

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

McNally(00:00:06):

Hello, I'm Terrence McNally. Welcome to Free Forum, A World that Just Might Work. And I'm going to be speaking today, Billy Wimsatt. He's the founder and executive director of Movement Voter Project and Movement Voter PAC, which help progressive donors to support the electoral efforts of the best local community-based organizations in key states. And you can learn more at movement.vote - movement dot vote.

On Free Forum we explore the lives, the work and ideas of individuals I suspect have pieces of the puzzle of a world that just might work. We look at politics, economics, environment, science, health, and culture - all based on the fact that I believe we can do better and I want to find out how.

The show streams weekly on the Progressive Voices Network on TuneIn and podcasts are available anytime anywhere on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, most major podcast sites, and at my site, terrencemcnally.net - T-E-R-R-E-N-C-E-M-C-N-A-L-L-Y dot net. (00:01:09)

We're recording this conversation Wednesday, August 7th. As of today, there are 89 days until the polls close in the 2024 election. And I encourage you to get involved, not only with candidate campaigns, but also with efforts to fight voter suppression and assure that all Americans get their right to vote. And we'll talk much more about the campaign with today's guest.

First of all, let me say thank you to President Biden. His passing of the torch to Kamala Harris has released enormous pent-up energy. The flood of delegates, volunteers, and funds to her campaign is unprecedented. Now, how do we make the most of this opportunity?

The stakes have never been higher. Far-right Supreme Court decisions have stripped away nearly 50 years of abortion rights, crippled the executive branch's ability to do good in the areas of health, safety, finance, and the environment, and granted the President immunity to do evil. (00:02:18)

Project 2025, MAGA's and the Republican party's 900-page blueprint calls for a national abortion ban, guts Social Security and Medicare, limits voting rights, ends separation of Church and State, abandons our global alliances, and disables any national response to the climate crisis.

How do we seize the moment? Our guest today, BILLY WIMSATT, has been developing and effectively implementing for nearly a decade a sensible, inspirational, and successful strategy that transforms the structures and methods, as well as the look and feel of election campaigns - making them more small-d democratic, human-centered, and successful.

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 1 of 24 Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

Movement Voter Project helps progressive donors shift money to local groups doing grassroots vote work in communities - a clear break from the tried-and-true beltway strategy dominated by big donors, big consultants, and big TV ad buys.

Over the last two elections, MVP has become recognized as best-in-class advising platform connecting progressive donors directly to the most credible and effective groups on the ground, in the most critical states and races across the country.

(00:03:35) In the 2020 elections MVP funded local groups who made tens of millions of voter contacts in key states that

narrowly swung blue for Biden: Arizona Georgia Wisconsin Pennsylvania and Michigan.

In the 2024 election cycle so far Movement Voter PAC and its 501(c)(4) affiliate Movement Voter Project have moved tens of millions of dollars to local voter mobilization efforts in battleground states and aims to move up to a hundred million by election day.

We'll talk about how they came up with their approach, what they've accomplished in previous elections, what they've learned, and then most importantly, their playbook for 2024.

Founding and building Movement Voter Project has been the culmination of BILLY WIMSATT's more than 25 years in journalism, philanthropy, organizing, and social entrepreneurship. He has advised hundreds of donors to strategically invest tens of millions of dollars in hundreds of organizations and initiatives.

Before MVP, Billy co-founded Gamechanger Networks, League of Young Voters, Generational Alliance, Ready for Warren, Solidaire Network, Coffee Party, VOTE MOB, Student Power, and Rebuild the Dream. He's consulted with the 2008 Obama Campaign, MoveOn.org, Rock the Vote, the Ohio Democratic Party, and Green For All and is the author or editor of six books on social change.

Q: Welcome again, BILLY WIMSATT to FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK.

Wimsatt (00:05:07)

Terrence, it's great to be back with you on this exciting Wednesday, huh?

McNally(00:05:13):

Isn't it? Tell me, we have had exciting day after day for the last couple of weeks.

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 2 of 24 Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

My initial three part question: How were the doubts regarding Biden's electability and the uncertainty whether he was staying in the race playing out for you in MVP? What did you do to deal with that? And how did his announcement of his exit and the swift alignment around Kamala Harris change things for you?

Wimsatt (00:06:04):

Oh my goodness. ...a rollercoaster. It has been a roller coaster. Terrence.

I mean, we were, and I'm actually going to go back a little bit further...

McNally: Sure.

Wimsatt:

Our partners...We have hundreds of local partners in key states. They've been saying for years that we need a new candidate, that we need a real primary, that this having Biden at the top of the ticket was very risky, if not outright malpractice., and they didn't feel like they had a voice in that process. Right? It was kind of an inside deal. Biden was like, "You know what? I'm running and that's that." And everyone else who would've thought about it backed down. And so actually... Well, actually, I'm going to take a little detour here.

McNally:

Sure. (00:07:05) Tangent on a tangent. Go ahead.

Wimsatt (00:07:07):

So MVP has made three big bets over the last year that were really coloring outside

the lines of what we normally do.

McNally(00:07:17):

By the way, let me just say, Billy, one of my questions was going to be - "Some of these new initiatives that you've taken. Was that a departure? Was that an expansion?" And you're saying, yes it was.

