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Campaign staff DROVE 'ordinary' Iowans to Hillary's first campaign stop - including health care 'lobbyist in training' who was an Obama campaign intern and Biden chauffeur

- Austin Bird sat for coffee on Tuesday morning in the town of LeClaire, Iowa, chatting with Hillary Clinton as photographers snapped pictures
- News reports called him a 'student' and her campaign called it an unscripted event
- But Clinton's Iowa political director Troy Price drove Bird and two other people to the coffee house
- Bird is a hospital government relations official who interned with Barack Obama's 2012 presidential campaign
- The Iowa Democratic Party, which Price ran until a month ago, tasked him to be Joe Biden's driver during an October Senate campaign trip in Davenport

By [David Martosko, Us Political Editor For Dailymail.com In Des Moines, Iowa](#)

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Hillary Clinton's astroturf candidacy is in full swing in Iowa.

Her Tuesday morning visit to a coffee shop in LeClaire, Iowa was staged from beginning to end, according to Austin Bird, one of the men pictured sitting at the table with Mrs. Clinton.

Bird told Daily Mail Online that campaign staffer Troy Price called and asked him and two other young people to meet him Tuesday morning at a restaurant in Davenport, a nearby city.

Price then drove them to the coffee house to meet Clinton after vetting them for about a half-hour.

The three got the lion's share of Mrs. Clinton's time and participated in what breathless news reports described as a 'roundtable'—the first of many in her brief Iowa campaign swing.

Bird himself is a frequent participant in Iowa Democratic Party events. He interned with President Obama's 2012 presidential re-election campaign, and was tapped to chauffeur Vice President Joe Biden in October 2014 when he visited Davenport.

'What happened is, we were just asked to be there by Troy,' Bird said Wednesday in a phone interview.

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STAGED: Clinton sat to talk with three young Iowans at a coffee shop on Tuesday – all of whom were driven to the event by her Iowa campaign's political director



Austin Bird

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NOT SO ORDINARY: Austin Bird is a Democratic Party insider who chauffeured Vice President Joe Biden around Davenport, Iowa in October during a pre-election campaign trip

'We were asked to come to a meeting with Troy, the three of us, at the Village Inn.'

The other two, he confirmed, were University of Iowa College Democrats president Carter Bell and Planned Parenthood of the Heartland employee Sara Sedlacek.

'It was supposed to be a strategy meeting,' Bird recalled, 'to get our thoughts about issues. But then all of a sudden he says, "Hey, we have Secretary Clinton coming in, would you like to go meet her?"'

'And then we got in a car – Troy's car – and we went up to the coffee house, and we sat at a table and then Hillary just came up and talked with us.'

Bird said 'we all were called.'

'I mean, Troy asked us all to do – to go to a meeting with him. And we didn't really know what it was about. I mean, he did. He knew.'

It's unclear how many Iowans featured in photographs with Clinton that rocketed around the country on Tuesday were planted.

'The mayor of LeClaire was there, and his wife was there,' Bird said, recalling the scene at the coffee shop.

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Price was executive director of the Iowa Democratic Party until a month ago. Clinton's team tapped him last week to be its political director in Iowa.

He did not respond to a request for comment.

Bird is a government and community relations coordinator at Genesis Health System in Davenport, Iowa, according to his LinkedIn profile.

A coworker at Genesis said Wednesday that Bird is 'basically a lobbyist in training. That's what he wants to do.'

Bird disagreed, saying his role was 'more public relations.'

He's also an outspoken progressive whose Facebook wall shows he ordered a 'Hillary For President' bumper sticker 22 months ago. 'Is it 2016 yet?' he wrote in May 2013.

Clinton's nascent campaign has carefully coordinated her image as a spontaneous, handshaking populist in her first days as a candidate, posing with Pennsylvanians at a gas station and venturing into an Ohio Chipotle restaurant for lunch.

When no one recognized the former first lady – she was wearing sunglasses – the campaign leaked information to The New York Times so its reporters could get security-camera footage to prove she had tried to mingle with voters.

Scripting supposedly off-the-cuff appearances is common in presidential politics but could hurt Clinton especially hard since her gonzo road-trip journey to America's broad midwest is designed to counter her image as cold, calculating and politically venomous.

And planting party insiders in place of typical Iowans won't go over well in the Hawkeye State, where pressing the flesh and collecting caucus votes is a quadrennial full-contact sport.



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ASTROTURF: Setting up faux events for news cameras is nothing new in politics, but Iowans take presidential contests seriously and could punish Clinton for the deception



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THE FIXER: Bird said Troy Prince (left, pictured with VP Joe Biden), who was executive director of the Iowa Democratic Party until he left last month to help Clinton's statewide political effort, recruited him and others to attend the 'spontaneous' coffee meeting

Clinton's campaign has already taken heat for depicting at least three people in her campaign launch video as 'everyday' Americans who were actually partisans with political connections.

One was even a former campaign manager for Wendy Davis, the Texas Democrat who mounted a failed bid for Texas governor last year.

In LeClaire on Tuesday, [Bloomberg](#) and other outlets referred to Bird as a 'student' at St. Ambrose University, not as a hospital government-affairs staffer with Democratic party street-cred.

He does study at St. Ambrose – part-time.

But Bird's ties to the party are deep enough that his Facebook wall includes a photo of him standing in front of Joe Biden's limousine in Davenport.

'I was driving the Vice President when he was in town in October,' Bird noted in a Facebook comment.

Biden was not there on official government business, but for a campaign stop in support of Democrat Bruce Braley.

'The Vice President will attend a grassroots event for Braley for Iowa with Representative David Loebsack,' according to White House press guidance for his October 27, 2014 schedule.



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