

## **My Experience As a 2007-2008 Center for Progressive Leadership Fellow**

Do you remember 8 years ago when discussing politics was off limits? The Rush Limbaugh's of the world had driven progressives underground. WPA meetings were like a speakeasy during prohibition. Instead of a secret password getting you through the door, a \$10 membership fee got you in where you would find people who not only shared your progressive values and who were hungry to talk about what was going on in our government, but who also shared their food. I remember why WPA meetings were so important to me. It was the only place that I could safely talk about my progressive values without getting into a fight. Do you remember that? Do you remember sitting in Marcia MacMullen's house for a WPA business meeting, and having so many people talking at once that we had to start using Robert's Rules just to get anything done? We channeled our anger into the constructive end of getting more women elected to public office. I made life long friends. Fortunately, we no longer have to hide to talk about our progressive values. The pendulum has swung the other way, and there are opportunities for progressives to not only find one another, but to receive training in political leadership.



Now imagine another room filled with diverse people who share belief in progressive values and who care about one another. People who get together every couple of months for weekend long retreats held at different locations throughout the state so as to be close for some of our fellows at any given time. We have people from all over the state, republicans and democrats, men and women, Caucasians, Arabic, Hispanic, African American, gays and lesbians; people of varying degrees of political activism from running non-profits, issue advocacy organizations, to running for public office. We're young and old and everything in between learning how to use our critical thinking skills to think strategically.

We've assessed our potential as leaders through a 360 degree analysis, and we've written a long term political plan for our future. We have faculty advisors who care about us, and who check in with us to see how we're doing on our plans and goals. We are peer coaches for one another and hold each others' feet to the fire to be sure we follow through and do what we say we're going to do. When we attend weekend retreats, we are prepared by having done the assigned readings, so that we can participate in group discussions. We sit at round tables together, talking, sharing, problem-solving together. We're given group tasks and told to complete a piece of a larger problem. By the time each group has reported out, the whole problem has been solved by the fellows. We eat, work, and have fun together.

We are identifying our values, embracing our personal stories of why we believe what we do, and learning how to lead with our values. To this end we have learned how to vision, to craft a message, to write a press release and conduct a press conference. We

are rehearsing our message and asking for money while learning how to fundraise for our causes. We are being taught how to conduct a power analysis to determine how best to accomplish a legislative goal, and how to think out of the box about actions that draw attention to a cause. Not just any action, but actions that are imbued with significance of the desired action.

We undergo simulations in how to balance the state budget, as well as planning a campaign. We are learning the difference between leadership and management in running a campaign. We're learning how to listen, embrace differences, delegate responsibility, manage conflict, and do organizational planning. We are learning how to set up a timeline that incorporates our budget from fundraising that captures the momentum from peak events so that the campaign can rise to the next level. We are learning that when we succeed; we celebrate and say thank you to our volunteers. We are learning how technology helps us level the hierarchy and engage the grass roots through blogs, videos, social networking, search ads and online advertising, house parties, and service politics.

Out of all of the many things I've learned as a fellow for The Center for Progressive Leadership's training the most important thing would have to be how to think strategically. In these challenging economic times, it is easy to get depressed and give up fighting. Looking at where you want to be five to ten years down the road is just the anecdote to despair. Thinking strategically means envisioning yourself achieving your goal in five or ten years and then, strategically figuring out how to work backward from that goal to find out how to accomplish it. Whether the women of WPA realize it or not, this is actually what we did 8 years ago when we gathered in the living rooms of June Rusten and Carolyn Diem. We imagined where we wanted to be 8 years from then; W would be on his way out of office as he is now. We wanted more women in state offices so the abuses of the Bush administration might be blunted. We accomplished that.