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Candidates, Campaigns, and Political Tides: Electoral Success in Colorado's 4th District

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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE
CANDIDATES, CAMPAIGNS, AND POLITICAL TIDES:
ELECTORAL SUCCESS IN COLORADO'S 4TH DISTRICT

SUBMITTED TO
PROFESSOR JON SHIELDS
AND
DEAN GREGORY HESS
BY
MEGAN GWYNNE MacCOLL

FOR
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INTRODUCTION

The 2010 congressional race in Colorado's 4th District became political theater for national consumption. The race between two attractive, respected, and qualified candidates was something of an oddity in the often dysfunctional 2010 campaign cycle. Staged on the battleground of a competitive district in an electorally relevant swing state, the race between Republican Cory Gardner and Democratic incumbent Betsy Markey was a partisan fight for political momentum. The Democratic Party made inroads in the 4th District by winning the congressional seat in 2008 for the first time since the 1970s. Rep. Markey's win over Republican incumbent Marilyn Musgrave was supposed to signal the long-awaited arrival of progressive politics in the district, after Rep. Musgrave survived successively closer elections in 2004 and 2006. The 2010 election of Cory Gardner, however, disrupted any signs of Democratic progress in Northeastern Colorado and added to the national woes of the Democratic Party as the Republicans regained control of the U.S. House of Representatives by a comfortable margin. Democratic incumbents lost fifty-four seats to Republican challengers in 2010, but the Gardner-Markey race is particularly interesting as a case study of voter motivation and the mediating forces, both regional and national, that influence electoral success.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2010 election, locals, pundits, and even campaign staffers described Betsy Markey's defeat as inevitable, and this consensus of inevitability persists into the 2012 campaign cycle. While there is a common understanding of the 2010 race, campaign sources in Colorado explain the election results from three different theoretical perspectives. The first theory holds that Markey was a poor fit for the 4th District and never representative of constituent interests. From this

perspective, Markey's election in 2008 was the exception, while Cory Gardner's 2010 victory was the rule. Supporters of this theory argue that the electoral history of the district, its majority Republican electorate, and Rep. Markey's inconsistent voting record in Congress made reelection by the 4th District impossible.

The second theory focuses on Cory Gardner's contribution to the race, and contends that his 2010 election resulted from a successful strategic campaign and a politically shrewd candidate. According to this theory, Gardner was an excellent candidate in 2010 because of his personal history in the district and his political acumen. By staying on message, avoiding missteps, and appealing to more moderate voters, Gardner ran an effective and efficient campaign that deserves more credit for Markey's defeat than any deficiencies of her own. Finally, a third theory for the 2010 election explains the inevitability of a Markey defeat in the context of the national political mood. With low approval rates for President Obama's policy agenda and for Members of Congress, the public was antagonistic toward congressional Democrats who supported the President's major policy initiatives. From this perspective, Betsy Markey's defeat in 2010 was a referendum on the Democratic leadership in Congress and unpopular legislation such as the stimulus bill and healthcare reform. Supporters of this theory consider Rep. Markey an unfortunate victim of the anti-incumbent, anti-Democrat national political mood.

Standing alone, each theory is an incomplete explanation for the 2010 congressional election results in Colorado's 4th District, but a combination of the arguments and their evidence provides a more comprehensive answer. Betsy Markey's voting record in Congress contradicts the 'poor fit' theory, but constituents viewed her

support for the Democratic leadership and President Obama's agenda as a betrayal of the electorate. In this misguided context, Rep. Markey *was* voted out of office for misrepresenting her district. The 'excellent candidate' and 'national mood' theories offer a more literal interpretation of the election results. Cory Gardner was an ideal candidate for 2010, and his personal contributions to the race are an integral part of the overall explanation for Markey's defeat, as is the national political mood which gave Gardner every advantage and left Markey extremely vulnerable. While no single theory is the definitive reason that voters in the 4th District elected Cory Gardner, each contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the inevitability of Betsy Markey's defeat.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONGRESSWOMAN AS REPRESENTATIVE

Betsy Markey's defeat in the 2010 congressional election is sometimes reconciled as a return to the political norm of Colorado's 4th District. After more than thirty years of Republican representation in Congress, CD-4 elected Democrat Betsy Markey in a wave of national support for Barack Obama and Democratic candidates. Voters in the 4th District quickly abandoned this temporary experiment with progressive politics by voting Markey out of office in 2010 by a double-digit margin.¹ From this perspective, Markey's defeat was inevitable because her victory in 2008 was not a sign of progressivism in the District or of Democratic momentum in Colorado, thus it did not signal a new beginning for Democrats in CD-4.

This interpretation of the 2010 election results casts Betsy Markey as a poor fit for the 4th District since day one. In this view, Markey's 2008 victory was an aberration and her 2010 defeat was a referendum on a congressional record at odds with constituent interests. Such an analysis of Markey's candidacy, and her voting record in Congress, is limited in both its scope and accuracy. The recent electoral history of the 4th District, its unique demographics, and the political concerns of its constituency refute this theory. Markey's victory in 2008 was not an accident, and many different factors—among them, Cory's Gardner's skill as a candidate, the unpopularity of President Obama and Congressional Democrats, and three controversial votes by Markey—contributed to her defeat in 2010.

¹ "Total Raised and Spent: 2008 Race: Colorado District 04," OpenSecrets.org, <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.php?id=CO04&cycle=2010> (accessed March 18, 2012).

RECENT ELECTORAL HISTORY

When Representative Marilyn Musgrave lost the 2008 congressional election in Colorado's 4th District, it was with an air of inevitability. The margin of Musgrave's defeat—12 percent, the largest of any incumbent that year—was surprisingly wide, but the result was not unanticipated.² While Democratic challengers chipped away at Musgrave's base of support in '04 and '06, the national wave of pro-Democratic support in 2008 ended both Musgrave's political career and the 4th District's time-honored tradition of electing Republicans to Congress. It was, according to Larimer County Democratic Party Chairman William Russell, "the perfect storm."³ In 2008, anti-incumbent sentiment and a downtrodden economy added to the growing unpopularity of Rep. Musgrave and helped elect Betsy Markey to the U.S. Congress.

During the 2008 campaign, the national economy was plagued by mounting inflation, high-gas prices, and a looming recession. Lame-duck President George W. Bush had an approval rating in the low thirties, and public opinion on Congress was even more depressed. In July 2008, Congressional approval reached a record low of 14 percent, with 19 percent of Republicans approving of Congress and only 11 percent of Democrats agreeing.⁴ Democratic success in the 2008 congressional elections is often attributed to such national concerns, but the election result in Colorado's 4th District was more than a reactive response to a troubled economy and unpopular President. As the

² "Rep. Betsy Markey (D)," *National Journal Almanac Online*, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/almanac/person/betsy-markey-co/> (accessed February 18, 2012).

³ "Personal Interview with William Russell," April 2, 2012.

⁴ Lydia Saad, "Congressional Approval Hits Record-Low 14%" Gallup, July 16, 2010, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/108856/congressional-approval-hits-recordlow-14.aspx> (accessed March 31, 2012).

recent electoral history of CD-4 shows, Democratic support strengthened during Rep. Musgrave's tenure and a Musgrave defeat was only a matter of time.⁵

Rep. Musgrave was first elected to the United States Congress in 2002 in a minor wave of midterm enthusiasm for President Bush and congressional Republicans. Musgrave won the Republican nomination to fill the vacant 4th District and, armed with a substantial war chest and the endorsement of retiring Congressman Bob Schaffer, went on to defeat Democratic challenger Stan Matsunaka by a double-digit margin.⁶

In the following two congressional elections, Democratic candidates began to weaken the Republican stronghold on the 4th District and make inroads within the traditionally conservative political landscape of Northeastern Colorado. Again challenging Rep. Musgrave in the 2004 election, State Senate President Stan Matsunaka came within six points of Musgrave on a campaign that sought to define Musgrave as, in Matsunaka's own words, a "one-trick pony" focused on marginal social issues. "We made a lot of headroom saying her heart wasn't in the district," Matsunaka told Salon in 2006. The message worked—to a point. While President Bush took CD-4 with 58 percent of the vote, Musgrave won the 2004 congressional election with a narrower 6 percent margin of victory.⁷

In 2006, the Democrats came even closer to recapturing the district after more than thirty years of Republican dominance, despite a concerted effort by Musgrave to focus on economic and security issues instead of her more polarizing social positions.

⁵ "Personal Interview with William Russell," April 2, 2012.

⁶ "Electing the New Congress: Races for the House," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/07/us/the-2002-elections-congress-electing-the-new-congress-races-for-the-house.html> (accessed February 18, 2012).

⁷ Michael Scherer, "The GOP's dwindling anti-gay parade," Salon.com, November 3, 2006, http://www.salon.com/2006/11/03/colorado_3/ (accessed April 3, 2012).

