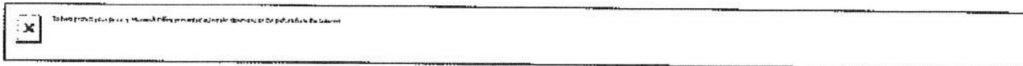


From: NCDP Press <RobertHoward=ncdemocraticparty.org@mail77.atl91.mcsv.net> on behalf of NCDP Press <RobertHoward@ncdemocraticparty.org>
Sent: Tuesday, July 18, 2017 10:51 AM
To: Julia Buckner
Subject: ICYMI POLITICO: Can Roy Cooper Show Democrats How to Win Again?



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 18, 2017

Contact: Robert Howard, RobertHoward@ncdemocraticparty.org

ICYMI: Politico: Can Roy Cooper Show Democrats How to Win Again?

NCDP and Governor Roy Cooper today [announced a new partnership](#), Break the Majority, to invest in key state-level races to break the unconstitutionally-elected Republican supermajority.

Gov. Cooper went on POLITICO's Off Message podcast ([listen here](#)) to discuss the new partnership; below is an article from that conversation.

[POLITICO: Can Roy Cooper Show Democrats How to Win Again?](#)

By Edward-Isaac Dove

July 18, 2017

Roy Cooper wants Democrats to do something they haven't done in state politics in years: Go on offense.

His eyes on 2018 state legislature races and potential special elections in between, the North Carolina governor is launching a multi-million dollar, multi-year effort to knock Republicans out of the state capital. And national Democrats, reeling from losing hundreds of seats in statehouses across the country over the last decade, are hoping other governors pay close attention.

Cooper's initiative is the latest frontier in a state that's a cauldron of just about every political fight in America—redistricting, voter ID, public education, gender. The two major parties are just about equally matched here, though unaffiliated voters outnumber Republicans. North Carolina is where Hillary Clinton swooped in for her final, exuberant past-midnight rally—only to see it called early the next night for Donald Trump; it's where a local battle over who can use which bathroom became a national brawl over human sexuality.

Already, Cooper has quietly banked \$1 million for his new group, [Break the Majority](#), and plans to raise several million more, along with recruiting

candidates and then campaigning for them in state senate and general assembly races. The money, being raised into a new state Democratic Party account, will also cover salaries for what will effectively be a new campaign committee, with a dedicated communications director, research director, several junior staffers and cash for everything from field organizers to ads.

Given the cutthroat nature of politics in North Carolina, Cooper's power play is especially audacious: Though there have been previous independent expenditures and coordinated campaigns in the state and beyond, an effort with this kind of focus and funding is unprecedented.

"Until I get some leverage in the General Assembly, I can't get the things done in education, in economic development. I can't do as much to stop this social conservative legislation that makes us embarrassed as a state, and doesn't truly reflect who we are as North Carolinians," Cooper told me, six months into the job, in an interview here in the governor's mansion for POLITICO's Off Message podcast. "And it's time for that to stop."

Cooper is coordinating closely on mechanics and messaging with Eric Holder, who's chairing the National Democratic Redistricting Committee. At the state party's Unity Dinner last weekend, Holder called North Carolina "ground zero in the fight to restore our democracy" as the finishing touches were being put on the launch for what NDRC executive director Kelly Ward calls "a great model for Democratic governors across the country."

Cooper already had national Democrats paying attention: He's the only swing-state candidate for governor or senator who won last year in a Trump carried, thanks in large part to the outrage over HB-2, the transgender "bathroom bill," and the businesses that pulled out of the state in response. Lanky, with a homegrown Nash County drawl and stories about growing up on a farm, plus two degrees from UNC-Chapel Hill, he's exactly what many Democrats say they've been waiting for. He kept them waiting for years, including four terms as state attorney general.

