

CONNECTICUT'S FOURTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

ALSO BY GARY L. ROSE

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CONNECTICUT'S FOURTH
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
HISTORY, POLITICS, AND THE
MAVERICK TRADITION

Gary L. Rose

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In Memory of Spike

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Preface

I have had a long and intimate relationship with Connecticut's fourth congressional district. For approximately thirty years, in my capacity as a political science professor, I have been asked by journalists to provide commentary concerning the congressional campaigns that have been waged in this most unusual and dare I say "special" congressional district. Journalistic inquiries are often directed to my attention from local, state, and national media outlets. I do my very best to offer clear and objective analysis, which I know reporters appreciate. Working as a professor for a university located in the district and knowing a number of the key political figures in the district have contributed to a useful vantage point from which to offer political commentary. I have also been fortunate to host educational forums which feature the congresspersons who represent the fourth district. And I have hosted a number of presentations involving both formidable and less than competitive congressional challengers.

There is little doubt that congressional campaigns in the fourth congressional district are intriguing to journalists and media commentators. Much of this interest can be attributed to the style of those who have represented the district in Congress. At the same time, the controversial policies promoted by the district's congresspersons, along with the unique demographics of the district, seem to add to the intrigue. The fascinating personalities who reside within the fourth district, along with the district's close

association to New York City, especially Wall Street, are additional reasons why journalists are drawn to the district's politics.

Many of my students over the course of the past three decades have been fortunate to work as interns on the staffs of fourth district congressmen. And many of my students have worked as interns on the campaign staffs of fourth district congressional candidates, including both incumbents and challengers. To date, virtually every student that I have placed in a field internship in this district has found the experience educational and rewarding. Fortunately the internships have involved substantive and meaningful tasks; my students do not stand at copiers or fetch coffee for their field supervisor. "Incredible," "fascinating," and "challenging" are some of the words used by my students to describe their experiences, and as a result of their internships several have expressed a desire to enter public service. Congressmen such as Stewart B. McKinney, Christopher Shays, and Jim Himes have served as excellent role models for young and aspiring public servants.

My personal and professional connection to the fourth congressional district is what motivated me to conduct this case study. After observing the political landscape of the district for three decades, I concluded that the time had arrived to conduct an empirical investigation into the district's political history and political trends. I also thought readers would want to know something about those individuals who have represented this district in Congress, information beyond that which appears in political almanacs and congressional reference books. I decided that I would compile information on the district from World War II to the present. In my view, a span of seventy years would be sufficient to capture the political character and nuances of this most unusual congressional district.

My case study unfolds in the following manner. The Introduction discusses why Connecticut's fourth congressional district merits a special investigation. I examine how the district is unique in the context of congressional politics. I also suggest that a partisan realignment, a term commonly used by political scientists to describe the electorate's shift from one party to another, appears

to be taking place in the fourth district.¹ I further argue that the realignment within the fourth district could be representative of realignments currently underway in congressional districts in other parts of the country, most notably the New England region.

Chapter One begins the empirical inquiry. In this chapter, I examine the district's geographical shape and demographics, illustrated throughout by maps and federal census data. The chapter concludes with several broad generalizations about elements of both continuity and change in the district's geography and demographics.

Chapter Two focuses on the political transformation of the district. Patterns of voting behavior within the district's seventeen communities and party registration figures across time are presented in the form of maps and tables. The conclusion which emerges from the data is that the district is undergoing a very slow, but observable, realignment. The cities are still heavily Democratic, but the once predictable Republican suburbs are becoming more competitive.

Chapter Three profiles the congresspersons who have represented the district from 1943 to the present. The profiles include some very colorful and controversial characters, several of whom were political "mavericks" during their years in Congress. It will be evident to the reader that the fourth congressional district tends to produce a very different breed of congressperson than many other districts. The congresspersons presented in this chapter include Clare Boothe Luce, John Davis Lodge, Albert Morano, Donald Irwin, Abner Sibal, Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., Stewart B. McKinney, and Christopher Shays.

Chapter Four describes and analyzes the 2008 congressional election, which resulted in Democrat Jim Himes's historic victory over Republican Congressman Christopher Shays. I suggest that the election of 2008 marks the beginning of a new era in fourth district politics. Himes's defeat of Shays further underscores a congressional district in a state of transition.

With Shays out of office, six Republican candidates in 2010 set their sights on the Republican Party's nomination. Chapter Five profiles these candidates and takes the reader through the mechanics and politics of the Republican nominating contest. As predicted by

the pundits, state senator Dan Debicella won the Republican Party's nomination. The nominating contest was nevertheless captivating and included elements of intrigue.

Chapter Six details the intense election battle between Debicella and Congressman Himes. In this chapter, I examine the key issues of the campaign, the six debates between the candidates, and the pattern of voting behavior in the district's communities. A careful description and analysis of the results of this race further reveals a congressional district in a state of political transition.

The Conclusion elaborates on the realignment occurring in the fourth district and discusses this realignment in the context of New England politics. I suggest that very challenging days lie ahead for the Republican Party in Connecticut's fourth congressional district: it is plausible to predict that doctrinaire elements of the Republican Party might gain control over the Party's nominating process, thus making it more challenging for a Republican to recapture this congressional seat.

I have enjoyed researching the material for this volume and in the process have learned much about the politics and history of the fourth district. I sincerely hope that readers of this case study will find my treatment of the fourth congressional district educational as well as interesting. It should become clear to readers of this volume that politics is never static. Gradual change is inevitable and sudden change is always a distinct possibility. An informed awareness of this volatility may allow us to be better prepared for it.

Acknowledgments

There are several individuals who in one form or another assisted me with this project. First and foremost is my former research assistant, Heather Falsetti. Heather spent countless hours generating maps and bodies of data which appear throughout various portions of this work. I was truly fortunate to have a research assistant of Heather's caliber assigned to my office. Her attention to detail, her commitment to the project, and her sense of responsibility were simply extraordinary.

I once again have experienced the pleasure of working with Sid Gottlieb, the production editor of this project, and am grateful to Seamus Carey, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences of Sacred Heart University, for supporting and facilitating Sid's ongoing involvement with the Sacred Heart University Press.

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offered helpful advice during the initial stages of this study. Bill's sage observations and wealth of personal knowledge have been helpful to me throughout my academic career.

Several individuals granted personal interviews for this project, for which I am most grateful. I was impressed by the quality, sincerity, and depth of their replies. Many thanks to former Congressman Donald Irwin; former Congressman, United States Senator, and Governor of Connecticut Lowell P. Weicker, Jr.; former Staff Director for Congressman Stewart B. McKinney, Joseph J. McGee; former Deputy Chief of Staff to Congressman Christopher Shays, Robert D. Russo; congressional candidate Rick Torres; state legislative candidate, Christopher DeSanctis; Tea Party leader and spokesperson Bob MacGuffie; and state senator and congressional candidate Dan Debicella.

Thanks also to Andrew Aleman and James Eagan, excellent research assistants, who were very helpful during the final phase of this project. Suzanne Golub, my administrative assistant, was always helpful with regard to managing the internal activity of the Government and Politics Department. Her attention to department details is exceptional.

Last, but not least, I thank my family for all their unconditional love and support. This book is dedicated to the memory of my father-in-law, David "Spike" Cole, who passed away as I was completing work on it. Spike always expressed a sincere interest in my writing and professional development, for which I am most grateful. He will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved him.

Introduction

There are currently 435 congressional districts in the United States. The only common feature of the 435 districts is that each contains roughly the same number of inhabitants. Otherwise, each district is unique, with respect to its geographical shape, the social and economic characteristics of its inhabitants, and the values and political preferences of those who reside within its borders. And each district is distinctive with respect to the type of individual its voters elect to Congress. As political science professor Ross Baker notes, some congressional districts “can be astonishingly atypical of the nation at large.”¹

What follows is a study of one congressional district which, to put it mildly, is rather “atypical”: the fourth congressional district in the state of Connecticut. It is the first case study ever conducted of this very unique district. Although one can argue that every congressional district in the United States deserves its own detailed case study, there is, quite frankly, something about Connecticut’s fourth congressional district that is especially interesting.

Even though the fourth congressional district is geographically located in Connecticut, many of the district’s communities, particularly those in the lower portion of Fairfield County, are in essence “bedroom communities” of New York City. People of exceptional wealth reside in these so-called “gold coast” towns, which include, among others, Westport, Greenwich, Darien, Ridgefield, and New Canaan. Lawyers, medical doctors, media personalities, celebrities, Wall Street executives,

hedge fund managers, and an array of individuals with staggering incomes populate the exclusive gated communities of lower Fairfield County. Mansions reflective of old and new wealth stand surrounded by sweeping and meticulously manicured lawns. Radiant flower gardens cared for by professional gardeners are highly visible, and property lines are often marked by majestic stone walls. Many of the gold coast's residents commute to work in New York City on a daily basis. Some take the train, some drive their Mercedes, BMW, or Lexus, while others are chauffeured in a limousine. Young children, destined for private school, are cared for by *au pairs*, regardless of whether parents work in or out of the home. Personal trainers and massage therapists also have lucrative businesses within the borders of the fourth district. It is a world and lifestyle unbeknownst to the vast majority of Americans. It should come as no surprise that Republican as well as Democratic candidates for president will troll the communities of lower Fairfield County in search of campaign contributions. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that lower Fairfield County is one of our nation's prime fundraising locales for presidential candidates.

Although impoverished communities also exist within the fourth congressional district, most notably the cities of Bridgeport and Norwalk, the fact of the matter is that the wealth of the district, its close association with Wall Street, and the liberal orientation of individuals elected to Congress from this district, have contributed to a certain mystique about the fourth district. The fourth district is well known not only in Connecticut, but also throughout the New England region for its extraordinary wealth and personal connections to powerful financial interests.

One particularly fascinating aspect of this district is the number of celebrities who make their home in one of the district's posh communities. For example, the late Bette Davis lived in the town of Weston. The late Paul Newman was a resident of Westport, the same town where Martha Stewart currently makes her home. Keith Richards, the lead guitarist of the Rolling Stones, resides in Weston. *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and movie star Robert Vaughn lives in Ridgefield. Greenwich is home to Glenn Close, Kathy Lee Gifford,

Mel Gibson, Ron Howard, Diana Ross, and Meryl Streep. David Letterman lives in New Canaan, and Christopher Walken makes his home in Wilton. The late William F. Buckley, Jr., lived in Stamford.² The presence of so many celebrities further elevates the political and social stature of the fourth congressional district and is one of many features that distinguishes it from so many others.

