

Women to Wisconsin Delegation

October 25-November 11, 2016



From October 25-November 11, 2016, the Richardson Center for Global Engagement hosted four political leaders from Myanmar on the Women to Wisconsin delegation. The election did not turn out to be the glass ceiling shattering event we all expected it to be but the delegation was a success and the delegates learned a lot that they could bring back to use in their own campaigns in Myanmar.

Meet the Delegates

The program recruited two political party members and two participants who could also play the role of translators. This unique model was used so that we could offer the opportunity to non-English speakers but also include translators who would be interested in the content of the program. This model worked well on our previous Women to Wisconsin delegation in 2014. All four women are planning to run for office in the near future and are currently active in politics in one capacity or another.





Khin Sandar Tun, Zin Min Thu, Mindy Walker, Thin Thin Swe, Nang Kham Bwar

Khin Sandar Tun

Khin Sandar Tun is ethnic Kaman from Rakhine State and works at Justice Base, which aims to promote the rule of law in transitional and post-conflict countries. She is also a researcher and assistant to women MPs in Naypyitaw. Khin Sandar is a graduate of the Yangon School of Political Science Master's program, a volunteer at Zin Mar Aung's Agora Community School and an iPACE trainer. She served as a participant/translator.

Zin Min Thu

Zin Min Thu is originally from the delta region and founded her own women empowerment organization, Nat Pha Yar Ma Institute. She has worked for Akhaya Women and Charity Oriented Myanmar before joining the parliamentary assistance team for National Democratic Institute this year. She helps new Members of Parliament with critical skills and research in NDI's Naypyitaw office. She graduated from Theik Khar Myanmar's Arts & Social Science Intensive College Program. Zin Min served as a participant/translator.

Thin Thin Swe

Thin Thin Swe is from Taungdwingyi in Magway Division. She serves on, and is the youngest member of, the Township Executive Committee for the NLD. In addition to her political activism, Thin Thin works as a lawyer on a variety of different cases. She was nominated by the NLD and served as a political party participant.

Nang Kham Bwar

Nang Kham Bwar is from Hopon, Shan State and is a rising star in the Pa-O National Organization. She is one of very few active young women in her party and serves as a party recruiter and trainer. Nang Kham Bwar hopes to run for office in 2020 and she was nominated by the PNO to serve as a political party participant.

The Schedule

Attached is the full schedule of events for our 17-day trip. Khin Sandar Tun was invited by Harvard to come speak at their university a few days early, unrelated to our trip. Otherwise, the group was together morning, noon and night for the entirety of the trip.

The following are highlights of the trips and lessons learned.

Campaign Offices and the People Who Staff them

We visited over a dozen campaign offices for Republicans and Democrats and they pretty much all looked the same—vibrant, busy, full of snacks, phone banks and door knocking packets.



We met with Kory Kozloski the Executive Director of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin who outlined his plan for getting out Democratic voters and increasing their numbers in the legislature. He walked us through the roles that staff play on a campaign from fundraising to media to voter protection to scheduling.



At labor temples and pop-up campaign offices in Green Bay and Madison, we saw volunteers running the show and many young people heading up the campaigns, which is a major difference from Myanmar where young people are rarely given any meaningful roles on campaigns and volunteers must be party members. The delegates were walked through the process of strategically going door-to-door and how it differs from persuasion to GOTV.

The delegates saw paid canvasses run by Super PACs, phonebanks set up at union halls and students running from dorm to dorm. For as much training as we do on campaigns and strategy in Myanmar, it is much more helpful to see how things are set up and organized in-person. While campaigns and data are much more sophisticated the same rules apply: hit as many doors as possible to turn out your voters.

How to Run a Campaign

Throughout our trip, I would sit down with the delegates and discuss in a roundtable format how to put together a campaign. The mini-lectures were similar to the campaign trainings the Richardson Center has been doing for the past four years in Myanmar. We talked about the research necessary before starting to run and the three phases of the campaign: Targeting and Identifying, Persuasion and Get Out the Vote (GOTV). The women worked on their own biographies and messaging and shared it with the group. Since the four women hope to run in the future, this was integral in tying together what the activities they saw in the US and what was possible in Myanmar.