Wimsatt (00:07:28):

Yes. So, okay, the four-part question, we got it all. Let's put it all on the table

McNally(00:07:32):

It's now a four part one. Go ahead.

Wimsatt (00:07:32):

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 3 of 24 Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

After the tragedy and the terror of October 7th, which was devastating, and the devastating response to that in Gaza, everyone was heart-stricken... "What are we going to do?" There was a ceasefire movement. And in January, there were the beginning of the primaries, and a few of us were talking about what can we do in the primaries? Because essentially it felt like we were on a march toward a very bad place - bad

things in Gaza, bad things in the Middle East, and bad things for Biden, and bad things for the future of democracy.

McNally(00:08:31):

In other words, the worst things are there and the more we're involved in them, supporting them, aligned with them, the worse it is for us over here. And so what starts out as a bad situation there could become four more years of Trump.

Wimsatt (00:08:50):

And a real sense of hopelessness and despair and just demoralization. And so I was part of a little group that was trying to figure out what to do about it. And the New Hampshire primary was coming up. This was very early in the year... and could there be some kind of intervention in the New Hampshire primary? So a couple of us worked on a little project called Vote Ceasefire where people wrote in the word "ceasefire" in the New Hampshire primary. And then a much bigger version of that happened in Michigan, where people voted "Uncommitted Michigan." Then people started voting "Uncommitted" and it was a huge deal.

McNally(00:09:39):

Let me just for listeners who don't know this, Michigan's fairly pivotal here because it

has a very high population of immigrants from the Middle East.

Wimsatt (00:09:52):

That's right. A lot of Arab-Americans, Muslims, and the biggest concentration, well the biggest concentration in a battleground state in the country.

So as Movement Voter Project, we're listening to our partners and hearing them say, "It's going to be really hard to turn out

young voters for Biden this cycle, certainly urban Muslim voters.” And there was just a sense of... Over all people were either kind of frozen and paralyzed about how do you engage with the electoral, or they were really mad at Biden. There was a growing Abandon Biden movement.

What you were hearing essentially from affected communities and from the Left was Abandon Biden and Genocide Joe, which were basically personalizing the issue to Biden, right?

McNally:

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 4 of 24 Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).
Um-hmm...

Wimsatt:

...which is a tactical thing that you do when you want someone to change things. You focus it on them and their role in it, which is an effective advocacy strategy, but it could have a very negative electoral consequences in the fall.

McNally: Right, right...

Wimsatt:

Thank God this group came along, Uncommitted, that took a very different approach. I'm explaining this because we got a lot of heat for getting involved in this.

McNally:

Yeah, I'm sure.

Wimsatt:

...and I want to explain why we did it. I wrote a whole blog called *Why MVP is Proud to Support the Uncommitted Movement*. This was something unlike we'd ever done before.

McNally(00:11:48):

And let me just also slip one thing in here, Billy, for listeners. As I described it all in the intro... I think there are few groups that are both in touch with, working with, working for both grassroots groups and donors. And I think that in a way gives you both a unique position and kind of a unique responsibility.

Wimsatt (00:12:25):

Yeah. Because we're listening to people on both ends of this, and so these incredible organizers in Michigan came along and they organized an Uncommitted vote, Uncommitted campaign that got a hundred thousand people to vote Uncommitted in Michigan in just a couple of weeks in the Michigan primary.

And so we supported them, we said we were supporting them, and we got a whole bunch of people upset with us. And they're upset for two reasons. One is because it's like, "Wait a minute, this isn't what you guys do. You support groups to help Democratic candidates, and now you're supporting groups that are opposing the Democratic candidate. They're opposing Biden. This is not your mission. What are you doing? (00:13:17) You're going to endanger...You're going to elect Trump."

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 5 of 24 Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

And we said, “This strategy is actually much more sophisticated than that.” This Uncommitted group is an intervention which is trying to create a ceasefire in the Middle East, is trying to save lives, and is critical of the offensive weapons transfers to Israel and some of these policies. But - unlike Abandon Biden, unlike the personalization and targeting Genocide Joe, they are a pragmatic intervention within the Democratic primary, within the Democratic party. Just like Bernie was, just like Elizabeth Warren was, saying, “We disagree. We want change on this.” It's a constructive strategy that is engaging pissed off Democratic voters just like Bernie did. In other words, it was like Bernie, not like Jill Stein, right?

McNally(00:14:20):

Right, right. Good clarification.

Wimsatt (00:14:21):

...and there are sophisticated operatives who are working with a very disenfranchised, understandably angry community to give them a voice in the process. And they had a four-phase plan, which people didn't know about.

McNally(00:14:46):

And this is, as you're pointing out, this is to keep them in the tent even if it means

we've got to grow the tent a little.

Wimsatt (00:14:54):

Exactly. It was to achieve a ceasefire now and humanitarian aid and contesting weapons transfers, and to get the Democratic party and Biden to listen to them so that they could get voters to turn out.

So phase one was the advocacy phase. Phase two is at the DNC to have their voice heard. Then phase three, after the DNC - and it says this on the Uncommitted Movement website - phase three, the day after the DNC begins, and their goal was to quote, and I've memorized this quote from the website, "Mobilize anti-war voters to save lives, stop fascism, and support democracy in November." Right?