The district's wealth, its close connection to financial interests in New York City, as well as the presence of movie stars further explains why those individuals who have been elected to Congress from the fourth district have had the luxury of a national stage compared to members of Congress from lower profile districts. Consider, for example, the political career of former Republican Congressman Christopher Shays. Although Shays's legislative accomplishments were somewhat scant during his many years in Congress, he was still able to command a national spotlight with respect to a variety of contentious political and policy issues. When Shays broke ranks with his party in the House of Representatives and announced that he would not vote to impeach President Bill Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, the media treated his announcement as a news story of major significance. The same level of media coverage was directed towards Shays when he repeatedly voiced support for our nation's military involvement in Iraq. Shays's numerous trips to Iraq and his optimistic reports on the war's progress were the subject of frequent and extensive media reporting. He also commanded a national audience when he launched a bold and uncompromising initiative to reform federal campaign finance laws. Shays's bipartisan reform effort, which eventually succeeded, placed him in the spotlight on a daily basis. At times it seemed as if the business of Congress was revolving around the agenda of Congressman Christopher Shays. Moreover, there was routine media coverage directed towards Connecticut's fourth congressional district whenever Shays ran for reelection, particularly during the final years of his career. During the elections of 2004, 2006, and 2008, it seemed that the fourth congressional district was the epicenter of American politics. The proximity of the fourth district to New York City and the district's relationship to the New

York media market were both contributing factors to such extensive media coverage, as was the fact that in 2008 Shays was the last remaining Republican in the United States House of Representatives from the New England states.

Congressman Christopher Shays was only the latest in a line of representative from the fourth congressional district who routinely attracted a national audience. Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., was a highly visible member of the House of Representatives from the fourth congressional district. During his tenure, he was an outspoken critic of the Vietnam war, a position that was in direct contrast to that held by a majority of congresspersons in both political parties and attracted considerable media attention, earning him national recognition as a “maverick.” His one term in the United States House of Representatives served as a stepping stone to the United States Senate. During his first term in the Senate, Weicker seized the national spotlight by investigating and exposing the corruption of the Nixon administration during the Senate Watergate hearings, a position that did not endear him to many of his Republican colleagues. Like Shays, Weicker always commanded a national stage, and like Shays, Weicker’s uncanny ability to attract media coverage had its origin in the district he once represented in Congress. The fourth district has historically been characterized by many free-thinking, independent-minded, and wealthy individuals who have felt beholden to no one, particularly those in positions of political authority. Voters in the fourth district have frowned upon those who appear subject to manipulation and who are willing to follow the party line. The district’s constituents appreciate political leaders who think and speak for themselves. Thus, in many ways, Weicker was the manifestation of a congressional district which mirrored his own strong streak of political independence.

And some years before Weicker, the fourth district was represented by another outspoken maverick, Clare Boothe Luce. Luce’s freely-voiced opinions on matters pertaining to foreign affairs, her specific area of interest and expertise, were frequently contentious and publicized, and she routinely attracted the attention of the print press during her time in Congress. During her

two congressional terms, Luce emerged as a leading critic of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's foreign policies. Her blunt political views as well as her personal life were the subject of public controversy. Her marriage to a New York-based media magnate, Henry Robinson Luce, contributed to making her perennially "newsworthy," as did her residency in the fourth congressional district in Connecticut, a seat of power and affluence. The spirited and strong-willed Congresswoman who spoke her mind irrespective of political consequence was, like those who succeeded her from the fourth district, a reflection of a constituency that valued intelligent, thoughtful, and independent-minded lawmakers. It is a tradition that is deeply embedded in the political culture of Connecticut's fourth congressional district.

The extreme wealth of the fourth congressional district, the district's close ties to New York City, especially Wall Street, a plethora of celebrities and influential and politically connected constituents, along with a tradition of electing outspoken and controversial members of Congress who attract national publicity are thus among the key reasons why Connecticut's fourth congressional district merits a careful case study. But there is yet another, and perhaps even more compelling reason, why a case study of the fourth congressional district is of particular value and interest. As will be evident in the following chapters, the district, which has more than often elected Republicans to Congress, appears to be in a state of political transition. To put it bluntly, it is no longer a safe haven for Republican congressional candidates. Although many of the district's constituents are affluent, a demographic trait historically associated with support for the Republican Party, such affluence no longer translates into routine and predictable support for Republican congressional candidates.

At one time in the not too distant past, there was a very close association between social class and voting behavior. This was true not only in Connecticut's fourth district but also in congressional districts in practically every region of the country. But what separated wealthy Republicans in Connecticut's fourth district from well-to-do Republicans in other regions of the country was the liberal leaning of

the district's constituents with respect to contentious social and moral issues. Republicans in Connecticut's fourth district, often referred to as "Country Club Republicans" or "Rockefeller Republicans" have always favored balanced budgets, free enterprise, limited government, and tax cuts.³ Yet these same individuals have also supported civil rights for African-Americans, equal pay for women, and a woman's right to an abortion. This is a particular brand of politics that defined not just fourth district Republicans but also Republicans elsewhere in New England as well as other states in the Northeast, including New York. "Maverick" and moderate Republicans such as Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., and Christopher Shays were both representative of this Republican tradition.

But in recent years as the Republican Party's national politics moved in a more conservative direction, particularly with respect to social, cultural, and moral issues, and as the Republican Party seemed to fall under the influence of conservative southern interests, most notably evangelical Christians, the white, wealthy, educated, and socially tolerant patricians, such as those in Connecticut's fourth congressional district, began to feel estranged from the party they once knew. Although wealthy and socially progressive voters have not by any means abandoned the Republican Party, it is nevertheless clear that many of these individuals now regard the values of the GOP as inconsistent with their own political views. As a result, many "Country Club Republicans," along with young, white, and wealthy voters who are just now entering the electorate are beginning to gravitate to the Democratic Party. In 2008, many of these white and well-to-do voters in Connecticut's fourth congressional district supported Democrat Barack Obama for president and Democrat Jim Himes for Congress. And in 2010, a good number of these voters helped to reelect Himes to Congress. What also makes this political development even more fascinating is that many white and wealthy professionals who reside in the suburbs of Fairfield County are starting to exhibit, to some extent, a voting pattern similar to that of the district's urban voters. There can be little doubt that Connecticut's fourth congressional district is in a state of political

transformation, and there can be little doubt that the movement of voters in what was once a Republican stronghold toward the Democratic Party will have profound implications for the future of the district's congressional politics.

The political realignment among white and wealthy voters in communities such as those along the fourth district's gold coast, has not gone unnoticed by academics and journalists. The late Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., was the first scholar to detect a developing relationship between wealthy white voters and the Democratic Party, voters who, like those in Connecticut's fourth congressional district, were fiscally conservative yet liberal regarding social issues. In his study published in the mid 1970s, he argued that the values of the Democratic Party would be more attractive to upper-middle and upper-class Americans, and that such an ideological attraction would likely have long term implications for electoral politics:

There has been an inversion of the old New Deal relationship of social class to the vote. In wide sectors of public policy, groups of high socio-economic status are now more supportive of equalitarian (liberal) change than are the middle to lower socio-economic cohorts (within white America); and as a result liberal (often, although not always, Democratic) candidates are finding higher measures of electoral sustenance at the top of the socio-economic ladder than among middle and lower rungs.⁴

The new trend, in Ladd's view, would be evident not just in presidential politics, but at electoral levels below the presidency. As a result, Ladd suggested that the Democratic Party's leadership base would be significantly expanded:

The fact that the upper socio-economic classes have moved toward the Democrats, especially that the intellectual stratum has become decisively Democratic, would suggest a broader leadership base for Democrats than for Republicans at subpresidential levels.⁵

The transformation detected by Ladd several decades ago appears to have arrived in Connecticut's fourth congressional district, driven by factors beyond the political values of the district's residents: personal lifestyle issues are also contributing to the movement of fourth district voters towards the Democratic Party. Such is the argument of *New York Times* columnist and political commentator David Brooks. His best-selling book, humorously titled *Bobos in Paradise* (2000), effectively captures the idiosyncratic lifestyles of many white, highly educated, young and upper class Americans.⁶ Although Brooks's work is not primarily devoted to political analysis, there are elements of his work that have relevance for understanding the current political behavior of fourth district voters, particularly those living in the gold coast communities of lower Fairfield County.

According to Brooks, there is now a subset of the American population who lead a lifestyle that has been shaped by both the liberal "bohemian" values of the 1960s, and the yuppie "bourgeois" values of the 1980s. Using the first two letters of each term, Brooks describes such individuals as "Bobos." In Brooks's view, the values of these two generations have now merged into a new and unusual "hybrid" culture. This is a fascinating thesis, and as one reads Brooks's somewhat pejorative treatment of the so-called "Bobos," it is not too difficult to apply his term to the young, affluent, and highly educated residents of Connecticut's fourth congressional district. As Brooks notes, Bobos tend to watch PBS and listen to NPR. They can be high-powered professionals who, besides practicing their profession, might enjoy touring vineyards or perhaps writing a novel. These people, as Brooks puts it, are unlike the "old country club and martini suburban crowd," and instead believe it is best to show their ideals in the "things they buy and the images they project."⁷ In essence, Bobos are very materialistic people, but they insist on conveying a somewhat counter-culture image of disdain for such things. According to Brooks, within this hybrid class of citizens, it is difficult to discern the difference between "an espresso-sipping artist from

a cappuccino-gulping banker” or “the anti-establishment renegade from the pro-establishment company man.” Bobos, in Brooks’s words, “have rebellious attitudes and social-climbing attitudes all scrambled together.”⁸

Although Brooks’s work is not directed towards the politics of the Bobo class, he does cite a voting study conducted in 1998 by the *National Journal* of the 261 richest towns in America. This study discovered a steady rise in support among wealthy voters for Democratic candidates. Democrats in 1980 won 25 percent of the vote in the nation’s richest communities, while in 1996 they won 41 percent of this vote.⁹ Thus, there is reason to believe that Bobos will increasingly vote for Democratic candidates. The social, moral, and progressive lifestyle positions of the Democratic Party are more appealing to this elite class of people, rather than the more conservative and traditional values currently endorsed by the GOP. Voters such as these do not appreciate Mike Huckabee, Sarah Palin, or Newt Gingrich telling them how to live their lives.

