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APRIL 5, 2017

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Three months later...

“You are not going through with this interview!” President McCoy demanded, pacing frantically, stopping only to point a finger in the Vice President’s face.

“Yes sir, I am,” Vice President Adair insisted professionally but forcefully.

Losing control, McCoy spoke in an awkward, high-pitched tone with his arms flailing, “No you’re not! I forbid it! I demand that you cancel it right now!”

The meeting’s location, the Oval Office, was selected intentionally to convey an air of ultimate authority. The audience was hand-picked from President McCoy’s closest advisors including the chief of staff, secretary of state, communications director, press secretary, and a smattering of other advisors, clearly sending a message that the Vice President was outnumbered.

The message was not having its intended effect. “Mr. President, I intend to conduct the interview as planned.” As a three-star vice admiral (ret), Jackson Carter Adair had encountered intimidating circumstances on many occasions. This gathering wouldn’t crack his top-100 fiercest conflicts.

The tandem of McCoy and Adair at the helm of the Federal Government was historic on many levels. It was the first time in over 150 years that the President and Vice President were from different political parties. It was the first time in almost 200 years that no candidate had garnered a majority of electoral votes. These circumstances are a testament to the wild and wooly presidential election of 2016.

The Republican ticket was led by Lionel Ireland, former CEO of Diversified Communications, or Di-Com as it was commonly known. Ireland was a business icon but a political newcomer. His brash, bombastic style caused friction among many party loyalists. His running mate, Grant Wembley, was killed during a hunting trip in what was thought to be an accident. However, it was later learned that Wembley was murdered by Ireland’s campaign manager, and second running mate, Victor Youngblood. These tawdry circumstances led to Ireland winning only a handful of states and 49 electoral votes.

On the Democrat side, 38-year-old Senator Mitch McCoy from Connecticut was the nominee. He was a legacy politician whose father was a four-term congressman and three-term senator. McCoy was by all accounts a despicable person. Although married to the same woman for 15 years, his philandering was among Washington’s worst-kept secrets.

McCoy scratched the itch of his progressive base, winning many coastal states and all the New England states, garnering 221 electoral votes, which were well shy of the 270 needed to win.

Elijah Mustang was the 2016 wild card, an independent candidate who rode the wave of dissatisfaction with the traditional parties. Mustang quickly gained traction with American voters. The founder and CEO of a large trucking company, Mustang personified integrity, character, and humility; his faith guided his core values. He almost pulled off the biggest upset in American history, but his 268 electoral votes left him two votes short.

“What is so hard for you to understand? You’re a naval officer. You’re used to obeying orders. I’m the President of the United States, the leader of the free world, the Commander-in-Chief! I’m telling you to cancel the interview.” McCoy was mostly speaking to the ceiling, unable to look Adair in the eye.

“I do follow the chain-of-command. You’re just not in my chain. You didn’t select me, and you do not have the authority to fire me. I was constitutionally selected by the U.S. Senate.”

McCoy mockingly repeated, “I was constitutionally selected by the U.S. Senate. How could I forget?!”

The two-party dynamic was threatening to the insecure McCoy. The day after inauguration he demanded that all questions and issues from major policy decisions down to mundane protocol matters flow through his office. He gave no duties or responsibilities to Adair.

This marginalization was quickly recognized by the media, who wanted to know more about Vice President Adair. Over the course of the first several weeks of the McCoy presidency, requests to interview Adair were declined, having the opposite effect than McCoy had intended as interest in Adair was now volcanic. #FreeAdmiralAdair was the highest trending hashtag on social media for the previous ten days.

Seventy-five days into the McCoy presidency, Adair decided to bypass McCoy and his staff to schedule his own interview with National News Service anchor Laurie Delgado. The interview was scheduled for the following night.

McCoy walked behind the Resolute Desk and slumped in his chair. Without looking up, he waved an arm and muttered, "Fine, give it to him."

The White House communications director handed Adair a folder.

"What's this?" Adair asked.