McNally: um-hmm...

Wimsatt:

They were very clear, they did not want Trump. So I got a lot of people upset with me, and then, of course, people are upset... "This is antisemitism..." And it's sort of all mixed together, all swirling together - the campus protests, and someone said "river to the sea", and someone else said something like Hamas... And so I was like, "We have to be discerning here. This is not a group that is saying anything positive about Hamas, is not saying anything

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 6 of 24 Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

antisemitic. As a Jewish person, this is very important to me. There is antisemitism in the movement, there is antisemitism on the Left, but you can't paint with a broad brush and just say, "Oh, all those people are supporting Hamas."

McNally(00:16:58):

Right. I think it's pretty easy to say ceasefire is not an antisemitic aim.

Wimsatt (00:17:06):

Right. And they're very intentional about this. And this is really one of the most beautiful and transformative experiences I've ever had in over 20 years of this work. We have a lot of donors, a lot of volunteers who called me, who wrote me, upset emails and texts... I got on the phone and the tenor of a lot of these conversations were, "I love MVP, but this broke it for me. I don't think I can be involved anymore... I told someone to donate and now I'm regretting it." And then, once I explained what the strategy was and why I as a Jewish leader who believed that this is actually a good strategy, this is good for the Jews, right?

McNally: (laughs)

Wimsatt:

No, in all seriousness. I'm writing an essay called *Love-based Judaism*. It's really important for Jews to have allies and to be good allies. It's good for Jews. It's good for Israel. Basically we're against all the right wing *meshugunas*. We're against Hamas. We're against the right wing *meshugunas* in Israel. We're against the right wing *meshugunas* in this country.

McNally(00:18:40):

That's right. Ultimately, it's pro-democracy.

Wimsatt (00:18:43): Yes, exactly.

McNally(00:18:45):

In fact, it's actively pro-democracy because what you are doing or what this strategy

is doing is giving people a voice.

Wimsatt (00:18:56):

Yeah, exactly. And also it's just been really hope-inspiring to see in this conversation the way that both Jewish and Arab Muslim Palestinian constituents that we have have found it

transformational to think, “Hey, we’re actually all on the same side with each other wanting peace. We’re not against each other.

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 7 of 24 Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

McNally(00:19:27):

That's right. Just to escape the sort of binary good/evil, with us/against us kind of approach that the media takes so often and that too many people take so often. It is so critical and it's almost unusual.

Wimsatt (00:19:48):

Yeah... So we made three big interventions this year. The first was supporting the Uncommitted movement, which people can - if you go to the Movement dot vote site, it's way back in our blogs, but you can read the in-depth explanation of why we did that.

McNally(00:20:08):

So the first one has to do with Uncommitted.

Wimsatt (00:20:10):

Yeah. The second... we basically accepted... We're political realists, right? I'm very pragmatic. I've been very clear all along. We've got to elect Democrats. We've got to elect whoever the Democratic candidate is. We have to elect a Democratic trifecta. Period. And even if it's all Joe Manchin, we'd be like, okay, that's the hand we're dealt. We're going to elect all the Joe Manchins. We're realists.

And so we were prepared to go pull out all the stops to elect Biden. And in fact, on the day of the bad debate... I had been putting out a series called the Bat Signals, and I put out the third Bat Signal on the morning of that debate and... It got lost after the debate, but it's a really nuanced analysis of how we had to have a two-step program to engage unhappy voters to elect Biden and create a permission structure. Anyway...

McNally(00:21:34):

By the way, I get those emails and that one I went, oh, okay. And then I saw it

was basically 54 pages long.

Wimsatt: (laughs)

McNally:

What's so ironic, frustrating, maddening is that this was clearly a well-thought-out, well-defined step-by-step approach to how to deal with the mixed feelings people had. As I recall, one of the lines was, "The number one rule of electing Biden," at least in the early stages of the campaign, was "Don't talk about Biden." But the fact that that came out the day of the debate is head spinning.

Wimsatt (00:22:21):

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 8 of 24 Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

Yeah, the timing was bad. Anyway, so the debate happens and we're like, "Oh my God, what are we going to do?" And we were pulled in two different directions. One is, "Okay, he's probably not getting out of the race, so we got to do everything we can

to support him.” On the other hand, “If he would get out, that would improve our chances. So let's explore that too.”

I started making calls and asking around what's going to happen. And the week after the bad debate performance, I was hearing some credible rumors that Biden was considering stepping back, and that, of course, he's going to say he's not until the moment he does - to buy time, to buy time for Kamala, et cetera...

McNally(00:23:17):

...to basically be able to time if he's going to do it, time it so that it fits with what

else is going on. The Republican Convention, the this, the that, right?

Wimsatt: Exactly .

McNally:

Even if it's an absolute secret until the moment it happens, it has to happen at the right moment.

Wimsatt (00:23:35):

Exactly. So basically, I was on vacation that week right after the debate, and I'm with my kids and the grandparents in Chicago, and texting people on the side furiously, “What are we going to do?”

I get back the next week after the 4th of July, and I sit with our senior team. I'm like, “What are you hearing? What should we do?” And we've all been hearing from local groups, “This is terrible. We don't know how we're going to win this election.” There was just a sense of dread and despair. The RNC was coming up and it just looked really bad.

