



The government is promoting bad behavior. This is America! How many of you want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills? President Obama, are you listening?

—Rick Santelli, *CNBC Squawk Box*, February 19, 2009

Following this line, the Chicago trading floor on which Santelli had been standing erupted in yelling and screaming. This typically happens because a stock is rallying or declining. Santelli's rant was interrupted by a nearby trader who quipped, "Maybe we should all stop paying our mortgages; it's a moral hazard."

Stock traders cheering at the political statements of an on-air business reporter? Talking about the pointlessness of paying a mortgage as a kind of moral hazard? It was like a scene from *Atlas Shrugged*, except, thankfully, the monologues were shorter.

These traders weren't reacting to the reallocation of wealth so much as the prospect of the United States' decline. These were not ideologues

or talking heads, nor were they activists or lobbyists. They were simply working people who wanted the freedom to continue working and to enjoy the fruits of their labor in a fair way. Santelli's complaint about the unfairness of rewarding the irresponsible behavior of those who didn't play fair resonated.

If one small rant could get a trading floor on its feet, was it possible that others felt the same? What would it take to get them on their feet? Could they be mobilized?

The country was being sold an entire line of New Ideas that were really just the same, recycled Old Ideas. This isn't merely a rhetorical flourish. The specific legislation that inspired Santelli's rant was the president's Home Affordability Plan, which was unveiled just the day before. What did the plan promise? To prevent foreclosures. How? By transferring massive sums of money from taxpayers to borrowers who just might have bought houses too expensive for their own budgets.¹ (The bill gives aid to those whose mortgage payments are 43 percent of their income.²)

Sound familiar? It should. The bill was essentially a way of pouring another \$200 billion into Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, government-sponsored entities that implemented government policy that had allowed people to get sweetheart mortgages that got them and all of us in trouble in the first place.

That people could get their hackles up over the minutiae of mortgages is pretty damning. There's no catchy cheer for ending irresponsible lending by government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs).

That's where we came in.

Unorganized Organizers

It seemed like a good idea at the time. As salespeople and politicians say, some of us saw a unique opportunity. Many individuals believed these sentiments were being felt, but not openly expressed, by millions of Americans.

Prior to President Obama taking office, there was significant skepticism regarding the very free-market capitalist system that has allowed our nation to be the most prosperous, generous, and powerful entity in the world.

At the dawn of the worldwide financial crisis, French President Nicolas Sarkozy proclaimed, "*Le laissez-faire, c'est fini.*" President Bush, renowned for sticking to his guns regardless of the changing winds of popular opinion, initiated the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP. In an interview with FOX News' Bret Baier, President Bush said, "I will be known as somebody [who] saw a problem and put the chips on the table to prevent the economy from collapsing. I'm a free-market guy. But I'm not going to let this economy crater in order to preserve the free-market system."

Bush's willingness to abandon his free-market principles in a time of financial crisis belied a fair-weather dedication to capitalism all too common among Republican politicians. Too concerned with his legacy, Bush fell into the old trap of haphazard grandstanding steeped not in principle but gumption.

Gumption is not an ethos. It is not a mast one cleaves to in the squall. The lessons of history and even the Founding Fathers have given us stronger stuff than this. If the Republicans, conservatives in particular, are serious about freedom, it must be the centerpiece of any deliberation—especially in crisis.

Going this direction, the direction of bailouts, TARP, and massive government takeovers, was a signal not only of a lack of seriousness, but a grand new legitimacy. To have a sitting Republican president whose previous policies project the image of fealty to free markets suddenly abandon them was to say that those free markets were a failed experiment and that the serious thing to do was to overturn them. The big-government cavalry alone could save the day.

At a convention in the 1970s, Malcolm Muggeridge, onetime Communist and subsequent editor of *Punch* magazine, asked the crowd why, during such troubled times, Americans had abandoned their faith. "It is as though," he began, "a Salvation Army band, valiantly and patiently waiting through the long years for judgment day, should, when it comes at last, and the heavens do veritably begin to unfold like a scroll, throw away their instruments and flee in terror."

