

To: NRSC Senior Staff
From: Ward Baker
Date: September 22, 2015
Re: Observations on Donald Trump and 2016

The place is Cleveland, Ohio. The date is July 21, 2016 and *Donald Trump has just accepted the nomination of the Republican Party to be its nominee for President of the United States.*

Not since liberal Republican businessman Wendell Willkie won the GOP nomination in 1940, had another dark horse candidate stood as its nominee for President.

And, Willkie and Trump have a lot in common. Both were seen as fresh-faced outsiders. Each had the backing or received the promotion of major news media outlets, and both we're outside of the established political order.

Willkie would go on to lose to wartime President Franklin Roosevelt, but this time it's harder to predict an outcome because of the volatility of the electorate. Trump has risen because voters see him as authentic, independent, direct, firm, --- *and believe he can't be bought.* These are the same character traits our candidates should be advancing in 2016. *That's Trump lesson #1.*

We should prepare for 2016, by understanding the environment and recognizing the Trump phenomenon.

The following are a series of recommendations to consider if Donald Trump is the GOP nominee in 2016:

- **Trump is a Misguided Missile.** Let's face facts. Trump says what's on his mind and that's a problem. Our candidates will have to spend full time defending him or condemning him if that continues. And, that's a place we never, ever want to be. It is certain that all GOP candidates will be tied in some way to our nominee, but we need not be tied to him so closely that we have to engage in permanent cleanup or distancing maneuvers.
- **Run Your Own Race.** You're running for the U.S. Senate so focus on that. Don't get drawn into every Trump statement and every Trump dust-up. Keep the focus on your own campaign and the voters back home.
- **Show your Independence.** As we know, Trump is subject to farcical fits. You can still obey the "run your own campaign" edict, while still taking Trump to task on outrageous statements where the media won't let you off the hook. Choose opportunities to take the moral high ground while exerting your independence.
- **Remember the Basics.** Every campaign is about telling voters who you are, what you want to do, and why you're the best choice for the job. Turn your biography into a compelling narrative that shows you're one of them. Promote a new vision (what you want to do) and own the future. Stake out new issue turf or reframe issues so it has a new look to it. This allows you to separate from the national debate, promote issues you care about in a new manner, and it's harder for opponents to knock since you're offering a future vision.
- **Change the Look.** It's time to change the way you and your campaign are presented. Lose the suit and visit

people in their homes and places of work. Hold sessions where you listen to people and capture audio and video of them discussing their real world problems.

People talk about *problems*, **not issues**. So, focus on the problems and offer your solutions. Avoid Washington-speak (legislation, bills, insider talk) in favor of Main Street common sense.

And, tell your communications and media teams to up the vibe and change the look. Voters are on to you when you do the standard walk and talk through a business, school, or factory. Try a new look and have business owners, constituents, family members, and workers talk about you. Have them talk about a problem you solved, a solution you came up with, or the life-changing moment you delivered on. *Feature them in your issue phase while you assume the role of a citizen-servant.* This also protects you from opposition attacks since real world people are talking about real world things you did for them. How can someone challenge that?

To accomplish the above, each campaign must line up the citizen narrators or storytellers now. Review your constituent files and find the old letters thanking you for solving a problem. Next, get permission to use their story in your campaign. Vet each person so they can handle the scrutiny. Populate your web content with stories instead of typical issue jargon. Instead of a webpage heading that says "JOBS" feature a working person talking about the importance of having a job, getting a better job, or working one job instead of two to make ends meet. Then, have them talk about your first job, the lessons you learned, and why better jobs at higher wages can make all

the difference for our working families. When you change the look of your campaign, you distance yourself from the national narrative and the Trump entertainment.

➤ **Special Note:** Consider doing some of the jobs the workers do in the machine shops, small businesses, and factories you visit. Have the employee show you what they do and then try to do it. This changes the visual narrative so it's more personal and engaging.