McNally(00:24:25):

Well, let me just remind listeners. The memo you write prior to the debate is already dealing with the lack of enthusiasm, the wish that things were different, all of that. And then the debate happens and that just accelerates it to where now I'm guessing you're in territory in a way you've never been in before.

Wimsatt (00:24:47):

Yeah, no, it was definitely a new rodeo.

And so we're looking at each other and we kind of all feel like the

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 9 of 24 Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

the frog that's in the water that's heating up and it's going to boil and when do you jump out? And so we kind of looked at each other and we said, "We've got to do something." We talked to a bunch of our ally organizations and our local partners, and basically everyone's telling us, "Yeah, we think he needs to get out, but nobody's going to say anything. What's the point of saying anything? Does anyone care what we think? And we'll get in trouble. Donors will be mad. And we don't want to be divisive. And..."

McNally(00:25:35):

One other thing that I was always thinking. I was with you - although you had much more responsibility and you were in touch with a lot more people - if he ultimately stays in, the heavier we pile on, the harder it makes it. And so it was that weird thing of, "I don't want to handicap the eventual race too much by being honest about how I feel right now." And that's what you're dealing with.

Wimsatt (00:26:08):

No, that's exactly right. And this is why phrasing is so important. I think same fallacy with Uncommitted. People are like, "Oh my god, if we're opposing Biden in the spring, that's going to make it impossible to help him win in the fall." And there's a fine line, right?

McNally: Y ep.

Wimsatt:

So we're calibrating that fine line and we said, "Let's survey our local partners. Let's see where are they at, because at the end of the day, our job is to support them and do what's going to be best for them." And of the 65 groups, we got surveys back from quickly. First of all, a third of them basically felt like they couldn't respond, either they couldn't represent their membership,

McNally(00:27:01): Right...

Wimsatt (00:27:02):

Or they're just like, "I don't feel like I can weigh in on this."

But of the two-thirds that responded, more than two-thirds of those said they thought their jobs would be easier or... They thought Biden should step down and it would make their job of getting out voters easier. There was an important group of people who felt otherwise, who were like, "This is a distraction. We need to move on. We need to stop talking about this. We need to just buckle down and elect Biden."

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 10 of 24

Transcript by [Rev.com](https://www.rev.com)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#). So we respect the entire spectrum of where people are coming from. And there was a

reasonable case either way.

McNally: Y eah.

Wimsatt:

Wimsatt (00:27:54):

And then we also surveyed our donors, our online membership, and low seventies percent of both our partners and our online members agreed that the best thing would be for Biden to step aside.

And then so with sweaty palms, we did something we'd never done before, and said, these are our findings. This is a data point that's concerning, and we think Biden should really consider this.

At that time, the narrative is like, "Oh, this is only coming from donors and elites in the media. Regular voters don't care about this."

McNally(00:28:41):

By the way, let me just say that that was what the media itself was putting out, and it was what the Biden camp seemed to be putting out, "But what about the primaries? What about the voters? It's not them..." And then he'd go and have an appearance and people would seem to be enthusiastic. And you 'e behind the scenes dealing with the fact that you know that's not so,

Wimsatt (00:29:04):

Yeah. There were a lot of people who in front of the scenes were saying, “We're all in for Biden. Everyone needs to shut up.” And behind the scenes were saying, “This is a disaster. He has to get out.” And there was a dynamic, especially in communities of color and Black communities saying, “There's a worry that Kamala would be skipped over.” Which is a huge deal.

McNally(00:29:30):

Oh, right. Our first worry is Biden stays in. Our second worry is Biden exits and she gets skipped over.

Wimsatt (00:29:40):

And there were a lot of donors and pundits who were saying that. I mean, it's breathtaking how much things changed in just a few weeks. I actually think exactly the way things happened has been a perfect storm of good for us because, what

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 11 of 24
Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).
happened was no one was saying anything very good about either Biden or Kamala...

McNally: That's right.

Wimsatt:

...before the bad debate. And then after the bad debate, because they're both getting attacked, people start standing up for Biden. “He's the greatest president we've ever had,” and “Don't you dare pass over Kamala, she's awesome. We've got her back.” So there's all this excitement for Kamala, right.

McNally(00:30:35):

You're right. There's both lowered expectations on both of them because of the

criticism and there's now sort of rallying to their defense.

Wimsatt (00:30:45): Yes, it was fascinating.

So we put out... I think two weeks after the debate, we put out our memo, and we were the only organization... Actually Sunrise Movement was I think the only other national organization of any kind who took any stand on this. And we were the only group that was sort of like a national multi-issue funder organization that took a stand on this. And all these people were thanking us behind the scenes for saying that and doing that and we got huge blowback. So many people...

McNally(00:31:28):

Let me ask you one quick question about the action here, which is that, at a certain point, clearly you get the feedback, you have hard conversations, you write the memo, and then the question is, "Is this a private memo or a public memo?" I mean, did that come up?

Wimsatt (00:31:50):

Well, that one was a public memo.

McNally(00:31:53):

...but the decision that you guys have to make is one thing is to say, this is how we feel and let folks behind the scenes know that. The other is to say, "We're going public."