It was hard not to agree with Muggeridge's sentiments as the financial crisis unfolded. Not only did Bush toss his instruments and flee in terror, he handed them off to those forces he had pledged to keep at bay. And then he left town.

The early days of the Obama administration saw a vast expansion of government—both in size and scope. Besides the spending earmarked under TARP, there were plans on the table to have another round of bailouts for troubled financial institutions, car manufacturers, and bad mortgages on a person-by-person basis.

The sentiment continued to be reflected in the media and in popular opinion. The February 2009 *Newsweek* cover read “We Are All Socialists Now.” A *New York Times*/CBS News poll, among others, indicated that the majority of Americans were comfortable with an expanded role for government.³ Other headlines said in various forms that capitalism was dead, or, in the words of Milton Friedman, that we were “all Keynesians now.”

But as government grew and inserted itself in the economy, as week upon week of huge spending programs—with money going to the losers!—passed by, a murmur began. People started to express concern; they began to openly worry about the debt burden and the unfairness of rewarding bad behavior by giving it more money. When Santelli ranted extemporaneously on-air, it was like compressed steam being released. All of a sudden, we could talk openly about our concerns, our potential opposition. If a bunch of working people on a trading floor were clearly upset, it didn't seem unreasonable to consider that a lot more people were also skeptical about the expansion of government rolling forth from Washington, D.C.

From Stewing to Brewing

My friend J. P. Freire called me late that night on February 19th. At the time, he was working at *The American Spectator*. The dialogue started: “You know what would be funny?”

As we spoke, it became clear that this wasn't really funny. We realized that our country stood on the brink of a new era that was hardly one worth hoping for. We were not opposed to Obama—or any other politician for that matter—as a person. We were opposed to vast government expansion, huge spending, entitlements, and intervention that would erode everything we believed was good about the United States.

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But what to do about it? As conservatives, we were part of an opposition movement that had little experience in marching on Washington and instead prided itself on good behavior. And we aimed to misbehave.

The idea was to have a “tea party.” There were already vague rumblings among the center-right grassroots and think tank communities about staging an event on the Fourth of July. But we thought it would be smarter to capitalize on the existing sentiment Santelli had unleashed. Already Facebook groups were multiplying, each carrying in its description iterations of the phrase “Rick Santelli is right,” or “Tea Party!” People we did not even know contacted us simply because we had listed ourselves as conservatives on social media.

On the horizon was the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), an event that would draw thousands of conservatives to Washington, D.C. Both of us had attended the event a number of times, but this year it had special significance.

This was a year of clarity. No longer would attendees be mealy-mouthed about the mixed results of the Bush administration and the desire to “stay in the game.” Both ideological purists and their more opportunistic brethren could share ground.

While political defeat would certainly pervade the mood, defeatism would not. The voters’ rejection of the Republican nominee was more vindication than failure. Run a moderate candidate with no clear philosophy and this is what you get: defeat.

The election of Obama was not a referendum against small government and tax cuts. It was a referendum on competence. Republicans had seemingly gone out of their way to show an utter lack of it. From controlling two branches of government yet failing to reduce the size of it, to Sen. John McCain’s lackluster campaign, the GOP had lost credibility as an agent of change. That moniker would belong to someone else.

Conservatives at CPAC would be sure to wonder, then, how to restore in the Republican Party a standard of competence and a core philosophy. That is, if it was at all possible.

Not that I or my brethren had answers. While most of my peers are young participants in the larger center-right movement, none of us were grassroots activists. Few conservatives are. But even this disconnect was troubling: Why was it so hard to think of ourselves as activists when all we did was live and breathe this stuff?

Within the next week, we planned and participated in a new American tea party—a snowballing popular *counter*revolution that encouraged people to speak up, people who never before considered playing an activist role in politics. In doing so, it was clear that the paradigm had shifted (as paradigms seem to do) and that conservatives were beginning to rethink their disdain for community organizing.

The Planning

We had media and event planning experience. But it never occurred to us that planning a protest in front of the White House would be a viable use of time. Then again, we never thought we would have to explain to people why the government shouldn't help people buy more house than they could afford.