After the success of Democratic attacks in 2004, Rep. Musgrave ran a broadened campaign in 2006, spending less time on controversial issues like gay marriage and abortion and more time on district concerns like agriculture and Social Security.⁸ Musgrave's tactical change helped stave off her Democratic challenger. State representative Angie Paccione came within two percentage points of Rep. Musgrave, eventually losing 43 percent to 45 percent. Third-party candidate Eric Eidsness took 11 percent of the vote, a majority of which constituted anti-Musgrave support.⁹

In both the 2004 and 2006 campaign cycles, Democrats tried to take advantage of Rep. Musgrave's conservative positions and portrayed Musgrave as an out-of-touch lightweight, obsessed with social issues like gay marriage and abortion while ignoring the economic difficulties of her constituents. In their second and third attempts to oust Musgrave, Democrats were aided by increasing ill-will, even among conservative voters, toward a representative some regarded as insubstantial at best and diabolical at worst. In an internal poll of likely voters in CD-4 conducted for the Matsunaka campaign in the spring of 2004, Rep. Musgrave's favorability rating was only 25 percent, while President George W. Bush had a 36 percent favorability. The same poll also found Musgrave had a 68-22 favorable-unfavorable rating among registered Republicans, whereas President Bush had an 83-15 favorable-unfavorable rating among registered Republicans.¹⁰ For a Republican incumbent in CD-4, these are discouraging numbers. While Republicans had a large advantage over Democrats in registered voters—nearly 40,000 more—Musgrave

⁸ Jeff Brady, "Gay Marriage Issue Looms over Colorado race," National Public Radio, October 15, 2006, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6270799> (accessed April 3, 2012).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ "Survey of Likely Voters in the 4th Congressional District of Colorado," Ridder-Braden Inc., February 24, 2004.

was considered particularly vulnerable as an incumbent reelected with only 51 percent of the vote in 2004.¹¹

Rep. Musgrave's increasing unpopularity among her constituents, particularly registered Republicans, may seem to support the theory that Betsy Markey was elected in 2010 as a one-off, in spite of her poor fit for the district, but decreasing support for national GOP candidates in CD-4 is evidence to the contrary. In the 2008 presidential election, Republican nominee John McCain won the 4th District by the narrowest margin of victory for a Republican nominee in recent history. Sen. McCain won with 50 percent of the vote in a district that President Bush carried with 57 percent in 2000 and 58 percent in 2004.¹²

Such statistics reflect the overall change in political composition of the 4th District and the Democratic momentum that peaked on November 7, 2008 with the election of Betsy Markey. While the 2008 congressional election was not a fluke, Musgrave's vulnerability gave Markey a significant advantage. The strength of the anti-Musgrave contingent is reflected by Mr. Russell's analysis of precinct data from the 2008 election, in which he compared support for Markey with CD-4 support for statewide Senate candidate Mark Udall. In comparing the data, Russell came to the conclusion that "precinct by precinct there was 6 percent anti-Musgrave vote. So there was a percent swing. Even some of my Republican friends said, you know, I can't stand that woman and I'm going to vote for somebody different."¹³

¹¹ "Colorado 4," RealClearPolitics.com, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/writeup/colorado_4-46.html (accessed March 21, 2012).

¹² "Presidential Results by Congressional District, 2000-2008," Swing State Project, December 15, 2008, <http://www.swingstateproject.com/diary/4161/> (accessed March 31, 2012).

¹³ "Personal Interview with William Russell," April 2, 2012.

Rep. Musgrave's unpopularity notwithstanding, Markey's reputation as a moderate Democrat, and her relatively conservative positions on popular issues like Second Amendment rights and budget reform, were the difference in her successful 2008 campaign. The 4th District is both geographically and politically diverse, spanning mostly rural areas of northern and eastern Colorado. The Eastern plains are overwhelmingly conservative, while the two largest cities, Fort Collins and Greeley, are more liberal and much more populous.¹⁴ By portraying herself as a middle-of-the-road moderate, Markey was adept at finding the ideological balance within her district. Markey's personal ideology and the positions she took on important constituent issues refute the theory that she was ever a poor fit for the 4th District. Her voting record, however, left Markey open to criticism from voters who did not see their interests represented in Congress. William Russell described the incongruity of Markey's relationship to her constituents as one of misperception among voters. "She was a great middle-of-the-road Democrat," Russell commented. "She represented her district really well on social issues, but the perception among the Republicans [was] that she never really represented that district."¹⁵

ON THE ISSUES

Rep. Musgrave's reputation as a conservative hardliner, and her controversial support for social issues like a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, hurt her 2008 re-election campaign despite the conservative values of the district's voters. In the economic uncertainty surrounding the 2008 election, Betsy Markey's focus on small businesses and the Colorado economy appealed to voters more than Rep. Musgrave's advocacy for

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

conservative social issues. A 2010 *TIME* magazine analysis of Rep. Musgrave's defeat determined that "[Markey's] victory was due more to Musgrave's weaknesses than her own strengths. Musgrave spent too much time talking about wedge social issues like same-sex marriage, abortion and religion in government."¹⁶

The internal poll conducted by the Matsunaka campaign found that "economy/jobs" was the single greatest concern of registered Republicans in CD-4, ranked above all social issues.¹⁷ For a candidate who believed that the most important issue facing the future of America was gay marriage, this reflected a decided lack of cohesion between Musgrave's priorities and those of her district.¹⁸ While a majority of Musgrave's constituents shared her conservative values on social issues, they were overwhelmingly more focused on pressing economic concerns.¹⁹

In some ways, the discrepancy between Musgrave's priorities and those of her constituents supports the 'bad-fit' theory, that the 2010 election was a referendum on Musgrave, not a statement of support for Markey's politics. This viewpoint, however, does not give enough credit to the positive relationship between Markey's election and her positions on important constituent issues. On the issues, Betsy Markey was a strong supporter of Second Amendment rights, renewable energy, the agricultural industry, budget reform, deficit reduction, and, more controversially, healthcare reform. She was endorsed in 2010 by the National Rifle Association (NRA); the conservative Fort Collins newspaper *The Coloradoan*; and the National Farmers Union, an organization that Cory

¹⁶ Jay Newton-Small, "2010: Races to Watch: Colorado's 4th Congressional District: Betsy Markey vs. Cory Gardner," *TIME*, October 7, 2010, http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,20191382019132_2024284,00.html (accessed February 6, 2012).

¹⁷ "Survey of Likely Voters in the 4th Congressional District of Colorado," Ridder-Braden Inc.

¹⁸ "Personal Interview with William Russell," April 2, 2012.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Gardner's family has supported for generations and of which he is a member.²⁰ During her time in Congress, Markey consistently voted in the interests of her district, even on unpopular legislation like the Affordable Care Act. The Gardner campaign repeatedly hit Markey on three particularly contentious votes: the 2009 stimulus bill, healthcare reform, and cap-and-trade legislation. Gardner and his surrogates generally stuck to these three policy areas, in part because Rep. Markey was pragmatically positioned on most economic issues.

In a rural district like CD-4, agriculture is of obvious importance, both politically and economically. By supporting local farming, renewable energy—particularly ethanol—and increasing competition in the marketplace, Markey not only received the NFU endorsement over Gardner, but also the organization's 2010 Golden Triangle Award for "demonstrating leadership on issues relevant to America's family farmers."²¹ While in Congress, Rep. Markey had a strong legislative record on energy and agricultural issues. Markey sponsored legislation to incentivize the use of renewable power (H.R. 4149), and co-sponsored bills to exempt certain farmland from the estate tax (H.R. 173) and to increase access to alternative fuels (H.R. 1757).²²

Second Amendment rights are another important issue for many constituents in the 4th District. A 2004 poll of registered voters in CD-4 found that more than 70 percent of respondents believed Second Amendment rights were fundamental and guaranteed to all Americans, but this cohort also supported limited restrictions on firearm possession

²⁰ Scot Kersgaard, "CO: Markey gets award from farming group Cory Gardner belongs to," *The American Independent*, September 15, 2010, <http://www.americanindependent.com/140989/markey-gets-award-from-farming-group-cory-gardner-belongs-to> (accessed March 19, 2012).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² "Bills Sponsored by Betsy Markey in Session 111," *The Political Guide*, http://www.thepoliticalguide.com/Profiles/House/Colorado/Betsy_Markey/Bills/111/ (accessed March 19, 2012).

including criminal background checks. Rep. Markey consistently represented the interests of her district by sponsoring legislation to protect limited gun-rights during the 111th Congress. Markey co-sponsored the Protecting Gun Owners in Bankruptcy Act of 2010 to exclude firearms from the claims of creditors, the Firearms Excise Tax Improvement Act of 2010 to decrease taxes on firearms manufacturers, and the National Right-to-Carry Reciprocity amendment to extend protection of right-to-carry licenses. Markey also supported a bill to allow carry license or permit holders to possess firearms for self-defense in national parks—relevant legislation in a state with as many national parks as Colorado—and a bill to ease firearm restrictions in the District of Columbia.²³ In endorsing Rep. Markey over Cory Gardner, Chris W. Cox, the chief lobbyist for the NRA, commented that “Betsy Markey’s support for our Second Amendment rights and hunting heritage has earned her an ‘A’ rating and endorsement.”²⁴

While Cory Gardner ran on a campaign of fiscal responsibility that described Rep. Markey as another Democratic supporter of big government spending, Markey’s legislative record on economic issues was very much in line with the fiscal conservatism of her district. In Congress, Markey co-sponsored bills to end the practice of annual inflation adjustments for Congressional salaries (H.R. 4255) and reinstitute PAYGO requirements for budget neutrality (H.R. 2920), while also voting for a Republican effort

²³ John Tomasic, “Markey outdraws ‘young gun’ Gardner in NRA endorsement showdown,” *The Colorado Independent*, September 17, 2010, <http://coloradoindependent.com/62086/markey-outdraws-%E2%80%98young-gun%E2%80%99-gardner-in-nra-endorsement-showdown> (accessed March 19, 2012); “Bills Sponsored by Betsy Markey in Session 111,” *The Political Guide*, http://www.thepoliticalguide.com/Profiles/House/Colorado/Betsy_Markey/Bills/111/ (accessed March 19, 2012).

²⁴ Monte Whaley, “NRA endorses Dems’ Markey and Salazar, GOP’s Frazier,” *The Denver Post*, September 18, 2010, http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_16106963 (accessed March 18, 2012).

to pass a balanced budget amendment.²⁵ Rep. Markey also supported consumer protection legislation, which *The Coloradoan* cited in its endorsement of Markey as an example of her taking “a more centrist leadership role...when she participated in an effort to curb credit card companies from exploiting their positions prior to reforms taking place.”²⁶

Perhaps the strongest evidence of Rep. Markey’s fiscal conservatism, and her centrist role within the Democratic Party, was her vote against President Obama’s first budget. One of only twenty Democrats to vote with the Republican caucus against the bill, Rep. Markey rejected the President’s budget because, according to her campaign spokesman Ben Marter, “She thought it was too big and didn’t contain deep enough cuts in the various agencies.”²⁷ In an ironic campaign misstep, however, a Gardner campaign ad released in October 2010 hit Rep. Markey for supporting “the most fiscally irresponsible budget in history.” While Betsy Markey never voted for the Obama budget, another congressional Markey did—Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA).²⁸ The inaccuracy of this claim, and the Gardner campaign’s subsequent attempt to spin the media coverage, should not detract from Rep. Markey’s *actual* voting record on economic issues. By

²⁵ “Bills Sponsored by Betsy Markey in Session 111,” The Political Guide; Mark Memmott, “Balanced Budget Amendment Falls Short in House,” National Public Radio, November 18, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2011/11/18/142509386/balanced-budget-amendment-falls-short-in-house> (accessed March 21, 2012).

