

Michigan Indo-American Democratic Caucus (MIADC)

Election 2008 Newsletter

Many MIADC members are actively involved in the 2008 General Election campaign. With just 2 weeks to Nov 4, they are working hard every day to bring a Democratic victory at National, State and Local levels. Our members are doing an outstanding job to create awareness in the community on the change we need, focusing on issues of reforming healthcare, spurring economic recovery, ending the Iraq war, achieving energy independence, Supreme Court appointments and more.

MIADC members have engaged full throttle in the General Election campaign and they are helping out on several fronts. With joint efforts by so many people and on so many fronts at once, Indian American community has become visible on the campaign trail like never before.

In this historic campaign, MIADC is also making history. Two MIADC members are running for office and two MIADC members attended the National Democratic Convention, Aug 25-28, in Denver as alternate delegates.

Ganesh Reddy, Candidate for Supervisor of Meridian Township



MIADC founding Member Ganesh Reddy is running for Supervisor of Meridian Township, a suburb of Lansing. With a campaign theme of “Ready for Change”, Mr. Reddy is running on a strong platform to provide effective leadership, stop wasteful spending and protect the environment. He is endorsed by Governor Granholm, Senator Stabenow, many Michigan lawmakers, county commissioners and public officials.

Website: <http://www.reddyformeridian.com>

Syed Taj, Candidate for Canton Township Trustee



Member Syed Taj is running to be a Canton Township Trustee. Mr. Taj is an accomplished physician and a business owner. Mr. Taj is running on a strong platform to keep government accountable and transparent, create jobs, protect environment and improve government services. He is endorsed by UAW President Ron Gettelfinger and many public officials. At the campaign website, you may sign up to help Mr. Syed in many ways, including display of a yard sign, help on election day, and other simple ways. Website : <http://www.syedtaj.com>

MAIDC at Democratic National Convention in Denver, Aug 25-28

Member Dr. Anand Prasad and Vice-Chair Jay Kommareddi traveled to the Democratic National Convention in Denver and made their mark on the attendees as representatives of the Indian American community. While people watching from home get to see only the parts televised, the convention participants have choices throughout the day to attend the various events.

Jay and Dr. Prasad attended meetings of the Asian Pacific American Caucus, the reception hosted by the Indian American Leadership Initiative and forums focusing on health care and foreign relations. One of the highlights of the trip was attending a luncheon hosted by the Indian ambassador Ronen Sen for the Indian American delegates.

Dr. Prasad attended the convention as an alternate delegate while Jay was a part of the Michigan delegation as a DNC rules committee member. One of the most important decisions to come out of the committee was to establish a “Democratic Change Commission”, to revisit the presidential primary calendar, the role of delegates and related issues. Jay’s trip was covered in mlive.com as a convention attendee from Grand Blanc. You can read the article at http://www.mlive.com/grandblanc/index.ssf/2008/09/convention_trip_energizes_gran.html.

MIADC Members helped Obama Campaign Organization



In the Rao family in Farmington Hills, electing Obama to the White House is a mother-daughter mission. The Rao residence is the staging location for Novi and Ratna (board member) is the Campaign Staging Director for Novi. Megan Rao (MIADC webmaster), a sophomore in college, is working full time as a Field Organizer at the Obama office for Novi and West Farmington Hills. On Sept 8, at the Obama rally at North Farmington High School, Megan energized the packed crowd with a passionate speech that made Indian Americans in the attendance proud of her.

Board members, Jay Kommareddi and Dr. Bobby Mukkamala, have led campaign efforts in Genesee County in a big way. Bobby and Jay have raised funds to help the campaign prepare for Obama's visits to Michigan and to get the word out.

Jay is the Chair of the "Genesee County Fundraising Team for Obama". She was instrumental in helping Obama campaign open a field office in Grand Blanc. Dr. Prasad and Jay Kommareddi have been hosting Obama field organizers at their home since May.

Bobby has provided tremendous support to Obama campaign staff in the Genesee County. He has generously donated laptops, supplies, and has lent a car to the field organizers. He has set up an account at a local Indian restaurant to take care of the hard working interns. (The inside word is samosas are the craze at the campaign office). In addition, Bobby also hosted a house party in Flint early on in the campaign.