We had also seldom participated in, let alone successfully planned, a protest rally. For many conservatives, rallies are the tools of the left, a notable exception being the March for Life. The stereotype fit: Conservatives are busy working and don't have the time or inclination to paint signs and stand outside cheering and jeering. And Libertarians never show up for anything except dinner and drinks—if they like the company and what is on the menu.

We weren't grassroots activists or community organizers. Our jobs, while in “the movement” were not particularly well suited to planning a rally. I was working at a nonprofit as a fund-raiser. Freire was a magazine editor. In less than a week we needed to procure a venue, a permit, speakers, and equipment—all while simultaneously promoting the event so that people would show up.

Both of our workplaces were flexible but skeptical. While both of our organizations were philosophically on board, it is not the mission of a magazine nor a think tank to do this sort of thing—an important point that I'll address further when confronting claims about some sort of right-wing conspiracy. (A preview: If the tea parties are a well-funded movement, we're still figuring out who to bill.)

Freire did the vast majority of planning for the event. He procured the permit for Lafayette Park in front of the White House, set up a web site from scratch, and began to plug the event in media

appearances. I started making phone calls to see who else would want to participate.

There was also the fact of visibility. Washington was a fantastic media environment, and it would be easy to lure cameras to the front of the White House. If we coordinated with others having similar ideas in other towns, we could make an even greater impact—if there was one tea party, it would look like a half-baked neighborhood watch. But if they happened across the country on the same day, that might be newsworthy.

The site, NewAmericanTeaParty.com, started attracting viewers. When Freire was interviewed about it on FOX News, the server was flooded and crashed. All the while, a number of other web sites were available—from the more anonymously-run ReTeaparty.com to Pajamas Media's site, to a site run by the founders of Top Conservatives on Twitter (a ranking system for conservatives on the trendy microblogging site). No site could claim an "official" distinction. The variety of sites simply meant a wider spread of information. Whatever potential for rivalry was immediately superseded by a realization: Interested people were logging on to the Web and trying to figure out where the closest event was to them.

For NewAmericanTeaParty.com, I sought sponsorship. Not financial sponsorship—a web site is cheap if you know how to design one—but sponsorship that imparts the "seal of approval" and sense of legitimacy from organizations with name recognition, ones that had a following and could help pull more people into the event.

This led to involvement from think tanks, grassroots organizations, and advocacy groups like Americans for Tax Reform, Americans for Prosperity, FreedomWorks, and the National Taxpayers Union. Many groups gave their support in name only but were eager to do more. But we had no idea what they *could* do. We'd never done this before, either.

As planning for the event progressed, Freire got on a conference call with members of Top Conservatives on Twitter to suggest a date—February 27th, that Friday, at 12 noon—in the hopes that the buzz about Santelli's rant wouldn't die down. Others on the call agreed. Individuals across the country could plan simultaneous protests from their hometowns.

NewAmericanTeaParty.com was flooded with requests to post events that were cropping up across the country. The site quickly went from the home for the D.C. event to a hub for citizens to post and search for events in their cities or towns. And, again, it wasn't the only one. Thousands of e-mails flooded in, announcing another event or requesting information about nearby events.

Here's a typical e-mail from a fellow unwilling to use Facebook. Joe wrote:

Thanks for taking this cause and running with it. I have been saying for quite some time now that a leader needs to step forward, get people organized, and show these sorry asses in Washington that the people back home, the ones they are supposed to represent, can be a force to be reckoned with.

I will gladly be one of the "troops" in this battle for our country's survival.

Good luck and thanks again!

Katherine in Minnesota wrote:

Please keep up the excellent work! This is exactly what we need. When is there going to be an event in Minneapolis/St. Paul?

I will e-mail your web site to all my friends and family. God bless.

Mike from Maryland penned:

I would like to find out more about this event, but every time I click an information link, it's an invitation to sign up for Facebook.

I don't want to sign up for Facebook, I just want to find out about the Washington, D.C., tea party. Could you do this some other way?

Thanks and best regards with best wishes for all success.

People were actively seeking out this web site on their own, without the direction of a Rush Limbaugh or a Matt Drudge. They weren't picked up off of an activist e-mail list. These were organic hits. People *wanted* this badly enough to pursue it on their own. They wanted to do something.

