and by doing this I came to a conclusion that should have been obvious to all of us a long time ago:

The Director's job, as currently structured, is impossible.

Think about our long list of past National Directors:

- * Eric O'Keefe was fired. Why? Was he incompetent? It's my understanding that he's worth quite a bit of money today. Funny that he got so competent all of a sudden, right after he left us.
- * Honey Lanham was fired too, and I know she wasn't incompetent. She was just burned out.
- * Then the job burned me out too. I offered my resignation, was talked out of it, and ended up sick for the better part of two years.
- * Terry Mitchell didn't make it either.

- * Neither did Kirk McKee.
- * Paul Jacob quit too, and now he's doing the same kind of work he did for the LP, and being paid a tidy sum for it too. Isn't it amazing how smart people get when they stop working for the LP?
- * Nick Dunbar made it through four grueling years on sheer determination, but it can't really be said that he licked the job either. He left these two cartoon's in the Director's office to remind his successors what he thought of the job.

(place cartoons here)

Do you think he'll feel quite the same way when he has a private sector job?

- * Stuart Reges was a proven manager. But this job was causing him to lose sleep and his health was failing. Was Stuart incompetent? I don't think so.

We should pay close attention to the accumulated evidence. We've had some pretty good people as National Director, but they have all failed. And because they have all failed the Party has also failed, and here we are -- still small after all these years.

There are two prevailing symptoms by which we can come to better understand our 23 year malaise:

- 1) Our office is poorly staffed and equipped.
- 2) The work load increases constantly, without regard to problem number one.

A clear identification of these two symptoms leads us, like a well aimed arrow, straight to the heart of the disease itself -- an imbalance between authority and responsibility.

The LNC can create new work (new mandates) for the office without providing increased staffing. If the staff resists the extra burden then they risk being fired, with all of the attendant problems: loss of reputation, loss of income, and loss of health insurance, as well as the disruption that comes when the staffer has to pack up and move back to his or her original home.

There are no comparable risks for LNC members.

The entire structure of authority and responsibility, and the incentives and disincentives that result from that structure, create a profound but perverse tendency for the

National Director to say yes to things that are positively bad for him or her.

Thus we have the phenomenon of a Stuart Reges who says again and again, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can," in the most confident voice, until finally he screams at the top of that voice: "No I can't!"

Of course, this only tells part of the story -- I'm quite sure that Stuart, being a human being, gave a great many hints that he was cracking, and he may even have pled for mercy on occasion, without it being much noticed. But I'm also certain that he turned down help when it was offered, because that's the way the incentives work -- you always want to impress your bosses, but with so many bosses your reputation lives and dies in the rumour mill. You don't want anyone to start saying you're a weenie, so you say yes to all the burdens and sometimes you even say no to the help.

I recently learned that for several months John Famularo had wanted to tell the Executive Committee that the job was too big for Stuart (or anyone) to manage. Stuart refused.

Now it should be clear from what I am saying that we are all in this together. I am not implying that our Directors have been faultless and the Area Managers and LNC members malicious. Far from it. Some of my best friends are Area managers. And besides, I too have been an LNC member, and I too have imposed new burdens on the HQ without providing the resources required for their execution.

But if I, with all of my direct and painful experience, could so easily have imposed new burdens on the HQ, then what brake is there for those who have never been LP staffers, or who have never worked for any other politically managed organization?

Ending our pattern of failure requires a supreme act of will -- both good will and volitional will -- on all our parts.

I believe that Stephen Dasbach, Karen Allard, John Famularo, Hugh Butler, Sharon Ayres and Tamara Clark understand the problem, and I want to thank each of them for all that they have done in recent weeks to ease my burden. And I especially want to thank Stephen Dasbach for his patience and concern.

But it will take even more, from all of us, if we are to vanquish this beast. It will take a new "internal culture" as well as the development of some new habits. The Chair can lead in this, but it will only work if the rest of

us are committed and participate. If not, then there will be more failed National Directors and more years of mediocrity. Specifically, we must:

