

Skywoman Roundtable: Political Organizing

Corinne Morse, Jordan Applewhite

12.13.22

Chris Newman's Opening Remarks - None of the moves we want to make in food sovereignty can exist if we don't have people in political seats who are supporting this work, taking positions of power, and making this legislation happen.

RESOURCES

- [Run for Something](#)
- [Emily's list](#)
- [Progressive Turnout Project](#)
- [National Council of Independent Living](#)
- BOOK: Politics Is for Power: How to Move Beyond Political Hobbyism, Take Action, and Make Real Change by Eitan Hersh
- [Action Network](#)
- [MiniVAN](#)
 - Mobile canvassing app
 - Local democratic committee will tell you ideal targets to hit. Gives you an interactive map.
- [ACTBLUE](#)
 - Fundraising platform for Democratic candidates
- [Democratic Victory Campaign Committee](#) (DVCC)

MINUTES

Corinne Morse is the State Representative for New Hampshire's Grafton 9 District

- Grafton 9 is made up of 3 small towns containing about 5-6,000 people in total, with the entire population of Grafton county being 90k people.
- New Hampshire is unique because their state house is made up of 400 representatives, making it the 3rd largest legislative body in the world after the UK parliament & US congress.
- Corinne stumbled upon Skywoman through Sylvanaqua Farm's Tiktok where owner and operator, Chris Newman, was speaking about the importance of getting involved in local politics. After Corinne and her husband spent some time contemplating how to best take care of their neighbors, the turnover of Roe V Wade was her final push to get more involved in the local legislature. She reached out to the State Rep of 2 years prior and they connected Corinne with local democratic organizations who were more than willing to help her get started. All of this after only living in New Hampshire for 4 years.
- Corinne approached the process thinking she would just knock doors for whoever was running for Grafton 9 representative but when nobody else stepped forward to run as a Democrat she stepped in to run herself.
- Corinne has always been involved in pushing for local legislature by calling her state representatives, sending letters etc. but this was her first time running for a seat, and now holding office.

- Being successful in this race begins with starting small. Corinne started in her local town as a member of the [Parent Teach Association](#) (PTA) and an alternate member on the planning board. Once a vacancy opened up she was appointed and will be running again in March.
 - Corinne's son receives services at his local public school for Autism support which have been life changing for her family. However, NH is pushing for a voucher system that will privatize schools, taking away the public school services her family and son depend on. Protecting children like hers, or those who are different for other reasons, is a huge priority. It's surprising how just being on school PTA can have a huge impact.
- Through her recent office seat, Corinne is eligible to be on the county executive council where budgeting & decisions for the county are made. Having that power at a local level means conversations can be had on handling crime, food safety, power distribution and other large issues that may often be swept under the radar but really keep the town running.
- Corinne sees a clear opportunity to protect the most vulnerable groups in her community. In NH, this means mitigating attacks on LGBTQ students. Through knocking doors & campaigning, local politicians can have honest conversations with their neighbors about how to address absurdities in the community. Some of these people are having a conversation with the opposite party for the first time ever, or in a long time, but they are able to recognize we are all just humans trying to protect people in the community who need support.
 - Lifelong conservatives are happy to go out and support Corinne just because they knew who she was within her local community
 - Many folks are on the fence about voting for a Democrat and some even thought Corinne was going to the white house to work w/ Joe Biden. It's about breaking down these barriers, educating, and reminding people you're just their neighbor. Cracking those shells through deep conversation is crucial.
- Corinne really pushes for rural Democrats to run for office. Just because she is a liberal person running as a Dem doesn't mean she is this "Washington DC barbie" that people envision.
- Precursors for representation - NH requires you obtain 15 signatures or you pay \$2 to get onto the ballot. To start the petition, start by going to the places you know the most people - kids in school? Go to PTA meetings and talk to teachers. Connected to *any* community groups? One signature will snowball to a ton of support. Talk to town administrators, police departments, fire stations.
- [Democratic Victory Campaign Committee](#) (DVCC) helped w/ financial support, putting lists together for door knocking, provided mentorships. Most locations should have something similar.
- Time commitment:
 - Running - intense, every weekend out knocking doors to get people when they're home. All the time you want to be home w/ your own family is when you need to be out knocking doors. As a mother, this meant Corinne was missing an entire

season of soccer practice for her daughter, family BBQs etc. but she justified the couple of months, one summer every 2 years (if you continue to run of course).