"It's a list of what you can and cannot say. It's also a list of the McCoy presidency's policy positions. We expect you to align your remarks with them." The communications director stated bluntly.

"No thank you. I'll be fine." Adair handed the folder back.

McCoy rose from his desk again and approached Adair. "You have two options: cancel the friggin' interview or follow these talking points. Got it?!"

Adair then rose from his chair, and at 6' 5" almost a foot taller than 5' 8" McCoy, placed the unopened folder in the chair and stated, "You gentlemen have a good day," and left.

"I'm serious. Follow these talking points! Don't stray off the script!" McCoy screamed as he heard the door to the Oval Office shut.

"I don't think he's going to follow the script," the communications director stated flatly.

"Oh, shut up." The flustered President again plopped down into his chair.



In the six months between the day Elijah Mustang declared his candidacy and Election Day, many unprecedented events took place. Among the most stunning was the grass-roots organization that emerged to build enthusiastic momentum for Elijah's campaign. Every state in the U.S. and thousands of individual communities organized in support of this unorthodox campaign. With no vast headquarters or centralized party apparatus, supporters knocked on countless doors to encourage their fellow citizens to vote for Elijah.

As Election Day drew closer, a palpable excitement was growing among Elijah's supporters. With each passing week, Elijah's poll numbers continued to grow. The enthusiasm led many Americans to become actively involved in politics for the first time in their lives, feeling like they were part of a historic movement. However, as high as the buildup to the election was, the Mustang for President alliance felt an excruciating low when the results left Elijah agonizingly short of victory.

In this disappointment's aftermath, one of two paths was

destined to prevail. One path was paved with frustration, alienation, and resignation. That path would send supporters running away from politics and, more importantly, from any civic responsibility to correct the ills the country was suffering.

A second path was marked by determination, a sense of unfinished business, and a healthy dose of patriotism. Elijah Mustang tried to nourish this second path, even before the results were in. In an election eve speech to 100,000 supporters, Elijah had a clear message:

*“I don’t know how the vote is going to go tomorrow; but it almost doesn’t matter, at least it shouldn’t matter. Tomorrow isn’t the end of the process; it’s the beginning. It’s the beginning of your taking back control of your country. Wednesday morning when the voting machines are returned to their closets, the pollsters put away their computers, and the networks convert their studios back to normal, you are just getting started.*

*“Stay engaged. Run for school board or city council. Run for statewide office. Write your congressman. Be your congressman! Make a difference!*

*“Beyond the emotion you are feeling tonight, there’s something more lasting going on inside you. A feeling of inspiration that you know things not only need to be different but WILL BE different. Take that feeling and inspire others. Keep this going! Because YOU’RE NOT DONE!”*

Elijah could never have dreamed how his words would

inspire his supporters to continue the movement, even after the disappointing election results. The speed at which events were moving in the three months since the House of Representatives selected McCoy as president left political pundits speechless.

As the movement worked to better organize after the election, one of the first decisions to be made was their name. A few suggestions were offered, but supporters never moved beyond the name *Mustangs*. They weren’t the Mustang Party; they were simply *Mustangs*. The name was derived from their candidate’s surname, but it had a deeper meaning. In the West, the mustang was a horse that was free to roam where it wished. It was unbridled but not wild. Originating from many breeds, Mustangs came in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Even the U.S. Congress recognized in 1971 the Mustang horse’s uniqueness, passing an act that stated, “Wild free-roaming horses are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West, which continue to contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people.”

With the name Mustangs settled, the next order of business was to add substance to what it meant to be a Mustang. This pursuit revealed the need to establish a process for reaching consensus among the far-reaching supporters.

A meeting among Mustang leaders was quickly organized just two weeks after McCoy’s election. Over 3,000 Mustangs assembled in Knoxville, Tennessee’s Convention Center to establish rules of engagement. After dozens of breakout sessions, several general meetings, and countless hallway

conversations, a decision-making structure was established.

