



Dupont Summit 2017

Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy

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Presentation

“In Pod We Trust: The Digital Invigoration of Grassroots Democracy”

He came in fifth place. In the 2014 Democratic Primary in the District 16 race for the House of Delegates he came in fifth place. It didn't matter that he personally knocked on 12,000 doors nor that 1 in 6 voters who met him at their front door contributed to his campaign. It didn't matter that he met 40,000 people over the course of an 18-month campaign, that he frequently put in 120 hour weeks on the campaign, that he had a team of 80 volunteers, had 25 meet and greet events in the homes of voters, attended countless community events, began involving himself in Maryland politics a decade earlier, raised \$60,000 worth of contributions from 850 contributors, or that his campaign received coverage 50 times in the local media. He lost.

In a district of 120,000 of some of the most well educated, wealthiest citizens in the United States, only 1 in 6 registered Democrats voted in the June 24, 2014 election. Only 6.25% of the total electorate voted for one of the winning candidates.

If two of those five registered Democrats who hadn't voted in the 2014 Primary Election decide to vote in the 2018 Primary Election for one candidate, that candidate will sweep the field.

Perhaps precisely because increased voter turnout would threaten incumbents and would dilute the impact of Party and special interest influence over the electoral process, the Maryland Democratic Party has continued to focus on turning out an ever-diminishing universe of “Super Dems” who voted in the past three Democratic Primary elections.

The response of the Maryland Democratic Party has always been the same: more doors, more mail, more phones, more money. Except that many attribute the loss of Lt. Governor Anthony Brown's gubernatorial bid to the lack of a coherent ground game, which is to say that there was no literature for canvassers to distribute to voters' doors, there were no Brown yard signs available in the field offices, volunteer phone bankers were instructed to hang up and not leave voicemail after three rings, and effectively direct voter contact was sacrificed for a top down strategy that clearly presaged the difficulty that Hillary Clinton and the political establishment around the world (i.e. Brexit) witnessed in the populist movements of 2016.

Determined that there must be a means to leverage technology to approximate an effective ground-game by creating a facsimile of a campaign Meet & Greet event, Jordan P. Cooper began broadcasting interviews with politicians, activists, advocates, and others who seek to improve the state of the

world through *Public Interest Podcast*.

The premise of the podcast is that if everyone were able to have a 25-minute one-on-one conversation with every elected official or candidate either currently or seeking to represent them then everyone would be able to decide which candidates they like best. Given that it is physically impossible for a congressman to spend 25 minutes with each individual in their 800,000-person constituency or even for a state delegate to reach all 120,000 of their constituents, by listening to *PublicInterestPodcast.com*, citizens might feel as though they were actually in the room with the politician, activist, advocate, or public servant. And so, the theory goes, these listeners would be more likely to vote and the net effect of the podcast would be to increase informed voter turnout.

The underlying theory behind *Public Interest Podcast* is that if a positive news source were to be created as a platform for individuals from across a wide swath of society to speak to how and why they have chosen to work to make the world a better place not only for themselves but for others as well, then perhaps our national dialogue could become more civil, more respectful, and more accepting of difference. There seems to be much hate and intolerance in our national community that is driven by a fear of the unknown. *Public Interest Podcast* operates upon the premise that by revealing our common humanity through our own voices and with our own stories, we will open space in our national dialogue for greater understanding of those who are not like us.

And having garnered tens of thousands of listens to interviews with cabinet secretaries, major network news anchors, Pulitzer Prize winners, Nobel Prize laureates and candidates, ambassadors to the United Nations, governors, foreign parliamentarians, congressmen, senators, delegates, mayors, councilmen, executive directors of non-profit organizations, and others who seek to improve the state of the world, *Public Interest Podcast* is well on its way towards bringing our society closer to one in which public service is valued, public servants are honored, our national dialogue becomes characterized by respectful civil discourse, and Americans feel empowered to take ownership of and exert influence over their own community, government, and society.

Speaker

Jordan P. Cooper, *Public Interest Podcast*