

## **Conversations with Ady Barkan and Shawn Sebastian, July 14, August 31, and September 2, 2016**

### **Participants**

- Ady Barkan – Campaign Director, Fed Up, Center for Popular Democracy
- Shawn Sebastian – Field Director, Fed Up, Center for Popular Democracy
- Alexander Berger – Program Officer, Open Philanthropy Project

**Note:** These notes were compiled by the Open Philanthropy Project and give an overview of the major points made by Mr. Barkan and Mr. Sebastian.

### **Summary**

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Mr. Barkan and Mr. Sebastian of the Center for Popular Democracy (CPD) to get an update on the Fed Up campaign. Conversation topics included Fed Up's recent advocacy activities, the role of its regional partner organizations, fundraising, and how Fed Up is conceptualizing success for the campaign.

### **Humphrey-Hawkins**

During June's Humphrey-Hawkins testimony, Fed Chair Janet Yellen addressed racial disparities in employment and wages near the beginning of her speech, which is a key issue that Fed Up has worked to bring attention to. Ms. Yellen also stated that the Fed had put together a multidisciplinary team to explore potential remedies for the lack of diverse racial and gender representation in Fed appointments, an issue that was one of Fed Up's main focuses this year.

Common Good Ohio, Fed Up's Cleveland partner organization, met with Senator Sherrod Brown prior to the Senate hearing. At the hearing, Sen. Brown asked the questions that Fed Up had proposed, and also noted that this was the first time that a Fed Chair had discussed the racially disaggregated data on employment and wages in her testimony.

### **Proposed slate of candidates for regional boards**

Fed Up originally intended to launch its proposed slate of candidates for regional Fed boards at Humphrey-Hawkins, but did not have it fully prepared due to the hearings happening earlier than expected (Fed Up learned that the Humphrey-Hawkins schedule had been moved a few weeks earlier only a couple of weeks beforehand). Fed Up did produce a document that included candidates' names, photos, and short bios, which it gave to Fed representatives and members of Congress. Beyond that, Fed Up has not yet strongly pushed the slate and has not yet received much response. Fed Up plans to have its partner organizations deliver a more polished version to their regional Fed presidents.

Fed Up gave its report on Fed board representation and its slate of candidates to Representative Terri Sewell, who presented Fed Up's statistics on representation

and its slate during the hearing and asked Ms. Yellen if she would be willing to interview the proposed candidates. Ms. Yellen committed to looking into the candidates.

#### *Sourcing the slate of candidates*

Fed Up asked its partner organizations to identify at least three people, ideally people of color and/or women, from community organizations, labor unions, or academia, to include in its proposed slate of candidates. Fed Up also reached out to the Center for Economic and Policy Research and the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) to source academic contacts. Fed Up then asked these people whether they would be willing to be publicly considered as candidates.

#### *Update from later conversations*

A Fed official told Mr. Barkan that the Fed would seriously consider all 39 of Fed Up's proposed candidates. In 1-2 months, Fed Up plans to call all of its proposed candidates to ask whether the Fed has reached out to them and scheduled interviews. Fed Up plans to publicly announce what it learns from these phone calls and to criticize the Fed if it has not reached out to any of the candidates. Fed Up will try to get at least a few of its proposed candidates appointed.

#### **Fed Up representation at the hearings**

Fed Up had a larger contingent present at Humphrey-Hawkins in June than at the previous round of hearings.

On the first day, Fed Up's Washington D.C. partner, SPACeS, brought about 20 people and Common Good Ohio brought about 5 people, who sat in the first two rows and wore shirts with Fed Up's messaging.

On the second day, about 15 people from Fed Up's New York partner attended the House hearing. During that hearing, there was a dialogue about racial disparities in unemployment.

#### **The People's Convention**

Fed Up was represented at the CPD People's Convention in Pittsburgh. One of the stops on the march was the Pittsburgh branch of the Cleveland Federal Reserve.

At the event, Fed representatives talked with Paul Henderson of Common Good Ohio. Henderson and others from Common Good Ohio were already scheduled to meet with Cleveland Fed president Loretta Mester in a few months.