Wimsatt (00:32:07):

Yeah, no, that was an interesting calculation too because... so in the first week we were hearing rumors that Biden was considering stepping aside and just needed some time. The second week he shut it down, he closed ranks. And on the Tuesday and Wednesday, everybody shut up. People stopped criticizing him. He

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 12 of 24
Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

basically played chicken with everyone. And he's like, "I'm not getting out, so if you keep criticizing me, you're going to hurt all of us." And then Nancy Pelosi... God bless, Nancy Pelosi - got on Morning Joe and did her very diplomatic..

McNally(00:32:52):

Oh my gosh. I mean it's like "I heard what you said..."

Wimsatt (00:32:55):

I think she's a national hero.

McNally(00:32:56):

"I heard what you said. Is that your final decision?" I mean, it was quite remarkable. And let me tell you, we're at about the halfway point and it looks like this is going to be a little different conversation than I anticipated, which is great because this is very interesting and compelling stuff I think.

So let me just tell people - This is FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK and I'm Terrence McNally, speaking with BILLY WIMSATT, founder and executive director of Movement Voter Project and Movement Voter Pac, which helps progressive donors to support the electoral efforts of LOCAL community-

based organizations in key states. And you can learn more at movement.vote.

So we're at the Pelosi moment... Wimsatt (00:33:45):

Basically Biden is trying to close ranks. I'm getting lots of phone calls, "Shut it down. What are you doing over there?" We had to look at each other and say, "Do we take this risk?" And so we decided to take it and we heard on Friday morning that this is the day. This is crap-or-get-off-the-pot day, and you have to get this to Jeffries, Schumer, Pelosi as a data point. If I were Biden, I would want this data point that most of the groups that are doing the grassroots outreach for me...It's not just elites and pundits. The people doing the actual work to talk to voters are very demoralized, are not even planning to talk about Biden because it will backfire. It's such a bad situation. Get this data to people who are in the decision-making seat,

McNally(00:34:59):

Epecially since you kind of have this sense that people... It's not just a sense, you

know it, people are not telling them the truth.

Wimsatt (00:35:09):

Right. He was pretty cloistered and had a close-knit team around him that was not giving him all the data. Basically we were like, "Get it to Jeffries, Schumer, Pelosi, et cetera, and get it in *Politico*. And I was like, "What about the *New York Times*?" They're like, "No, no, not the *New York Times*. Get it in *Politico*."

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

So we said, “All right, we're just going to go for it.” And we did that. And we got more blow back - I thought wading into Middle East stuff was going to be bad - so much blow back and so much of it was pretty kind of 101 assumptions of, we think he's too old, or we don't appreciate him, or all this stuff. And it's like, “No, no, no.” And I had to write out, “This is actually why we're doing this. We actually have intel that he was considering doing this. He may still be considering doing this. We are offering him this data point. This is nothing disrespectful toward him, et cetera.”

And so then - duh-da-duh - he makes his big move, which we're all so grateful to him for ...

McNally(00:36:43):
1:46 PM on Sunday. Yes,

Wimsatt (00:36:47):
I love that you know that.

McNally(00:36:48):
It's so funny. We remember where we were...

Wimsatt (00:36:53):
Yeah...and Kamala just catches the baton like a champ and runs around the track so

many times and it's this phenomenal outpouring. Yeah...

McNally(00:37:10):

I think, Billy, if I could say, I'm guessing for you and your allies as well as it was for me, the response that we have seen, whether it was in the first hour, in the first day, in the first week, has exceeded our expectations. The risk you took, you never imagined, I don't think the events to unfold the way they have.

Wimsatt (00:37:39):

Yeah, I mean I think we did imagine it. It was sort of the best-case scenario that we're hoping for, but not an unlikely scenario. We did game it out and we did think that what happened would be the most likely scenario.

McNally(00:37:56):

Well, what I meant was that the response... that thing that I mentioned at first, which was, the pent up energy, that that response would be as huge as it has been, as you say, best case scenario.

Wimsatt (00:38:13):

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 14 of 24
Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

Yeah. Yeah. No, we anticipated that too. That's part of why we were doing it. That's part of why we were making the big bet is because we thought that things would go the way they went.

I'm proud of that analysis, and obviously they could have gone differently, but people had closed ranks behind Kamala so much that I didn't see there being any kind of big primary and I thought that the excitement factor would be so huge.

So then a couple days after that, there's the whole veep stakes happening and there's these lists coming out of who's she going to pick and "White Boy Summer", and here are all the people... and Tim Walz was not on most of these lists that were coming out from the papers of record...

McNally(00:39:06):

Absolutely. I downloaded those. Here's the seven. Here's the nine. Here's the this.

And he was not in those groups.

Wimsatt (00:39:18):

Occasionally he'd be ninth out of nine or something.

McNally(00:39:23):

“Others. Others who might get consideration.

Wimsatt (00:39:27): Exactly .

We knew about Tim Walz because we have been working closely with groups in Minnesota for years. We have Minnesota-based staff... or we have one Minnesota-based staff now, but we have a very deep relationship with the organizations in Minnesota that had done this absolutely incredible...