- Elected - time commitment slows down. You can either (i) only show up when you have to be there for voting or other committee deliverables or you can (ii) try to climb the ladder by being very involved, attending committee meetings that get together really frequently and do a lot of work. But at the least, bare minimum it's likely a once per month commitment.
- Town government is a lot less of a time commitment than state government.
- Being on the select board is huge for decision making and you get paid more!
- Corinne's campaign messaging and platforms remained consistent throughout. Platforms include: (I) Town Lake Association (drinking water comes from here) to make sure they're mitigating bacteria & blooms. (II) Talking about reproductive healthcare. (III) Public schools. People don't want you to change your platform and prefer you just stick to what you believe in. Respect from Republicans is also more likely because although they might disagree with the platform, they respect your firmness to remaining consistent on that topic.
 - One of her focal points: Expanding broadband and pursuing solar power/community power to lower energy costs. When your community knows that's the type of work you're doing, that's how you gain their support to move forward.
- Jane from the Skywoman community mentioned a lack of confidence in policy & turning community needs into agenda items. Corinne can relate because she knows what she believes in and has done some minor research but now she's navigating how to you put it into a bill once you actually win an office seat. She's still learning but has really great mentors and folks who know the process and are ready to help. There is one rep specifically who is now on her 22nd term (44 years) that is instrumental in walking Corinne through these processes.
 - Mentors - pick and choose who is the best fit for you, Corinne had about 4-5 people available
 - Local town chair for Democrat party
 - DVCC provided mentors (out in sidelines and there to pull a list or talk through frustrations)
 - Run for Something offered mentors
- Corruption definitely exists in local politics and there is sometimes a push to get folks elected for the wrong reasons, this can get very nasty. But don't be discouraged! If you can make one connection, you're in and can continue pushing into more groups and slowly connecting with more people.
- Corrine initially focused on voters she knew in town were republican voters and asked them to spread the word about her. When knocking on doors, she could tell in her rural areas how to approach specific people. If people were active Trump supporters or anti Biden she just didn't knock that door. But if you choose to, you can go at it as "Hi, I'm your neighbor" rather than "I'm a Democrat running for office"
 - Method for which doors to knock: Used a site to see how many people voted in the last 6 elections and started with the strongest dems who voted all 6 times.

They're likely nice and supportive and it's a good way to get a feel for knocking doors.

- Mostly focuses on face-to-face interactions because it's most effective rather than written communications. Social media wasn't as effective as it could've been, most folks only use the town FB page. Twitter was awesome to get to know other candidates and learn about active issues and know what to talk to people about
- Both Corinne and Jordan (below) raised \$5-6,000. Money went towards signs, cards and literature to give to people. Sent out 2 pieces of mail (2 orgs supported as well).
- Biggest lessons learned:
 - There were so many people who wanted to volunteer and support during her campaign but Corinne was afraid to ask and didn't know how to articulate what she truly needed. In the future she would lean on these folks in a more effective way.
 - If you want to get involved, just start making connections *now*. By the time that year rolls around that you wish to run you will have established yourself.
 - Fundraise early on so you can get the materials you need and just get out there.

Jordan Applewhite - Grafton 1 District, 6 towns, 5k voters

- The seed to get involved in local politics was planted after Jordan read the book "Politics is for Power" by Eitan Hersh where he distinguishes between obsessive news watching & rage tweeting (political hobbyism) and how to actually do politics by acquiring power.
- How did they get started? Jordan reached out to their local community to support on polling day & met a bunch of folks, including those who maintain voter roles. The town wanted someone young to train and quickly appointed Jordan as an assistant and a full fledged supervisor. Eventually they'll have to run for the position more formally but it really came down to showing up and asking "what do you need" for them to lean on Jordan. Besides, there is usually more work to do than people to do it.
- Even if there are incumbents making their way for those positions, support their campaign & get involved. Awesome way to build good will, connections & meet neighbors.
- Jordan got started by finding a local democratic committee and just putting oneself out there. Their district was having a redistricting year and because of this there was an extra seat open so they ran. The secret ingredient is just showing up, this will really get your foot in the door.
- Jordan started getting invitations to candidate trainings, policy programs and education opportunities.
- The more local you get the more practical the government gets because the federal side is so hyper polarized. There is a movement towards hyper partisan polarization - where for example, library trustees may have been a boring position to hold in the past but now there are national movements to have people capture these low hanging positions to band books w/ LGBTQ themes. People just aren't paying attention and think these positions aren't powerful. It's just as important, if not more, to pay attention to these local levers of power in comparison to federal politics.