The work of political scientist Everett Carll Ladd, Jr., which documents a transition of high-status persons toward the Democratic Party, as well as the anecdotal and keen observations of journalist David Brooks concerning the emergence of a bohemian yet materialist class of highly-educated persons, part of class shifting from traditional allegiances, are both highly relevant to understanding the political trends currently in motion: in Connecticut’s fourth congressional district and elsewhere as well. In a similar fashion, I hope that the present volume will not only demonstrate how unique and very “special” Connecticut’s fourth congressional district is but also how the district’s political trends are in some respects reflective of trends well beyond the district’s borders. Political case studies tend to be few in number and are by definition very focused and parochial inquiries, but those that do exist often underscore important recent national trends. One such study is *What’s the Matter with Kansas?*, by Thomas Frank, an exceptionally insightful and revealing examination of political trends in the

“Sunflower State.”¹⁰ And just as the political trends in Kansas can serve as a bellwether for national political developments, the trends revealed in a congressional district case study of Connecticut’s fourth district may also have implications beyond its borders. The fourth district could prove to be a bellwether for politics in the New England region and also provide valuable clues concerning where we are heading as a nation.

CHAPTER ONE

Connecticut's Fourth Congressional District: Geography and Demographics

Situated in the southwestern corner of the “Nutmeg State” is Connecticut’s fourth congressional district. Prior to the landmark United States Supreme Court rulings concerning legislative reapportionment, the fourth district and Fairfield County were essentially one and the same. The fourth congressional district has historically consisted of some of the wealthiest communities in the United States, as well as three urban communities in which a portion of the citizenry, many of whom are racial minorities, live below the poverty level. Communities along the “gold coast” such as Greenwich, Darien, and Westport are known for their exceptional wealth, while the cities of Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk are very poor by comparison. Indeed, the sprawling city of Bridgeport is regarded as one of the poorest urban communities not only in the state of Connecticut, but also within the entire United States. The fourth district is by no means homogenous and one discovers communities and individuals that stand in great contrast to one another in terms of economic, social, and political demographics. *Connecticut Post* staff writer Genevieve Reilly perceptively captured the contrasting nature of the fourth district in these terms:

To say the district is a study in contrasts is an understatement. In Greenwich can be found multimillionaires and titans of industry. A Cape Cod-style house there is assessed at \$1.85

million and has four bedrooms. In Bridgeport can be found day laborers and families struggling to make it to their next paycheck. There, a Cape has two bedrooms and an assessed value of \$171,970.¹

Geography

The geographical shape of the district, because it was based on the boundaries of Fairfield County, remained static for several decades. Figures 1, 2, and 3 present maps of the district lines as they existed in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. As one can see, for thirty years there was virtually no change in the geographic shape of the fourth congressional district.

Beginning in the 1960s, the lines of legislative districts across the United States began to change dramatically due to a series of United States Supreme Court rulings regarding the controversial issue of legislative reapportionment.² The high court, under the leadership of Chief Justice Earl Warren, affirmed the constitutional

Figure 1
Congressional District Four, 1942

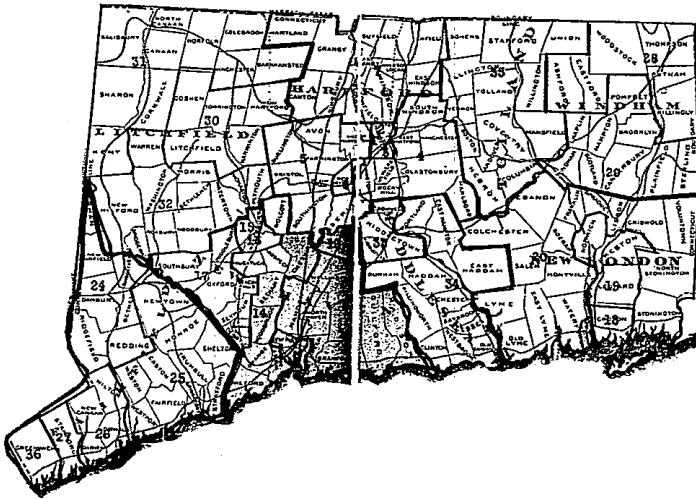


Figure 2
Congressional District Four, 1952

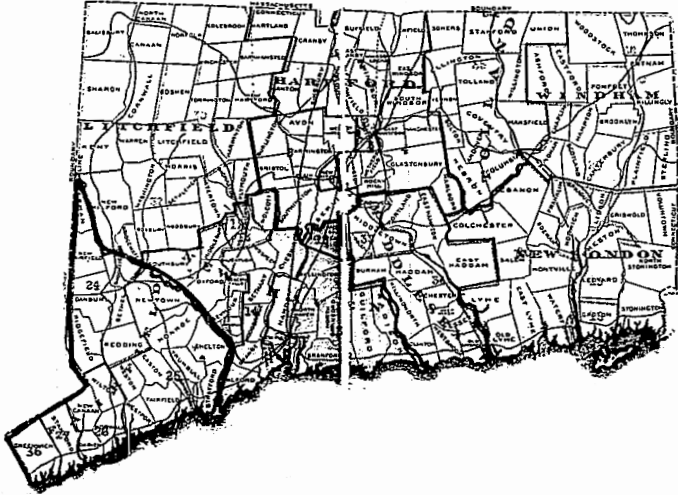
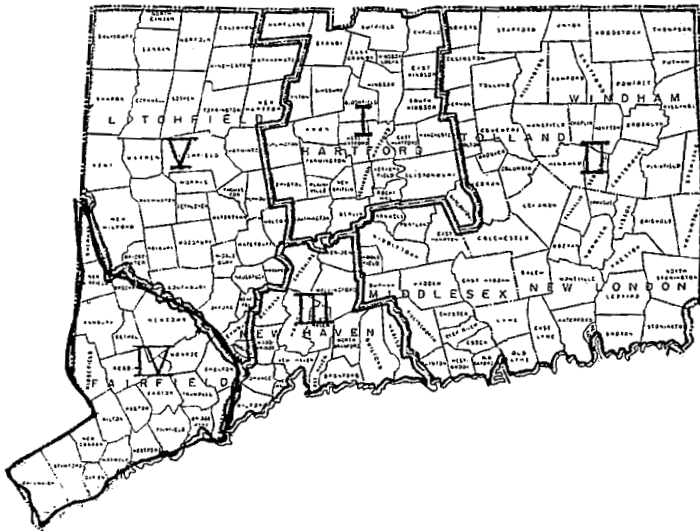


Figure 3
Congressional District Four, 1962



requirement that state and federal legislative districts should contain roughly the same number of inhabitants. According to the Supreme Court, congressional districts must be standardized in terms of population across the United States, while state house and state senatorial districts should be standardized within the borders of each state. It was the Court's position that only with population standardization could the constitutional principle of "one-person one-vote" be realized. As a result of the Court's landmark rulings, state legislatures, following the federal decennial census and the population formula developed by the federal government, were now required to redraw congressional districts to accommodate the one-person one-vote principle. Thus, Connecticut's congressional district four would now have approximately the same number of residents as every congressional district in Connecticut. Moreover, congressional district four in Connecticut would also have roughly the same number of residents as every congressional district across the land.

As a result of the high court's rulings, population, not county or town boundaries, was now the primary concern of state lawmakers assigned to the difficult task of drawing the contours of legislative districts. Congressional district four would no longer mirror the geographical boundaries of Fairfield County. Although the fourth district continued to consist of many communities within Fairfield County, a number of suburban communities in the northern portion of the county would now be included within Connecticut's fifth congressional district, with a few towns absorbed into the newly created sixth congressional district. As a result, the fourth congressional district was contracted dramatically with respect to geographical size. Although the fourth district was still referred to as the "Fairfield County District," the fact of the matter was that due to legislative reapportionment rulings congressional district four would now consist of a portion of Fairfield County communities, but not the entire county. Congressional district four and Fairfield County were no longer synonymous with one another. Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 reveal the evolving and changing shape of Connecticut's fourth congressional district over the span of four decades.