²⁶ “Betsy Markey Endorsed by Fort Collins Coloradoan,” *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2010, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/politics/blog-network/2010/10/betsy_markey_endorsed_by_fort.html (accessed March 24, 2012).

²⁷ Ashley Parker, “Gardner v. Markey(s) Takes an Unusual Turn,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2010, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/tag/betsy-markey/> (accessed February 24, 2012).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

supporting Republican efforts to reduce the federal deficit and balance the budget, Rep. Markey crossed party lines to represent her district through fiscal responsibility.²⁹

While Rep. Markey's voting record on agriculture, Second Amendment rights, and budget reform legislation was positively reported in local editorials and various endorsements, her support for healthcare reform was widely criticized in the 4th District.³⁰ Markey originally voted against the House version in November 2009 because, in her own words, "[the] bill did not do enough to help small business."³¹ When the House eventually voted on the Senate version, The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), in March 2010, Rep. Markey switched her vote, arguing that "quite simply, this was a better bill than the legislation in the House passed last fall. It does more to contain costs while providing increased health insurance coverage."³² Such cost-based justification became the central theme of Markey's self-defense on healthcare reform during the campaign. Like other Blue-Dog Democrats who switched their votes on healthcare, Rep. Markey pointed to a Congressional Budget Office report that estimated the Senate bill would reduce the deficit by \$130 billion over one decade, and \$1.2 trillion over two decades. For Markey, a centrist who touted her business experience during the 2008 campaign and supported deficit reduction legislation in Congress, "the clincher was

²⁹ "Betsy Markey Endorsed by Fort Collins Coloradoan," *The Washington Post*.

³⁰ Michael Riley, "Markey, DeGette a capsule of health bill pickle," *The Denver Post*, March 5, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 18, 2012).

³¹ Rep. Betsy Markey, "Why I voted for this health care bill," *The Denver Post*, March 26, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 18, 2012).

³² *Ibid.*

the CBO score.”³³ The fiscal logistics of the bill, however, fell on deaf ears and Rep. Markey returned home to a deeply divided and even hostile constituency.³⁴

The home-grown vitriol that greeted Markey’s vote on the Affordable Care Act, and her return to the campaign trail that summer, was explosive, if not surprising. *The Denver Post* ran a scathing editorial the week after PPACA passed, arguing that Markey “caved to partisan interests and abandoned her initial principled opposition.” Echoing a common talking-point from the Gardner campaign, the Editorial Board complained that Markey was a cog in the Democratic caucus—“just a little arm-twisting and -poof- she’s on board.”³⁵ Cory Gardner, wasting no time to bludgeon the Markey campaign, said her vote on healthcare was “the tipping point” in a congressional record that showed “Congresswoman Markey is out of step.”³⁶ *The Post* reported multiple donations to the Gardner campaign marked ‘Thank Betsy Markey’s health-care vote for this check.’³⁷ In an interview with *The Post* on election day 2010, Fort Collins resident Brad Davies said he “voted for Betsy, but she let me down,” before heading into a polling station and voting for Gardner.³⁸

³³ Dan Balz, “Emotions of health-care debate reverberate in Colorado race,” *The Washington Post*, April 5, 2010, LexisNexis, http://web.lexisnexis.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/congcomp/document?_m=59a0183c0b23937d5cf0532e719cca56&_docnum=36&wchp=dGLbVzVzSkSA&_md5=03c1578e24b12f8e52fe11278289e56f (accessed March 31, 2012).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Editorial Board, “EDITORIAL Political failure on health care: Not only will the deeply flawed bill hurt the nation in years to come, it also could cost Democrats in November’s election,” *The Denver Post*, March 22, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 22, 2012).

³⁶ Dan Balz, “Emotions of health-care debate reverberate in Colorado race.”

³⁷ Lynn Bartels, “Glad, mad over Markey’s health vote,” *The Denver Post*, March 28, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 18, 2012); Dan Balz, “Emotions of health-care debate reverberate in Colorado race.”

³⁸ Lynn Bartels, “Gardner defeats Markey in 4th District,” *The Denver Post*, November 3, 2010, http://www.denverpost.com/election2010/ci_16506117 (accessed March 31, 2012).

While Rep. Markey's vote on healthcare reform was met with criticism, and often outrage, from constituents like Brad Davies, regional media outlets like *The Denver Post* mischaracterized the local response as universally negative.³⁹ There was certainly a hostile reaction from many in the 4th District, but Markey's vote also received praise from constituents like unaffiliated voter Les Gelvin, who told *The Post's* Monte Whaley that "[Markey's] the best representative we've ever had" because she "wants what is best for the 4th District."⁴⁰ Another unaffiliated voter from Greeley sent Rep. Markey's office an email thanking the Congresswoman for her "gutsy, gutsy move" and her "bravery...and courage in making the right choice."⁴¹

Though Markey's campaign received many similar messages of support, they were outnumbered and overshadowed by the angry opposition of some constituents. A *Washington Post* article from the summer of 2010 described how Rep. Markey "has kept a low profile [on returning to the campaign trail], worried that emotions remain raw" about the Affordable Care Act, while a Markey campaign staffer remembers the Congresswoman being "threatened with firearms" on the campaign trail.⁴²

The hostile, even violent, local reaction to Rep. Markey's vote on healthcare reform may appear to support the theory that Markey was poorly suited to represent the 4th District, but this assessment is inaccurate and incomplete. While the Gardner

³⁹ Lynn Bartels, "Glad, mad over Markey's health vote."

⁴⁰ Monte Whaley, "Campaign 2010 In the 4th, GOP fights for old turf Markey beat an incumbent in '08. Her rival Gardner hopes to pull off the same feat," *The Denver Post*, September 29, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁴¹ Dan Balz, "Emotions of health-care debate reverberate in Colorado race."

⁴² *Ibid.*; "Interview with William Russell," April 2, 2012.

campaign and national Republican organizations like the NRCC cast Betsy Markey as a spineless liberal bending to pressure from the Democratic leadership, her vote on healthcare, the most controversial and probably damning vote of her short congressional career, *was* a gutsy and risky effort to protect the interests her district. But for many residents in the 4th District, the motivation behind Markey’s vote did not matter and, in a sense, the same can be said for the campaign itself. Whether Markey’s constituents viewed PPACA was a form of socialist governance, a legitimate effort at deficit reduction, or something in between—as *The Denver Post* described it, simply a flawed bill—would not have substantially changed the campaign rhetoric or the final result.⁴³

Even if voters in CD-4 realized that with the highest obesity rates in Colorado (and the lowest rates of insurance coverage by county) their district needed healthcare reform, Markey would not have escaped from the debate unscathed. The Gardner campaign would continue tying the Congresswoman to a toxic Democratic leadership headed by an unpopular Nancy Pelosi.⁴⁴ And if Markey had voted *against* the Senate bill, it would not have mattered, according to Democratic consultant Adam Dunstone, a veteran of the 2006 Paccione campaign. “I think they ran a great campaign,” Dunstone says, “but 2010 was just so brutal almost everywhere that I don’t know if there was much they could have done.” While Dunstone believes that Markey represented her district well in Congress, he agrees that Markey’s political positions and congressional record

⁴³ Stuart Rothenberg, “Swing Voters, HOP to Democrats: You’re Fired!” *Roll Call*, November 4, 2010, Lexis Nexis, http://web.lexisnexis.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/congcomp/document?_m=c6f6b678c28526d54bcd77f7dc1e70d1&_docnum=2&wchp=dGLbVzV-zSkSA&_md5=2fffffb0d5a3704bbae4dfa6e7aff893 (accessed March 31, 2012).

⁴⁴ “Colorado: 2012,” *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps*, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/about-project/team> (accessed April 4, 2012); Monte Whaley, “Campaign 2010 In the 4th, GOP fights for old turf Markey beat an incumbent in '08. Her rival Gardner hopes to pull off the same feat.”

were something of a moot point during the 2010 campaign. “She could have voted Tea-Party line and it wouldn’t have mattered,” Dunstone says, “because she’s still got a “D” in front of her name, and she’s getting lumped into that whole cycle which was ‘tax and spend us into oblivion’.”⁴⁵

For Markey, Dunstone argues, the writing was on the wall before the Affordable Care Act even came to a vote. As *Denver Post* columnist Mike Littwin noted after the healthcare bill passed Congress, “it would have been political suicide for Markey...to help this bill fail. The only way she can be re-elected in the district is if Democrats improve their standing by November.”⁴⁶ Rather than acting as a referendum on Markey’s record in Congress, including her vote on healthcare, the 2010 election in Colorado’s 4th District was a reactionary statement of disapproval for the Obama agenda and Congressional Democrats.

Betsy Markey’s voting record on important constituent interests such as agriculture, economic issues, Second Amendment rights and, more controversially, healthcare reform disproves the theory that Markey’s election in 2008 was an aberration, and thus her 2010 defeat a predictable return to the political norm of the 4th District. There are further reasons that this so-called ‘bad-fit’ theory is an incomplete explanation for the 2010 election results. Cory Gardner’s talent as a politician—one Democratic consultant called him “an amazing candidate”—and the national political mood both worked against Betsy Markey and were more directly responsible for her 2010 defeat than any positions she did, or did not, take in Congress and on the campaign trail.

⁴⁵ “Personal Interview with Adam Dunstone,” April 2, 2012.

⁴⁶ Mike Littwin, “Morning Brew: Markey faces music, trumpets vote.” *The Denver Post*. March 19, 2010. Lexis Nexis. <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 18, 2012).