The irony was that while people referred to us as leaders in a number of these e-mails, we were flying by the seat of our pants. We certainly

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weren't the only people on the planning side, either. We barely had enough time to keep track of everything happening on our end.

The speaker lineup was no exception. Freire was prepared to do a good deal of speaking and had gotten a megaphone from a friend who, appropriately, only used it for an annual Fourth of July celebration. We grabbed a couple of friends representing think tanks, and at the last moment met Joe the Plumber at a breakfast and puckishly suggested he participate.

Again, nothing could have prepared us for planning a rally in front of the White House to address government mismanagement of the financial system alongside Joe the Plumber. It still seems a little surreal.

Politicians played no role in the event. Originally we wanted a few principled folks. We asked a few of the usual suspects—fiscal conservatives, those who voted against the bailout. A few responded that they were out of town; otherwise, calls were rejected or not returned. Interestingly, one month later they'd be scrambling to speak at any event with the words "tea party."

Details were so haphazardly managed that even the permit for the location wouldn't be solidified until two days before. Originally, we had planned on using space in front of the Washington Monument. But the location was far from a metro station, and we were hoping to make it easy for CPAC attendees and commuters to show up.

At one point we discussed using the tidal basin and perhaps a boat with some sort of symbolic action—like dumping tea *a la* the original Boston Tea Party. But dumping tea in a national park seemed like a bad idea when a friend had recently been arrested for dancing at the Jefferson Memorial. Known as the Jefferson 1, she was part of a larger group of freedom lovers who brought iPods to the Jefferson Memorial to dance in silence on the Founding Father's birthday. It was apparently unnerving for the police who had no idea what was happening (while my peers have little community organizing experience, apparently we do have a dash of Merry Pranksters about us).

The threat of rain on the 27th was also a concern, and we discussed bringing the event indoors. Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich was also scheduled to speak at the same time the tea party was scheduled.

Eventually, we decided to keep it outside for maximum impact. Ideas for a gimmick at the event were numerous, but we settled on doing nothing, just having folks show up with signs, have a few speakers talk, and let the rally go from there.

Leading up to the event, we received a number of e-mails about sending tea bags to the Hill or to the White House. Particularly for folks who couldn't make it to the D.C. tea party or a concurrent one in their town, this seemed like a great alternative. While we didn't endorse or run the effort, it certainly was admirable. We didn't have the heart to tell enthusiastic patriots that due to post-9/11 safety measures and anthrax terrorism, their tea bags would likely end up scanned and discarded at a scanning center in Maryland or Virginia.

Within 24 hours of the event, we determined that there would be significantly greater impact and it would be more appropriate to have the event in front of the White House or the Capitol. The White House has a park where up to a few hundred could easily gather. So the location was changed, and the word disseminated via new media and e-mail, and surprisingly, the word got out.

To spread the word and to track projected participants, we created a Facebook page for the New American Tea Party Coalition and for the February 27th D.C. event itself. By game day, we had over a thousand Facebook supporters and a few hundred people planning to attend the event. The coalition page allowed people to discuss starting a tea party in their city or town or to discuss the news of the day and how it fit into the theme for the rally.

From there, event pages sprung up across the country with people joining in support of or to attend an Atlanta tea party or a Chicago tea party.

I cannot stress enough the role that online networking tools like Twitter and Facebook played in these rallies' success. Freire and I hardly knew or know 400 free-market people we could call on to show up outside the White House with a week or less notice. A decade ago there would have been absolutely no way to make this possible. The multiplier effect of Facebook, for example, was amazing. To be able to forward an invite to 10 friends who could in turn forward it collectively to 100 and so on was invaluable. Folks that barely knew how to check their e-mail were signing up for Facebook just to stay in the loop on protests in

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their area. This phenomenon continued exponentially into the April 15th events.

Game Day

February 27th was predicted to be overcast and rainy. We decided to plow ahead without a rain location, hoping for the best and realizing that even if attendance was cut in half due to rain, even 100 people turning out would be significant.