Grass Roots Political Activities

➤ In Farmington Hills, Ratna Rao keeps a busy schedule. She phone banks daily to reach out to Indian American families in Farmington Hills and Novi. On weekends, she coordinates canvasses for the campaign. She invites her friends to join her and makes it a fun activity for everybody; whether she is registering voters at a mosque on Id day or hosting a party at her home on a debate night. With her grass roots experience in talking directly with voters, Ratna reports a strong commitment from Indian Americans in supporting Obama, and Democrats in general. Ratna advises all volunteers to also focus on State and Local races. Along with Obama literature, she distributes literature for Gary Peters, candidate for 9th Congressional District, Andy Meisner, candidate for Oakland County Treasurer, and others.

➤ Like Farmington Hills, the city of Troy and surrounding areas are buzzing with activity. A team called “Indians for Obama” has been formed under the auspices of Obama field office in Birmingham. Team leader is MIADC member Rita Ravikrishnan. Other members on the team are : Mukesh Bhargava (MIADC election committee), Tej Jhamab (board member), Shanti Menon (past Vice-Chair), Nalini Motwani (past board member), Swarn Rajpal (Treasurer) and Veena Rao (member). Nalini has successfully convinced many people who have voted for republican candidates in the past elections to vote for Obama in this election. Their main activities are :

- Recruit volunteers
- Organize meetings and house parties
- Phone banking

Many families have responded to their calls.

- Sasha Kenkre (daughter of MIADC Secretary), a sophomore in High School, phone banks at the Obama field office in Clawson. For a change of pace, she also helps out with data entry work.
 - Members Jayanthi and Guruswamy Balakrishnan hosted a house party on Oct 12 at their residence in Bloomfield Hills. At the house party, Josh Hyman from Obama field office in Troy/Clawson praised the Indian American Community for being one of the first to join the campaign and for providing unflinching support.
- In Canton, board member Sheetal Patel is attending house parties and has her schedule planned with phone banking and going door to door till the election day.
- Jay Kommareddi hit the campaign trail very early, traveling to New Hampshire in early 08. While volunteering in the crucial NH primary, she was awestruck to see how pampered New Hampshire’s voters were. At home in Grand Blanc, she is actively involved in many grassroots activities involving voter registration, voter protection, health care, fundraising, supporting Democratic candidates and many Democratic causes. She is also the resource co-ordinator for the Obama campaign in Grand Blanc.
- Jay is part of the Midwest Regional Finance Team for Obama campaign.
- Jay is also supporting the candidacy of Michael Thorp for Michigan’s 51st District and is helping him on the campaign trail.
- Drs. Appa Rao and Bobby Mukkamala are members of “Doctors for Obama”, a group of more than 8000 doctors and medical students who support Obama’s healthcare reform plan. For more information on Doctors for Obama, please see <http://doctorsforobama.net>.

Voter Protection

Protecting the rights of voters is a major issue in every election. Information on rights of Michigan voters is posted on MIADC website. Many volunteers are needed on the day of

election to monitor the voting process. Ramesh Verma and Prasanna Vengadam are two of the volunteers who will be doing Poll Monitoring on Nov 4th. Ramesh and Prasanna have attended a special training session conducted by Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), on voter protection issues. AALDEF is a national organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. Prasanna works within the Indian American community to educate voters about their rights.

A recent incident in Grand Blanc Township should make all voters pay more attention to protecting their voting rights. The Township clerk sent a checklist to voters that included misleading information creating an impression that voters who turn up at the polls without photo identification would be turned away and denied the right to vote. The story was covered in the Grand Blanc View. Jay Kommareddi created awareness on this issue in the Grand Blanc community by contacting other citizens and the media. In Michigan, voters without a government issued photo id can still vote by signing an affidavit. There are an estimated 370,000 registered voters in Michigan without a government issued photo id.

Media Eposure

- *Internet* : MIADC website www.miadc.org is a good place to get information on voting rights, your polling location and information on obtaining an absentee ballot. At MIADC website, you will also find links to websites of many candidates including those of our members Ganesh Reddy and Dr. Syed Taj.
- *Print* : Please read member Prasanna Vengadam's interview in the Oct 22 issue of Detroit Metro Times about the changing face of Oakland County voters. <http://www.metrotimes.com/news/story.asp?id=13377>
- *Radio* : When you hear a Democratic candidate or a surrogate on a weekend Indian radio program, the odds are it is arranged by none other than MIADC chair Ramesh Verma. He has served as the key person to arrange for media exposure. Because of Ramesh, the Indian community has had opportunities to listen to Governor Granholm, Andy Meisner, and many others directly addressing them. Recently Asian and Pacific Islanders Association (APIA) was thankful to Ramesh for arranging an interview for Tammy Duckworth, an Iraq war veteran who lost both her legs in combat, to speak to the Indian American community. Ramesh's leadership in the Metro Detroit Indian community has been recognized beyond Michigan. He was invited by the Indian ambassador to attend a reception on Sept 24th honoring the Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh at the Waldorff Astoria hotel in NY.
- *Television* : Bobby arranged a press conference in his office as a "Doctors For Obama" event to draw attention to the health care issue in this campaign. With television and print media in his office, Bobby and State Rep. Brenda Clack discussed Obama's health care initiative. Bobby made a strong case for Obama's superior health care reform plan, and why McCain's proposal to fund his health care initiative by taxing health care benefits is not good for the country.