CHAPTER TWO: THE CANDIDATE AS POLITICAL MAESTRO

Betsy Markey was a vulnerable incumbent in 2010, but her campaign for reelection still had the advantages of incumbency: name recognition, a well-staffed and organized operation, and a significant war chest. Though incumbency can be a liability in years like 2010, it remains a high predictor of electoral success and the defeat of an incumbent Representative is unusual. Even amidst the political volatility of the 2010 campaign cycle, 85 percent of incumbents won reelection at the midterm—still the lowest rate of incumbent reelection to the U.S. House since 1964.⁴⁷

While the data suggest that incumbency is historically an advantage in American congressional politics, when the public has an antagonistic relationship with Congress, incumbents can be particularly vulnerable.⁴⁸ Incumbents from the President's Party are especially at risk in midterm elections. The President's Party has lost seats in the House in every midterm election since 1938 with only two exceptions: the 1998 midterms during an economic boom and the 2002 midterms following 9/11.⁴⁹ Both of these factors worked against Rep. Markey in 2010 and weakened her advantage as an incumbent in the congressional race against Cory Gardner. Markey's approval rate, while higher than the public approval of Congress or the President, remained abysmally low in 2010. Pollsters generally consider an incumbent polling with less than 45 percent during an election year

⁴⁷ "Reelection Rates Over the Years," OpenSecrets.org, <http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/reelect.php> (accessed April 11, 2012).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Seats in Congress Gained/Lost by the President's Part in Mid-Term Elections," The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/mid-term_elections.php (accessed April 11, 2012).

to be “in deep trouble.” Markey, polling at 38 percent in early fall 2010, was “toast” according to *Roll Call*.⁵⁰

For Markey, these numbers were the beginning of the end. By October 1, 2010, Larimer County Democratic Party Chairman William Russell “knew we had a loser on our hands.” Around the same time, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) announced it would not spend the \$700,000 it had previously earmarked for Markey’s campaign. This was, according to Russell, an implicit acknowledgement that even another “\$2 million would not have won that race.”⁵¹

As a Democratic incumbent in 2010, Betsy Markey had a “brutal year”, said strategist Adam Dunstone.⁵² But according to *The Denver Post*’s Lynn Bartels, even if 2010 had been less damaging for Democrats nationally, “she would have a fight on her hands against Gardner.”⁵³ While Cory Gardner was certainly aided by the national political mood, his professional background and personal history in Colorado should not be underemphasized as deciding factors in the 2010 congressional race. Gardner brought a natural charm and charisma to the campaign, and his personal appeal as a candidate—one of Gardner’s greatest strengths, according to a Republican strategist—became an important part of the campaign’s strategy to win over crucial Independent and unaffiliated voters.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Stuart Rothenberg, “Race Fundamentals’ Are Telling for Vulnerables,” *Roll Call*, October 5, 2010, LexisNexis.http://web.lexisnexis.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/congcomp/document?_m=c6f6b678c28526d54bcd77f7dc1e70d1&_docnum=10&wchp=dGLbVzV-zSkSA&_md5=a7b436da06ad9c4f37c35c408954f39c (accessed March 31, 2012).

⁵¹ “Personal Interview with William Russell,” April 2, 2012.

⁵² “Personal Interview with Adam Dunstone,” April 3, 2012.

⁵³ Lynn Bartels, “Gardner defeats Markey in 4th District.”

⁵⁴ Personal Interview with Republican Strategist,” April 3, 2012.

While the theory that Betsy Markey was a bad fit for the 4th District is discredited by the recent congressional history of the district and Rep. Markey's voting record on constituent issues, an alternative explanation for the results of the 2010 election is more credible. Cory Gardner was simply an excellent congressional candidate who ran an efficient campaign. Gardner had two important assets that set him apart from Betsy Markey: a longstanding family history in the District—in the agricultural industry, no less—and an easy charm that translated into bipartisan appeal.

A Democratic strategist, who did not wish to go on the record praising Gardner, described him as “dangerous to Democrats” because “he’s so talented as a politician.” Describing several encounters with Cory Gardner on the campaign trail, the same source said that “the funny part is, we’d by like, ‘God I can’t help liking that guy’, because he’s really charming.”⁵⁵ Gardner’s personal appeal helped compensate for the campaign’s financial disadvantage. While the Markey campaign had a significant fundraising advantage and outpaced Gardner by more than \$1 million by fall 2010, Cory Gardner was arguably the better debating candidate and his personable demeanor played well in the campaign’s otherwise negative TV spots.⁵⁶ The fact that Betsy Markey, a moderate with the organizational and financial advantages of incumbency, was handily defeated by a rookie congressional candidate is a testament to Gardner’s own individual appeal and the effectiveness of his campaign.

⁵⁵ “Personal Interview with Democratic Strategist,” April 2, 2012.

⁵⁶ Burt Hubbard, “Big-money gifts flow into races for U.S. House,” *The Denver Post*, July 31, 2010, Lexis Nexis. <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 18, 2012); CoryGardner2010, “Colorado Votes,” Youtube.com, October 5, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR67ZaWv4xY> (accessed March 31, 2012).

PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND CHARACTERISTICS

Cory Gardner's homespun narrative of life growing up on Colorado's Eastern Plains would be an affective anecdote for any campaign in CD-4, but it provided a particularly useful contrast with non-native Betsy Markey. Gardner's personal background and fifth-generation roots in the 4th District became an important talking point for the campaign, because his local history supported the campaign's central theme—that Markey was something of a political imposter and never represented the District.⁵⁷ In portraying Rep. Markey as, in Gardner's words, "out of step with the commonsense voters of the 4th," the campaign implied that the divide between Markey and her constituency went beyond politics.

Rather, it was the result of contrarian values and an inconsistent pedigree. As an East Coast transplant, Betsy Markey was, for some residents of the 4th District, nothing more than a carpetbagger. The Gardner campaign reinforced this negative perception by drawing on Cory Gardner's personal history. In an interview with *National Review* after the 2010 election, Congressman-elect Gardner attributed his victory to the personal distinction he made between himself and Markey. "We made it clear that we have the same background values and commonsense approach that the voters do," Gardner said, "that is what brought us over the finish line."⁵⁸ In order to oust an unpopular incumbent, the Gardner campaign made a strategic decision to exploit a basic principle of group processes, the 'we-they feeling', and cast Markey as an outsider in her own district.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Michael Sandoval, "Exclusive: Rising Star Gardner (CO-4) Discusses Agenda for District," *National Review Online*, November 9, 2010, <http://www.nationalreview.com/battle10/252932/exclusive-rising-star-gardner-co-4-discusses-agenda-district-michael-sandoval> (accessed April 12, 2012).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "Personal Interview with William Russell," April 2, 2012.

While Betsy Markey grew up on the East Coast, where she lived until 1995, Gardner was born and raised in Yuma, Colorado where his family owned and operated a farm implement dealership founded by his great-grandfather in the late 1800s.⁶⁰ Whereas Markey left her family in New Jersey to attend college in Florida, Gardner not only stayed in Colorado for college, but he transferred from the University of Colorado at Boulder—roughly three hours from Yuma—to the nearer Colorado State University in Fort Collins, because Boulder was too much of a change from sleepy Yuma.⁶¹ However, Gardner did return to Boulder for his law degree and shortly after graduating in 2001, he moved to Washington, D.C. to begin his political career as communications director for the National Corn Growers Association.⁶²

After a short stint in Washington, Cory Gardner returned to Colorado as an aide to Republican Senator Wayne Allard, who would later endorse his former staffer for the seat Allard represented in Congress from 1991-1996.⁶³ Gardner joined Sen. Allard’s staff as communications director in 2001 and was promoted to legislative director by the next year, setting into motion a precipitous rise up the Colorado legislative hierarchy.⁶⁴ While Betsy Markey was also a former congressional aide (regional director for Democratic Sen. Ken Salazar) who subsequently ran for office, Cory Gardner’s path to public office

⁶⁰ “Rep. Cory Gardner (R),” *National Journal Almanac Online*, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/almanac/person/cory-gardner-co/> (accessed March 19, 2012).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “Gardner Announces First Wave of Endorsements,” Cory Gardner for Congress, January 14, 2010, http://corygardner.com/_blog/Cory_Gardner_Latest_News/post/Gardner_Announces_First_Wave_of_Endorsements/ (accessed April 9, 2012).

⁶⁴ Albert Eisele and Jeff Dufour, “Allard aide appointed to Colorado Legislature,” *The Hill*, July 14, 2005, LexisNexis. <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/inacademic/?shr=t&sf=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed April 3, 2012).

was more unorthodox than Markey's.⁶⁵ In 2005, Gardner was appointed to the Colorado Legislature "thanks to a series of dominoes toppling over in state politics," according to *The Hill*.⁶⁶ When former State Treasurer, and current Representative from Colorado's 6th District, Mike Coffman resigned from his position to complete a tour in Iraq, he was replaced by state Senator Mark Hillman. Hillman's Senate seat was then filled by state Rep. Greg Brophy, which in turn "opened up the 63rd District state House seat for Gardner, who just happened to grow up in Yuma."⁶⁷

If Cory Gardner's arrival on the Denver political scene was somewhat serendipitous, the stability of his career in the state legislature and his meteoric rise to House Minority Whip was due to a combination of ambition, pragmatism, hard work, and careful attention to constituent interests, with a cautious eye toward 2010.⁶⁸ As a rising star in the Colorado Republican Party, Gardner was chosen to help chair Congresswoman Musgrave's reelection campaign in 2008.⁶⁹ Gardner, however, clearly had his eye on 2010 and was overheard at the Republican State Convention privately telling delegates that Musgrave was a lost cause and, should she lose in November, he would immediately announce his candidacy to challenge Betsy Markey in 2010.⁷⁰ The importance of Gardner's prescience cannot be overstated; because Cory Gardner was planning his run for Congress as early as spring 2007, he was perfectly positioned, as a Musgrave campaign committee chair, to study the intricacies of campaigning in CD-4.

⁶⁵ "Rep. Betsy Markey (D)," *National Journal Almanac Online*.

⁶⁶ Albert Eisele and Jeff Dufour, "Allard aide appointed to Colorado Legislature."

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

⁶⁸ "Personal Interview with Republican Strategist," April 3, 2012.

⁶⁹ Jennifer Brown, "Musgrave builds team for 2008 re-election bid," *The Denver Post*, May 16, 2007, http://www.denverpost.com/ci_5904207?source=rss (accessed April 9, 2012); 9, 2012).

