

Fellow Democrats,

Over the last few weeks, people who I trust, respect, and admire have asked me to consider putting my name forward to be your next Iowa Democratic Party Chair. I am continuing to explore that possibility. Many of you have heard from me and I intend to reach out to all of you in the coming days.

To be very honest with you, serving as IDP Chair has never been an ambition of mine, but I care deeply about the success of Iowa Democrats. As a teacher, a farmer, a state senator, LG and congressional candidate, I have seen time and time again how the policies our leaders implement affect every day Iowans. **My focus is squarely on helping our party begin winning elections again.**

With that focus on winning in mind, I have worked to put together a series of proposals on the governance of our party and structure of staff that will put IDP's focus squarely on supporting our elected leaders and candidates for office. I am sharing the vision document of my "Mandate for Change" plan with you today. If I choose to go forward as your Chair, **I want to be very clear about what I intend to do and the processes I want to begin on day one.** I do not want to offer vague wishy-washy promises to earn your support and then have hard feelings when we misunderstood our promises to one another. That's why I am giving you this presentation in writing.

As the current Clinton County Chair, I do want to thank all of you for stepping up and being involved. It is a great deal of work to be involved in the Party between families, jobs, and all the challenges of day-to-day life. I am amazed by your commitment to our party's success and look forward to continuing to talk to you about how we can win in Iowa.

Sincerely,

Rita Hart  
Clinton County Party Chair and Former State Senator

## **Principles and Overview of the “Mandate for Change” Vision**

- 1) The mission of the Iowa Democratic Party is to re-elect Democratic officeholders and elect Democratic candidates to office.**
- 2) We cannot fix everything in one two-year cycle. We need to be realistic about what can be achieved in two-year and four-year time frames.**
- 3) When we add new positions or new responsibilities to IDP, we must have an answer for the question: “How will it be funded?”**
- 4) Nothing else matters in structure if we do not have the correct model for fundraising because we will not have the money to do it** (covered in detail in “Finance” section).
- 5) Most of the Chair’s time will be spent fundraising so staff can execute the program. This includes call time to individual donors, but also building a Finance Committee to help raise across the state.**
- 6) The brand of an “Iowa Democrat” comes from a much wider mosaic of people and groups than just press releases from the “Iowa Democratic Party.” The party’s most useful role to impact the party’s brand is serving as a megaphone for its leaders and as a disseminator of best practices and data-driven messaging between leaders, allies, and partners** (covered in detail in “Communications” section).
- 7) Counties that voted for Barack Obama twice and Donald Trump twice need to be prioritized in party-building efforts**
- 8) It is better for organizers to do “deep” organizing work in smaller turfs than assign “broad” organizing of 20-county turfs but less ability to focus on specific projects. Each organizer should also have an individualized plan, not just a top-down cookie cutter approach as long the number of organizers remains manageable.** (covered in detail in “Organizing” section)
- 9) All county parties that want it should have access to tools, training, and guidance from an organizing staffer to do their own organizing work in their communities.** (covered in detail in “Organizing” section)
- 10) The Caucus-to-Convention process this year will remain in flux for a while. This document does not directly address the Caucuses because I do not want to pre-judge a fluid process.**

## Proposed staff structure for IDP and Budget

This staffing structure is based on three fundamental assumptions:

- 1) The mission of the Democratic Party is to re-elect Democratic officeholders and elect Democratic candidates to office.
- 2) The first constraint on any plan is “How will it be funded?”
- 3) The second constraint on any plan is “What can actually be achieved on a two and four-year timeline?”

Each position is designed to help Democrats win and recognizes that IDP cannot do everything at once. The job descriptions included are designed to be flexible and objective based, rather than a list of discrete projects. The job description is a North Star for all projects that can be referred back to as needed, not a daily to-do list.

I have also included initial thoughts on funding each position. Some of these roles need to exist because IDP has certain responsibilities that must be met. These roles are labeled “Core IDP” and should be considered the base of any budget that needs to be built. The second group of positions is labeled “Program.” These roles are beyond the basic operating role of IDP and new funding will need to be secured working with elected officials and allies. Finally, I have labeled the funding for the Data Department “TBD” because this past cycle the Data Director position was funded through grant money designed to increase data literacy in state parties. It’s likely that money will be available again, but when and for what duration is up in the air.

*Role: Iowa Democratic Party Chair*

*Funding source: Core IDP*

*Estimated salary: \$100,000*

The Chair of IDP is the leader and CEO of the party. This should not be confused with being the leader of “Iowa Democrats.” The job of the Chair is to run an effective organization that helps Democratic candidates win, not answer for (or to) the 602,019 registered Democrats in the state of Iowa.