And if you want your mind blown, watch a video. It's on our website of Doran Schrantz who is a senior advisor to Faith in Minnesota Pac. She tells the 10-plus-year story of how in Minnesota the organizations got together in a way that's almost unique in the country, and came up with what they called the Minnesota Values Project, the other MVP. And they basically got the entire Democratic Party bought into this agenda, and then they elected that they used a PAC to elect and win a Democratic trifecta in Minnesota. It's a really incredible model. And then they passed all these laws and Walz signed them.

(00:40:52) So those groups in Minnesota knew about Walz and that he... He comes from a much more moderate background, but he's willing to listen. And they thought he was a great guy as politicians go. And from everything I knew about him... I'm

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

looking at these other candidates, I'm like, "This one has executive experience, but no DC or Congressional experience. This one has Senate experience, but no executive experience." So if they don't choose him, they're choosing between someone who doesn't know how to run anything and someone who doesn't know their way around DC.

And we just had this instinct, "This guy is awesome. He's an undervalued stock here. And so I got together with Doran and Javier Morillo and Laura Flynn. Javier, our Minnesota-based senior state strategy director who comes from running an SEIU local. He's the president of an SEIU local in Minnesota for years. Laura Flynn, our former Minnesota state director who's now at Win the Midwest. Anyway, the four of us got together and we wrote this memo on behalf of Walz. It was kind of a long shot. We were just like, "Hey, this guy should be considered too."

McNally(00:42:25):

Yeah, I've read *The Case for Governor Tim Walz*

and it basically says... just that he be considered, just that he be on the table.

Wimsatt (00:42:37):

Exactly. And then we're hearing, "Oh wow, maybe he's in the top five... Oh wow, maybe he's in the top three..." And then lo and behold... He does really well on television. There's so much grassroots enthusiasm for him.

McNally(00:42:56):

And if I could almost make fun of myself, there is that “weird phenomenon”, which is the phenomenon of his having said the word “weird”, suddenly catapulting the word and him to the top of the news cycle. It is just not something you could have ever counted on.

Wimsatt (00:43:20):

Yeah. So now we're celebrating. The world's celebrating. So many people are loving this guy.

We made three big bets this year where we colored outside the lines, in addition to our normal mission - with Uncommitted, with Pass the Baton, and with Walz8. And we went three for three. It was... we're going to have to evaluate after this year if we should do more stuff like that, where there are leadership vacuums that someone needs to...

McNally(00:43:51):

I think the dire circumstances, whether it's Gaza - dire, Biden's age - dire, Biden's, debate - dire. You were pushed into, “Do we have to do more than we've always done? And can we? And what would that look like?” And you did it all, and you're right...

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 16 of 24
Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

To go three for three. If I had asked you...if we'd been having this interview six months ago, you would've been just like so many of your partners feeling, “Well, we could end up voiceless.”

And one of the other things I think that's so striking is that, as I pointed out before, you are one of the organizations that is both

in touch with and representing and partnering with grassroots local groups and donors. You don't move tens of millions of dollars without being aligned and partnered with rich donors, wealthy donors.

But I think so many of us felt that we were voiceless, that this was going to be another 2016, where the insiders made the decisions, whether we agreed with them or not. And the fact that you took the risks... But the fact that the voices were heard makes... it's an amazing... For me, it's revolutionary in terms of democracy within the Democratic party.

Wimsatt (00:45:29):

Yeah, I'm like smiling from your... We're so kind of blown away that it's worked out so well and happy and proud. And now we have 98 days to close the deal. So just to get straight to that,...

McNally(00:45:44):

Yes. This has been fabulous. And now let people know about the Movement Voter Project/Movement Voter PAC model, and the battle plan from now till November.

Wimsatt (00:46:01):

Yeah, well, the final stretch... We just had a great briefing call and one of our speakers, Maurice Mitchell from Working Families Party, who's super brilliant, shared a really simple way to think about money in the last stretch, which is... The campaign is on track to getting what it needs due to this incredible outpouring...

McNally(00:46:30):

Yes, this amazing influx of funds now puts the party in good shape.

Wimsatt (00:46:34):

The Super Pacs and IE are on track to getting what they need, we think. And so the real missing piece, the missing leg of the stool is the ground game, is the grassroots organizations, the hundreds of them that we fund and are in partnership with. We estimate the budget gap to be a couple of hundred million. So it's a really big lift to fill the gaps. And some of them are very acute, like a really well-known group in Arizona is basically looking at whether they have to stop their canvass if they don't get millions of more dollars in PAC money immediately. So it's dire. And that's not just

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 17 of 24
Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).
one group. The field has not been funded properly. All the pent-up energy went to

the campaign and the c,

McNally(00:47:44):

Lemme just jump in because I think you're saying, "Remember all that doubt we had and all that anxiety we had? Well, that was cutting off money across the board." as you just pointed out, the changes released the pent-up energy for the national campaign, but catching up on the local grassroots levels is a very different question.

Wimsatt (00:48:08):

Correct. So we have to go all out to get money to the grassroots organizations that are going to knock on tens of millions of doors, talk to tens of millions of voters - if they have the

resources. So what we're doing - and this is one of the coolest things about Movement Voter Project - we have a very robust volunteer operation, which is mostly focused on organizing house parties and Zoom parties primarily in blue states. Could be anywhere... But we've had over a hundred. We're on our way to 200 house parties this year - house parties and Zoom parties. And it's all organized by volunteers. It's incredible. And so we teach volunteers to teach people this model because most people - zooming all the way back- don't really know there are these local grassroots groups. Or if they do, it's like, "Well, how would I know which one to give to or...?" (00:49:05) It's complicated.

