

North Jersey GrassRoots

March 2009

OBAMA Era Is Launched

It is early in the Obama administration, and already the president has made conscientious efforts to fulfill his campaign promises. Notable are the code of ethics adopted for administration officials, the abandonment of secrecy in government, the closing of Guantánamo, the outreach to the Muslim world, the serious attempt at bipartisanship, and the effort made to pass a recovery bill to get American moving again. Big stuff.

There have also been a few flubs with the unfortunate Daschle and Geithner situations and the inability to get participation in the Obama “reach across the aisle” style of doing business. It may be too early to predict that the Republicans will discontinue their old worn-out habits of divisiveness and negativity. They seem to thrive on such behavior and know they are good at it. We had all hoped that in the interests of America and its people, especially in these troubled times, such partisan practices would be put aside and lessons learned from the dreadful Bush era. This is not to say that debate and discussion of issues should not take place. On the contrary, Obama has always declared that debate and discussion is what is needed. What is not needed is the Rush Limbaugh agitation for failure and a Republican policy undermining actions that serve the American people. This is a time for mobilization to get Americans back to work, to move the economy forward, and to seek solutions to the many issues that must be addressed.

Some supporters of Obama are discontented with his quiet style and want him to show his power. It is perhaps more important that Obama react in a way that shows firm intent but does not condone divisiveness, and that he maintains his goals and long-term prospects for change. Change is coming and we have already seen that through some of the examples cited above. One of the more significant signs of change was Obama tak-

Coming Events

FEBRUARY 25, 2009, 7:00PM

Health Care Team Meeting, Panera Bread, 1300 Rte. 17 N, Ramsey, Kohl's Shopping Center

MARCH 1, 2009

2:30PM: Take Back the 5th District, Demarest Borough Hall, 118 Serpentine Road, Demarest, NJ; R.S.V.P.: Mike Simonson 201-572-1030

5:30PM: NJG Potluck Dinner/Strategy Meeting, private home, Woodcliff Lake: directions to be e-mailed to MyBO registrants; sign up on MyBO

MARCH 19, 2009, 6:00PM

***Vigil Commemorating the Start of Iraq War, Hawthorne, NJ, Municipal Building, Lafayette Avenue, Hawthorne, NJ
sponsor: Passaic County DFA***

ing responsibility for the Daschle appointment. When have we seen any of our leaders take responsibility for actions in recent years? Obama's detractors, of whatever persuasion, will likely continue their sniping and angry rhetoric, but we can be hopeful that, over time, the American people will grow tired of childish reaction when serious governing is required. The bipartisan approach Obama promises offers an opportunity to encourage discourse and solve problems together. We hope that this opportunity will not be squandered.

Americans are looking forward to change; we must be vigilant and active. This is more important now that the election is over. We know from our personal lives that change requires hard work. NJG is mobilizing to work for change. We must keep focused, join or create teams to address issues, and let our elected officials know where we stand by writing or calling their offices and being ready to act. The change for which we have worked and continue to work will come—but it takes involvement and effort. No one will do it for us. It is up to us to make the country we want.

NORTH JERSEY GRASSROOTS MISSION: *The Mission of NJG is to mobilize political activists at the grassroots level to influence, support and/or challenge the Obama administration, congress, state and local political leaders in order to further a progressive agenda.*

NJG will accomplish this by means of organizing, networking, issues research and advocacy. It will rely primarily on the initiative and skill of its members to energize and sustain this endeavor.

BlueWave NJ Expands to Bergen County

Sister organization BlueWave New Jersey is coming to Bergen County. Cyndi Collen and Cindy Finestine have met with the BlueWave NJ organization to seek assistance in establishing an offshoot group in Bergen County. Bergen BlueWave hopes to involve individuals who want to make change through community service, programs and related activities. Members can overlap with other organizations; it's the doing that counts.

Programs such as improved local recycling, "Ban the Bag", education programs for an informed population, health care policy work, ecology fairs, "Save the Planet in Your Own Backyard", municipal issue work, lobbying for and/or against legislation, and more are anticipated. Anyone who has a specific passion and is willing to take ownership of that issue is urged to get involved. Bergen BlueWave intends to join and collaborate with any and all like-minded groups to achieve successful outcomes. An early March meeting is planned; more information will be forthcoming.

Report: Health Care Team

After two meetings and a conference call, the Health Care Team has identified team skills and interests and submitted comments to the Obama administration. The discussion as to what form and shape health-care reform should take is still ongoing. Bottom line: the team agreed that health care is a right; all are entitled to health care.

Most of the team recognized the political obstacles to a single-payer plan and believe that some combination of a public plan with an employer supported plan will succeed, although this position is not unanimous. There is interest in expanded support for home care vs. nursing homes and for community health centers.

The team agreed also to examine specific New Jersey health issues and to work with other like-minded groups such as BlueWave New Jersey, NJ Citizens Action, and Healthcare-NOW. If health care is your interest, join the team. See the calendar for meeting information.

Thank You, Carmeli

A special thank you to Carmeli Kaspi of Carmeli Studio for volunteering time and energy to design this newsletter. We do appreciate it.

Contribute your news and information by sending e-mail to NJG Newsletter coordinator Rhoda Schermer at ***RhodaSchermer@verizon.net***

PROFILE: RICK LEWIS, NJG Coordinator

Throughout the campaign to elect President Barack Obama, Rick Lewis has been our leader and mentor. His enthusiasm has motivated us to make phone calls, write letters, canvass neighborhoods, donate, and carry out many and varied important actions.

Mr. Lewis had never done anything remotely political in his life. He got involved in politics as so many of us did in 2008—he was simply unwilling to sit on the sidelines for another election cycle, and he feared another 4 or 8 years of Republican mismanagement. A contributing factor was that his twin girls, Andrea and Sydney, came of voting age last summer and both registered in Texas as Democrats. Rick lives with his wife, Mindy; son, Tucker; and third daughter, Bryn, in Round Rock, a suburb north of Austin. He is a computer consultant who has worked in 19 states plus Canada and Mexico since 1980, traveling to new client locations every 6 to 12 months.

When he found himself in Bergen County in 2008, Rick called the Obama office and volunteered for the primary-election effort. He continued his active leadership throughout the campaign for president, and today he is the coordinator of the new North Jersey Grassroots organization. Rick is currently making a transition from Texas to Maryland and, once settled, will be commuting to New Jersey to lead our post-election activities. Meanwhile, he leads by telephone and e-mail.

Coming next issue: Rick Tells His Story