The Chair sets the direction of the organization and then tasks the senior leadership with implementing that direction. The Chair has two primary tasks on a day-in day-out basis: raising money and engaging with party stakeholders (donors, allies, SCC, county parties) to increase buy-in of the party’s program. That entails a lot of 1-on-1 meetings and a lot of call time every week.

Finally, the Chair does have public facing duties. The Chair holds on-the-record press appearances and is the “attack dog” as necessary to contrast Democratic electeds and Republican priorities. Selling stakeholders on the party’s work will include public events at county party meetings and representing Iowa to the DNC and ASDC.

The buck stops with the Chair on these responsibilities. However, it is important that the Chair has a goal of “organizing themselves out of a job.” That means having team members to help with the work of managing 99 county chairs, building a Finance Committee, and finding the right messenger (often not the Chair) for “attack dog” responsibilities.

I want to formalize that “organizing themselves out of a job” promise. It is my pledge to you that when this job does not require more than 40 hours a week to fulfill the responsibilities of being Chair, I will come to the SCC and suggest a reduction in a salary appropriate to the new workload.

None of these responsibilities require a Chair that is constantly in Des Moines. I live 40 miles from the Mississippi River in a mid-sized county that voted for Barack Obama twice and Donald Trump twice. The Democratic Party needs to focus on communities like this - especially the counties along the River that have gone from reliably Democratic to reliably Republican in the past ten years. A good first step in staying connected to these communities is conducting my responsibilities to the Party from my home in Wheatland on a daily basis instead of an office on the south side of Des Moines. Eventually, the Party should aim to open a permanent secondary office along the Mississippi River.

#### Senior Leadership

Beneath the Chair on the org chart is the senior leadership layer. These positions are responsible for helping operationalize the Chair’s vision and execute it on a day-to-day basis. The goal is to split the “Executive Director” position into two roles - one that focuses on politics and one that focuses on the business aspects of IDP.

*Role: Senior Staff “A”*

*Funding Source: Core IDP*

This role will be responsible for the “political” functions of the party: Comms, Organizing, and fundraising. It manages the staff of those departments day-to-day. Alongside “Role B” and department heads, it develops goals and holds departments accountable to those goals.

Finally, this role serves as the staff point-of-contact for IDP for partners, official staffs, and other aligned entities. It also assists the Chair in managing relationships with and selling the party’s program to party stakeholders (ABI/SCC/County Parties/donors/partners/etc).

*Role: Senior Staff “B”*

*Funding Source: Core IDP*

This role is responsible for ensuring that IDP operates as a business, not a club. It is heavily involved in reforming the SCC and the Constitution. It manages the day-to-day logistical issues and cash flow of the Party. It also handles the Caucus-to-Convention process and the logistics of major events.

### Finance Department

IDP has been funded in a similar way since the Vilsack/Harkin days - the club program, a reliance on the LJ and Hall of Fame dinners, and selling VAN access. This model has historically served us well. But the lack of Democratic elected officials means we need to try something new. A new model for the IDP consists of three elements (and to be clear, IDP *must do all three* well if it is going to successfully fund the “Program” elements of this plan):

- 1) A renewed commitment from high-dollar donors. Our leadership will need to ask for six- and seven-figure investment from traditional high-dollar donors to the party. This level of investment requires real staff work and transparency on the work of IDP. Building and maintaining relationships with substantial donors takes time and money and the IDP Chair, senior leadership, and finance chair need to be prepared to spend both.
- 2) Lots of mid-tier call-time and Finance Committee event fundraising. Having up to three competitive congressional campaigns, large statewide campaigns, and two aggressive state leg caucuses in state means that there is a well-developed tier of donors in Iowa who give three- and four-figure checks. The simplest way to bring this money in will be call time from the Chair selling donors on a vision for the future of the IDP and what winning elections again looks like. Bringing in these donors will also likely rely on going to them. Rather than two big events a year, IDP should hold a single, large statewide fundraiser for activists and then build a Finance Committee across the state to hold events in all major cities (e.g. CB, CR, DBQ, DSM, IC, SXC, QC, and Waterloo-Cedar Falls among others, we should hold events wherever we have local enthusiasm that can bring in dollars!). Building out events will take substantial staff resources, but there is a lot of low hanging fruit. Past congressional candidates should be top targets to assist in building out the Finance Committee and hosting events.
- 3) A robust small-dollar program. E-mail. Direct to donate. Mail. IDP needs to be doing it all and putting real money behind creating a strong small-dollar base. It will require the work (and dollars!) of SCC members, county leaders, and committed Democrats across the state.