Figure 4
Congressional District Four, 1972

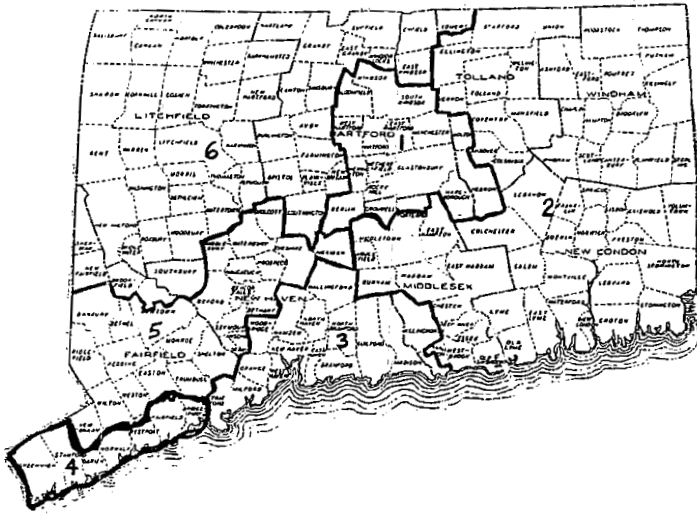


Figure 5
Congressional District Four, 1982

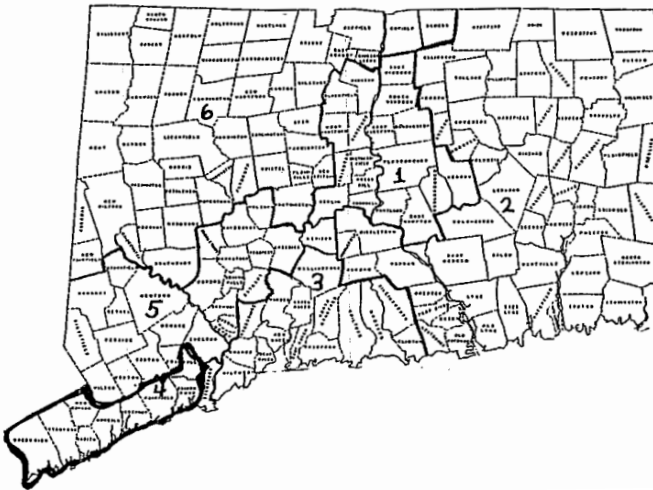


Figure 6
Congressional District Four, 1992

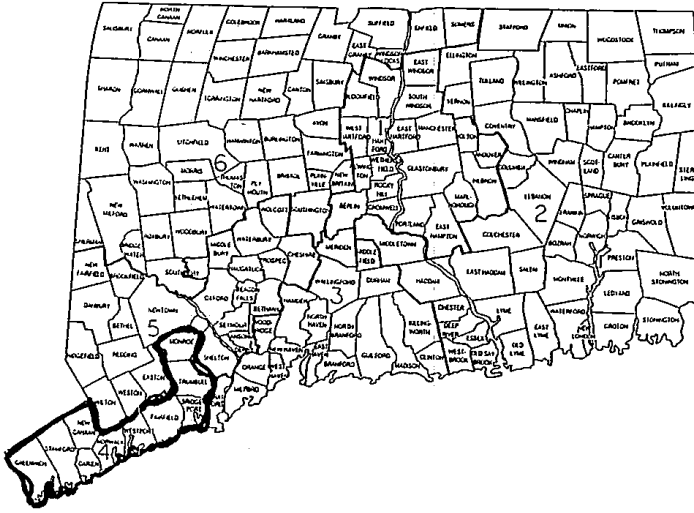
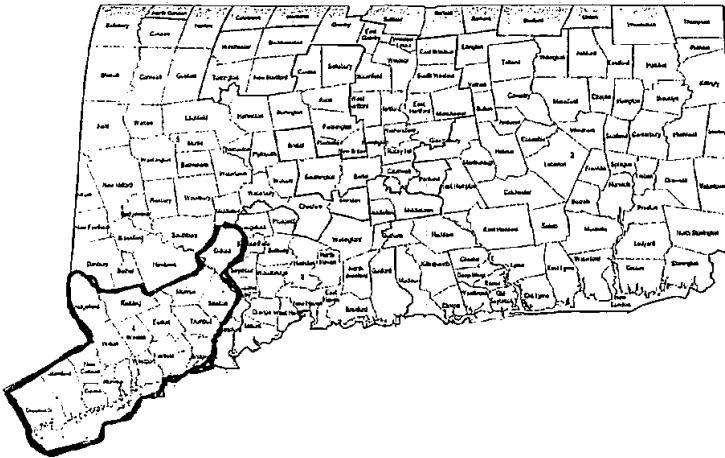


Figure 7
Congressional District Four, 2002



Demographics

Population

The demographic characteristics of congressional district four have demonstrated both continuity and change over the past seventy years. As table 1 shows, the district has grown by more than 280,000 residents from 1940 to the present. Needless to say, the task of representing the fourth district has become more challenging in light of population trends. The district's members of Congress undoubtedly have come to rely more on the assistance of additional district staff workers to meet constituent needs as a result of this development. Skilled and motivated constituent staff assistance will be imperative in the years ahead.

Table 1
Population Trends in Congressional District Four: 1940-2010

Year	Population Total
1940	418,384
1950	504,342
1960	653,589
1970	508,520
1980	532,520
1990	547,764
2000	681,176
2010	706,740

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Gender

Although population has grown within the fourth district, the district's characteristics with regard to gender have remained largely unchanged over an eighty-year period, with females consistently comprising a majority of the district. The gender gap has never been vast, although from 1970-90 females outnumbered males by

approximately 5 percentage points. In recent years the gap has narrowed, with females outnumbering males by slightly less than 3 percentage points.

Table 2
Gender Characteristics in Congressional District Four: 1940-2010
(in percent)

	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Male	49.5	48.8	48.7	47.7	47.4	47.7	49.1	48.7
Female	50.5	51.2	51.3	52.3	52.6	52.3	51.9	51.3

Source: 1940-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

Race

Congressional district four has historically been a white district. The suburban communities throughout the district are home to mostly white residents. Non-white residents, particularly Blacks/African-Americans, and Hispanics/Latinos, tend to reside in the urban areas of Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk. Although the fourth district has remained predominantly white for the past seventy years, it is evident that the racial composition of the district has changed rather considerably, as shown in table 3.

Table 3
Racial Characteristics of Congressional District Four: 1940-2010
(in percent)

	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
White	97.6	96.7	94.7	89.5	84.7	80.0	77.5	76.9
Non-White	2.4	3.3	5.3	10.5	15.3	20.0	22.5	23.1

Source: 1940-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

In 1940, non-white residents comprised less than 3 percent of the district. Currently, non-white residents, which includes primarily Hispanics/Latinos and Blacks/African-Americans, account for more than one-fifth of the district's residents. Persons of color are also heavily concentrated within the district's urban communities, which is consistent with housing patterns throughout the state. In Bridgeport, Blacks/African-Americans account for 35 percent of the city's population, while Hispanics/Latinos comprise 38 percent of community residents. In Norwalk, Blacks/African-Americans account for 14 percent of the population, while persons of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity comprise 24 percent. Stamford's Black/African-American population, as well as the city's Hispanic/Latino population, also account for, respectively, 14 percent and 24 percent, which is identical to that of Norwalk's minority population. As the racial composition of the fourth district continues to change, so too do the policy issues which confront those who represent the district in Congress. The increasing heterogeneity of the district will in various ways affect the district's congressional politics as well. A legitimate question is whether or not the growing heterogeneity of the district and the increasing salience of issues germane to minority interests will potentially divide white and minority voters. Social issues for many voters have become increasingly relevant with respect to electoral behavior.

Age

The age of residents within a congressional district has important implications for congressional elections. The age of a district's residents is often reflected in the policy platforms of those who seek a seat in Congress. The age of a congressional district's residents also correlates with voter turnout and the age of voters is reflected in the choice of candidates. When the age of the fourth district's residents is examined according to seven age categories, it is evident that the district has remained fairly stable in this respect. There are

more senior citizen residents now than in the past, but the increase has not been dramatic. Other age categories have fluctuated, particularly the 15-24 and 25-34 age groups, but not to the point where one can state with certitude that the fourth congressional district has undergone a sea change with regard to the age of residents (see table 4). The age of the district's residents for the past seventy years has been fairly well-distributed into categories that can generally be described as children, adolescents, young adults, middle-aged, and older residents. In other words, there is a very broad distribution of age groups throughout this congressional district. Although senior citizens routinely record the highest level of voter turnout, the wide distribution of age groups tends to suggest that one age group alone does not dominate the district's politics.³

Table 4
Age Characteristics of Congressional District Four: 1940-2010
(in percent)

	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Under 15	20.9	23.6	29.0	26.8	20.1	18.5	22.0	21.5
15-24	17.8	12.5	11.0	15.7	17.2	13.3	10.0	12.6
25-34	16.9	16.9	12.6	11.6	14.3	18.0	3.0	10.8
35-44	14.7	15.9	15.6	12.1	12.0	15.0	18.0	15.5
45-54	13.7	12.5	13.0	13.5	12.3	12.0	14.0	15.8
55-64	8.6	10.2	9.0	10.2	11.8	10.0	9.0	10.8
65 & older	7.1	8.5	9.4	9.9	12.2	14.0	13.0	12.9

Source: 1940-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

Educational Levels

Like the age variable, the educational level of a congressional district can also have profound consequences for the district's

politics. Voter turnout and political orientations are often reflected in the educational level of a district's residents.⁴ The data in table 5 reveal in no uncertain terms that the residents of the fourth congressional district have become much more educated over an eighty-year period. This is not surprising, as educational levels have risen in general across the nation.

Table 5
Educational Levels in Congressional District Four: 1940-2010
(in percent)

	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
High School								
Less than 1 yr.	60.4	42.9	34.3	24.7	16.7	9.0	6.2	5.2
1-3 yrs.	12.9	15.8	18.3	16.8	12.3	12.0	5.5	6.2
4 yrs.	14.7	22.3	25.1	29.1	30.2	25.0	25.5	22.7
College								
1-3 yrs.	4.5	6.8	9.7	11.0	15.1	20.0	20.2	14.2
4 or more yrs.	5.6	8.4	11.6	17.4	25.7	34.0	42.1	45.6

Source: 1940-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

With respect to the fourth congressional district specifically, only 5.6 percent of the district's residents had completed four or more years of college in 1940. Attending college during this time period was confined to the privileged class of American citizens. By 2010, the number of residents with four or more years of college had dramatically risen to 45.6 percent. The 2005-09 American Community Survey discovered that more than 80 percent of fourth district residents now have a high school diploma or more, while more than 45 percent have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. The residents of Connecticut's fourth congressional district are highly educated.

Median Family Income

One of the most important variables that has historically conditioned the political context of a congressional district is the median income of the district's residents. Income, like education, has direct bearing on the political behavior of citizens.⁵ Although political scientists suggest that cultural issues have eclipsed socio-economic status as determinants of the vote, the median family income of a congressional district is still related to a congressional district's politics.⁶ Generally speaking, Connecticut's fourth congressional district is clearly a wealthy district. As previously noted, the suburbs of the fourth congressional district are for the most part exceptionally rich and the standard of living is very high. As table 6 shows, from 1950 to the present, the median family income of the fourth congressional district has been above the median family income of the state and well above the median family income of the nation.

Table 6
Median Family Income in Connecticut's Fourth
Congressional District Compared to Median Family Income
of Connecticut and the United States: 1940-2010

	District 4	Connecticut	United States
1940	N/A	N/A	N/A
1950	\$3,664	\$3,609	\$3,083
1960	\$7,371	\$6,887	\$5,657
1970	\$15,973	\$11,811	\$9,590
1980	\$32,980	\$23,149	\$19,917
1990	\$56,320	\$49,199	\$35,225
2000	\$74,379	\$65,521	\$50,046
2010	\$104,097	\$83,797	\$62,363

Source: 1950-2000 data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 data obtained from 2005-09 American Community Survey.