⁷⁰ "Republicans Look Ahead to November," ColoradoPols.com, June 4, 2008, <http://www.coloradopols.com/diary/6326/>

As a close observer of Musgrave's 2008 defeat, Cory Gardner saw firsthand the limitations of campaigning on social issues. While issues like gay marriage and abortion were at the forefront of national political debate during President Bush's second term, by 2008, the economic crisis overshadowed social issues. According to a *Denver Post* article on Musgrave's campaign woes, "gay marriage and abortion are fading from kitchen table conversations as voters struggle to stretch paychecks."⁷¹ According to *The Post*, Musgrave was particularly vulnerable because she "built a reputation in Colorado as a standard-bearer for conservative values," thus she was a target for outside spending from advocacy organizations. During the 2008 campaign cycle, such soft money organizations "spent twice as much fighting Musgrave as supporting her."⁷²

Musgrave's defeat, and the ineffectiveness of her campaign, clearly made an impression on Cory Gardner. Throughout the 2010 campaign, Gardner ignored social issues and ran his campaign against Betsy Markey's economic positions and congressional record on government spending, without engaging her in a conversation about social issues. This, however, was a strategic decision and should not be considered as evidence that Gardner is "far more animated by fiscal issues than the kind of divisive social issues that helped drive Marilyn Musgrave...out of office," as *The Post* argued in its 2010 endorsement of Gardner.⁷³ Cory Gardner is an active proponent of conservative social values, and as a state legislator he supported many of the same causes that Musgrave championed in Congress.

⁷¹ Jessica Fender, "Musgrave finds self in another close race," *The Denver Post*, October 23, 2008, http://www.denverpost.com/houseraces08/cj_10788529 (accessed April 9, 2012).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

While Gardner was a prominent voice for conservative social values as a member of the Colorado Senate—he supported pro-life legislation and opposed a bill to ban discrimination of same-sex couples—his congressional campaign focused on the less divisive issue of economic recovery.⁷⁴ In a *New York Times* interview, Gardner declined to comment on abortion, saying that “those issues haven’t come up very often.”⁷⁵ By pivoting away from social issues, Cory Gardner recast himself as a fiscal disciplinarian worthy of the left-leaning *Denver Post*’s endorsement as the best candidate for “these shaky economic times.”⁷⁶

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY AND TACTICS

One of the lessons Cory Gardner might have learned by example from the 2008 congressional race in Colorado’s 4th District is the limitations of campaigning on social issues. While Gardner was never a “one trick pony”, his record in the state legislature was not overtly focused on economic issues. In contrast, the Gardner campaign was almost entirely focused on economic recovery and fiscal responsibility.⁷⁷ In the context of 2010 and a stagnant economy with high unemployment, Gardner’s pivot toward economic issues is neither surprising nor particularly noteworthy, but the campaign’s ability to stay on message was impressive.

⁷⁴ Joseph Boven, “Gardner, despite past record, offers no comment to NYT on abortion,” *The Colorado Independent*, August 5, 2010, <http://coloradoindependent.com/58950/gardner-despite-past-record-offers-no-comment-to-nyt-on-abortion> (accessed March 19, 2012).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Editorial Board, “Gardner right for the 4th CD,” *The Denver Post*, October 7, 2010, http://www.denverpost.com/opinion/ci_16279708 (accessed February 6, 2012).

⁷⁷ “Incumbents Keep Congressional Seats,” *TheDenverChannel.com*, November 3, 2004, <http://www.the-denverchannel.com/politics/3885579/detail.html> (accessed April 11, 2012); Monte Whaley, “Campaign 2010 In the 4th, GOP fights for old turf Markey beat an incumbent in '08. Her rival Gardner hopes to pull off the same feat.”

While Markey and her surrogates tried to deflect attention from unpopular votes on the stimulus bill and healthcare reform by targeting Gardner's stance on social issues, the Gardner campaign took advantage of Markey's theoretical unwillingness to engage on economic issues. Campaign rhetoric increasingly targeted Markey for trying "to distract the voter with social issues."⁷⁸ By refusing to comment on Gardner's own social positions, while hitting Markey as "the only person in this race talking about social issues," campaign spokesperson Rachel Boxer gave a fairly comprehensive abstract of the Gardner campaign's strategy for appealing to moderates while avoiding the ensnarement of Tea-Party affiliation.⁷⁹

The campaign took this opportunity to cast Cory Gardner as the experienced adult in the race, despite the considerable age and experience gaps separating the candidates, because unlike his opponent, Gardner was "focused on jobs, the economy and reigning in spending."⁸⁰ While several news articles addressed the discrepancy between Gardner's priorities in the state legislature and those he emphasized on the campaign trail, overall it was an effective strategy in the district.⁸¹

The Denver Post, which endorsed Democratic candidates in all but one of the previous four elections, was convinced that "the district would be better served by [Gardner]" because he is "motivated by bringing fiscal discipline to government."⁸² While *The Post's* influential endorsement did acknowledge that Gardner was "less

⁷⁸ Jesse Benn, "Gardner Not Talking Social Issues In Colorado's 4th," *The Huffington Post*, October 31, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jesse-benn/gardner-not-talking-socia_b_776669.html (accessed April 9, 2012).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Joseph Boven, "Gardner, despite past record, offers no comment to NYT on abortion."

⁸² *The Denver Post*, "Gardner right for the 4th CD."

forthcoming” with the Editorial Board on his solutions for entitlement reform and reducing the costs of health care, the Board was satisfied with Gardner’s unsubstantiated promises of bringing “fiscal discipline to Washington.”⁸³ Gardner’s message of fiscal responsibility was predominantly described in ‘Washington outsider’ platitudes—“from town-hall meetings to coffee shops to neighborhoods, all I hear are worries about too much spending and the growth of government,” he told *The Post*—but his unspecified agenda for bringing change to Washington was enough for many voters.⁸⁴

For those voters in CD-4 who felt “betrayed” by Rep. Markey, Cory Gardner’s reputation as a local candidate looking out for his friends and family was a comforting contrast to Markey, the East Coast transplant they sent to Washington to represent their interests but who only let them down.⁸⁵ The Gardner campaign capitalized on this sense of betrayal, running television ads that appealed to both the political and emotional animosity toward Markey:

We sent her to Congress to fight for us. Instead Betsy Markey has hurt Colorado with one bad vote after another...Unlike Betsy Markey, I was taught early that a person’s word is their bond. I’m Cory Gardner. I approve this message because I will always put Colorado families before the Washington special interests.⁸⁶

In ads like “Colorado Votes,” the Gardner campaign suggested that Rep. Markey was not only misrepresenting the 4th District, but that she had become a pawn to the Democratic Leadership in Congress. On the campaign trail, Cory Gardner consistently tied Rep. Markey to controversial House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, citing her votes on healthcare,

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Monte Whaley, “Campaign 2010 In the 4th, GOP fights for old turf Markey beat an incumbent in '08. Her rival Gardner hopes to pull off the same feat.”

⁸⁵ Lynn Bartels, “Gardner defeats Markey in 4th District.”

⁸⁶ CoryGardner2010, “Colorado Votes.”

stimulus, and cap and trade as examples of Markey voting with Pelosi, “instead of voting for the district.”⁸⁷ Outside ads supporting Gardner, including one paid for by the 501(c)(4) Americans for Prosperity, were blunter. “Betsy Markey is the same as Nancy Pelosi,” the ad’s voiceover says, “after she flip-flopped on healthcare, Liberal supporters gave her more than \$350,000. Maybe that’s why Markey back Pelosi.”⁸⁸

For the Markey campaign, this line of attack was nearly indefensible. While Markey could justify her congressional record as protective of constituent interests, and even her controversial vote on healthcare as deficit reduction, there was no defensive option for dealing with Congress. With congressional approval under 20 percent and deals surrounding healthcare reform giving the American people a sense of congressional incompetency—according to *The Hill*, the “public watched sausage being made in Washington—Markey’s record of “voting with Pelosi 94 percent of time” was a huge liability.⁸⁹

While Markey’s campaign had trouble distancing itself from an unpopular Democratic-helmed Congress, it tried to distract the Gardner campaign by tying Cory Gardner to a similarly polarizing group: the Tea-Party. Along with the rise of the Tea-Party movement during the summer of 2010, Markey’s campaign saw an opportunity to force Gardner into commenting on sensitive and potentially alienating issues. Though the

⁸⁷ Monte Whaley, “Campaign 2010 In the 4th, GOP fights for old turf Markey beat an incumbent in '08. Her rival Gardner hopes to pull off the same feat.”

⁸⁸ Michael Sandoval, “NRCC Prepares Fall Ad Campaign, Betsy Markey Named Top Target,” *National Review Online*, August 19, 2010, <http://www.nationalreview.com/battle10/244255/nrcc-prepares-fall-ad-campaign-betsy-markey-named-top-target-michael-sandoval> (accessed March 31, 2012).

⁸⁹ Dick Morris, “An epic Dem disaster,” *The Hill*, September 7, 2012, <http://thehill.com/opinion/columnists/dick-morris/117521-an-epic-dem-disaster> (accessed March 31, 2012); CoryGardner2010, “94%,” YouTube.com, October 13, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lo7sQ0wnhvE&feature=plcp&context=C3251cf7UDOEgsToPDskLQ0jKEg-HyEmeBlqHwt9fl> (accessed February 6, 2012).

Tea-Party's platform was ostensibly one of fiscal responsibility, many individuals affiliated with the organization were controversial and, for Republican campaigns, unwanted sources of distraction.⁹⁰ In the 4th District's 2010 congressional race, Betsy Markey was given the political gift of two-third party candidates with Tea-Party affiliations, both of whom—unlike in 2006—might pull votes from Gardner.⁹¹ American Constitution Party candidate Doug Aden and unaffiliated Ken “Wasko” Waszkiewicz ran grassroots campaigns against big government in Washington and, Democrats hoped, might draw enough votes away from Gardner to put Markey back into contention.⁹²

Doug Aden, in particular, was positioned to influence that race because of another, more established American Constitution Party candidate in Colorado: former Congressman Tom Tancredo. Tancredo, a five-term Representative from Colorado's 6th District was an unsuccessful candidate for Governor in 2010.⁹³ Markey supporters hoped that, as a high-profile statewide candidate, Tancredo could have an “impact on the ticket [that] could help other Constitution Party candidates and possibly influence the outcome in tight races,” according to Democratic political consultant Steve Welchert.⁹⁴

Because Aden was, at least superficially, a factor in the race, Markey's campaign tried to force Gardner out of his foxhole on more polarizing political issues. When the

⁹⁰ Kenneth P. Vogel, “Dick Arney: Avoid ‘tea party’ label, MSNBC,” *Politico*, June 17, 2010, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0610/38625.html> (accessed April 12, 2012).

⁹¹ Monte Whaley, “Two underdogs are wild cards in close Markey-Gardner race,” *The Denver Post*, October 9, 2010, http://www.denverpost.com/politics/ci_16293685 (accessed April 2, 2012).