We set out to focus mainly on local races where person-to-person contact is key. In Myanmar, there are no national elections so while it was interesting for them to see the Presidential election first-hand, very few presidential election techniques apply. For example, there is no negative campaigning allowed (a fact many of them were jealous of) and TV commercials are not allowed

(another point of jealousy). Campaigns in Myanmar are similar to local races where relationships with constituents, trust and listening can make the biggest impact in results. They were able to witness this at the Farmer's Market where they met volunteers who were campaigning and a local judge who was out meeting her constituents.

They also saw people doing visibility and voter education in populated areas of campus and busy intersections. In Myanmar, they often rely too heavily on sound trucks which only encourage one-way communication. Even visibility activities in the US allow conversations and interactions with volunteers, where voters can find out where they vote and how to register.





The delegates learned about the political system in Wisconsin and the US. Analyzing the races, the polling, the electorate and historical data was important for them to understand what they were seeing out in the field. They met with communications and media teams who create the pamphlets that amplify campaign messages. Joel Rivlin from The Pivot, a voter communications company, walked them through what a powerful ad can look like, microtargeting certain communities and putting together a comprehensive ad that will

engage the reader. Even for small campaigns in Myanmar with few resources, an eye to detail and messaging is very important and this can be the greatest area of improvement in Myanmar where messaging and targeting is seldom used.

How to Run Elections

A major concern about the Myanmar elections in 2015 was the lack of transparency or knowledge of the election rules. They were constantly changing the rules as the election neared, making it hard for political parties to plan. The delegates were able to meet with two elections officials during their trip to Wisconsin who showed them how they managed the elections. In Madison, the City Clerk, Maribeth Witzel, was able to put together one of the most accessible early voting systems in the state, allowing Dane County residents to vote at any library in Madison during the weeks before the election. This was a boost to voter turnout but also a way to mitigate the damages of the new voter ID laws. The delegates were shocked by the transparency of the process and how systematic it was. But the fact that our election processes are determined at the local level, making a patchwork of systems and rules was very confusing to them. It was a good lesson in local control and the benefits and pitfalls.



Maribeth allowed the delegates to test the voting machines, follow the early voting process from beginning to end and see the machines used for people with disabilities. She informed all the polling chiefs that we would be coming by on Election Day and they all greeted us warmly and educated us on the process at each step.



We then visited the Brown County Clerk, Sandy Juno, to discuss what the county's role is in developing the ballot, the rules and coordinating with the municipalities. Green Bay was not as liberal in allowing early voting as Madison and actually drew the ire of students for not allowing early voting on campus. Sandy allowed the delegates to cast a sample ballot in the electronic voting machines so they could see how they work.

On Election Day, we observed the opening of a polling place starting at 7am in Madison. The Chief Polling Agents were very welcoming and showed us the layout of their station. The lines were long before work but they moved quickly. Wisconsin is unique in having same-day registration so the delegates were able to see how that process worked as well. There were many absentee ballots due to early voting and the polling agents processed them throughout the day when things slowed down. Unlike Myanmar, anyone can be an election observer, you just need to sign in. In Myanmar, you need prior approval from the national Election Commission in order to observe a polling station.



They witnessed attorneys playing the roles of voter protection agents in case anyone was challenged throughout the day. There did not seem to be any incidents but it is a model that could be useful in Myanmar. We visited six polling stations on Election Day, many on or around the UW-Madison campus. At 8pm we watched the closing of a polling station but by then results were starting to come out about the presidential election.

Meeting Role Models

Our schedule was kicked off with a meeting with former Lt. Governor Barbara Lawton, one of my role models early in my political life. I had worked for her during the 2006 campaign and thought she would be a good inspiration for the four female delegates. She really drove home the point that most women would not run for office if they are not asked and she recounted her path to politics as a late in life aspiration because people who knew her from her philanthropy and activism had asked her to run.





