

State Committee Report

By Daniel Marks Cohen

Last month Jay Jacobs, the NYS Democratic Party chairman, called a meeting of the executive committee and county chairs in Kingston, NY. The purported justification for the gathering was about his recently released [plan](#) for improving the party following last year's election losses of several congressional seats, along with scores of county and state legislative spots as well. The plan is a doozy, calling for an orgy of hiring and staff allocations, none of which is budgeted, and there was precisely zero talk about how this was all going to be paid for. Which raises the question that if we had money to do this before, why didn't we do so, and if we don't have money to do it now, how will this plan be implemented? It should be noted that the plan was not new ideas. It was full of suggestions that have been made for YEARS by my colleagues in the State Committee

about how to move us into becoming a 21st century political organization, instead of what feels like a 19th century one. The plan feels way too late; the metaphorical cow has not just left the barn, it has moved away to New Jersey and the barn has burned to the ground. What exactly are we doing?

In reality, it felt more like a chance for Jacobs to try to get some positive optics – party leadership rallying together in support of him and his plan – rather than a step forward in making the party more transparent, responsive and responsible. I renew my call for Jacobs to resign or be replaced.

Quoting the late former Republican President Richard Nixon would not be my first choice of inspiration when defending myself against accusations of poor performance, but it was apparently for Jacobs, who leaned into Tricky Dick's comments to the White House staff prior to his resignation from the Presidency about not getting discouraged and hating the haters.

That perhaps had some meaning for Nixon, but at a Democratic huddle, it felt wildly out of place for Jacobs to use those comments to refer to himself. Sadly, the same action – subsequent resignation -- did not follow Jacobs' invocation of Nixon, and he used the remarks to pivot away from the overwhelming negative public feedback about the 2022 election results (not to mention 2021 and 2020, which all marked various degrees of Democratic losses in New York State) in an attempt to rationalize why and where we are politically at the moment.

But rather than spend some time reflecting on what happened and how we can work to prevent it from happening again, or at least show some humility and recognition of his culpability, Jacobs chose to justify why the state party is a mess, including: (1) it is Andrew Cuomo's fault, (2) it is Kathy Hochul's fault, and lastly, my personal favorite, (3) it is because our BYLAWS prevented him from acting more aggressively. These

various flavors of “the dog ate my homework” were rather remarkable because at least two of them are still in effect, that being Hochul and our bylaws, and it is only now, some six months after the election, that Jacobs decides to clear the air about why none of this is his fault.

To be fair, Cuomo did not like innovation in the Party unless it had a direct benefit to him politically, so that has a ring of truth. But Hochul took office in August 2021, over a year before the Democratic primary in which she trounced NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams and Congressman Tom Suozzi with 66% of the vote. She was never at risk of losing the primary, and there was ample time for Jacobs to make changes to the state party to help her and Democrats down ballot get elected. This would have been in her interest, as well as in the interest of the state party as a whole, but again, as with Cuomo then, nothing has happened. But it is the really outrageous statement that it is our BYLAWS, the internal working [document](#) of the state

party that is holding us back. Somehow this was never raised before – and yet this is now what we must struggle to reconcile and overcome. I find this ludicrous. All of it. With descending levels of credibility. Cuomo, perhaps. But Hochul held us back from progress? Or is it our outdated bylaws? Please. Spare me. That is absurd.

At one moment during the discussion (which was generally civil and packed with people praising Jacobs as being the victim of forces beyond his control), Jacobs said that the reason Wisconsin and Michigan have robust state parties is because they are swing states. But Maine – about as reliably blue as New York – has a permanent field organization four times the size of New York's despite having a population less than ten percent that of the Empire State. Yet none of this really matters because Jacobs isn't listening to criticism, he wants to be forgiven and the results forgotten, old news he says, time to

move on. Yes, perhaps it is time to move on, but we are condemning ourselves to the same results without changing anything, which is the definition of madness.

We need a 62-county plan, similar to the 50-state plan that former Vermont Governor Howard Dean put into place when he was chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He supported Democrats in every state, motivating people across the country, not just in blue states or blue counties, but specifically in places that were overlooked. It has been said that you cannot beat somebody with nobody, but if you do not even have a Democratic candidate – or support the ones you have -- you forfeit any chances of winning at the margins. And the margins, in a 222-213 GOP majority in Congress (that would be a difference of FIVE seats, of which NYS lost four in the last cycle), are what we are talking about.

Americans have sorted themselves out into red areas and blue areas, so winning at the margins matters;

competing in swing states, and swing districts, really matters. And we didn't. So Hakeem Jeffries is Minority Leader rather than Speaker. Maybe that isn't all Jacobs' fault, or even mostly his fault. But he bears some responsibility for it.

Congressman Jerry Nadler spoke at an Upper West Side political club meeting this month about the NYS Democratic Party, and he pronounced it "non-existent" and lamented that it was not going to change while Jacobs was in power. I agree. It has long been time for Jacobs to go. This isn't personal, it is political, and Jacobs' loyalty to Hochul almost cost her the Governor's mansion and decidedly prevented us from holding the House. Jacobs' reign must end, he should resign and the work of rebuilding the state party must begin.