⁹² Stuart Rothenberg, “Will Democrats’ Third-Party Scenario Pay Off?” *Roll Call*, July 6, 2010, Lexis Nexis, http://web.lexisnexis.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/congcomp/document?_m=c6f6b678c28526d54bcd77f7dc1e70d1&_docnum=17&wchp=dGLbVzV-zSkSA&_md5=c8e5fa8d8d26bd1639991af06f06e3cd (accessed March 31, 2012).

⁹³ Lynn Bartels, “Tancredo may help party ticket Constitution nominees draw attention,” *The Denver Post*, August 23, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

only debate between the candidates was organized without Alden and Waszkiewicz, Markey dropped out of her scheduled commitment, saying that “it’s important for everyone to have an opportunity to talk to people they want to represent.”⁹⁵ By refusing to debate Gardner one-on-one, Markey was clearly angling for an opportunity to lump Gardner in with conservative fringe candidates and, in doing so, appear as the only experienced and moderate choice for voters. “I think frankly Cory Gardner is terrified to debate these Tea-Party candidates,” Markey spokesman Ben Marter said, working to inject Tea-Party affiliation into the race.⁹⁶ The Gardner campaign hit back, arguing that Markey was “merely ducking and dodging because she knows she can’t handle playing in the big leagues with Gardner.”⁹⁷ It was an argument that Gardner won, and it also reflected the effectiveness of his campaign and its ability to stay on message. Although the debate was reformatted to include Alden and Waszkiewicz, multiple editorials criticized Markey, including *The Denver Post* which thought Markey’s “claim that she’s simply trying to be more inclusive sounds disingenuous.”⁹⁸

Another potentially embarrassing moment for Gardner came from the impromptu cancellation of a campaign fundraiser with Rep. Steve King (R-IA) after King made a racially-charged comment about President Obama.⁹⁹ While Gardner took some heat from his conservative base and was even taunted by Rep. King in an interview with Fox News,

⁹⁵ Monte Whaley, “Markey refuses to debate without third-party candidates on roster,” *The Denver Post*, September 15, 2010, http://www.denverpost.com/commented/ci_16085220 (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Editorial Board, “EDITORIAL Coloradans deserve robust debates with top candidates It’s good to see Tom Tancredo back in gubernatorial debates, but why is Betsy Markey balking at facing her GOP challenger?” *The Denver Post*, September 17, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁹⁹ “Top Stories of 2010 #6: ‘Teflon Cory’s’ Triumph,” ColoradoPols.com, December 30, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 17, 2012).

his disassociation from King was a tactical decision to avoid further controversy.¹⁰⁰ In this moment, Gardner “resisted the temptation to pander” and, according to an article from *ColoradoPols*, by quickly identifying the risks and taking action, Gardner “affirmed moderate credentials, making him safer to support by “Tea-Party”-averse independents and business interests.”¹⁰¹ The campaign’s discipline in cancelling the event, despite inciting the scorn of King and others, is another example of Gardner’s political acumen in action. Gardner, the article continues, “had numerous opportunities to alienate different groups of voters, and blow this race even though it was his to win,” but his political deftness avoided the kind of campaign meltdown suffered by 2010 Republican candidates like Carly Fiorina and Christine O’Donnell.¹⁰²

According to one Democratic consultant, Cory Gardner’s political savvy is his greatest weapon, because “he is so smart, he’s so good, and he doesn’t [screw] up... He won’t go and say something absolutely insane at a Tea-Party rally because he’s smart enough to know that could hurt him later.”¹⁰³ While his personal history in the district, message of fiscal responsibility, and individual appeal as a candidate were all key factors in Gardner’s 2010 electoral success, his “campaign smarts” are the most important piece of the puzzle, according to multiple sources in Colorado.¹⁰⁴ By staying on message and avoiding costly distractions, Gardner ran an effective, efficient campaign worthy of what

¹⁰⁰ “Tancredo, King Go Hostile on Cory Gardner,” *ColoradoPols.com*, June 18, 2010, <http://www.coloradopols.com/showDiary.do?diaryId=12713> (accessed April 9, 2012).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Dave Levinthal, Michael Beckel and Evan Mackinder, “OpenSecrets.org’s Top 10 Money-in-Politics Stories of 2010,” *OpenSecrets.org*, December 31, 2010, <http://www.opensecrets.org/news/2010/12/the-top-10-money-in-politics-storie.html> (accessed March 31, 2012).

¹⁰³ “Personal Interview with Democratic Strategist,” April 2, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*; “Personal Interview with Republican Strategist,” April 2, 2012.

one strategist called “[Republicans’] best politician in Colorado by far.”¹⁰⁵ Betsy Markey may have been a vulnerable incumbent, but Gardner was an excellent candidate. Markey’s vulnerability and the antagonistic national political mood should not take away from the successful strategy, and tactical implementation, of Cory Gardner’s 2010 campaign.

¹⁰⁵ “Personal Interview with Democratic Strategist,” April 2, 2012.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ELECTION AS REFERENDUM ON NATIONAL POLITICS

As a candidate in 2010, Cory Gardner was well suited to challenge Betsy Markey in Colorado's 4th District, and the national Republican Party took notice. To regain control of the House of Representatives in 2010, Republicans needed to win back all 26 seats they turned over to Democrats in the 2008 elections, plus an additional 14 seats already held by Democrats.¹⁰⁶ It was an ambitious goal, but considered realistically attainable in the context of the national political climate.¹⁰⁷ At the top of the list were must-win seats held by vulnerable freshman Democrats like Markey. In order to take back the House, Republicans could not afford to lose historically Republican seats in conservative districts like CD-4.¹⁰⁸ As a capable challenger in a potentially competitive, possibly lean-Republican race, Cory Gardner received significant financial support from the NRCC—nearly \$1 million by election day—and also benefited from publicity within the national Party.¹⁰⁹

Gardner was selected as a second-tier candidate in the NRCC's 'Young Gun' program, founded by Reps. Eric Cantor (R-VA), Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), and Paul Ryan (R-WI) during the 2008 cycle to promote the NRCC's agenda and groom

¹⁰⁶ Naftali Bendavid, "Republicans Win Control of House," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 2, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704462704575590750945022926.html> (accessed April 9, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Mike Allen and Jim Vandehei, "GOP: We'll take back the House," *Politico*, January 14, 2010, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0110/31481.html#ixzz0cfcB8I4C> (accessed April 2, 2012).

¹⁰⁸ "House GOP targets freshman Democrats in new ad," CNN.com, July 1, 2009, http://articles.cnn.com/2009-07-01/politics/gop.targeted.ads_1_house-gop-house-republicans-democrats?_s=PM:POLITICS (accessed March 31, 2012).

¹⁰⁹ "Cory Gardner," OpenSecrets.org, <http://www.opensecrets.org/politicians/summary.php?cycle=2010&cid=N00030780&type=l> (accessed February 19, 2012).

Republican candidates for electoral success in competitive races.¹¹⁰ Congressional candidates must meet eligibility requirements in fundraising and campaigning goals before advancing in the program to top-tier status and while Gardner was not among the “Contenders [who] graduated to Young Guns,” his selection as a second-tier candidate still reflected the campaign’s organizational achievements and “gave the Gardner campaign notice and added legitimacy” in the eyes of political analysts and outside interest groups, according to the *Colorado Independent*.¹¹¹

The Young Gun program, and the NRCC’s active promotion of Cory Gardner, supports a final theory for Rep. Markey’s defeat in 2010, which posits that the race for Colorado’s 4th District is best explained in the context of the anti-incumbent, anti-Democrat national political mood. According to this theory, while there were purely local reasons for Betsy Markey’s vulnerability—she was, as William Russell noted, “coming out of Fort Collins with a typical liberal cut in her suit and cut in her hair”—the race was ultimately determined by the political climate.¹¹² In the ‘national mood theory’, Markey’s controversial votes on stimulus, healthcare, and cap-and-trade were “nationalized”, and thus the 2010 election was a referendum on the national Democratic Party and not on Markey as an individual Representative.¹¹³ From this perspective, there was nothing Markey could have done to win reelection.

¹¹⁰ John Tomasic, “Gardner not among NRCC Young Guns,” *The Colorado Independent*, February 10, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 17, 2012).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² “Personal Interview with William Russell,” April 2, 2012.

¹¹³ Kirk Johnson, “In Colorado, Voters Voice Uncertainty and Anger,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 2010, Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/?shr=t&sfi=AC00NBGenSrch> (accessed March 17, 2012).

Multiple sources in Colorado support this theory, particularly because Markey was a “great legislator” for Democrats to run in the 4th District, and her 2010 campaign was “extremely focused” and “a technically sound campaign.”¹¹⁴ Larimer County Democratic Party Chairman William Russell, who was on the ground in an “extremely reactive” CD-4 during the 2010 campaign cycle, described the race with an air of inevitability as “the perfect storm. There was no way she could have survived that...you were working against a tide that could not be beat.”¹¹⁵ Democratic consultant Adam Dunstone, the former deputy campaign manager for the Paccione campaign, also considered the 2010 race out of Markey’s control and did not think “there’s anything [the campaign] could have done to combat the wave in such a Republican district.”¹¹⁶

This wave, tide, storm, or—after election day—flood of Republicans in congressional races was the result of a GOP strategy to turn the 2010 elections into a “national referendum on the party in power” and it reflected the nationalization of the race between Markey and Gardner.¹¹⁷ With record-low congressional approval rates, and approval for President Obama continuing to fall, public discontent with national Democrats made 2010 an impossible year for already vulnerable incumbents like Betsy Markey.¹¹⁸ Republicans at the NRCC and in Congress built their plan to reclaim the House majority around the “public loathing of Washington,” according to a *Politico* article in which then-Minority Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA) participated. While Cantor

¹¹⁴ “Personal Interview with William Russell,” April 2, 2012; “Personal Interview with Adam Dunstone,” April 2, 2012.

¹¹⁵ “Personal Interview with William Russell,” April 2, 2012.

¹¹⁶ “Personal Interview with Adam Dunstone,” April 2, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Mike Allen and Jim Vandehei, “GOP: We’ll take back the House.”