We then met with former Assistant Democratic Leader Donna Seidel and Democratic Leader Peter Barca to discuss the role of the minority in politics. Donna Seidel was a fantastic legislator and now serves as Barca's Chief of Staff. She toured us around the Assembly chambers and talked to us about her engagement and what she sees her role as now.

Another female legislator that we met with was Melissa Sargent from Madison who we followed door-to-door in her district as she talked to voters and asked for their votes. Her path to politics was a reaction to the Act 10 provisions passed by Governor Walker in 2011, which dismantled labor unions in Wisconsin and she has been an advocate ever since. During the last delegation, she inspired one delegate in particular when she said she was pregnant while doing doors with her three sons following her. That same delegate is now in Myanmar's parliament and just delivered her first baby. Rep. Sargent is in a safe district and doesn't need to do doors but her commitment to listening to the voters is what was most important for the delegates to see.



Our homestay families were great role models by showing that they too went out to volunteer for their candidates of choice. All of them were making calls, doing bake sales and driving voters to the polls during our stay.

We met with One Wisconsin Now's Analiese Eicher to discuss voter disenfranchisement. In addition to her work at OWN, she talked about her service as a 22-year-old on the County Board. Analiese attended the Emerge candidate training for women and now serves on the board. The delegates are interested in having a similar program in Myanmar for women leaders.



Republican Rep. David Steffen who we met at the Republican Women's Luncheon in Green Bay took us door-to-door in his district. He is running for his second term in this safe seat but still pounds the pavement getting the support of voters. The delegates took turns going up to each door with him and hearing what he says to voters but more importantly how he listens to what voters have to say. They saw how quickly he moved in order to cover more ground, the perils of meeting with dogs at the door and the special touches of making voters feel like they have access to

lawmakers.

Twice we were fortunate to meet Senator Tammy Baldwin who was out stumping for Hillary Clinton and Russ Feingold. In Green Bay, she was revving up the volunteers at a campaign office but she took some time afterwards to impart some wisdom on the delegates. She talked about how the number of women in the Senate was increasing but still not high enough. We saw her again on Election Day on campus meeting with student volunteers and encouraging them to go knock doors to drive up turnout on campus. It was a reunion of sorts since I had worked on her coordinated campaign as the campus director in 2002 and 2004 during her congressional campaigns.



Observing the Surrogates out on the Campaign Trail

One of the major reasons we select Wisconsin as the destination for these delegations is because it is a swing state and garners a lot of attention. This year was no different and various surrogates were sent to stump for Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Our first night in Madison we saw Chelsea Clinton speak at the Overture Center. She impressed the delegates by taking questions (even tough ones) from the audience. They thought it was interesting that even young people felt encouraged to ask questions.



When we got to Green Bay, Representative John Macco invited us to join his table at the Republican Women's Luncheon where Mayor Rudy Giuliani flew in to campaign for Donald Trump. He spoke to the crowd of women about national security, crime, economic development and education. Giuliani also invited the press to be there and took questions from the crowd at the end. It was good for the delegates to see that even stump speeches allow for back and forth from voters.



Transparency in Government

What always surprises our guests is the transparency and accessibility of our state government in Wisconsin. People have access to appear at hearings, walk into their legislators' offices, watch floor sessions, write emails and letters and the ability to protest on site when they aren't being heard. In Myanmar, even with a change in government, it is still hard to access your legislator and there isn't any staff for them so it makes their jobs difficult to do outreach.



In addition to in-person communication, all hearings and floor sessions are broadcasted on the internet for anyone to see. This applies to even local level governance like city council meetings and school board meetings. We have government sites that provide information, which were all new concepts for the delegates. We have a website where you can look up donations and fundraising committees to follow where the money comes from. There are open records laws to shine light on what government officials are doing from office. All of this is new to Myanmar and it will take a while for them to build these systems but it is a good example of how citizens should be involved in their democracy.