According to the most recent American Community Survey, in 2010 the fourth district's median family income was slightly more than \$20,000 above the state's median family income, and more than \$40,000 above the national median family income. Many fourth district residents are employed as white-collar executives in banking and financial services. The district also contains many self-employed professionals, such as attorneys and physicians. It is also in lower Fairfield County where one finds hedge-fund managers. Many men and women commute to work on a daily basis to New York City, which is why Fairfield County is so often described as a "bedroom community" for the "Big Apple." In some respects, many residents of the fourth district are likely to have closer allegiances to New York City, due to their occupations, than they do to their local communities and the state of Connecticut.

District Profile: Generalizations

Several generalizations emerge from our demographic review of the fourth congressional district:

Generalization 1:

It is evident that the fourth district consists of some of the richest communities in the United States, as well as some of the poorest. There are stark contrasts among the district's residents with respect to per capita income, home values, and the standard of living.

Generalization 2:

Legislative reapportionment has significantly altered the geographical dimensions of the fourth congressional district. It is evident that the district has become much smaller in land size. The fourth district is still largely contained within Fairfield County, but by no means can one describe this district as the "Fairfield County District," as it was once known.

Generalization 3:

The population in the fourth congressional district has steadily and quite dramatically increased over an eighty-year period. Representing constituents of the fourth district is likely more cumbersome for current office holders compared to years past. As noted, the role of district staff workers has undoubtedly become more pronounced as the district's population has increased. Fortunately, laws passed by Congress have provided members of Congress with more district and legislative staff assistance.

Generalization 4:

The ratio of women to men has not changed much within the district, although the district has changed rather dramatically with regard to racial composition. The fourth district is clearly more racially heterogeneous than it once was. It therefore follows that greater sensitivity to the plight of racial minorities and urban issues will be required on the part of those who seek congressional office. Any individual who runs for Congress within the fourth district, irrespective of the candidate's race, gender, or ethnicity, must be intimately aware of not only the concerns of white homeowners in the prosperous suburbs, but also the very unique and complex issues that confront the residents of Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk.

Generalization 5

The fourth district is not characterized by a dominant age group. The age of the district's residents are distributed throughout various age brackets.

Generalization 6:

The educational level of the district's residents has steadily increased from 1940 to 2010, consistent with state and national trends.

Generalization 7:

The most notable, and perhaps the most distinguishing demographic characteristic of the fourth congressional district, is the district's median family income. It is this characteristic, more than any other demographic characteristic, which sets the fourth district apart from other congressional districts. Although the district includes three cities characterized by low median family incomes and low per capita income, the district nevertheless is wealthy. The wealth of the district becomes evident when compared against the median family incomes of both the state and the nation. The overall wealth of the district helps explain why the district for so many years, with only a few exceptions, has sent Republicans to Congress. The fiscal conservatism of the district has undoubtedly shaped the district's voting behavior in congressional elections. But this is not to suggest that the district's congressional politics is static. As the following chapter will demonstrate, the politics of the fourth district appears to be in transition.

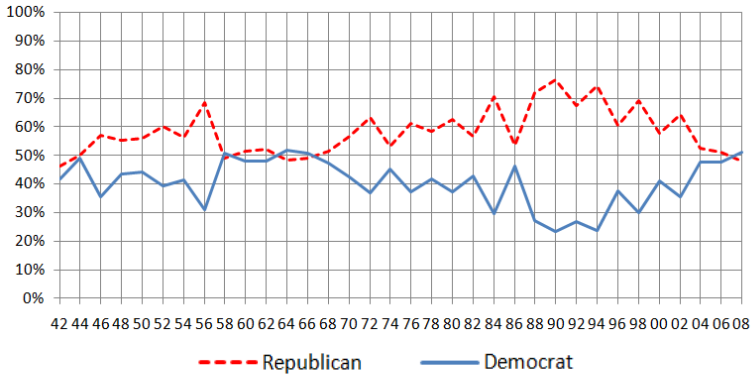
CHAPTER TWO

A Congressional District in Transition

From World War II to the present, Connecticut's fourth congressional district has been dominated by the Republican Party. From 1942 to 2008, which involves 34 congressional elections, Republican candidates were victorious a total of 30 times. In other words, since the start of America's involvement in World War II, Republicans have won Connecticut's fourth congressional district 88 percent of the time. It should be noted that of the four contests in which the Democrats won during this time period, it was the same Democrat, Donald J. Irwin, who won the seat in three of these contests. Irwin won the seat in 1958 but lost his bid for reelection in 1960. He then reclaimed his seat in 1964, due to President Lyndon Johnson's long coattails in the fourth district, and was reelected in 1966. In 2008, Democratic challenger Jim Himes defeated Republican Congressman Christopher Shays's bid for reelection, thus ending a long reign of Republican rule over the district. But other than these four contests during this span of time, Republicans have been elected and reelected, and often by large margins.

Figure 8 shows the percentage of votes received by Republican and Democratic congressional candidates within the fourth congressional district during congressional mid-term and presidential contests from 1942 to 2008. Republican dominance is apparent.

Figure 8
 Percentage of Votes Received by Fourth District
 Congressional Candidates in Mid-term and
 Presidential Election Years, 1942-2008



Straight or Split-Ticket Voting?

Straight-ticket voting was characteristic of the fourth district during presidential contests from 1960 to 1996. The party lever, which was eliminated by a state constitutional amendment in 1986, contributed to this pattern, although straight-ticket voting by no means disappeared once the lever was removed from voting machines. Fourth district voters routinely supported congressional and presidential candidates of the same political party. Split-ticket voting did appear, however, in 1996, 2000, and 2004, with fourth district voters supporting Republican incumbent Congressman Christopher Shays, while at the same time voting for Democratic presidential candidates Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and John Kerry. Shays, however, ran well ahead of the Democratic presidential candidates who won the district. Straight-ticket voting returned to the fourth congressional district in 2008. Fourth congressional district voters supported Democratic challenger Jim Himes and Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama.

Table 7 presents the pattern of straight and split-ticket voting behavior in presidential election years in Connecticut's fourth congressional district over the course of fifty years.

Table 7
Congressional and Presidential Voting Behavior in
Connecticut's Fourth Congressional District, 1960-2008
(in percent)

	Congressional		Presidential	
	R	D	R	D
1960	51.30	48.00	53.40	43.60
1964	48.20	51.80	38.20	61.80
1968	51.40	47.30	51.00	43.10
1972	63.10	36.90	61.90	36.60
1976	61.00	37.10	56.20	43.10
1980	62.60	37.40	52.60	36.50
1984	70.40	29.60	63.20	36.40
1988	71.80	27.10	56.60	42.30
1992	67.30	26.70	42.10	41.80
1996	60.50	37.60	39.80	51.10
2000	57.60	40.90	41.00	54.80
2004	52.40	47.60	46.30	52.40
2008	48.00	51.00	39.60	59.70

Source: Statement of Vote, 1960-2008. Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.

Voting Behavior in the Seventeen Communities: Evidence of Transition

Congressional voting behavior in the seventeen communities of the fourth district appears to be shifting. The change in voting behavior has not by any means been dramatic or earth shaking, but there has nevertheless been noticeable change in several communities. For the purpose of this particular analysis, those communities in which Republican or Democratic congressional

candidates are elected by a 10 or more point margin are classified as strong Republican or strong Democratic communities. Those communities in which Republican or Democratic candidates normally win by a 5-9 percent margin are classified as moderately Republican or moderately Democratic. Communities in which Republican or Democratic candidates win by less than 5 percent of the vote will be classified as two-party competitive. The following coded maps of the fourth district, Figures 9-12, present the pattern of voting behavior in four recent congressional elections, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008.¹ Two of the elections are congressional mid-term elections (2002 and 2006) while two of the congressional elections occurred during presidential election years (2004 and 2008). As the maps show, the voting behavior within several fourth district communities indicate a noticeable move away from Republican dominance. In the 2002 congressional mid-term election, sixteen of the seventeen communities could be classified as strong Republican communities with respect to congressional voting behavior. In 2004, eleven communities were classified as strong Republican. In 2006, nine communities were in the strong Republican category, while in 2008 seven communities could be classified as such. In short, fewer and fewer communities within the fourth congressional district can now be regarded as Republican strongholds. The individual communities within the fourth district are becoming more competitive within the context of congressional elections.

Party Registration in the Fourth District

Emerging Trends

The pattern of voting behavior examined above generally corresponds to party registration trends within the seventeen towns of the fourth district. The Republican Party still enjoys an advantage within the district's suburban communities, while the Democratic Party is dominant within the district's urban communities. At the same time, however, a careful inspection of voter registration trends reveals a gradual weakening of the Republican Party's base