Mustangs would be organized in geographic teams at the state and local levels. An equal voice for each state would be a central tenet of the Mustang movement; thus, each state would get one vote for each decision. State votes would be determined at the local level with each state establishing a process for reaching consensus. The national headquarters would be located in Knoxville, Tennessee. The national organization would be limited in power and would serve in primarily organizational and administrative roles. All of the Mustangs' proposed core beliefs would originate at the local level and would be submitted to the respective state organizations, who would forward all approved ideas to the national level for organizing a vote.

While this process made sense during a group planning session, its implementation proved challenging. Mustangs left the Knoxville meeting full of enthusiasm and hundreds of ideas. Quickly overwhelmed, the small HQ staff were unable to process the numerous proposals and also found duplication, overlap, and contradictions as they reviewed the submissions.

The leadership team—who remained intact except for the loss of their leader, Admiral Adair—knew they needed to find a quick solution involving minimal bureaucracy. They hired a firm to build a simple app to process ideas and tally votes. Via the app, any local Mustang team could submit a proposal to the state for consideration. Proposals adopted at the state level would then go to the HQ staff for a brief review to combine similar proposals. Then they would be

loaded onto the app for all Mustangs to see. In this formative stage, there was virtually no limit to what could be considered. Proposals could include a platform in the Mustangs' core belief, a candidate they wanted to support, or an event they wanted to organize.

Every Wednesday night, each local Mustang team would vote on that week's proposals. The app would tally votes at the local and state levels. Strong support was sought before a proposal was adopted; therefore, to obtain a "yes" vote at the state level, 75% of the local votes had to be in favor. To obtain a "yes" vote at the national level and to be adopted by the Mustang movement, 75% of the states had to be in favor, the same margin required to amend the U.S. Constitution.

Although the Mustangs were united in support of their presidential candidate and in their frustration with the country's political direction, they found it difficult to be united on other matters. Only a handful of proposals had garnered the necessary 75% local/75% state vote. Items passed included the following: the U.S. Constitution would be the guiding document; the movement would not be a political party; no elected official identifying as a Mustang could serve more than two terms on any level (local, state, or federal); and that they supported the selection of Admiral Adair as vice president.

An important vote was pending on this night that could play a pivotal role in sustaining enthusiasm for the movement.

"What time does the voting window open?"

"6 p.m. We'll have the usual 24 hours to get everyone's

input although this vote should be easy. Everyone is excited. I'm expecting the tally to be at least 45-5. May 6<sup>th</sup> can't get here soon enough!"

While this discussion was happening at the Paducah, Kentucky Mustang team meeting, similar discussions were happening throughout the country. The Knoxville HQ staff had received proposals from five states recommending a national gathering of Mustangs. The HQ staff took the best of all proposals and put the following up for a national Mustang vote:

*Mustangs shall gather on Washington, D.C.'s National Mall on Saturday, May 6, 2017, from noon to 8 p.m. to encourage one another, make our voices heard, publicize our beliefs, and serve as a clarion call that WE'RE NOT DONE!*

May 6 was selected because it was the date that Elijah Mustang had formally declared his candidacy for president in 2016. Washington D.C. was selected because it was supposed to represent the people of the United States; however, many Mustangs believed it had become home to the entrenched political elites with the American people's representation far down on the priority list. They felt that showing up *en masse* would serve as a wakeup call that the Mustangs were leading the charge for wresting their government away from those who had held it tightly for too long.

Undertaking such an event in less than a month would have been ambitious. There was no agenda, no speakers, no coordination with the Capitol Police or the National Park Service. Trying to pull this off in such a short time was far from normal. However, if Mustangs had shown anything

consistently, it was that they were redefining *normal*.

Although states were given 24 hours to debate and reach consensus on each proposal, by 6:30 p.m. the Paducah, Kentucky team had voted unanimously to support the proposal for the May 6<sup>th</sup> gathering. By 7:30 p.m., every other local Kentucky team had also voted affirmatively. By 9 p.m., all 50 states had joined with Kentucky in supporting the proposed event.

The 50-0 vote had put wind in the movement's sails. Mustangs throughout the country were exuberant about gathering in the nation's capital. It was an exciting time to be a Mustang.