There is a saying among political staff: “Never starve the profit center.” While always being frugal with donor dollars, the Chair, senior leadership, and FD should not hesitate to add additional finance capacity if the opportunity to net more money with more staff is there. This memo proposes a three-person department, but I can easily envision more and propose potential “add-ons” at the end.

*Role: Finance Director*

*Funding Source: Core IDP*

The Finance Director runs the Finance Department and is ultimately responsible for reaching fundraising goals. The Finance Director works with Senior Leadership to develop the party’s fundraising plan that meets budget needs and works with the Chair to execute it.

The Finance Director is a management position that hires and manages the Finance staff and coaches and holds staff accountable.

The position also has execution responsibilities. The FD works directly with the Chair to build the Party Finance Committee and with hosts to build events. The FD also runs the high-dollar donor maintenance process - ensuring major investors can see their money is well-spent. Finally, the FD will be responsible for the money element of the one large event per year the Party holds.

*Finance Assistant 1 - Call Time Manager*

*Funding Source: Core IDP*

The Chair needs a full-time Call Time Manager. Under the guidance of the FD, the Call Time Manager runs the donor research process, staffs the Chair's call time on a daily basis, and staffs call time for members of the Finance Committee if the FD needs assistance. Finally, the Call Time Manager is responsible for small- and mid-tier donor maintenance (ensuring thank you notes go out, pledge chase letters, etc)

*Finance Assistant 2 - Small Dollar Director*

*Funding Source: Core IDP*

The small dollar program should have a dedicated staffer. The primary responsibility of this position will be to manage online fundraising. Critically, it has no comms-based online responsibilities - it is just to activate donors. The position handles the back-end donor database and writes content. This position should have candidate support responsibilities - helping legislative candidates, setting up email programs, and disseminating best practices.

Finally, this position will also manage the relationship with IDP's digital consultant. That consultant will only be responsible for purchasing ads - it will not produce content. As such, it will only be paid for services provided - no monthly retainer. However, a firm that has relationships with the platforms that provide ads will be valuable in ensuring best practices and any issues can be resolved quickly.

*Add-ons: National Fundraising Consultant, additional research capacity*

Leader Konfrst's, Auditor Sand's, and Leader Wahls' commitment to rebuilding the IDP together opens some interesting possibilities for national investment in IDP that should be explored. In all likelihood, it will be best for them to raise money into their own committees, but we should not close off the possibility of national travel together.

The Finance Director should also keep a close eye to ensure there is enough research, event planning, and donor maintenance capacity. It is the obligation of all staff to be mindful of donor dollars, but not starving the profit center should be a priority.

Comms Department

Being clear about what IDP's Comms Department can and cannot do is the most important part of its success. Every cycle, without fail, there will be a news piece in Iowa asking what "The Democrats" message was. IDP, as an institution, cannot solve this problem alone. Fortunately, there is already work going on across the party to solve this challenge. The Party must work with entities like the Heartland Research Project and other partners to actively manage the

“brand” of the party because it has such a profound impact on our candidates’ successes or failure.

Candidates and elected officials also drive the brand of “Iowa Democrats.” The party’s most useful role to impact the party’s brand is serving as a megaphone for its leaders and as a disseminator of best practices and data-driven messaging between leaders, allies, and partners. Sometimes it will need to be in the lead, often it will need to serve a supporting role, but the Party needs to take its role as guardian of the brand of “Iowa Democrat” seriously.

Part of recognizing IDP’s limits in this regard is understanding the limits of earned versus paid media. Aggressive candidates and office-holders can change their numbers through earned media campaigns. No state party in the country can change the state political environment through simple earned media. At best, an aggressive operation can bend narratives just slightly (And it should spend every day pushing to do that!) However, paid media is what substantially moves numbers and IDP leadership needs to be involved in conversations about how to get more funding for paid media that holds Iowa Republicans accountable.

With that in mind, this Comms structure envisions a heavy focus on meeting Iowans where they are through a heavy focus on digital and measuring earned media success by how it can be deployed by candidates around election time (e.g., a headline that can go on a mail or TV piece, not just a nice quote in a piece).

IDP needs a Comms staffer just to respond to incoming press requests and the daily ups and downs of the news cycle, but additional hires should be clear value-adds for elected officials, candidates, and county parties (and, as such, are categorized as “Program” funding). Instead of simply being reactive, these hires will allow IDP to have a pro-active, forward-looking comms team.