➤ **Understand the Changing Environment and Recalibrate Now.** The Trump phenomenon exists because Washington politicians promise change, but don't deliver. *Your job is to deliver.*

In the past two cycles it was easy to say, "Washington's broken" but in 2016, you need to demonstrate that you'll rip up the rotten roots and begin anew. To get on the reformist wave, advance clear-cut reforms that change the way Washington works. The best way to do this is to highlight reforms that you have previously advanced, or discuss reforms that are working in your state. You can also feature stories of reformers who have changed things for the better. This gives people hope, and it shows you offering a positive future vision.

> **Special Note:** Consider visuals that communicate change and reform. Feature candidates working on an old engine and note how sometimes you have to do a complete overhaul to get things working. Consider featuring a candidate in a field ripping up a rotten tree stump so the field can be cleared and planting can be done. Have a constituent or citizen talking about the candidate cleaning up the mess in Washington as the

candidate participates in a street cleaning & beautification campaign.

Post a reform tab on your website and feature stories of real world reforms that can change Washington. Be sure to feature reformers in your videos, on your YouTube channel, and in social media. Promote tweets that push reforms or condemn Washington's dysfunction. The time to build the case against Washington (even if you are part of it) is now, not in the final three months of the election.

Finally, call on citizens to post their own reform recommendations and then select the best of the lot. This "bottom up" method allows you to say that the reforms are from regular citizens. Post the best ideas, promote discussions on your social platforms, and discuss them on your YouTube channel, talk radio, podcasts, and TV appearances.

➤ **Special Note:** Always bring the campaign back home to real people and their daily struggle. The Trump show may be going on, but back home our families are in a fight for their livelihoods. Keep your narrative on them, not the national scene. Tell stories of citizens overcoming obstacles and succeeding. Sell optimism. Promote hope. Story-based messaging allows you to plough new ground and own the field.

➤ **Trump Can Hit the Right Chord.** We may not like it, but Trump has connected with voters on issues like trade with China and America's broken borders. When Trump was criticized on building a wall to stop immigration, he noted how Israel successfully built walls that were cost effective and did the job. Trump will continue to advance

those messages, but you don't have to go along with his more extreme positioning. Instead, you should stake out turf in the same issue zone and offer your own ideas.

Target China on industrial espionage. Hit China on its cyber war against the U.S. government. Focus on China breaking existing trade rules and using Chinese government intervention to create an unfair advantage.

On immigration, select areas where reform can be done and should be done. One example is better tracking of those who violate their tourist visa. Governor Christie recently noted that 40% of those in our country illegally overstayed their visas. This is a highly correctable matter and a reform that should be promoted. Select some commonsense and doable reforms.

- **Trump and Women.** Houston, we have a problem: Donald Trump has said some wacky things about women. Candidates shouldn't go near this ground other than to say that your wife or daughter is offended by what Trump said. We do not want to reengage the "war on women" fight so isolate Trump on this issue by offering a quick condemnation of it.
- **Trump Rises Because People Understand Him.** Trump is saying that the Emperor has no clothes and he challenges our politically correct times. Our candidates shouldn't miss this point. Don't insult key voter cohorts by ignoring that America has significant problems and that Trump is offering some basic solutions. Understand the populist points Trump makes and ride that wave.

- **We Can't Afford to Depress the GOP Vote.** Spending full time attacking our own nominee will ensure that the GOP vote is depressed. That will only serve to topple GOP candidates at every level. Maintain the right amount of independence, but avoid piling on the nominee.
- **Covering the Trump Bet.** Conventional wisdom has counted Trump out on several occasions. But, Trump continues to rise and the criticisms seem to make him stronger. Trump has been gaining Democrat adherents and he's solidifying GOP cohorts who feel they've been totally ignored by the Washington Ruling Class. If the environment aligns properly, Trump could win. It's not a bet most would place now, but it could happen. That's why it's important for our candidates to run their own races, limit the Trump criticisms (other than obvious free kicks), and grab onto the best elements of the anti-Washington populist agenda.

This memo is written under the assumption that Donald Trump wins the nomination. We don't have a crystal ball, but in 1940, few were predicting that an Indiana businessman with New York connections would win the Republican nomination for President of the United States.