Ralph Northam, running for governor in Virginia this fall, and Gwen Graham, running for governor in Florida next year, are among those who've debriefed with Cooper, and DNC chair Tom Perez has expressed interest in learning from the victory, according to a person familiar with the conversations, and the Democratic Governors Association hired his campaign manager Trey Nix as its campaign director for the 2018 cycle.

Cooper tells the people who call him for advice to start early, and commit to raising huge amounts of money to outspend opponents who'll likely have massive outside help. Campaign aides have pushed how they invested in online organizing, and how much time Cooper spent responding to attacks directly himself, on camera. "They knew that he was a little more progressive than they were, but they also knew that he had a connection and cared about the state in a unique way," Nix says of North Carolina voters.

Cooper also stresses what he thinks is the connecting thread between taxes, education and jobs that most candidates miss: They have to figure out how to

shake voters who believe "Democrats are going to take something from them and give it to somebody else who doesn't deserve it."

But first, Cooper warns, his party needs to get real about how completely Republicans have outmaneuvered them in state-level elections, and how in the existential moment the party finds itself after the 2016 wipeout, it's time to get scared straight. The Trump fatigue he says he already hears from the North Carolinians isn't going to be enough.

"Democrats didn't get it," Cooper says. "And where else can you go at this point? We have to look at the root of the problem."

Winning a legislative majority is Cooper's dream—optimistically, some North Carolina Democrats say there's a chance of that by 2020—but for now, the goal is breaking the GOP's super-majority in the General Assembly, which has allowed North Carolina Republicans to essentially govern around Cooper, overriding vetoes, cutting funding and—in an example Democrats cite as pure proof of overreach—threatening to impeach the secretary of state.

The state's districts are so gerrymandered that when HB-2 was passed last year under the previous governor, North Carolina Democrats point out, 90 percent of the legislators who voted for it had won their previous race by double digits, if they drew an opponent at all. "They have complete confidence in their absolute authority," says Morgan Jackson, the top Democratic strategist in the state who is advising Cooper on Break the Majority.

In June, after years of litigation, the Supreme Court ruled North Carolina's existing district map as racially gerrymandered and unconstitutional, and sent it back to district court to reconsider holding special elections before next November, as Democrats had been hoping for. Cooper says that makes the current legislature itself "unconstitutional," and is calling for special elections before they get to vote on another budget next year.

The current court situation makes special elections unlikely, creating complications for Cooper and the other Democrats who've fanned out to begin recruiting—state law requires that legislators live in their districts to run, and right now, no one knows where the eventual district lines will be, and thus who'd be eligible where.

But given how many legislators have never faced competitive races due to the existing map, Cooper and his colleagues are feeling optimistic, citing the kind of energy in the base and turnout at local political meetings that Democrats say they're seeing around the country since Trump won. "There's a great deal of enthusiasm. There's a great deal of check writing, too," says Dan Blue, the state senate minority leader.

Cooper's political career is a sometimes puzzling mix of boldness and caution. He got his start in politics fresh out of law school, running a successful primary against the then-majority leader of the General Assembly. He says he's agnostic about primaries in the races he's recruiting for now.

He's less agnostic about running for president, of which there's been some talk: Despite a party that has no clear 2020 frontrunner, despite Cooper fitting a Bill Clinton-esque profile of a Democratic governor from a southern Republican state, despite his approaching politics with a tactical, figure-out-how-to-win and just-make-it-happen-sensibility, no one close to him sees any chance of that. This is a guy, after all, who spent 15 years as attorney general never quite feeling the fire in the belly to run for the job he has now.

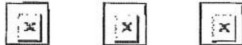
Among the people still holding out hope is Jim Hunt, the former North Carolina governor who remains a dominant Democratic presence in the state 16 years after finishing his fourth term and is a gushing Cooper fan.

"He doesn't want to be president—yet," Hunt says.

But Hunt, who ran a smaller independent expenditure effort on behalf of state legislators when he was in office, says he's fine with Cooper focusing on winning a majority for now.

"You know it's a huge job," Hunt says of Cooper's ambitious plan to oust his rivals, "because no one in America has done it successfully."

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