¹¹⁸ Dick Morris, “An epic Dem disaster.”

acknowledged that the GOP's image was worse than the Democrats', he described the national disapproval of Democratic policies as the "wind at our back."¹¹⁹

This strategy, which trickled down to local races, led to politics in Colorado's 4th District being "nationalized" by outside interests, according to Bob Moore, the executive editor of the *Fort Collins Coloradoan*. "The personality that should be in a local race gets obliterated," Moore told *The New York Times*, "and you just have the Democrat and the Republican – you don't have Betsy Markey and Cory Gardner."¹²⁰ Because of voter disapproval for President Obama's domestic agenda and the cooperation of congressional Democrats, Betsy Markey succumbed to Republicans' proactive strategy of nationalizing local races. More than her controversial voting record or Cory Gardner's political acumen, the national political mood was responsible for Betsy Markey's defeat in 2010.

NATIONAL REPUBLICAN STRATEGY

The Republican strategy to win back the House, internally called the '80-20 strategy' for its emphasis on spending "80 percent of the time whacking Democrats and the remainder talking up their own ideas," according to *Politico*, was successful because the Democratic agenda became increasingly unpopular during the campaign season.¹²¹ When *Politico* published its review of the GOP plan, it reported that independent analysts thought the Republican takeover was "doubtful" and anticipated a pickup of "perhaps two dozen" seats in the 2010 congressional elections.¹²² This analysis, from January 2010, is almost quaint when compared to the GOP's actual net gain of 63 seats, but Rep. Cantor's

¹¹⁹ Mike Allen and Jim Vendehei, "GOP: We'll take back the House."

¹²⁰ Kirk Johnson, "In Colorado, Voters Voice Uncertainty and Anger."

¹²¹ Mike Allen and Jim Vendehei. "GOP: We'll take back the House."

¹²² *Ibid.*

confidence reflected congressional Republicans' anticipation of further erosion in public support for President Obama's domestic policies as well as a deepening pessimism over the state of the economy.¹²³

From the beginning of the Obama presidency until January 2010, a majority of Americans approved of the job President Obama was doing in office. By February, however, the approves and disapproves were within a few points in every major tracking poll and by July 2010, a majority of Americans disapproved of President Obama's handling of "every domestic issues surveyed," including some by double digits.¹²⁴ Congressional approval rates showed a similar decline, albeit from already depressed levels, as Americans blamed an 'out of touch' Congress for enacting unpopular legislation and a 'do nothing' Congress for everything else.¹²⁵

The 'do nothing' label, which Republicans employed to regain control of Congress in the 1994 'takeover', was thus edited to reflect the bizarre duality of congressional disapproval for what the Pew Research Center once called "a do-nothing Congress that's done too much of the wrong thing."¹²⁶ While the 111th Congress was one of the most productive legislative sessions in recent history, its major accomplishments such as the massive stimulus bill, sweeping overhaul of the healthcare system, and financial regulatory reform were political liabilities with a majority of voters.¹²⁷ Because

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid; "President Obama: Job Ratings," PollingReport.com, http://www.pollingreport.com/obama_job.htm (accessed April 15, 2012).

¹²⁵ Nancy Cords, "Americans Scorn Do-Nothing Congress," CBSNews, February 17, 2010, http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-18563_162-6214278.html (accessed April 12, 2012).

¹²⁶ Richaed Morin, "A Do-Nothing Congress That's Done Too Much of the Wrong Thing," August 8, 2006, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/45/a-do-nothing-congress-thats-done-too-much-of-the-wrong-thing> (accessed April 12, 2012).

¹²⁷ Mike Allen and Jim Vendehei, "GOP: We'll take back the House"

Democrats controlled Congress, Republicans—despite nearly single-digit approval ratings—sought to capitalize on “widespread unease with Democratic policies.”¹²⁸ It was a reactionary strategy that depended on voter anxiety continuing through November and, as such, it was inherently pessimistic. In learning from history, however, Republicans in Congress were following a blueprint for electoral success because, as *Politico* noted, “it’s not often that a party picks up 40 seats on the power of its ideas—at least not in contemporary elections.”¹²⁹ Both the Republican and Democratic gains in 1994 and 2006, respectively, were reactions to voter disapproval of the party in power and provided a template for the NRCC’s ‘80-20 strategy’.

The national political mood filtered down to Colorado’s 4th District, where it was distilled into anti-Markey sentiment. For the Gardner campaign, the public disapproval of Congressional Democrats and President Obama’s agenda was enough of a platform to run on—or, more accurately, against. While Cory Gardner entered the race with a reputation of charisma and competency, his short legislative career was not a substantial platform on which to run a congressional campaign. Gardner was, according to a *TIME* magazine analysis of the race, “a polished candidate with a thin voting record.”¹³⁰ Although his personal background and conservative values might have been enough to compensate for an abbreviated political record, Gardner received further ammunition from anti-incumbent fervor. As part of the national Republican strategy, Gardner hammered Markey on her record of voting with Nancy Pelosi “94 percent of the time” and supporting all of President Obama’s big-ticket items, though he did notoriously confuse

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Jay Newton-Small, “Colorado’s 4th Congressional District: Betsy Markey vs. Cory Gardner.”

Betsy Markey’s vote against Obama’s first budget with Rep. Ed Markey’s (D-MA) vote for the bill.¹³¹ Without offering many specifics on his plan to turn around the economy—Gardner’s discussion of economic recovery was often limited to vague promises of “our ideas and solutions”—Cory Gardner cast himself as the obvious, and only, choice the 4th District had to bring change to Washington.¹³²

On healthcare reform, in particular, Betsy Markey was in an unenviable position. One of the forty-six House Democrats who represented districts carried by Republican Nominee John McCain in the 2008 presidential election, Markey had to “cast one of the most difficult votes of [her] congressional career” on the Affordable Care Act. Markey voted with the Democratic leadership on the final version after voting against the initial House bill in November 2009.¹³³ While Markey and her cohorts hoped a CBO report touting the potential deficit reductions of the bill—\$2 trillion over two decades—would be a “game-changer” for their prospects in November, a *Hill* article from March 2010 anticipated the “impossible balancing act involving fortunetelling...and long-term political planning” that would confront those unfortunate forty-six Members.¹³⁴ Congressional Democrats also anticipated the trouble that PPACA might cause them on the campaign trail, but there were limitations to the protective measures they could take. Minority deputy whip and ‘Young Gun’ Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) “laughed off the Democrats’ talking point that they won’t be taken by surprise” according to *Politico*.

¹³¹ CoryGardner2010, “94%.”; Ashley Parker, “Gardner v. Markey(s) Takes an Unusual Turn,”

¹³² Michael Sandoval, “Exclusive: Rising Star Gardner (CO-4) Discusses Agenda for District.”

¹³³ Aaron Blake, “Getting inside the heads of undecided Dems before vote,” *The Hill*, March 19, 2010, LexisNexis.http://web.lexisnexis.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/congcomp/document?_m=59a0183c0b23937d5cf0532e719cca56&_docnum=48&wchp=dGLbVzV-zSkSA&_md5=bbffdaaee35ef52903f605aa25748998. (accessed March 31, 2012).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

“You can be prepared for the tidal wave,” McCarthy commented, “but it knocks me on my butt—it goes over the top of me.”¹³⁵ While both congressional Democrats and Rep. McCarthy purported a better understanding of the political situation, neither could predict the extent of the Republican surge in 2010.

Though Democrats were publically downplaying Rep. Cantor’s prediction for a GOP takeover as a “hallucination”, DCCC Chairman Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) said that “the big issue will be the economy” and Democrats would win in November because “people’s confidence [in the economy] will be restored.”¹³⁶ Unfortunately for Democrats, the economy limped into the fall of 2010 and Markey’s vote on healthcare remained a focal point of Cory Gardner’s 80 percent.¹³⁷ As public opinion continued to sour on healthcare reform and the national political mood became increasingly antagonistic toward incumbents, Betsy Markey was held accountable by constituents for both her own votes in Congress and the body as a whole. She was in an impossible situation and was, to invoke the maritime imagery of Russell and Dunstone, swept away by the tide of an anti-incumbent, anti-Democrat national mood.

OUTSIDE INTEREST GROUPS

The “nationalization” of the race in Colorado’s 4th Congressional District also influenced campaign finance and fundraising as outside interest groups poured money into the race.¹³⁸ While only 27 percent of the total \$5,931,884 raised by Cory Gardner and Betsy Markey during the 2010 campaign came directly from Political Action

¹³⁵ Mike Allen and Jim Vendehei, “GOP: We’ll take back the House”

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ CoryGardner2010, “Colorado Votes.”

¹³⁸ “Personal Interview with William Russell,” April 2, 2012.

Committees (PACs), many organizations spent money outside of the campaigns.¹³⁹ Total outside spending from interest groups and party organizations injected another \$2.5 million into the race, leading to a level of outside advertising that, according to the *National Review*, “goes well beyond the typical election year bombardment.” The dollar amount of outside spending was an indication of Colorado’s new status as “an attractive destination for outside political money” because of its bellwether status, competitive congressional races, and relatively inexpensive media rates.¹⁴⁰

In this environment, special interest groups spent millions targeting the candidates for their positions on national issues like abortion, taxes, and energy. Over 90 percent of this PAC money came five interest areas: national party organizations, women’s’ issue groups, the business sector, labor unions, and environmental groups.¹⁴¹ The distribution of outside spending among interest groups reflects Bob Moore’s concern about the “nationalization” of the Gardner-Markey race.¹⁴² Instead of local groups running ads about purely regional issues, national organizations like Americans for Prosperity and EMILY’s List spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on issue advocacy campaigns that substituted Cory Gardner and Betsy Markey for ‘Republican’ and ‘Democrat’. Because Rep. Markey was more vulnerable to the generic party label than Gardner, her campaign took the brunt of interest group influence on the race, despite an advantage in both campaign fundraising and outside spending.

¹³⁹ “Total Raised and Spent: 2010 Race: Colorado District 04,” OpenSecrets.org, <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.php?id=CO04&cycle=2010> (accessed April 10, 2012).

¹⁴⁰ Michael Sandoval, “CO Friday Morning Mega-Roundup.”

¹⁴¹ “2010 Race: District 04: Outside Spending,” OpenSecrets.org, <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/index.php?cycle=2010&id=co04> (accessed April 10, 2012).

¹⁴² Kirk Johnson, “In Colorado, Voters Voice Uncertainty and Anger.”