Figure 9
Fourth District Voting Behavior in the 2002 Congressional Election

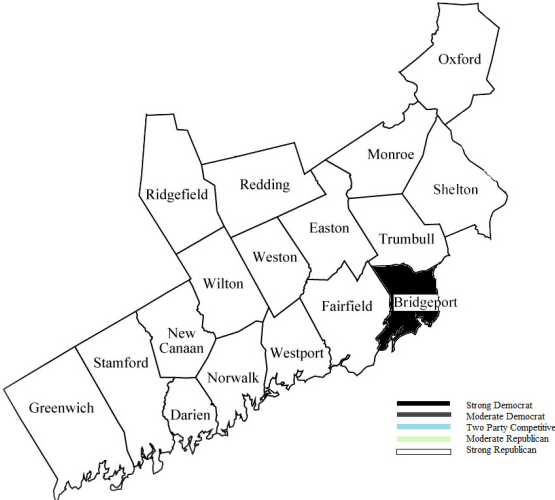


Figure 10
Fourth District Voting Behavior in the 2004 Congressional Election

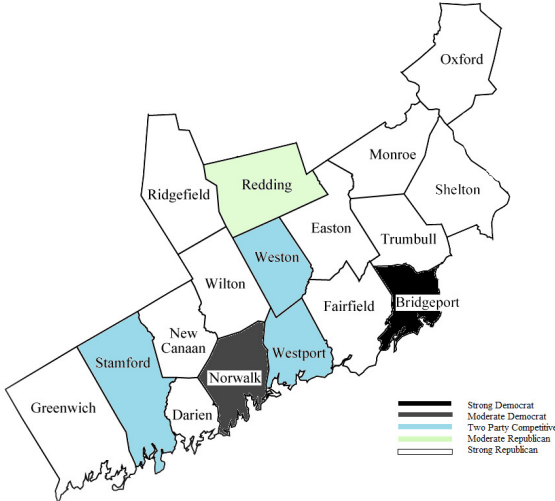


Figure 11
Fourth District Voting Behavior in the 2006 Congressional Election

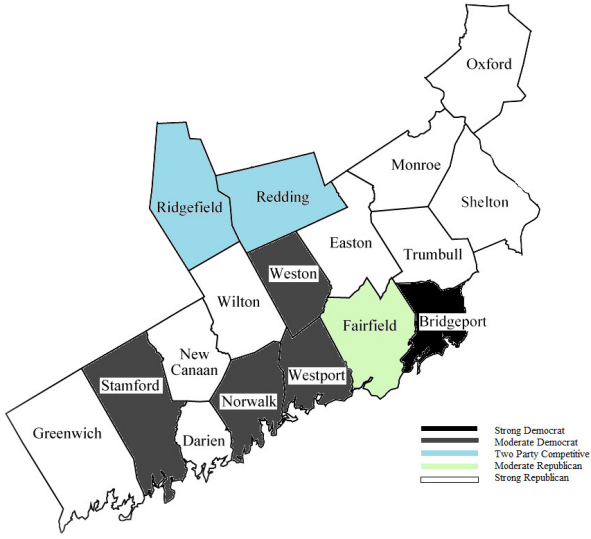
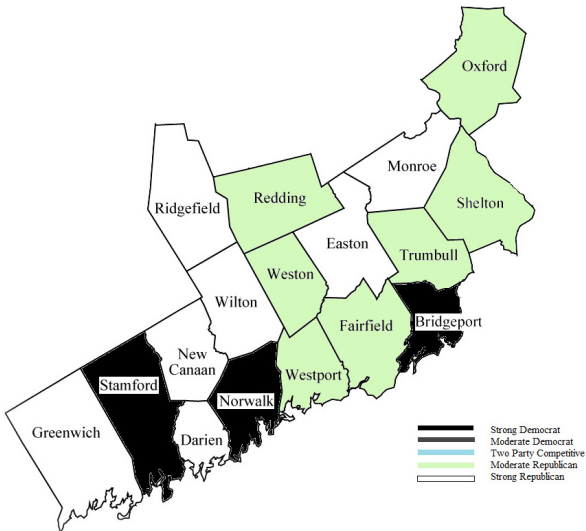


Figure 12
Fourth District Voting Behavior in the 2008 Congressional District



in very traditional Republican communities. In such communities, the percentage of registered unaffiliated voters and the percentage of registered Democrats is growing (see table 8, at the end of this chapter). Whether a long-term partisan realignment within the fourth district is in progress can only be determined from future election results and party registration trends. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that a slow moving yet discernible realignment appears to be underway.

Modest movement in the direction of unaffiliated voters and Democrats can also be observed when registration figures for the seventeen fourth district communities are examined collectively. As evident in table 9, at the end of this chapter, movement away from the Republican Party is occurring. Although the realignment is taking place at a snail's pace, the trend is nevertheless evident.

Regardless of how one interprets the data presented in this chapter, the conclusion that must necessarily emerge is that the fourth congressional district is in a state of political transformation. And there can be no denying that recent changes in the political behavior of the district are somewhat portentous for the Republican Party. Partisan and political trends within the fourth congressional district are simply not in favor of the GOP. Congressional elections have become more competitive within the fourth district, fewer local communities are political bastions of the Republican Party, and party affiliation trends within the district further suggest a diminished Republican presence.

Although party affiliation figures within a congressional district provide insight into the political character of a district, such figures alone cannot capture the nuances of a congressional district and what makes the district a truly special and unique political enclave. The following chapter takes one deeper into the political complexion of the fourth congressional district by exploring the personalities who have represented the district from the end of World War II to the present. As one will quickly learn, there has been something quite different, and perhaps even unpredictable, among those who have been elected to the United States Congress from Connecticut's fourth congressional district.

Table 8
Registered Party Affiliation Trends in Fourth
Congressional District Communities, 2001-08
(in percent)

R = Republican; D = Democrat; U - Unaffiliated

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Bridgeport								
R	11	10	10	9	9	8	8	7
D	56	58	60	57	58	90	61	63
U	33	32	30	32	33	32	31	30
Darien								
R	57	56	56	53	53	51	39	49
D	16	15	16	16	16	17	13	19
U	27	28	28	30	31	31	47	31
Easton								
R	38	38	37	36	35	34	34	33
D	19	18	19	20	20	21	21	23
U	44	44	45	45	45	45	45	44
Fairfield								
R	33	33	34	32	32	31	30	29
D	24	24	24	25	25	26	26	28
U	42	42	42	43	43	43	43	42
Greenwich								
R	43	44	44	42	41	41	40	38
D	20	20	20	21	21	22	23	25
U	36	36	36	38	38	37	37	36
Monroe								
R	29	28	28	27	27	26	26	26
D	17	17	17	17	17	18	18	20
U	54	55	55	55	56	56	56	54
New Canaan								
R	54	53	54	51	52	51	51	49
D	17	17	17	18	18	19	19	21
U	29	30	28	31	31	30	30	30
Norwalk								
R	23	24	23	22	22	22	21	20
D	30	30	30	30	30	31	31	34
U	44	44	45	46	47	48	47	44

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Oxford								
R	31	28	29	28	29	30	30	30
D	16	16	16	16	15	16	16	18
U	53	55	55	56	56	55	53	52
Redding								
R	40	40	38	36	35	34	34	32
D	23	23	23	24	24	26	26	29
U	37	38	39	40	40	39	40	38
Ridgefield								
R	43	42	41	39	39	38	38	36
D	23	23	23	24	24	25	25	28
U	34	35	35	36	37	37	36	35
Shelton								
R	26	26	26	26	26	25	25	24
D	19	19	19	19	19	20	20	22
U	54	55	55	55	56	55	56	54
Stamford								
R	28	27	27	25	25	24	24	22
D	40	39	39	39	38	37	40	41
U	35	33	33	36	36	39	36	35
Trumbull								
R	28	27	27	26	26	25	25	24
D	23	23	23	23	23	24	24	26
U	50	50	50	51	51	51	51	49
Weston								
R	37	36	35	33	33	32	31	30
D	30	27	27	28	28	30	30	34
U	35	37	38	38	39	38	38	36
Westport								
R	36	35	34	32	31	30	29	28
D	30	30	27	31	31	33	33	36
U	34	35	38	37	38	38	37	36
Wilton								
R	44	43	42	40	39	38	38	37
D	21	21	21	22	22	23	24	27
U	34	36	36	38	38	38	38	37

Source: Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut. Based on reports provided by the Registrar of Voters.

Table 9
Registered Party Affiliation Trends in Fourth
Congressional District, 2001-08
(in percent)

	Republican	Democratic	Unaffiliated
2001	29	33	38
2002	30	31	39
2003	30	31	39
2004	28	31	40
2005	28	31	41
2006	27	32	41
2007	27	32	41
2008	25	35	39

Source: Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut. Based on reports provided by the Registrars of Voters.

CHAPTER THREE

A District Represented by Mavericks

If there is one word that best describes those individuals who have been elected to the United States Congress from Connecticut's fourth congressional district, that word, plain and simple, is "maverick." Indeed, Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., who represented the fourth district prior to his election to the United States Senate, titled his autobiography "Maverick" to underscore his conduct and orientation during his years in public office.¹ Political mavericks, however, have ruled the fourth district long before the appearance of the contentious Weicker.

Clare Boothe Luce (1943-47)

Clare Boothe Luce, who served in Congress from 1943-47, is perhaps the first representative from Connecticut's fourth congressional district to deserve the maverick moniker. The fact that she was not only a woman but also a woman elected to Congress during World War II speaks volumes about the independence and resolve of this quite extraordinary individual. A woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives at a time when so few women had even considered entering politics, and during a world war no less, is in itself quite remarkable. During Luce's first term in Congress slightly less than two percent of House members were women, while during her second term slightly less than three percent of the House consisted of females. There were no women in

the United States Senate during Luce's two congressional terms.² Prior to her election to Congress, Luce was a writer, accomplished and renowned playwright, journalist, and a widely traveled and astute foreign correspondent. For a short while she served as an associate editor of *Vanity Fair*.³ Her first marriage to the much older George Tuttle Brokaw, a New York clothing manufacturer, ended in divorce. The couple did, however, have one child together. Her second marriage to Henry "Harry" Robinson Luce, who divorced his wife of twelve years after falling in love with Clare, lasted for thirty-two years. There were no children born from the second marriage.

Henry Luce was an internationally renowned publisher. He was the founder of *Time* magazine and the business journal *Fortune*, and would eventually found *Life* magazine and *Sports Illustrated* as well. At the start of World War II, Clare Boothe Luce traveled to Europe, Africa, India, China and Burma as a correspondent for *Life*. Her interviews with leading military and political figures, along with her informative reporting, bolstered her credentials as an authority on global politics. Moreover, her world travels and reporting as an international correspondent, combined with her reputation as a political conservative, served to enhance her stature within Republican circles as a potential candidate for the United States Congress.