We arrived with the recently procured bullhorn and our permit. The rally was scheduled for noon. It was 11:45 A.M. and there were hardly 30 people there. It was obvious that the location change and the weather had affected attendance.

Freire began to gather people around with the bullhorn while I liaised with Secret Service and the park police regarding the rules of the road.

By noon there were 100 people gathered and the speeches began. We had tapped our coalition members to provide speakers and had no more than five lined up.

Logistics-wise, the event went off almost without a hitch. We had to move the rally 100 yards or so due to the specifics of the permit. The only other incident involved balloons. Megan Barth, an Irvine, California, resident who flew in to participate and who was an invaluable volunteer for the rally, had purchased about \$300 worth of pig balloons to symbolize pork. After distributing them, we were informed that balloons weren't allowed in front of the White House for security reasons. The police and Secret Service were understanding about the entire thing, and quietly asked me to collect them.

Two friends took the majority of them and stuffed them in a car around the block. I was asked to collect the remaining balloons, held by a few young children and conservative author Michelle Malkin. Malkin kindly obliged, and I coaxed the balloons from the children and walked across the street and appropriately popped the pork balloons with a mini American flag's point.

By 12:30 P.M. more than 300 people had gathered. When the speakers we had lined up were finished and the crowd was still pumped up

and calling for more, Freire waded into the crowd with the bullhorn. We heard from a woman business owner concerned about the cost of doing business and hiring people. An electrician gave an impassioned speech about the fiscal situation we'd be handing to our children and grandchildren.

Off to the side of the protest, a family was dressed in Revolutionary War garb playing the era's music on fiddle, drum, and pipe.

The participants consisted of men, women, teens, and families. Democrats, Republicans, and Libertarians waved Gadsden flags and signs decrying bailouts and pork or calling for the Fed to be audited.

It was beautiful, it was real, and it was entirely unscripted. It couldn't have gone better.

We're All Community Organizers Now

While the event was scheduled for two full hours, we closed it after about an hour while the momentum was still going strong.

Following the event, the mood was not one of anger but of hope, but it was a different flavor of hope than promised during the recent election. The event, while only a few hundred strong, showed those present and those watching at home that they were not alone. Little did we know this last-minute, first-time rally of ours would spark a nationwide "million-man" taxpayer protest.

For an hour or so after the crowd dispersed, Freire, as head planner and MC of the event, was overwhelmed with media requests. I acted as a press agent, lining up everyone from Joe the Plumber to PBS to do interviews with Freire.

Cable and network news coverage was disappointing. One cable network in particular provided ample coverage of the event, but that was expected. But many major networks ignored the events. In a time where a half a dozen Code Pink protestors make national news, why would a few thousand taxpayers protesting major government expansion not make cable headlines?

That said, coverage was fairly wide in traditional media, from the *Washington Times*, to the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and *Investor's Business Daily*.

The Tax Day Tea Parties

By mid-March, the tea party movement was a formidable force. Thousands had turned out in Orlando and Cincinnati following the February 27th events. What we heard from many groups and individuals during the planning for the February tea parties was that they wished they'd had more time to rally the troops, to get off from work, or to arrange for transportation to an event in whatever major city was closest to them. The one-week notice for the first event in D.C. was too short. While we were happy with the turnout in February, particularly given our timeline, it seemed like a no-brainer to shoot for a large-scale, national concurrent tea party on a highly symbolic day like tax day. On April 15th the average American is faced with the reality of how much of their hard earned money is going to the Leviathan instead of to their 401(k), a child's college fund, or a family vacation. In other words, on April 15th, every American is a fiscal conservative.

Hundreds of cities and towns began to plan tax day tea parties. Again, we saw the movement fully utilizing the Internet and new media like Twitter and Facebook. Many existing think tanks and grassroots organization set up networks far more sophisticated than our original coalition web site that allowed individuals to find a tea party organizer in their city or town, print off posters and talking points, or volunteer to take the lead on getting something going in their town. Many of these groups had weekly conference calls in each city and nationally to discuss logistical concerns, press opportunities, and so on for the tax day events. One impressive site that was organized was TaxDayTeaParty.com. It was a very sophisticated version of the hub we had tried to produce for the February events.