*Role: Comms Director*

*Funding Source: Core IDP*

The Comms Director’s role changes slightly depending on the funding level of the Department and its ability to hire additional staff. Regardless of funding, the position will have traditional press secretary roles: serving as an on-the-record-voice, writing and sending press releases, developing relationships with major reporters. The position also will be the point-of-contact for Comms work across the infrastructure - elected staff, caucuses, DCCC, DGA, DSCC, etc.

The role adds a major management component if IDP serves as more of “Comms Hub” than it did in the 2021-2022 cycle. The Comms Director will work with the junior staff to set priorities and build longer-term plans. The position will need to create a culture focused on earned media that can translate to comms and amplifying the voices of our elected officials. Finally, in the event the Comms Department is fully funded, the Comms Director will oversee the process, working with the Comms/Political Assistant in disseminating talking points and messaging across the infrastructure to allies, partners, and local activists and assisting county parties in their own media plans.

### *Platforms Director/Digital Organizer*

#### *Funding Source: Program*

The mirror position to the Small Dollar Director. This position is focused entirely on the communications and persuasion side of digital, not fundraising. There are two parts of the role: content generation and digital organizing.

Content generation includes managing IDP's platforms and providing some candidate support as needed. Doing this work well is time intensive.

As a digital organizer, this position will build relationships with online influencers and recruit and manage a team of digital volunteers to amplify content. The team should work hard to develop metrics that measure whether metrics get outside of political "bubbles" and to voters in target audiences.

### *Comms/Political Assistant*

#### *Funding Source: Program*

A statement from the IDP Chair saying Kim Reynolds is bad is unsurprising and unlikely to make news. The stories of people lowans relate to and how they are affected by Republican policies can make a much bigger impact if handled correctly. It also generally requires looking outside traditional Democratic circles. The primary role of this position is building relationships with validators and storytellers that will make compelling content.

The second role is logistics support. While the Comms Director will take the lead on synthesizing and generating messaging to disseminate across the infrastructure, this position will be in charge of making sure it actually gets to people who can use it. It will set up trainings and actually recruit people to attend. It is not just creating a website, but measuring traffic and working to increase participation.

### *Add-ons: More!!!*

More people in Comms will be able to do more things and allow for more specialization. More press/media relations staff will allow for more relationship building with members of the press corp and more geographic specialization. Meanwhile, more digital staff will allow for focus on the digital organizing or content generation parts of the role. As with everything, how much can be done will be affected by funding.

### Organizing/Field Department

"Year-round organizing" is a popular phrase after almost every election. Putting it into practice has been very difficult. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see what has and has not worked the last two cycles IDP has attempted to implement this kind of program.

Barring a huge amount of unanticipated funding, this department will be less than a half dozen staff. Any funding of the department at all is dependent on stakeholders wanting to run this program - IDP will not be able to do it without new funding. Historically, the party has simply



assigned each staffer a congressional district. The effect has been wide coverage, but not deep organizing in any particular county. This plan proposes to flip that arrangement. **Instead of starting with four organizers covering 20+ counties each, we will begin with organizers having responsibility for only a couple of contiguous counties and responsible for working that turf all off-year aggressively. This program will grow to cover more counties as more funding becomes available and serves as a pilot for an eventual 99-county year-round program.**

To be clear, this plan does not mean that counties that do not immediately get an organizer will be left out in the cold. The plan creates an “Organizer at-large” position that is meant to offer support and guidance to all county parties that want IDP’s help in formulating their plans for the cycle and providing additional training on tools and resources. In addition, IDP should have a robust team approach here to utilize volunteers across the state to assist county parties in their work.

Choosing which counties qualify for their own organizers will be a complicated process. It will need to bring in the Data Department, the HTF and SMF, and consider congressional targets. However, I can outline a few general principles I believe should guide the process.

- 1) Prioritize counties with legislative targets in 2024
- 2) Prioritize smaller pivot/swing counties in a statewide race over base Dem counties.
- 3) Prioritize counties that need additional capacity to grow but have shown clear signs of committed leadership

Once the number of organizers and turf is determined, we get to the most challenging question: what are they going to do? My simple answer is: **IDP should not be overly programmatic on the exact program or field tactics.** In an operation with single digit organizers, we should be creating a targeted program for each organizer.

Working with HTF, SMF, allies, and funders, IDP will develop plans for each county. Drawing on election results, demographics, and VAN data, organizers should build plans to increase volunteer capabilities and capacity in their assigned counties. The division between persuasion work and turnout work should be on a county-by-county basis, **but the principle of all plans should be that the county party is responsible for turning out and activating Democrats, and candidates at all levels are responsible for persuasion.** This will entail organizers working with the county parties on tactics for turning out Democratic voters and serving as candidate support for all levels of candidates for persuasion work. Branding of these tactics will be important for local buy-in. For example, I foresee referring to any relational program “neighbor-to-neighbor organizing” rather than the newer “relational” phrasing.