- There are institutions ready to support you @ every level in your local town you just have to take the first step. A lot of it is about effort, knocking doors, having individual conversations. That's the work, and where healing in our country is going to happen. It's about humanizing each other and realizing we are not each other's enemy.
- When they started the campaign six months ago they were much more of a firebrand but Jordan quickly learned how to listen empathetically with people you may disagree with. Being able to hold space for folks is important - maybe you're the first person Trans they've had a conversation with. You are working to remove the barriers that maybe the media or society is portraying of Democrats, or Trans folks, or whomever you identify with. People have initial reactions against democrats or folks of their opposite party but that's likely rooted in trauma or hardship & just speaking with them is a form of healing.
- Jordan pointed out that really progressive folks are running for school board in a decidedly red town and they are winning! Not because they're trying to run a hyper partisan campaign, but because they're just trying to do good governance. They are running good, empathetic campaigns focusing on their neighbors. There will always be the fighting forces of gerrymandering but you just have to go after it and make yourself heard.
- Platform: Clean energy and housing. Jordan doesn't have kids so they are less plugged into how bad public school funding is, but through knocking door they were able to get feedback, realize the seriousness of this issue, and learn ways that the local government can work better for folks with children in public schools. KNoocking doors was an amazing way to reveal Jordan's blind spots.
- Exhausted by the blame game of partisan campaigns, Jordan hopes to focus less on the issues themselves and more on the overall vibe and needs of the people they hope to serve.
- Younger people don't always have the most heartwarming impression of the Democratic party, but the more local you get it's likely just your neighbors doing the work to support fellow neighbors.
- Biggest lessons learned:
 - A lot of races are won or lost by the margins (under 2%) & there's no one button you can press that will make you win. Jordan knocked 1,000 doors, even if they knocked more doesn't guarantee a victory.
 - Look @ candidates who won and identify what their characteristics are. In their case, the people who won live in the largest populated towns so they naturally drew in more votes.
 - Jordan is really interested in recruiting people who can do better than them.
 - Future: enlist more help, knock twice as many doors
 - You can build hundreds of connections or even dozens that will really make or break your win/loss (someone in Corinne's district lost by 4 votes which flipped the seat because she didn't spend enough time in typically Democratic districts and those folks just didn't know her well enough to vote)
 - Don't be afraid to get personal and don't hide behind issues. People want to know who you are and your story, talk about your struggles or your dreams.

- Minivan App - your local Dem committee can define a list of voters based on your criteria and define which houses are most effective to hit for knocking doors. The interactive map has different doors marked and you can plan your route and hit the door already knowing their name, age, and party position. You can even record the results of the conversations in real time.
- Jordan didn't have any strategy in place for targeting unregistered voters. Their alpha voter list doesn't even include unregistered voters so you would have to determine which doors to knock based on process of elimination for folks that aren't on the list, it's a huge time commitment.
- Instead, Jordan would knock doors of independents who might not vote unless someone shows up & talks to them. Contact w/ legislatures is the single most important thing for getting people to show up and vote.
- Social media - Create an Act Blue and post about your campaign and issues you care about - link the Act Blue and people will donate to your cause. IF you can get outside organizations interested in your district and campaign people will write you checks bc they care about Dems having control of the state house. It helps around the margins but social media will not win you the election.
 - A lot of local politicians will directly tweet about policy, which groups they work with through tagging, and how they're getting the work done.
- County democrats and regional democrats both gave Jordan \$1000. At the start of the campaign, apply for county endorsements - take some time to develop answers to the prompts, it helps you generate your talking points. They'll give you \$250-\$1000. These groups are really good at fundraising for elections and help lift some weight off.

Chris - Shocked to find out that his own county had been solidly blue until the Obama administration because you would never think people reliably voted for Democrats in his area. One local guy who worked on Chris's house was a Trumper... until they spoke for 30 minutes and realized Chris is a guy who kills things for a living, again breaking down Democrat stereotypes. Conservatives can warm up to a "liberal agenda" that the media portrays as 50/50 issues which are really more like 80/20 issues, the 20% side just has a bigger megaphone and a lot of money backing them.

There's no "how to" guide for getting involved in politics. Civics is dead in public education. Chris would like to create a political class of people to know "this is how you get involved" - essentially a roadmap for how to get to different waypoints, which office seats to run for etc.

For Chris, it's shocking how much gets done at the local level. Emma from Moon Valley Farm recently shared how many grants can be applied for by local government organizations - tens of thousands of millions of dollars that can be put towards any ag venture as long as your gov agency applies. These local govts are likely run by 3 people, voted for by 500 people, the amount of leverage is huge!

Next Steps

Chris hopes to develop a [Skywoman Board](#) with Jordan, Corinne and other political organizers to build a walk through on how folks can go from zero to a state delegate seat in their own regions.