Institutional Organization

We were excited to see this movement take off, although we were skeptical of people co-opting it. This was genuinely a grassroots movement—something quite rare on the left or the right. It is one thing for an organization to pull together an event. It doesn't take away the validity of its points, but in a sound bite world, a more organic

grassroots uprising is a lot more impressive and largely immunized from fallacious leftists attacks—or so we thought.

In the February effort, we were eager to have the event endorsed, for it to look legitimate in order to get boots on the ground for the protest. Skeptical but willing organizations signed on and sent out notes to their members. This was good for the event and good for them. Many of them have the explicit mission of aiding grassroots movements like this. We, on the other hand, needed the infrastructure to get the word out to protestors and the press.

After the success of the February events, people were coming out of the woodwork with “official” tea party organizations, web sites, and events. With the change of administrations paired with the struggling economy there was no shortage of out of work, entrepreneurial individuals in libertarian and conservative camps looking to make a name for themselves. We’re market guys, this makes sense. Our concern was, however, that any group, or groups, claiming to be *the* tea party was antithetical to both the broad, grassroots nature of the movement and the core principles of the movement. On the one hand you have Democrats, Republicans, small and big “L” libertarians and independents who were frustrated with runaway spending and the state of the nation we’d be passing on to the next generation. To associate these principled concerns with one organization is problematic. Frankly, many center-right think tanks turn off Democrats and Independents, regardless of the fact that they may see eye to eye on virtually every fiscal principle and beyond. A dishonest SourceWatch entry is enough to make many people, rightly or wrongly, quite skeptical. Even if the average tea party protestor didn’t care, there was always the concern of the media. Local or national media outlets, if they didn’t like the flavor of any one organizing group, could write it off as “Astroturf”—a term for fake activism playing off “grassroots.” This was, after all, a constant—and legitimate—criticism of many protests on the left, funded by George Soros and the like.

Secondly, there is the fact that any sort of command and control infrastructure was against everything these protests stood for. Thousands of people were turning out to protest an ever-expanding, heavy-handed federal government command and control. To take a similar approach to the protest of this Leviathan would be absurd. There were people

claiming to be *the* tea party coordinators at the national, state, and local levels. There were “official” t-shirts, talking points, posters, and web sites. There were official spokesmen who had never officially spoken for anything in their entire lives, let alone the millions of Americans frustrated with the various implications of the federal government’s fiscal imprudence. That said, there you have the free market at work.

Striking a Balance

Fortunately, in the vast majority of cases, the will of the people prevailed. It was an interesting case study that illuminated why central planning simply doesn’t work. It is nearly impossible for one person or group to dictate to a highly motivated, distant, and disparate force of individuals, rather like trying to herd cats.

The impractical prospect of a far-off puppet master controlling several hundred thousand or even a million or more protestors of various individual temperaments with varying political gripes, paired with the philosophical incompatibility of a command and control approach to organizing a grassroots effort made for a nice free-market solution to many of the organizational issues.

For example, back in Chicago at this time, I found myself at the reigns of the Chicago effort almost overnight. Having burnt a solid week of personal and work time on the February efforts, I was ready to retire as a tea party organizer. However, it became apparent that there was nobody taking the lead on a tax day tea party in Chicago. Eric Odom’s TaxDayTeaParty.com that spearheaded a lot of national coordination was based in Chicago. Its volunteer PR person, a young PR professional, was tasked with also planning the Chicago effort. She was, however, overwhelmed with the task of coordinating national media. She wasn’t able to focus on actually getting the event off the ground in her home city—the city where Santelli famously blasted the bailout and called for a Chicago tea party.

Only a few weeks out, there was no location, no time, no speakers, and no permit. This is arguably the easiest part. Getting people to the rally is the hardest, and there were already thousands signed up to attend on Facebook.

I volunteered to help coordinate in my free time with my friend and colleague Brian Costin. We found that what really worked was institutions offering aid—financial, logistical, PR help, but not branding or controlling events. When that happens, ancient organizational rivalries, prima donna personalities, and general PR issues cloud the message of the movement.