- 1) Lay to rest the idea that "Directors should speak at meetings only when spoken to." No other organization works the way ours has. Quite the contrary. Executive Directors usually do most of the proposing and the Board passes judgement on those proposals. As a positive step in the direction of other successful organizations, our National Director must at least be allowed to participate in the discussions, as there is NOTHING that the LNC will ever decide for which the Director will not be held personally responsible -- with his or her reputation, livelihood, and personal well being at stake.
- 2) We must prepare our new ventures more carefully. We must anticipate the costs not only monetarily, but also in staff time. We must test our assumptions. We must write down procedures in advance and then see if they work. Wherever possible we should capitalize our projects and define success or failure before we begin. We must develop an ethos of testing and of caution and careful preparation. Ask the Director if he or she thinks the staff can do something, but don't necessarily take his or her word for it. FIND OUT FOR YOURSELF, BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE PROJECT! TEST IT! DO A TRIAL RUN!
- 3) We must come to view each other more as partners, and less as owners versus employees. I too am a Libertarian. I too care. I too have contributed. And I too have been a volunteer. Indeed, I have accomplished more and risked more than most Libertarians. I do not become a slave just because I cease to be a volunteer. Bill Winter has commented on how surprised he was to find himself being talked to as if he were the enemy, by the very people who hired him! No Libertarian employee should ever have to feel that way. Each of us has taken a heavy risk to work for the Party we love. Having Libertarian employment on one's resume isn't a help (believe me, I know!). If you want to keep good experienced people then you will need to treat them well. Treat them the way you would like to be treated.
- 4) Be careful when you try to help, because your help may actually hurt. Stuart was relieved of some of his burden when Bill Winter was hired, but this was done in a way that killed Stuart's interest in the job. All of the things that Stuart liked about his job were taken and given to Bill. Stuart didn't hold this against Bill, quite the contrary, he liked Bill very much and

was glad to have him in the office. But he did resent the fact that his interests weren't considered.

Likewise, if I were to do this job, I would want everyone to understand that my over-riding interest is development and membership prospecting. I am willing to work 70 and 80 hour weeks and eat most of my meals at my desk (as I have done) for only one reason:

I want to get things under control, start living a normal life, and spend the bulk of my time raising money and recruiting new members. I want to sleep at night and not worry about the job. Hell, I want to have pleasant dreams about the job.

But if I am not going to be allowed to do development then tell me now, because I won't want any of the long hours and the drudge work either. I won't want the job.

- 5) We must remember that not everything can be of equal priority. The Director has 251 items on his things to do list and he can only do what he can do. In the brief time it takes for you or I to conceive of a project, we can also imagine it done, but real people can't work as quickly as imaginations do. New projects will almost always mean more staff.
- 6) We need excess capacity in our staffing for the same reason that we need excess cash in the bank -- things always go wrong (Monday a hard disk crashed, and Wednesday the phone system started breaking down, and our cager was sick for two days, and if one of us gets the flu we'll need to hire temps, and our intern has cut back his hours so we're falling behind anyway) and there are always emergencies (Bill Winter had to fly to New Hampshire to mediate a dispute between the Party and the Legislative delegation). My point is this -- for the jobs we have to do today we don't have enough staff. And for the new jobs we envision for tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, we have no staff at all.
- 7) Finally, the Director must learn his or her limits early and state them often. I promise to do that if I become National Director. I am doing it now.

G. Current Status and Plans for Improvement

a) Physical plant and equipment

We bought a new work station and that stopped the network crashes. Then we lost one of the old work stations to a hard disk failure and one of our machines can't be used for address corrections, or much of anything else either.

We don't have enough phones for every office, so the staff spends a lot of time running from one room to another or upstairs or downstairs to take calls.

Our receptionist or Bill or me or someone has to stand at the FAX machine for long periods because it will only feed one sheet at a time. S-L-O-W-L-Y

Two of our keyboards have gone bad.

Our laser printer has gone down twice since I've been here. We've had other problems with the printer cue on the line printer, and you don't even want to hear about the ribbon problem we had.

The back door to the downstairs apartment won't stay shut even when it's locked. It has a barred gate in front of it so it's secure for the moment, and Kiana and I have barricaded the door with boxes.

The front door also pushed open when it was locked. I had a carpenter fix the jam.

All of the smoke alarms are disabled. Kiana will get them fixed (she's worked 40+ hours a week as a volunteer).

There hasn't been any procedure for backing up DacEasy. John and I have just solved that on a short term basis and will implement a long term fix soon.

Our "archives" were stacked in crumbling boxes in a fire trap downstairs. When CNN called and wanted information on our 1980 Presidential campaign we couldn't provide it because we couldn't get to the archives. In fact, we didn't even know if we had the stuff. I still can't find financial statements for past years, or 1099's for certain contractors. We also had hidden inventories of some items because they were stacked behind boxes of crap. We've had five or six special trash pick ups to take away mountains of junk, garbage, and obsolete items.

THE FIX:

Budget to refurbish equipment. Replace items as necessary, and always have more equipment than is needed on a daily basis. Buy the best. Cheap costs more in the long run.

Buy some fire proof file cabinets and treat our historical records with respect.