So MVP basically exists to solve that market problem of grassroots groups on the ground that need money and donors that want to fund them but don't know the best way to do it. We have state advisors in all the key states who are working, who are in touch with, on a very regular basis, about 40 organizations in Wisconsin, 40 organizations in Michigan, 40 organizations in Pennsylvania. It's about 40 in the big states and maybe five to 10 in the Nevadas and Montanas. And we know them intimately. We vet them, we know their gaps. We know when this one actually doesn't need money as much. They just got a big check and we know this one could actually grow their program if they had an extra staff person in another place.

So we work really closely with them and we pride ourselves... (00:50:18) We try to be the best in the world at what we do, connecting the donors to the groups. And so if I'm an individual listening to this show, it's like I want to do something. Maybe I could have a Zoom party with friends. You can just go on the website, on movement.vote, sign up to host a house party. We make it really easy for you. There's a deck and we have a great team that supports volunteers to do that. And people have been

raising money out of the woodwork. Especially Pac money is needed. And that is the kind of money that these house parties raise.

McNally(00:51:02):

Explain. In other words, you're in the middle of this all the time. PAC money is

obvious to you. What does that mean?

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 18 of 24

Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

Wimsatt (00:51:12):

It's money that you can use to talk directly about candidates. You can say Kamala Harris and Donald Trump and Democrats and Republicans as opposed to non-partisan money where you can just say, "Are you registered? Are you voting? Here's your voting location. .."

McNally(00:51:35):

And in that un-PAC money, can you say things like, "vote for democracy" or "vote

for..."?

Wimsatt: Yes.

McNally:

...but what you can't do is mention parties or candidates.

Wimsatt (00:51:46): Correct.

McNally(00:51:47):

You can mention issues - vote for...

Wimsatt: Correct.

McNally:

You can say “vote to restore the child tax credit.” You can say “Vote for the climate”...

Wimsatt: Correct.

McNally(00:51:58):

What you're saying is what they need the most is PAC Money where they can actually mention the candidate and What's the difference in the tax implications for the donor.

Wimsatt (00:52:09):

So for a donor, if you're just giving a personal gift of \$50 or \$500 or \$5,000, the best

thing to do is give it PAC. Your name will be disclosed. That's the only downside. And

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 19 of 24

Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).
you don't get a tax write-off.

For donors who are looking to move non-partisan money to get a tax refund for non- partisan work. And it is genuinely non-partisan charitable donations to get people civically engaged in general. Then there's another way to give that. You can contact us and we can make referrals.

McNally(00:53:04): Very good.

Wimsatt (00:53:04):

Good. But for the average person, basically, if people are looking to move a lot of

money, we have a whole bespoke process of helping people.

McNally(00:53:16):

That's right. You're saying there are people who are going to donate \$10, \$20,000 and maybe more. Those people you work with them like almost an investment advisor. But for people who it's - as you said - \$50, \$500, a \$1000, \$5,000. If you're like a lot of people, you say it's an election year. I'm someone who gives, and this is an investment I'm going to make that I'm not going to get a tax deduction. I'm just doing this cause I've got to do it.

Wimsatt (00:53:51):

And we optimize it based on where the biggest needs are from the budget gaps from

all the organizations.

McNally(00:53:59):

One thing I want to point out to people is all that stuff we talked about it first about the Uncommitted, the Pass the Baton, and the Case for Tim Walz. That's what Movement Voter Project hasn't done in the past. What we're talking about now is the meat and potatoes of what they've been doing so successfully and effectively for years, which is that they search out the best local groups, they vet them, they keep track - nas you're pointing out - of even on a real time reality. Who needs it today? Who needs it this week? Who needs the most? What would that contribution...Oh, they need to hire one more staff person. We better get some money there. So that thing that you've been perfecting for over a decade is what's got to be harnessed for the next 90 days.

Wimsatt (00:54:52):

Exactly. So we need to get the money to the field so the groups can hire their canvassers and run their programs. And what they will do is talk to tens of millions of voters, which has a marginal impact on getting many new voters, thousands of new voters in key states to turn out who would not have otherwise turned out.

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 20 of 24
Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

And this election is going to be incredibly close. It's going to come down to a couple thousand votes in a couple of states. And the entire future of the world's going to be determined by these humble actors who nobody's heard of in Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, hopefully North Carolina that are going to determine the future of the world.

McNally(00:55:45):

And you guys understand this because what was it, Trump won in 2016 and the margin was really about 40,000 votes in several precincts in the Rust Belt. Biden won by less than that, like 12,000 or something. Again, a few precincts in a few key states. If you're sitting in New York or California and you say, I don't matter because I'm a blue state, or you're sitting in Oklahoma and you say, I don't matter because I'm a red state. By going through Movement Voter Project, you can have an impact in the precincts where it's needed.