Fundraising

- June 1 – Fundraiser for Carl Levin, US Senator for MI, running for reelection, held at the residence of Dr. Prasad and Jay Kommareddi.
- Aug 10 – Obama Campaign Fundraiser at Dr. Bobby Mukkamala’s residence. Special guest Hollywood actor Kal Penn.
- Sept 27 – Fundraiser for Andy Meisner running for Oakland County Treasurer, held in Bloomfield Hills. Fundraiser co-hosted by board members Dr. and Mrs. Ram Ramanathan and member Naren Balasubramaniam. The fundraiser event was reported in the Oct 24 edition of the weekly India Abroad.

Community Outreach and Coalitions

- MIADC awarded two summer internships. Board member Sheetal Patel did an outstanding job in managing the summer internship program. The interns, Meghna Pathak and Nikhil Gupta, were placed with Obama’s Campaign for Change offices in the Oakland County. Meghna worked in the Novi/Farmington Hills office and Nikhil worked in the Troy/Clawson office. Meghna and Nikhil participated in a wide variety of activities. They helped to recruit, train and organize volunteers to carry out crucial summer operations. They helped with phone banking, event publicity and neighborhood exercises. Meghna helped tremendously with the Campaign Volunteer Training held on August 5 to prepare for India Day. Nikhil was an integral part of outreach into other parts of Oakland County, including North Oakland, Bloomfield and West Bloomfield.
- MIADC teamed with Obama campaign for the annual India Day event which took place on Aug 10 at Rock Financial Place in Novi. MIADC and Obama Campaign set up their booths side by side at the event.



Many volunteers including Meghna, Nikhil, Ramesh, Swarn, Jay, Ratna, Mahendra and Sheetal took turns to staff the booth. Hollywood actor Kal Penn was present at the booth in the morning drawing big crowds. The booth was visited by US Senator Carl Levin, MDP Chair Mark Brewer, Brenda Lawrence (candidate for Oakland County Executive) and Andy Meisner (candidate for Oakland County Treasurer).

- On Aug 24, MIADC and *Bangladeshi American Political Action Committee (BAPAC)* hosted a joint fundraiser for Gary Peters, Democratic candidate from Michigan’s 9th Congressional

District, at Troy Community Center. Other candidates in attendance were Judge Jessica Cooper running for Oakland County Prosecutor and Andy Meisner running for Oakland County Treasurer.



Board members Ramesh Verma, Swarn Rajpal and Mahendra Kenkre worked with *BAPAC* to plan the event. The fundraiser was hosted by members Drs. Appa Rao and Sumathi Mukkamala, Dr. Prasad and Kitty Pinnamaneni, Dr. Prasad and Jay Kommareddi, Mahendra and Shama Kenkre.

➤ Several members are part of the “*Asian Pacific American Leadership Council for Obama*”. They are Ramesh Verma, Dr. Swarn Rajpal, Dr. Bobby Mukkamala, Mahendra Kenkre, Jay Kommareddi and Shanti Menon. Jay and Ramesh helped to start the APA leadership Council in Michigan by arranging the first organizational meeting in Birmingham. On Sept 27, Jay organized the APA Leadership Council breakfast in Novi, attended by many APIA volunteers who traveled to Detroit from Chicago. Iraq war veteran, Tammy Duckworth and Nancy Chen, Co-Chair of the Obama national APA leadership team were part of the volunteer group from Chicago. The event was co-sponsored by APA leaders in Michigan that included Rep. Hoon-Yung Hopgood, Sook Wilkinson, Roland Hwang and Peter Hwang, all of whom are members of the Michigan Governor’s Council on APIA Affairs.

➤ Jay worked with *India Club of Greater Flint* to register voters. She also coordinated efforts with the *Flint Association of Physicians from India* and the Obama policy team in hosting a debate on the health care plans of the presidential candidates. Jay arranged for Dr. Tom Buchmueller, a professor at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, to defend the Obama health care plan in the debate.

Please take the time to vote in this election & get ready for a sweep on Nov 4th.