Give a lot of thought to the proposed move. Let's look before we leap. We don't want to move into a place and find

out it's too small a year from now, or not shaped right, or has some other problem.

b) The Staff

Hiring interns is a bad idea. Their schedules change too often and they leave too frequently. Just about the time we get them trained they're out the door. You can't schedule time critical tasks because you don't know if they'll show up. Those we've had here are very smart and hard working, but the LP isn't their top priority. We should replace them with real staff.

The Director's position is a bottleneck. He's a manager, a clerk, and an accountant all rolled into one, and he can't do any of these jobs well for trying to do all of them so-so. The clerical functions need to be devolved onto a clerk, and the accounting needs to be done by a bookkeeper.

We plan to replace our part-time and full-time intern and our campus contractor (Marti Stoner) with one full-time person, hopefully Jim Lewis. A guy like Jim would also be able to take some of the clerical load off the Director's back.

The next step, later in the year, would be to get someone to keep the books. Then the Director could really be a manager, improve the systems, and increase money and membership.

2. Who should the next National Director be?

It should be someone who wants to succeed and who is willing to state clearly what that success will require. I have stated some of those requirements here. I have also outlined my strategic and tactical views in a document called "The Campaign That Never Happened." If you haven't read it and would like to, I'd be happy to supply a copy.

The next National Director should have experience and a solid record of accomplishment. I'd stack my record against anybody's:

- * In 1982 I wrote a speech for an LP Congressional candidate that consistently brought both the candidate and his audiences to tears. The candidate was heavily recruited by the Republican Party on the basis of that speech.
- * In six months as Executive Director of the Libertarian Party of San Diego in 1983, I doubled membership, took the party's ranking from number eight in the state to number two, and built a monthly pledge program that paid back the cost of my employment many times over.
- * I worked for the Bergland campaign in 1984. When I was sent to troubleshoot the Oklahoma ballot drive we were only getting 250 signatures a day. I boosted that to 2,500 signatures on my very first day in the state. Later in the campaign I drafted my first fundraising letter. It pulled \$70,000, kept the campaign going, paid for TV ads, and allowed us to finish with a surplus. It is still the per capita record holder for LP Presidential appeals.
- * As Finance Director for the Libertarian Party of California I doubled, in just three months, a pledge program that it had taken Marshall Fritz over a year to build.
- * When I was asked to serve as National Director I quickly discovered a \$3,500 monthly operating deficit that no one had known about and corrected it. I also, with the help of Tom Radloff, made the computer system user friendly (according to the testimony of the local volunteers), and implemented a debt reduction plan that was three months ahead of schedule by the time I attended my first LNC meeting. I also drafted a fundraising letter that may still be the per capita record holder for non-Presidential appeals (\$27,000 raised out of 6,500 members), and ended our over-reliance on telemarketing. The constant phone calls

were disturbing our members. Instead, I began the modern practice of regular direct mail appeals.

- * I was the premier advocate of using direct mail prospecting to increase membership. I wrote and mailed the LP's first successful prospecting appeal. My letters have brought in thousands of new members over the years. I am by far the most successful membership recruiter in LP history.
- * I placed an early focus on building a pledge program to cover the LP's basic operating expenses, and many of our current pledgers were recruited through my work.
- * A strong case can be made that more positive media exposure was generated during my six month tenure as the head of the Marrou/Lord campaign, than in all of the previous LP Presidential campaigns combined.

When I learned that would-be Libertarian voters would have to ask for our ballot in the New Hampshire primary I placed the clear focus of that campaign on Dixville Notch. We used the tactic of repetition to win there, and Tonie Nathan, in her review of the New Hampshire campaign, made note of a letter I wrote to the citizens of Dixville Notch as a determining factor in our victory.

Nearly all aspects of the Marrou/Lord campaign were ahead of expectations during my time at the helm, including revenues.

- * I have also written numerous other successful fundraising and prospecting appeals for other organizations, including one signed by Charlton Heston for the California educational choice initiative (attached).

I have been a full-time Libertarian activist for eleven years. I have been National Director, a Presidential Campaign Manager, an LNC member, a state Chair, a local Chair, and everything in between. Few can match my years of service, and no one can match the depth and breadth of my experience, or my record of consistent success in the areas that matter most to us at this stage in our development -- fundraising and membership recruitment.

The next National Director should be someone exactly like me, but I will only do it if I see a commitment on the part of all LNC members to avoid the mistakes of the past, and to treat me as a full and respected partner in the work ahead. I must feel certain that the work environment is conducive to success, or I will accept no offer of employment, should it be made.