Fed Up is not aware of press covering the Fed reform advocacy aspect of the convention specifically. However, Fed Up believes it is valuable to expose the members of other progressive movements to its message, especially as it begins to implement its legislative strategy of expanding beyond the twelve cities with Federal Reserve Banks to other districts with members of Congress who might potentially support its goals.

## **Democratic Party Platform**

Fed Up advocated for this year's Republican and Democratic party platforms to include commitments to full employment, and had some success on the Democratic side.

The Democratic platform mentioned the Fed this year for the first time since 1984, and full employment for the first time since 1988. These items were not in the initial draft of the platform, and Fed Up believes that its advocacy played a role in their inclusion. The platform also newly includes a commitment to not allowing bankers to serve on regional Fed boards or select Fed board members.

Fed Up also advocated for the platform to include an amendment supporting the Fed becoming fully public, but this was ultimately not included.

## **Trip to Jackson Hole**

For the third year in a row, Fed Up attended the 2016 Jackson Hole Economic Policy Symposium, an event held annually by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City.

### **Meeting with Fed officials**

At the Jackson Hole conference, Fed Up met with Esther George (President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City) and nine other FOMC members. Many of these people agreed to meet with Fed Up at Ms. George's invitation.

Press and officials told Fed Up that they were surprised by the high quality of the discussion at the meeting and that they were not aware of any other groups that have gotten similar public meetings with numerous Fed officials. Mr. Barkan was surprised by the degree of press coverage the event drew.

### **Local work in Jackson, WY**

While in Jackson Hole, CPD held a workshop focused on local issues including:

- The high cost of housing in Jackson.
- The immigrant workforce.
- EPI's report on the ways in which tax policy fuels economic inequality. Josh Bivens discussed the facts that Wyoming does not have a state income tax and that its minimum wage is lower than the federal minimum wage.

Fed Up also took some of its members into the town of Jackson to canvass at apartment complexes and in public spaces for 1-1.5 hours. They talked to residents of Jackson about housing and the Federal Reserve, and invited them to join a local community group that works on housing issues. Fed Up's goal was to give its members an opportunity to practice talking to people about the Fed, and they seemed to enjoy the experience.

## **Role of partner organizations**

The role and activities of each of Fed Up's partner organizations depends on those organizations' capacity, skills, and engagement level. For example:

- Fed Up's New York partner, one of its largest and most engaged partners, sent representatives to Humphrey-Hawkins hearings in 2015 and 2016.
- Fed Up's Washington, D.C. partner also sent representatives both years.
- Fed Up's Philadelphia partner sent representatives in 2015.
- Members of Fed Up's Dallas partner convinced Dallas Fed president Robert Kaplan to tour neighborhoods in southern Dallas that have not experienced economic recovery.
- Fed Up's Minneapolis partner, Neighborhoods Organizing for Change, plans to meet with Fed president Neel Kashkari in early August.

The effectiveness of Fed Up's partner organizations is contingent on two main factors: (1) the strength and membership size of the organization and (2) Fed Up's tactics and ability to creatively produce good tasks for the organization. When Fed Up has appropriate projects for its partner organizations to pursue, the organizations often follow through effectively. Recent projects for partner organizations have included identifying candidates for the proposed slate and meeting with local Fed presidents. However, it has been somewhat difficult for Fed Up to mobilize members for large campaign-style events without a strong issue (e.g. a recent interest rate increase) to rally around.

## **Fundraising**

Fed Up does not expect to bring in much more funding this year. A couple of Fed Up's local partner organizations are looking for local funding.

## **Defining success of the Fed Up campaign**

Because Fed Up is pushing for systemic change rather than advocating for a concrete short term goal, it is more difficult to determine whether the campaign is succeeding. In order to evaluate its success, Fed Up plans to consider the status of indicators including:

- What the Fed does in response to the next recession.
- Whether officials continue cite Fed Up and appear to be responding to its actions.
- Whether reforms of the Federal Reserve Act have been passed.

Factors that indicate that Fed Up may already be having some impact on the Fed include:

- The Fed's discourse on monetary policy has shifted to include discussion of racial disparities following Fed Up's critique of the lack of racial diversity in the Fed.

- Fed officials engaged seriously and substantively with Fed Up at the recent meeting in Jackson Hole.

*All Open Philanthropy Project conversations are available at <http://www.openphilanthropy.org/research/conversations>*