While the NRCC was by far the largest single contributor with nearly \$1 million, the Markey campaign had an overall advantage in outside spending. The DCCC, which spent only \$61,648 on the race, was outflanked by the NRCC, but Markey benefited from an imbalance in special interest group spending, particularly from pro-choice and environmental groups.¹⁴³ Cory Gardner received moderate levels of spending from the pro-life Family Research Council and National Right to Life, but he was heavily targeted by the pro-choice heavyweight EMILY's List. Through the super PAC Women Vote!, EMILY's List made Rep. Markey's reelection an organizational priority and spent nearly \$700,000 on television commercials opposing Gardner.¹⁴⁴ The advertising offensive gave Markey a 17-1 advantage over Gardner in outside spending from women's groups.¹⁴⁵

Women Vote! spent nearly 20 percent of its total outlay for 2010 on the Gardner-Markey race as part of an organizational strategy to push back against Republican challengers who "pose a serious threat to EMILY's List's favorite Democrats," according to a *Politico* report.¹⁴⁶ Like Gardner himself, the EMILY's List sponsored commercials sidestepped the abortion controversy and focused on families, condemning Cory Gardner for voting against insurance coverage for autistic children and for making it harder for women to receive child support.¹⁴⁷ While the ads targeted Gardner's legislative record in the Colorado assembly, the organization was invested in the race as part of a national initiative to protect pro-choice Congresswomen. It was not a campaign against an

¹⁴³ "2010 Race: District 04: Outside Spending," OpenSecrets.org.

¹⁴⁴ Alexander Burns, "EMILY's List clocks win, targets Colo.," July 16, 2010, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0710/39838.html> (accessed April 10, 2012).

¹⁴⁵ "2010 Race: District 04: Outside Spending," OpenSecrets.org.

¹⁴⁶ Danielle Kurtzleben, "5 of 7 Biggest Super PACs Support Democrats," *U.S. News & World Report*, October 29, 2010, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2010/10/29/5-of-7-biggest-super-pacs-support-democrats> (accessed April 10, 2012); Alexander Burns, "EMILY's List clocks win, targets Colo."

¹⁴⁷ Alexander Burns, "EMILY's List clocks win, targets Colo."

individual candidate, but rather a ‘nationalizing’ of the Gardner-Markey race to advance organizational interests. In a statement to *Politico*, Women Vote! spokeswoman Jen Bluestein Lamb described the ad campaign as “making sure that voters in these districts, particularly women, know what’s at stake.”¹⁴⁸ What was immediately at stake was an election in Colorado’s 4th District, but outside interest groups like EMILY’s List poured thousands of dollars of outside spending into the race as part of an effort to “define this year’s top races in stark terms.”

While the ‘nationalizing’ of the Markey-Gardner race by reproductive rights groups like EMILY’s List and, to a lesser extent, NARAL Pro-Choice America, gave Markey an advantage in outside spending, Cory Gardner received similarly disproportional support from the oil and gas industry. In 2010, Gardner benefited from \$177,274 in outside spending by oil and gas interests, compared with only \$63,400 spent toward Marilyn Musgrave’s 2008 reelection bid.¹⁴⁹ As a state legislator, Gardner opposed legislation to increase wildlife protections, restrict oil and gas development, or institute a climate tax, and as a congressional candidate he denied the reality of global warming.¹⁵⁰ While Gardner strongly supported the oil and gas industry, his record on energy and environmental issues did not substantially differ from Musgrave’s positions.¹⁵¹ Rather, the uptick in outside spending by the oil and gas industry in CD-4 resulted from an

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ “Top Industries: 2008 Race: Colorado District 04,” OpenSecrets.org, <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/indus.php?cycle=2008&id=CO04> (accessed April 10, 2012).

¹⁵⁰ David O. Williams, “Coffman, Colorado GOP clamor for environmental protection after blasting Salazar for years,” *The Colorado Independent*, May 27, 2010. <http://coloradoindependent.com/54373/coffman-colorado-gop-clamor-for-environmental-protection-after-blasting-salazar-for-years> (accessed April 10, 2012); “4th CD candidate Q&A: Cory Gardner,” *The Boulder Daily Camera*, October 9, 2010, http://www.dailycamera.com/election/ci_16201520?source=pkg (accessed April 10, 2012).

¹⁵¹ “Marilyn Musgrave on Environment: Republican Representative (CO-4),” OnTheIssues.org, http://www.ontheissues.org/house/Marilyn_Musgrave_Environment.htm (accessed April 10, 2012).

overall shift in the industry's campaign finance from direct contributions to soft money spending.

In 2008, less than one third of 1 percent of the oil and gas industry's total contributions to political campaigns was in the form of outside spending. By 2010, however, it had reached 7 percent.¹⁵² This paradigm shift reflects the further encroachment of special interest groups on traditionally local politics. Though clearly not a unique or even unusual development, the increase in outside spending by oil and gas interest in the Gardner-Markey race was a reaction to new federal moratoriums on drilling and oil shale development. According to Katy Atkinson, a consultant for Republican candidates, the industry began directing soft money toward Republican candidates in Colorado's congressional races as a form of interest group activism.¹⁵³

While it is not surprising that the oil and gas industry would act on its financial interests in the district, the increase in outside spending for the Republican candidate reflects the influence of special interest groups within the Gardner-Markey race. When the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, an interest group that raises millions of dollars from oil companies every year, directed over \$200,000 in outside spending to support the Gardner campaign by running political ads against Markey's clean energy legislation, it was a sign that local energy issues had been nationalized.¹⁵⁴ The oil and gas industry provided Cory Gardner with a crucial counterbalance to the financial support Markey received from

¹⁵² "Oil & Gas: Long-Term Contribution Trends," OpenSecrets.org, <http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/totals.php?ind=E01> (accessed April 10, 2012).

¹⁵³ Burt Hubbard, "Big-money gifts pour into swing House races in Colorado," *The Denver Post*, July 31, 2010, http://www.denverpost.com/politics/ci_15645251#ixzz1sWoK14bS (accessed April 10, 2012).

¹⁵⁴ "2010 Race: District 04: Outside Spending," OpenSecrets.org; Brad Johnson, "U.S. Chamber of Commerce Is Fueled by Foreign Oil," ThinkProgress.org, October 23, 2010. <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2010/10/23/126082/chamber-foreign-oil/> (accessed April 10, 2010).

women's groups. By heavily funding ad campaigns that depicted Betsy Markey's energy policies as costly and unnecessary, the oil and gas industry outspent pro-Markey environmental groups and diluted their message.¹⁵⁵ During an economic recession and amidst high gas prices, the 'nationalizing' of Colorado's energy issues further weakened Rep. Markey's credibility in the district and contributed to Gardner's electoral success.

As a Republican challenger in 2010, Cory Gardner was already well positioned to defeat Betsy Markey in Colorado's 4th Congressional District, but his campaign was helped by the national Republican Party and outside interest groups. Capitalizing on dismal public approval rates for Congress and majority disapproval for President Obama's policy agenda, the NRCC developed the '80-20 strategy' to win control of the House. The Gardner campaign employed this strategy successfully and Betsy Markey was defeated in a referendum on Democratic leadership in Washington. Markey's brief record in Congress was also targeted by outside spending. Her controversial votes on stimulus, healthcare, and cap-and-trade were "nationalized" by outside interest groups including the powerful U.S Chamber of Commerce. Outside spending by interest groups nationalized the race by targeting and defining candidates on largely partisan terms. As an incumbent Democrat who toed the party line on unpopular legislation during a time of historically low national approval for politicians, Betsy Markey was fruitlessly "boxing the wind" during her reelection campaign.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Eric Kleefeld, "Chamber of Commerce Unloads New Ads Against Dems (VIDEO)," Talking Points Memo, October 6, 2010, <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2010/10/chamber-of-commerce-unloads-new-ads-against-dems.php> (accessed April 10, 2012); "2010 Race: District 04: Outside Spending."

¹⁵⁶ Leslie Jorgensen, "A 'Top Gun' Gardner hits the mark in CD 4: 'Blue Dog' Democrat Markey lost traction on the campaign trail," *The Colorado Statesman*, November 11, 2010, <http://www.coloradostatesman.com/content/992303-a-top-gun-gardner-hits-mark-cd-4> (accessed April 10, 2012).

CONCLUSION

No one, it seems, was surprised by Cory Gardner's win over Betsy Markey in the 4th District's 2010 congressional election. For Markey to survive a challenge by the GOP's strongest candidate, in a Republican district, *in 2010*, would have been the political upset of the year. That a moderate incumbent's reelection would constitute an upset is, in itself, a testament to the changing tides of political America. In two short years, the 4th District saw a 23 point partisan swing in congressional elections as Betsy Markey won in 2008 and lost in 2010 by double-digit margins. The apparent volatility of the electorate makes the Gardner-Markey race an apt case study of voter motivation and outside influences in an election cycle. Why did the electorate change course so dramatically? Did voters in 2008 get caught up in the national rhetoric of 'hope and change' and support the Democratic candidate by default, or was the 2008 election a purposeful endorsement of progressive politics? To understand voter motivation in CD-4, we must consider whether Betsy Markey misrepresented her district in Congress and, if not, why voters did not re-elect an amenable representative.

In the case of Gardner-Markey, the electorate voted a good representative out of office because (a) her record in Congress was perceived as against constituent interests (b) the alternative candidate was an excellent politician and (c) her incumbent status became a liability. Other factors came into play, especially tactical campaign strategy and the influence of outside interest groups, but Rep. Markey's defeat is mostly explained by a combination of these three electorate concerns. Some voters supported Markey in 2008 simply out of frustration with the Republican incumbent, but many believed in her campaign and its political principles. Two years later, some constituents were satisfied

with Rep. Markey's performance in office, but more were ready to try again. In moving on from Markey, the electorate was not simply reverting to old habits. Rather, it was acting on a misguided judgment of Markey's congressional record.

The effectiveness of Cory Gardner's campaign and the souring of national opinion on congressional Democrats contributed to a general sense that Rep. Markey had failed her district. Against this tide of public disapproval and negative campaigning, Markey became trapped in a defensive campaign. From this position, she had little opportunity to connect with the electorate. Instead, the 2010 campaign became a race to the bottom as Cory Gardner ran against Betsy Markey, and Markey ran against Congress. The race for Colorado's 4th Congressional District was influenced by the environment, not by ideals, and the election results must be considered in that context.

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