Wimsatt (00:56:25):

That's right. Yeah. And the biggest thing people say to us when they come to our house parties is like, "Wow, this gives me

hope. I didn't know this was an option. I've always felt like alienated from politics and what can I do?" It gives people hope, it makes people happy. A lot of our people were happy even before things got good because they know they get to hear from these local organizations in Michigan, in Arizona, in Pennsylvania who are so inspiring and they know they get to see where their money's going and what it's doing.

So I'm in love with this model. It's so cool. And just when I encourage people to check it out and sign up... Don't just donate. Donate and testify. Donate and put something on Facebook. Tell your family, put it on your family group chat. "Hey, I just found this new way to support things." And consider organizing a little house party.

McNally(00:57:40):

Think of maybe your high school reunion group, your college alumni friends, the people that you have an affinity with that you haven't reached out to yet - passing on this information, introducing them to this model, having a house party, having a Zoom party. Of course, it can be nationwide, sitting in your office, your living room.

So if somebody gets off hearing this and says, "I'm going to the movement.vote website, what should they look for? I suggest they look for maybe the Case for Tim Waltz just to see that and so on. But what should they look for and what should they do? And then we'll close.

Wimsatt (00:58:36):

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 21 of 24
Transcript by [Rev.com](https://www.rev.com)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

Yeah, it's go right to how to volunteer or how to host a house party and we'll get you plugged right in. And the cool thing is we're trying to win the election, but it's a triple bottom line.

McNally: Yes.

Wimsatt:

We're winning the election. We're supporting these amazing organizations that are transforming their communities in so many ways, just like the groups in Minnesota, that eventually you get this amazing legislation and Tim Walz, and we're building an awesome community that spans race and geography and age and generation, and we're building a beloved community of movement donors, funding movements, and it just makes me happy every day.

McNally(00:59:26):

Yeah. I'm just going to say two last things. One is the reason that I suggest going to that memo, The Case for Tim Waltz is because what they achieved with a one vote majority in the legislature called the Minnesota Miracle is amazing. It is like the list of what you would want your government to do if you're a progressive. And they did it.

And why I say look at that is then you can imagine doing the same thing on the national level. If you can motivate people to not only elect the Harris-Walz ticket, but to get out for their Senators, to get out, for their state legislators, to get up and down the ballot, to realize... Something that you had in that long memo, Billy, was "I Get Excited", and it went on for five pages of what we can imagine doing if we can get the trifecta. But you look at Minnesota and you see they got the trifecta in the rust belt and they were able to do these things that... I

always say what you want to do is you want to vote for people and organizations that care about the common good. (01:00:45)

So that's an example of what can happen if we really succeed here. And then the other thing is, what we've left out so much is when I've talked to you guys before or when I tell people about you, is what you were just saying, is that that triple bottom line, is that if you give money just to parties or to candidates, they spend it just on that election. If you give money through Movement Voter Project to grassroots groups on the ground, they're there before the election. They're there after the election. They are working for you in that community to make lives better.

Wimsatt (01:01:26):

Maybe our motto in the future will be “Taking the Minnesota Miracle national since 2024.”

McNally: Y eah.

Wimsatt-08-07-2024-raw (Completed 08/07/24) Page 22 of 24
Transcript by [Rev.com](#)

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

Wimsatt:

Because that's what we want to do. We want to build this Minnesota Miracle nationally, at the federal level, and in all the states, and we have a chance to do that.

McNally: Y es.

Wimstt:

People, this is our chance. This is it. We have been given this

perfect storm and we have to close the deal. And then we can make the country wonderful and have nice things.

McNally: Super

Wimsatt: Go team.

McNally(01:01:55):

Yes. So again, we've been talking about Movement Voter Project, and Movement Voter Pac, which helps progressive donors support electoral efforts of the best local community-based organizations in key states. You can learn more. You can sign up. You can volunteer. You can learn how to do house parties. You can learn how to do Zoom calls at movement.vote

For this conversation and many other interviews and articles, and to join me in pursuit of a world that just might work go to terrencemcnally.net or aworldthatjustmightwork.com - the same website. If you want to receive my weekly email announcements telling you, who's going to be on, what we're going to talk about, and links to 10 or 15 articles to flesh out the conversation, email me at T-E McNally, T-E-M-C-N-A-L-L-Y at M-A-C dot com.

You can find years of podcasts at my site, terrencemcnally.net or at Apple Podcasts or most podcast sites. Michael Lewis, Jeremy Scahill, Naomi Klein, Robert Reich, Van Jones. You can follow me on Twitter at [mcnallyterrence](https://twitter.com/mcnallyterrence). Thanks to Kiyana Williams in production and George Vasilopoulos at Progressive Voices, and most of all you, my listeners. Please share this podcast widely. And with this one, I really mean it. Share it widely. Get the word out. And thank you, Billy Wimsatt. Keep up your good work.

Wimsatt (01:03:11):

This transcript was exported on Aug 07, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).
Thank you. Go team. And I'm so glad we did this on the
Wednesday after instead of

Monday, right? McNally(01:03:16):

Yeah. Billy calls me about an hour before we're going to do the
interview on Monday, and he says, "Can we wait until the Vice
President announcement?" We of course said yes. And then it
turns out we have that to celebrate. We have the Minnesota
Miracle going national to celebrate. Yes. Thank you so much,
Billy.

Wimsatt (01:03:35):
Celebrating with you. Thanks, Terrence.