Media's Role

In 2012, Myanmar's censorship of media was lifted and private papers were allowed to print daily. Senior reporters have only about three years of experience and the government still is unclear as to how to work with them. Media literacy rates are low and trust is especially precarious of the news institutions. It was helpful for our delegates to meet one of the capitol reporters for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Jason Stein, and discuss how he covers various political events in the capitol so that the populace is better educated. He spoke about how he needed to remain unbiased while reporting and

also used tools to get to the heart of the story. The delegates had many question about liable issues since it is a major issue of contention in Myanmar now.



In Green Bay, we met with the editorial, news and political directors of the Green Bay Press Gazette and they discussed how digital media is changing how they do their jobs. People are getting more and more information from online sources and they need to find a way to remain relevant and trusted. This is quite similar to the path Myanmar has taken as more people get their news from Facebook than anywhere else and it is riddled with fake news and rumors. The team shared how they are getting endless blasts from campaigns to

cover their stories and how they decide what to cover with so much going on.

We saw the press covering the Chelsea Clinton and Rudy Giuliani events and also saw them at a volunteer rally at the Green Bay Democratic Party office. We discussed how many of these events are created just to hit the major television markets and how candidates use earned media to get out their messages.

Exploring University Life

In Myanmar, the university system and education as a whole were severely crippled by previous governments. So, our universities in the US stand as a very different model of education, encouraging liberal thought, critical thinking and constant questioning. While the delegation was in Wisconsin, they visited three universities: UW-Madison, UW-Green Bay and the private St. Norbert College in Green Bay. At UW-Madison they attended a constitutional law class to see what a typical lecture looks like and were interested in the fact that even with 200 students in the class, there was still a dialogue with the professor. They then met with the professor, Howard Schweber, to talk about academia and constitutional law. Khin Sandar would like to invite him as a visiting professor to the Yangon School of Political Science and he is eager to visit.



We also met with graduate students who are doing their research on Myanmar or other Southeast Asian nations and discussed outreach programs at UW with Mark Johnson, a 2015 Partnership Opportunity Delegation delegate. This year UW-Madison has a Fulbrighter from Myanmar teaching Burmese to a small group of researchers. We attended their class to discuss issues in Myanmar and practice their language skills.





At UW-Green Bay we spoke with the Student Council Vice President and asked about his priorities for students which included transportation, voting access and funding. They saw several political campaigns tabling in the cafeteria and the programs led by student groups to bus students to early vote on the Friday before the election. We grabbed students in the resource center to get their

opinion on the election since the delegates wanted to see what “real people” thought about the election. One of the students had led a protest against police brutality and another was involved in many student organizations on campus.

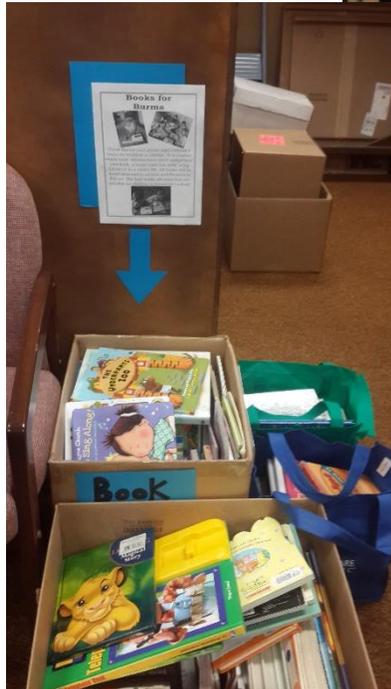
And at St. Norbert we met with pollster Wendy Scattergood who conducts political polling in Wisconsin. She talked about how sampling has become more difficult since young people don’t answer their cellphones and the benefits and downfalls of public polling. Afterwards, we met with the College Democrats chair, Anna Thompson, who discussed how they turn out the student vote on campus, the restrictions she has on a conservative religious campus and the benefits of attending a small liberal arts school. She also gave us a tour of the gender studies building where the delegates were excited about all the books in the library.