Her stepfather, Dr. Albert Austin, had been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1938, representing Connecticut's fourth congressional district. Through her stepfather, she established a wide range of personal contacts on Capitol Hill, including her introduction to Albert P. Morano, a key staff assistant for her stepfather.⁴ Morano was intimately familiar with Republican Party politics and immediately sensed that Luce would someday be a superb candidate for Congress. Her familiarity with global affairs as well as her impressive presence had an immediate and positive impact on Morano and others who came into contact with her. Following her stepfather's defeat for reelection in 1940 by Democrat Le Roy Downs and his subsequent death in 1942, Morano launched an aggressive campaign to recruit Luce as the Republican candidate

for the fourth congressional district. She was initially reluctant to seek the Republican Party's nomination. Although she was still a legal resident of Fairfield County, she felt that she had not spent enough time getting to know the residents and the policy issues germane to the district, and therefore did not feel prepared to run as a congressional candidate. After all, for a significant portion of her adult life she had traveled the world and for all intents and purposes had been a resident of New York City. Morano was reluctant to give up on her and proceeded to encourage the owner of the *Bridgeport Post* to publish an editorial advancing her qualifications for Congress. At the same time, extensive behind-the-scenes political maneuverings by Morano were generating support for her candidacy among voters and the Republican hierarchy. As a result of Morano's efforts, she became convinced of her electability and decided to seek the fourth district's congressional seat. Whether or not Luce was playing "hard to get," as biographer Stephen Shadigg suggests, is difficult to ascertain. The evidence surrounding her candidacy does however lend support to this assertion.⁵

In 1942, despite an element of intra-party competition, Clare Boothe Luce was overwhelmingly endorsed by the Republican nominating convention to be the Republican Party's candidate for the fourth congressional district. The 1942 congressional contest was competitive, yet due to financial resources, superb organization, and tireless campaigning, she was able to unseat the congressional incumbent Le Roy Downs. Her congressional campaign was managed not by Albert Morano but instead by William H. Brennan, an Irish-Catholic political strategist intimately familiar with Connecticut politics and strategies for mobilizing the ethnic vote.⁶ Biographer Sylvia Jukes Morris captures the vigorous pace of campaigning demanded of Luce by her chief strategist:

Shortly after sunrise, disregarding Clare's lifelong need to sleep late, he would drive her to a factory to shake hands with employees arriving for their first shift. From there he would whisk her to bleak school auditoriums, hospitals, firehouses, or hotel ballrooms, for as many as seven

speeches a day. Given time, they grabbed a hamburger in a diner. While he gulped coffee and dragged on Pall Malls, she puffed Parliaments and tried to soothe her raw throat with milk.⁷

Luce received 46.1 percent of the vote while Downs won 41.9 percent. Extremely relevant to the outcome of her victory was the presence of a Socialist candidate on the election ballot by the name of David Mansell. Mansell received 11 percent of the popular vote.⁸ The consensus is that the Socialist vote would have gone to the Democratic candidate, thus denying Luce her upset victory.⁹ Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce took the oath of office in 1943.

Luce's reputation as a maverick and strong-willed member of Congress emerged not long into her first term. In her first speech to Congress in 1943, she attacked the position of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's vice-president, Henry Wallace, who was advocating the idealistic position that in the aftermath of World War II all countries should be allowed to fly freely throughout the world and land wherever they pleased without restrictions. Wallace's "Freedom of the Skies" position was described by Luce as "globaloney." Wallace's position in her view was naïve and potentially harmful to the U.S. air industry. Foreign airlines, she argued, would undercut U.S. airline rates thus reducing the appeal of U.S. airline travel.¹⁰ It was clear to members of Congress that Luce would not mince words about issues she felt strongly about. She was also a leading critic of the Roosevelt administration's foreign policy, suggesting a certain ambivalence on the part of the administration in the years leading up to World War II. It was Luce's position during her campaign for Congress and while a member of Congress that the President had left the United States in a vulnerable position at the outbreak of the war, and was thus woefully underprepared to fight the Axis powers. Openly criticizing a very popular president during the midst of a formally declared war, and a war that had the enthusiastic support of the American people, underscored the congresswoman's sense of personal resolve and self-confidence. As Shadegg notes, "In 1943, her first year in Congress, Mrs. Luce made only two major speeches

on the floor of the House. Both of them dealt with American foreign policy and were generally interpreted to be anti-Administration and anti-Roosevelt.”¹¹ Her positions can certainly be interpreted as that of a partisan Republican, although from all indications this was a congresswoman who spoke her mind and deferred to no one.

During her first year in Congress, Luce was also instrumental in helping to secure passage of the Fulbright Resolution in the House of Representatives. The Resolution called for the United States to participate in an international organization for the purpose of achieving world peace. The Resolution provided impetus for the eventual formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as the United Nations. Supporting more international involvement on the part of the United States was at odds with a significant element of her party which, at the time, favored American isolationism.

Luce’s first choice for a legislative committee assignment was the Foreign Affairs Committee, which struck congressional leaders as a rather audacious request by a freshman lawmaker. She was thus denied appointment to Foreign Affairs and instead appointed to the Military Affairs Committee, which was her second choice. It was clear to everyone from the very beginning of her political career that Clare Boothe Luce was a congresswoman to contend with and one who marched to the beat of her own drum. Shadegg captures the congresswoman’s maverick inclination: “Her independence of mind, her refusal to conform to the Republican Party lines or to the majority opinion of her own class, made her appear unpredictable, if not undependable.”¹²

In 1944, the Democratic Party nominated a woman, Margaret Connors, to run against Luce when she faced reelection. Connors was an attorney with public service credentials. She had been a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union and had served as a Deputy Secretary of State. She also had been appointed as a special agent in the U.S. Department of Justice. The Democrats were hoping that a woman candidate, along with President Roosevelt’s political coattails, would conjoin to unseat the controversial

Republican incumbent. Indeed, on a campaign visit to Bridgeport, President Roosevelt called for Luce's defeat. Moreover, Vice-President Wallace made multiple visits to the fourth congressional district for the purpose of defeating Congresswoman Luce. The Democratic strategy was effective, although Luce still managed to win reelection, albeit by a very slender margin. Congresswoman Luce received 49.9 percent of the vote while challenger Connors received 48.9 percent. With respect to the popular vote, Luce's margin of victory was a total of only 2,008 votes. The Socialist candidate Stanley W. Mahew received 2,448 votes.¹³ As in 1942, it is likely that a number of Socialist votes in the 1944 race would have gone to Connors had Mahew not been on the ballot. Whether or not enough Socialist voters would have supported the Democratic candidate to make a substantive difference in the election outcome is difficult to determine.

Luce's second term of office was far more active than her first with respect to legislative initiatives. Her major bills addressed an array of policy issues including immigration quotas, civil service opportunities for military veterans, a profit-sharing strategy for resolving labor strikes, income tax deductions for medical professionals who voluntarily help the poor, equal pay for equal work regardless of race, the promotion of scientific inquiry on the part of government, and the direct election of representatives to the United Nations. As Shadegg notes, during her first term of office her "speeches and insertions" accounted for less than forty pages of space in the *Congressional Record*, while during her second term her speeches and insertions accounted for five times as much space.¹⁴

After two terms of office Luce decided not to seek reelection. While in Congress her daughter Ann was killed in a car accident, which had a profound impact on her desire to continue as a member of Congress. The death of her daughter also led her to reevaluate her personal priorities as well as her faith. The accident prompted Luce's conversion to Catholicism. The personal tragedy and her religious conversion did not, however, alter her involvement in politics and public life. Following her congressional career, Clare Boothe Luce served as the U.S. Ambassador to Italy from 1953-

1957, and as the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil in 1959, a post she resigned from after only three days. She also served on the President's Foreign intelligence Advisory Board from 1981-83. Moreover, she continued to write plays and articles for magazines following her years in Congress and in 1983 President Ronald Reagan bestowed upon her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the most prestigious award given to a civilian in the United States.

John Davis Lodge (1947-51)

Following the decision of Congresswoman Luce not to seek a third term of office, voters in the fourth congressional district turned to a well-heeled patrician from a most prominent family by the name of John Davis Lodge. The Lodge family was very wealthy and had very deep roots in American politics. As Lodge's biographer Thomas A. DeLong notes, "There had been a Lodge on the Washington scene since the late nineteenth century, and there would be one for much of the twentieth."¹⁵ Lodge's great-great-grandfather was George Cabot, who served as a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts from 1791 to 1796. He was also the Secretary of the Navy under President John Adams. George Cabot's great grandson, Henry Cabot Lodge, who was John Davis Lodge's grandfather, served as a member of Congress from 1887 to 1893, and as a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts from 1893-1924. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., John Davis Lodge's brother, served as a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts from 1936 to 1944. In addition to several U.S. ambassadorships, including an appointment as the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, Lodge's brother was also Richard Nixon's vice-presidential running mate in 1960. Needless to say, the political pedigree of the Lodge family was impressive. One might suggest that the Lodge political tradition was one of *noblesse oblige*, like that of the Kennedy family of Massachusetts.

Prior to his bid for Connecticut's fourth congressional district seat, the Harvard-educated Lodge had worked for a time as a lawyer. He had also experienced a modicum of success as a movie actor. Lodge's acting roles in Hollywood films were primarily those of a

supporting cast member, although he did assume leading roles in movies produced in Europe. From all indications his lead performances were well received among the European audiences. His marriage to a famous Italian dancer, Francesca Bragiotti, elevated Lodge's profile within social circles and enhanced his movie career. During World War II, Lodge served in the United States Navy and attained the rank of Lieutenant Commander. He served in the European Theatre and saw considerable action.¹⁶ Lodge's two congressional terms were won with relative ease. In the 1946 race, Lodge received 57.1 percent of the vote while his Democratic opponent Henry Mucci won 35.4 percent. Socialist candidate Stanley W. Mayhew garnered only 5.76 percent, while Independent candidate William W. Sullivan received slightly less than 2 percent of the vote. Unlike Clare Booth Luce's election in 1942, the Socialist candidate's presence on the election ballot was irrelevant to the outcome.¹⁷ The 1946 congressional mid-term election was in some respects a referendum on the performance of Democratic President Harry Truman, who as vice-president succeeded to the presidency following the death of President Franklin Roosevelt in 1945. The election resulted in Republican control over both chambers of Congress. In no uncertain terms, the voters in 1946 expressed their displeasure not only towards President Truman, but also towards the Democrats in Congress.