Internal Complications

The Chicago protest would eventually go off without a hitch, but there were plenty of bumps along the road. I was handed an interesting brew. For one, the only speaker that was confirmed was the previous organizer's boss, a conservative commentator who ran a professional public relations firm. And he posed a problem. It was well known in Illinois Republican circles that he was feeling out a race for governor. The last thing this effort needed was to be branded as Republican, particularly as a springboard for a campaign. This was a genuine concern and it spoke to the movement's commitment to keep the protest focused on the issues and not about parties. He understood, and stepped down as a speaker.

Then I was told that a local radio station was promised exclusive cosponsoring rights. I was flabbergasted. This was going to be an event with people in the thousands. Any and every local radio and TV outlet would be covering it. That day I had gone on FOX News Channel and its local affiliate to promote the event. What did this radio channel bring to the table? Would they *not* cover it if they weren't cosponsors? It turned out that our previously scheduled conservative commentator speaker was a paid commentator for the station. I eventually decided to move on, as the spot as promoter had already been promised before I took the reins.

I proceeded to line up speakers from Illinois state think tanks, a female business owner, and a young man who worked on Hillary Clinton's campaign who was disenchanted with his party.

No, Really, We're Nonpartisan

As momentum built, Eric Odom received a call from the Republican National Committee. It was RNC Chairman Michael Steel's scheduler.

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The caller mentioned that Steele would be in the area on April 15th and wondered if he could speak at the rally. Odom stuck to his guns and said "thanks, but no thanks." He told them Mr. Steele was welcome to attend, but that no political figures would be sharing the stage in Chicago.

This was a gutsy move. In many other cities, politicians were speaking at rallies. However, organizers for the most part limited themselves to fiscally responsible, antibailout officials. In the case of Steele, he stood for a party that millions of people felt had let them down. Steele rightly saw this as an opportunity for him to pick up the mantle and reclaim fiscal responsibility for Republicans. But this was not the point of the rally. This was a chance for the people to speak to the politicians for a change. Odom made the right call respectfully declining. He then sent out a press release hailing the decision, which was gutsy insofar as it was touting a dissing of sorts of the one party that, at least on paper, had some sympathy for the protesters' beefs. This move alone should have provided ample proof that the rally was not partisan and was not about the GOP. We had, after all, rejected the *head* of the GOP. Our naiveté was showing; this factoid would, of course, be overlooked by many in the media later.

Bureaucrats and Permits

The permitting issue was a huge concern. For one, the original site for Chicago was the Daley Plaza. This site required a \$1 million insurance policy. Thankfully, the folks at FreedomWorks, one of the top grassroots facilitators in the country, helped out.

As the expectations grew from 1,000, to 2,000 attendees or more, we realized the Daley Plaza wouldn't hold the crowd. To further complicate matters, the city of Chicago required 30 days notice and more insurance for staging, among other requirements. But thousands of attendees were planning on showing up at that location. I knew from the weekly conference calls we were running that folks in the suburbs were chartering buses to come in. We needed to nail down a location and permits as quickly as possible.

I went with Brian Costin to the Kluczynski Federal Building, the plaza of which could hold up to 5,000 people safely. As one might

imagine, getting a permit approved was a tiresome bureaucratic process (giving us some sympathy with our community organizer/protest brethren on the left). Two other groups had permits for the location. One was an antitax group that needed limited space. That group's organizer said, "sure, they can join the party." The other was an antiwar group that expected up to 100 people and wanted half the plaza. Efforts to contact the organizer went unanswered. With days until the event, if the location was going to change it had to change quickly. I sent our press releases and Facebook messages to thousands of attendees and press. On the day of, we would have volunteers redirecting people from the original location. Now all we needed was the permit.

The day before the event there was still no word from the Federal building. Costin and I went to the Federal building and waited for the supervisor. At 1:45 P.M., she was still at lunch. When she finally arrived, we made a good case for our permit being approved. More than 4,000 people were showing up the next day at that plaza, permit or no permit. Additionally, the existing protestors had similar beefs. The folks with fiscal concerns could be easily integrated. We then argued that since the antiwar protestors had a complaint with the spending on the war, that, too, was quite compatible. Besides, they expected 100 at the most and likely were to have about 6 people show up. Finally, she slapped on the seal of approval and we were in business.