Seeing Positive Learning Environments

Senator Tammy Baldwin’s staffer, Jennifer Garner, arranged for us to visit Fort Howard Elementary School where they just recently had five young Myanmar students join in the fall. The school has the highest concentration of non-native English speakers and immigrants in their district and has turned an under-performing school into a model for the rest of the nation. Delegates were able to see child centered learning approaches, how we teach critical thinking and reasoning at a young age, and ways to engage students at every level. After touring different classrooms, we met with teachers and aids to

discuss how to make Myanmar students feel more comfortable settling in. The delegates felt good about helping the staff understand cultural issues.



We then met with the Green Bay Superintendent and her Assistant to discuss education in Myanmar and in the US and how best to work with Myanmar parents. They talked about some of the challenges but were very obviously eager to make life better for all their students. They invited us to join the School Board meeting that night to see them discuss and pass a difficult budget. The open system was a good reminder to the delegates that all sectors of our government allow for public discussion and debate. Additionally, the staff from the ESL program held a book drive for Myanmar and they donated 200 pounds of books for our Books to Burma program.

Learning about Native American Culture

Being in Green Bay offers an interesting opportunity for the delegation to visit the Oneida Nation to learn about the difficult history of Native Americans. Most Myanmar do not know much about tribal culture or history in the United States but get a lot out of the meetings because there are quite a lot of similarities with Myanmar's ethnic communities and their sovereignty. We met with two tribal council members, Fawn Billie and Brandon Stevens as well as the tribal attorney. They shared stories about how they are using education to promote advancement in their community, how they are struggling to get their lands back, how they operate as a domestic dependent nation and the issues of poverty and alcohol abuse they face. All of these issues are central to development of ethnic communities in Myanmar as they start to decide what type of federalist system would work best and what level of sovereignty communities should seek.



These shared commonalities were eye opening for the participants and they all further explored issues at the heart of native populations after their visit. This was true of our last delegation as well.

Homestay and Cultural Experience

We stayed with the same homestay families as we did two years ago, which made for a soft landing when we arrived and a wonderful cultural experience for the women. The host family in Madison is a retired couple from the University of Wisconsin who were Peace Corps volunteers in Southeast Asia and the husband was a recent Fulbrighter in Myanmar. The host family in Green Bay is a “mixed family,” meaning the husband is a Republican and the wife is a Democrat, which is interesting for the group to see.



In addition to trying new foods and seeing first-hand how Americans live, they were able to partake in traditions like watching sports on TV, potlucks and trick-or-treating. They went to the big Halloween celebration in Madison to see thousands of people dressed up, they passed out candy to kids on Halloween, carved pumpkins and then went with our homestay family’s grandchildren trick-or-treating. They also saw the Cubs win the World Series for the first time in over 100 years and saw the sea of red going to the Badger game on Saturday.



Creating a Sisterhood



Most importantly for the delegates going forward is the creation of a sisterhood of political activists in Myanmar. The three women from the last delegation are still good friends despite being from different political parties, and the same is true with this group. We had one Muslim woman from Rakhine State, one Pa-O woman from Shan State, one Burmese woman from Irrawaddy Region and one Burmese woman from Magway Region. They all come from very different backgrounds, with varying levels of political party experience but they talked often about how they will support each other when they are back in Myanmar even if they are from different parties. It is always surprising to

Americans that I can bring women from different parties and expect them to share rooms and constantly be together during our travels. I think it says a lot about how much women see their roles in lifting each other up in a male-dominated sphere.



Now that we have returned to Myanmar, it is my hope to work with them in training women MPs for the upcoming by-elections. Zin Min Thu runs her own women's organization and wants to work on putting together an internship program for young leaders to connect to MPs at the state and national level. I'm keen on helping her with that, as I've been trying to get people interested



in a similar program. Khin Sandar works with women MPs in Naypyitaw and we will put together trainings for them to do constituent outreach. Thin Thin and Nang Kham Bwar are both very involved in their local party committees so we will plan trainings in their respective communities. The hope to turn the seven leaders that have come to Wisconsin on our programs into a group that leads other women into politics and trains them based on what they've learned.



Thank you for the support you have given to this program and to the women who participated. I believe this will make a huge difference in their lives and the lives of the people who they met in Wisconsin.