*Role: Organizing Director*

*Funding Source: Program*

Any field program will need a dedicated staffer to run it day-to-day. The Organizing Director will work with leadership to build individualized county plans and then coach and manage

organizers to execute plans. The Organizing Director is ultimately responsible that goals across the program are reached and for continuously raising the bar as goals are met. It is possible this position could also have the “Organizer at-large” portfolio, detailed below.

*Role: Turfed organizers (# determined by funding)*

*Funding Source: Program*

The core of the organizing program will be organizers responsible for two to three counties selected through conversations between senior leadership, partners, allies, SMF, and HTF.

Organizers will be responsible for knowing their turf backwards and forwards. They will work with the Data Department and the Organizing Director to develop plans specific to their counties. Past programs have been hampered by organizers having too wide a geographic area. These positions will have the direct objective of pro-actively building county leadership and volunteer capacity. Whether the focus is on turnout or persuasion organizing (understanding that county parties are focused turnout and candidates are responsible for persuasion) will be dictated by data. Plans will include metrics organizers will be held responsible for.

*Role: Organizer-at-large (1)*

*Funding Source: Program*

Depending on funding, this is either a stand-alone role or folds into the Organizing Director’s responsibilities. This position serves as a resource for all the county parties that are not targeted for organizers. That includes being a point-of-contact for chairs and central committees. As opposed to the pro-active Turfed organizers, this position is reactive. It should provide tools and training for “go-getters” and assist county parties that want to do their own evaluation and program building. However, because it will be responsible for several dozen counties, it will not be able to drive the process the way the Organizers in targets will.

### Data Department

*Role: Data Director*

*Funding Source: TBD*

Pro-actively managing and improving the voter file to maximize its usefulness for campaigns, county parties, and other users, assisting campaigns with targeting, and coordinating with data departments across Democratic infrastructure requires a dedicated staffer. The Data Director position was funded by StacLabs in the past. Naturally, StacLabs was involved in fleshing out the exact nature of this role. Senior leadership will need to determine quickly if this funding is again available. A staffer comfortable with large datasets and targeting will need to be part of the process of building county organizing plans.

### Ops/Compliance Department

*Role: Compliance Director (currently Erika Bartlett)*

*Funding Source: Core IDP*

As a permanent institution instead of a seat-of-its-pants campaign or fly-by-night PAC, IDP has compliance, legal, and institutional obligations that need to be met. These include managing a complicated set of books and campaign finance rules, needing true HR, and the logistics (not to be confused with the business or other SCC responsibilities) of holding a State Convention every two years. All those roles will live here.

#### Department Add-on: Political

While some constituency group organizing could be part of individual county organizing plans, this structure does not provide for statewide constituency group organizing efforts. IDP should hire several turf-ed organizers before considering a full political program. The Chair and Senior leadership should also work with allies and partners to determine if this infrastructure hole could be filled by a different entity.

#### **Governance reform**

The State Central Committee has dozens of committed Democrats working to make our state a better place. However, it is clear the institution of the SCC needs fundamental reform. The sheer size of the SCC makes it hard to build consensus for action, let alone respond quickly to the challenges the party faces on a daily basis. I believe the creation of a smaller select committee, to be directly involved on a day-to-day basis, is necessary for the success of IDP. Such a committee would conduct day-to-day oversight of IDP, serve as the best conduit between SCC members and the IDP Chair and staff, and report back to the SCC on their work.

I realize that a resolution is already being circulated that would create the steering committee. I do not believe the current language needs to be the final draft and I am pleased to see conversations about the exact make-up of the committee. However, I do believe the committee should formalize the role of our Party's leaders. I am encouraged that Leader Konfrst, Auditor Sand, and Leader Wahls are stepping up to be involved in helping IDP succeed. They should be given a seat on any select committee that is formed alongside whomever the SCC elects as its representatives.

A streamlined structure will empower the Chair and staff to focus on winning elections, allow the Party to better take advantage of SCC's members' talents and time, bring more stakeholders to the table, and ensure effective oversight of IDP's finances and operations.

#### **Conclusion**

I cannot do this alone. This document lays out some of the infrastructure that will begin to rebuild our Party. To truly succeed, we have to have a team approach. Whether it's fundraising, organizing, comms, or any of the other functions the party has, we must utilize the talents of our elected officials, our staff, and our volunteers. My promise to you is to bring that team approach to my work every day and I look forward to working with you.