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PLANNING A WASHINGTON STATE PROJECT

Pat and I just had an excellent meeting with a group of officials in the state of Washington, leading to a whole new approach to healthy democracy. The idea would be to conduct the Citizens Election Forum on initiatives rather than candidates for governor, at least to get the process going. This leads to some interesting changes we may want to make in our ideas, and also some planning challenges.

Changing the Big Picture

The change suggested by Mike Lowry, and accepted by most (all?) present, could lead to a shift in the way we present our ideas. The emphasis is moved away from a specific format (the Citizens Election Forum) and towards creating an authentic voice of the people -- a voice which is representative, caring and informed. None of us have liked the name, Citizens Election Forum, but we have felt stuck with it in order to describe the means we propose to institute healthy democracy in Washington. I think we should consider setting up "Healthy Democracy, Washington", an organization which aims at creating an authentic voice of the people in Washington using tools such as the Citizens Panel and the Televote.

So as we move into Washington, we are asking for a commitment and we are providing some tools:

The commitment we ask for is that people in Washington work to create a representative, caring and informed voice of the people which will advise the broader public when they vote. Those who work on this should be prepared to set aside their own interests and specific goals about democratic reform in order to build a structure which will deliver an authentic voice of the people.

The tools we bring are:

- The Citizens Panel

- The Televote

- The Citizens Control structure, in which an Evaluation Panel of citizens will select and advise a board which will conduct the project in a trustworthy way.

- The customizing Citizens Panel and Televote in order to make sure that a structure is built which suits the wishes and needs of the people of Washington.

- Funding and organizational skills to get the whole thing rolling, so long as we find citizens to work on the effort.

So imagine a dialogue between a volunteer working on this project in Washington and someone who wants to know what the volunteer is doing:

- What this democratic reform thing you are working on?

- Healthy Democracy, Washington

- What does that do?

- It works to create an authentic voice of the people to advise the public about issues and votes.

- So what will it do?

- It is being started to review some key initiatives and give trustworthy judgments to the people of Washington about those initiatives.

- How will that be done?

- Through a Citizens Panel and Televote. (Explains briefly.)

- So is that all it will do?

- No. If it works well in the initial test, then we are going to ask a representative group of Washingtonians whether they would like to see this institutionalized through state government.

- How will you do that?

- Through a Citizens Panel and Televote to ask an informed, caring and representative group whether or not they would like to see this done, and if so, how. (Explains the customizing process.)

- This sounds very confusing.

- Not really. We are out to promote healthy democracy. We have some tools we are going to use to create an authentic voice of the people to advise voters in Washington about some key initiatives. If this works well, we may go on to other things. Sure, the details are a bit complicated. But think of the automobile. It's a very complicated machine. Not very many of us understand in detail how it works. But it is easy enough to know that you can get into this machine, turn in on with a key and drive from point A to point B. If people can understand how to use cars, they can certainly understand our approach to healthy democracy and how to use it.

- So if the goal is healthy democracy, what do you call the process which will advise us all when we vote on initiatives?

- Hmmm. I don't have an answer for that right now. I think that if a name for the specific structure is needed, that will be up to the people of Washington to decide.

Getting the Process Going

When we think how to do the first demonstration project, aiming to do this next year in Washington, how should we go about setting this up?

The standard way to do this would be to get some of the typical good government groups to form a coalition, raise the money with our contributions to help them out, and then conduct the project. But the disadvantage to this is that we will be relatively powerless as opposed to the more powerful of the groups, which may use their weight to protect their turf or to protect their ideology.

Therefore, I would prefer mobilizing a fairly large number of volunteers to gather the participants, help organize the televote and do the survey immediately after the televoters have watched the panelists explain their views. My initial guess is that this will require 1,500 volunteers. What I want to do now is figure out whether there is any conceivable way this can be done.

Assume that a two-hour seminar can mobilize 10 potential volunteers per session. Imagine, also, that it takes another two-hour seminar to get them committed and that 5 come out of it this way. Assume that we will need a minimum of 1,000 volunteers by the time the project arrives and that 1,500 are better. What schedule might possibly lead to this result?