April 15, 2009: The Million-Taxpayer March

Around the country on April 15th, the much anticipated tax day tea parties took off in all forms. Every capital and every major city had one. Some were also held in small towns. The final count for attendees was conservatively estimated at over 500,000. And for every man, woman, and child in the street, there were at least a dozen Americans at home or at work cheering them on.

As the *Christian Science Monitor* reported:

By some estimates, over half a million Americans took to the streets last Wednesday to protest taxes and Washington spending—the largest single-day turnout of protesters in the U.S. since 750,000 people

THE TEA PARTIES

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marched in Los Angeles in support of rights and protections for immigrants on March 25, 2006.⁴

Prior to the event there was significantly more press coverage than with the first event in D.C. I received two calls from a producer—one was to ask “is this a Fox event?” I responded that it was not, that it was newsworthy and many outlets were covering the lead-up to the event and planning on attending the events themselves. I asked if he wanted to talk to any organizer or participants; he said “no.”

I received a second call a couple hours later and was asked why the permitting was not in order for Daley Plaza. Well, as the press release explicitly stated, the event was not taking place there but at the Kluczynski Federal Building plaza. “Why has Chicago not heard of any permit?” I patiently gave the CNN person a brief civics lesson, explaining that the great city of Chicago doesn’t oversee federal property. The confrontational tone and lack of knowledge foreshadowed the CNN interaction that would take place and make news itself just one day later.

The Chicago speakers and participants represented a broad spectrum. Speakers at other events included concerned taxpayers, grassroots organizers, and fiscally conservative local and state Republicans and Blue Dog Democrats. Some events procured folks like Ted Nugent, and a couple were covered live by the likes of Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck.

The Chicago event went off without a hitch. The speakers were passionate, the crowd was excited. There was no violence, no disruptions from ACORN as that group had promised.⁵ A few strange folks showed up in masks, but outnumbered about 1,000 to 1, they did nothing. Afterward, the crowd cleaned up the plaza, impressing the law enforcement so much that it made news the next day on Rush Limbaugh’s radio show.

All told, the nationwide estimates were 250,000 to 500,000. Americans for Tax Reform compiled a master list of the turnout in all cities, specifically asking for conservative estimates for each. All told, it counted over half a million participants.⁶ Cities the group reported as having 5,000 or more participants are listed on page 20. I’m confident the numbers are rounded down as police estimates in Chicago put the number at 5,000 to 7,000 and on this list, Chicago doesn’t make the conservative estimate cut.

A NEW AMERICAN TEA PARTY

Location	Attendees
Atlanta, GA	15,000
San Antonio, TX	13,000
Overland Park, KS	10,000
Sacramento, CA	10,000
St. Louis, MO	10,000
Madison, WI	8,200
Dayton, OH	7,500
Fresno, CA	7,500
Columbus, OH	7,000
Nashville, TN	7,000
St. Paul, MN	7,000
Woodland, TX	7,000
Austin, TX	5,000
Baton Rouge, LA	5,000
Birmingham, AL	5,000
Bossier City, LA	5,000
Cleveland, OH	5,000
Dallas, TX	5,000
Denver, CO	5,000
Ft. Meyers, FL	5,000
Ft. Worth, TX	5,000
Lansing, MI	5,000
New York, NY	5,000
Oklahoma City, OK	5,000
Olympia, WA	5,000
Phoenix, AZ	5,000
Portland, OR	5,000

SOURCE: Americans for Tax Reform. "People Attended Yesterday's Tax Day Tea Parties." www.atr.org/people-attended-yesterdays-tax-tea-parties-a3138.

What's more, the tea parties were viewed favorably by a majority of the nation with a Rasmussen Reports poll indicating 51 percent approval and 32 percent of respondents reporting *very* favorable views of the events.⁷

Unfortunately, as we would discover, the political class, the media, and the Hollywood elite didn't share America's view.