Month	# of 2-session events	Total volunteers gathered
September:	4	20
October	8	40
November	12	60
December	8	40
January	20	100
February	25	125
March	30	150
April	35	175
May	40	200
June	40	200
Totals	182	1,100

What is the cost of a team to conduct the intro session and the training session which make up the 2-session event? Imagine a two-person team which is paid at the approximate rate of $12. Then to conduct an event and get people to attend will take 5 hours per event. Thus it should cost $120 to put on an event. This could be done on a contract basis (ie: pay each $60 per event, rather than asking them to keep time). Imagine that the typical team is willing to put on ten pairs of events. Assume further that it will cost $200 to train them in to conduct the sessions. Thus the cost of a seminar, with training, could be estimated at $150 per event. The above schedule calls for 182 pairs of events. Thus the cost of this, not including much of the infrastructure costs to set it up, is 182 x 2 x $150.

This equals $54,600. This is much less expensive than I had thought it would be. But when you add a full-time director and four half time assistants to oversee and train (and assume quite a bit of volunteer time to help in the training), you still end up with staff costs for the year of close to $120,000 and overhead of $30,000 for a total, with the sessions, of about $200,000. That is more like I thought it would cost.

Remember that this is simply the cost of mobilizing the volunteers to gather the televoters and the potential citizen panelists. To train them to go out and select the televoters at random, follow up with calls to get them to watch the show and then to survey them afterwards, all will cost between $30,000 and $50,000 per project. This is why it makes a lot more sense to use the same televoters for both projects, assuming we try to do two initiatives.

Let's then add the cost of two Citizens Panels at $65,000 each and a staff to conduct these at $30,000 each for a total of $190,000. To this we should probably add a staff to get the whole thing running over the next year at $100,000.

Thus the initial estimate for the grand total, using this approach:

Gather volunteers:	$200,000
Oversee volunteers:	80,000
Two Citizens Panels:	190,000
Organizing staff:	100,000
Total	$570,000

It is conceivable that we could raise $200,000 for this project and that we might put up the remaining $370,000. But this would be a formidable undertaking.

More on Volunteers

If Washington has 4.2 million adults and we want 600 in the Televote, then we need one televoter for every 7,000 adults. Take the four counties in northwest WA: Clallam with 56,000; Jefferson with 20,000; Mason with 38,000; and Kitsap with 190,000 (as listed in the 1998 Rand McNally Road Atlas). Since Rand McNally gives 4.888 million as the total population, we should multiply the above total of 304,000 by .875 in order to estimate the adults living there. This equals 266,000. This in turn would require 38 televoters. According to my estimates, we will need between 1.6 and 2.4 volunteers per televoter recruited. This means that to get 38 televoters we would need between 60 and 91 volunteers. Doing Jefferson County alone, we would need 2 1/2 televoters and therefore would need between 4 and 6 volunteers to gather them.

It obviously would not be difficult for Paul and Lisa to find between 4 and 6 volunteers, doing it in a couple of months if we asked them. But the more interesting question is how much time and effort they would have to put into it.

King County is listed as having 1.5 million, for an adult population of 1.3 million. This would mean that we would need to gather 187 televoters there. Rounding this off at 200 because all of these estimates are open to question, we would need between 320 and 480 volunteers there. To figure out the cost of this, would we rather have an effort by Paul and Lisa in Jefferson County or would we rather have an effort by someone else in Seattle (perhaps with Paul's and Lisa's help) make the attempt?

Lincoln (8,864), Douglas (26,205), Ferry (6,295), and Okanagan (33,350) appear to make up one of the most sparsely settled areas of Washington. Together they have 74,714, corrected to 65,000 adults, requiring 9 1/3 televoters and therefore needing between 15 and 22 volunteers. This may have to be increased due to the driving time that will be required there.

But it might be the case that we can divide the state into something like 8 to 20 regions and gather the volunteers from central points in those regions. It may be more important to draw the volunteers from a central point where they can easily meet with each other than to try to disperse them throughout the region where they are expected to work.