Lodge's reelection in 1948 was slightly more competitive. Lodge won 55.2 percent of the vote while Democrat William Gaston won 43.4 percent. Mayhew, the perennial Socialist candidate, won less than two percent of the vote.¹⁸ Both of Lodge's election victories were landslides. However, in the election of 1948 the Democrats reclaimed their majority status in both the House and the Senate and President Truman was elected in one of the most historic upsets in the history of American politics. Although Lodge was able to hold on to his congressional seat, three Republican congressmen in Connecticut were defeated in their bid for reelection. The Republican candidate for President, Thomas Dewey, won Connecticut, however, by a very slim margin. While Lodge's two elections to Congress were in no way of historic proportions,

there was nevertheless an element of historic importance to Congressman Lodge that should be noted. As DeLong notes, "In 1946, Congressman-elect Lodge blazed a trail for future actors and entertainers seeking to enter Washington politics in government service. . . . Gradually, other movie performers gained a place in government."¹⁹ As examples, DeLong notes that George Murphy an acclaimed dancer and movie actor won a seat to the U.S. Senate, child movie star Shirley Temple was appointed as a delegate to the United Nations and as a U.S. Ambassador, actors Ben Jones and Fred Gandy, as well as singer Sonny Bono, were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, television actor Fred Thompson was elected to the U.S. Senate from Tennessee, and movie actor Ronald Reagan was not only elected to the California governorship, but also as our nation's fortieth president. According to DeLong:

Both Reagan and Lodge emphasized the fact that acting prepared them for the criticism that comes to any politician, no matter how popular. They had endured a lot of negative reviews and experienced public criticism years before facing it as candidates and elected officials. With a performer's background, Lodge concluded, a political figure had the training and finesse to transform statements and speeches into dynamic, attention holding pronouncements. At the very least, an actor-turned-politician could give conviction to what he was saying.²⁰

As a first-term member of Congress, Lodge in some respects displayed an element of independence, although he was by no means as strident or contentious as former Congresswoman Luce. He excelled in the area of foreign policy, which was his true passion. Moreover, he had no qualms whatsoever working with Democratic congressmen and members of the Truman administration to develop bipartisan policies. He was an avid supporter of the Truman Doctrine, enunciated by President Truman for the express purpose of containing communist aggression in Western Europe. The Doctrine also pledged economic and military aid to Greece and

Turkey. Lodge was by no means an isolationist, which put him at odds with elements of his own party in Congress. On domestic policy issues, however, Lodge was more partisan and normally towed the Republican Party line. For example, he favored income tax reductions and voted for the Taft-Hartley Act. The Act was designed to weaken the capacity of labor unions to organize strikes.

Lodge's apparent commitment and intense interest in foreign policy issues would sometimes lead constituents in the fourth district to complain that he was overly absorbed in foreign policy at the expense of local problems.²¹ Nevertheless, regardless of constituent concerns, Lodge continued to direct most of his energy and legislative work towards matters pertaining to foreign policy. He had a particular interest in American foreign policy as it related to postwar Western Europe. Indeed, in 1947, Lodge delivered an hour long speech on the floor of the House of Representatives entitled "The Challenge of the Hour." In this riveting speech, Lodge called for immediate aid to several war-ravaged Western European countries, particularly Italy, in order to thwart the appeal and potential expansion of Soviet communism. DeLong describes Lodge's historic speech as "the most important and masterful address he ever delivered in Congress."²² Lodge's speech and his extensive work as a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee had direct bearing on the substance and eventual implementation of the Marshall Plan in 1948. The Marshall Plan, which provided millions of dollars in aid to Western European countries, was directly responsible for rebuilding and stabilizing this vital region of the world.

Not surprisingly in light of his marriage to Francesca, the economic and political development of postwar Italy was one of Lodge's principal points of interest. He sponsored a variety of bills which in one form or another served the interests of the Italian people. And through his efforts Italy became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).²³ Throughout Lodge's second term of office, foreign affairs were once again his primary focus, although he did take positions on domestic issues which increasingly bolstered his image as a progressive Republican. Lodge

openly encouraged liberals to join the ranks of the Republican Party and advocated without reservation a Republican platform in favor of civil rights legislation.

Following his two congressional terms, Lodge continued to serve the public in various capacities. He was elected to the Connecticut governorship for one term. In his bid for reelection, Lodge was defeated narrowly by U.S. Senator Abraham Ribicoff. Following his defeat, Lodge was appointed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower as the U.S. Ambassador to Spain. In later years, he was also appointed U.S. Ambassador to Argentina by President Nixon, and U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland by President Reagan. Lodge had also assumed a leadership role in drafting the 1965 Connecticut Constitution. The 1965 document has remained in effect to this day. Other than Lodge's portrait in the Hall of Governors located in the Connecticut Public Library across from the state Capitol, the only visible reminder of Lodge is the "John Davis Lodge Turnpike." Formerly known as the Connecticut Turnpike, the highway covers a portion of I-95 and I-395 in Connecticut. The Turnpike, dedicated in 1986, runs from the New York to the Rhode Island state line. DeLong notes that the highway was built largely due to Lodge's efforts as governor. The irony, however, is that the highway was a source of consternation and resentment among voters in Connecticut. Many property owners within the state viewed the highway as very invasive and an unnecessary intrusion through quaint and exclusive neighborhoods. According to political analysts, controversy involving the highway contributed to Lodge's defeat in the election.²⁴

Albert Morano (1951-59)

Very little has been written regarding those individuals who represented the fourth congressional district from 1951 to 1969. What is known regarding their impact on the national stage of American politics is rather sparse.²⁵ Albert Morano, as previously noted, was initially a behind-the-scenes Republican staffer in Congress who was instrumental in encouraging Clare Boothe

Luce to pursue the fourth congressional district seat in Connecticut. Morano served as administrative secretary to both Congressman Albert Austin and Congresswoman Luce. Morano resided in Greenwich and served on the town's Board of Tax Review. He served four terms in Congress and essentially won each of his congressional races by comfortable margins. In the 1950 campaign, Morano defeated his Democratic opponent, Dennis M. Carroll in a landslide, 55.8 percent to 44.2 percent.²⁶ In the 1952 election, Morano rode on the coattails of the Republican presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower, who carried both the state and congressional district four by comfortable margins. Morano received 60.1 percent of the vote while Democrat Joseph P. Lyford won 39.1 percent.²⁷ The impact of a party lever in Connecticut voting machines was quite apparent with many voters voting a straight party ticket. Morano's safe seat was also evident in 1954 when he handily defeated Democrat Edward R. Fay by 17 points, 56.2 percent to 41.4 percent.²⁸ The coattails of President Eisenhower were apparently once again an important factor in the 1956 campaign. Morano garnered an impressive 68.4 percent of the vote compared to Democrat Jack Stock's paltry 31.1 percent.²⁹

Donald Irwin (1959-61)

The incumbent president's political party routinely loses seats in congressional mid-term elections. Thus, in the 1958 congressional mid-term election, voters in Fairfield County elected Democrat Donald J. Irwin to represent them in Congress.³⁰ Irwin received his undergraduate and law degree from Yale University. He was born in Argentina to American parents and due to his bilingual ability taught Spanish while attending Yale. Irwin practiced law and was very involved in Democratic Party politics. He had been elected to the Norwalk Board of Education and would serve in a variety of public offices during his distinguished political career. The election of 1958 was exceptionally close. Irwin defeated Morano by a razor thin margin, 50.9 percent to 49.1 percent.³¹

Abner Sibal (1961-65)

Fairfield County voting behavior returned to normal in the 1960 election. Although John Kennedy carried Connecticut with 53.7 percent of the vote to Richard Nixon's 46.3 percent, the fourth congressional district cast its vote for Richard Nixon, 53.4 percent, as well as the Republican candidate for Congress, Abner P. Sibal.³² Sibal defeated Irwin's bid for reelection in a close vote, 51.3 percent to 48 percent.³³ JFK's coattails in the fourth district were not long enough to help secure reelection for Irwin. Like Irwin, Sibal was also from Norwalk. He graduated from Norwalk High School, Wesleyan University, and St. John's Law School, worked as a prosecuting attorney in Norwalk City Court, and served in the Connecticut state senate.³⁴ Sibal retained his seat in the 1962 mid-term election by winning 52 percent of the vote to Democratic challenger Francis C. Lennon's 48 percent.³⁵

Donald Irwin (1965-69)

In the election of 1964 Sibal lost his seat to his Norwalk rival Irwin. Irwin was able to reclaim his seat due to the coattails of President Lyndon Johnson. Johnson won an astonishing 67.9 percent of the statewide vote, while the Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater won a mere 32.1 percent. Presidential voting behavior in the fourth congressional district followed the statewide trend, with Johnson garnering 61.8 percent of the vote to Goldwater's 38.2 percent.³⁶ Due to LBJ's popularity among fourth district voters, Irwin was able to secure 51.8 percent of the vote to Sibal's 48.2 percent.³⁷ Split-ticket voting was apparent, but not enough for Sibal to win reelection. Irwin and Sibal would face each other again in the 1966 mid-term election. Irwin was narrowly reelected with 50.9 percent of the vote to Sibal's 48.2 percent.³⁸ It should be evident that Irwin and Sibal were political rivals during this time period. The two individuals, both from Norwalk, had faced one another a total of three times in what can only be described as highly competitive and robust election contests. As

Irwin noted in a personal interview with this author, the competition between himself and Sibal “was very lively.” The former-congressman also noted that because the fourth district was a Republican stronghold, a Democrat running for Congress had to wage a very “effective” campaign in order to win.³⁹ Irwin fondly recalled his days in Congress working with fellow Democrats and President Johnson on landmark bills related to LBJ’s Great Society. But Irwin’s congressional career came to an end in 1968 when he lost his congressional seat to an outspoken, controversial, and rising star in Republican Party politics. The challenger was a state representative and first selectman from Greenwich by the name of Lowell P. Weicker, Jr.

Lowell P. Weicker, Jr. (1969-71)

The Vietnam war was raging in 1968. The American death toll had reached more than 35,000 and the American people had grown weary of our nation’s military commitment to South Vietnam.⁴⁰ The Tet Offensive launched in January of 1968 by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong demonstrated in no uncertain terms that the enemy had not been defeated, nor demoralized. It was evident that despite President Johnson’s and General William Westmoreland’s optimistic statements regarding the war’s progress that the North Vietnamese army and the Viet Cong guerrillas were still capable of waging full-scale warfare.

The Democratic Party had become divided over the issue of the war. There were those who favored a military withdrawal (“doves”), while others favored the policies of the Johnson administration, a continued and firm military commitment to South Vietnam (“hawks”). The Republican Party was not as factionalized over the war, with most, but not all, Republicans during this time period supporting the war effort. It was this division, within and between parties, over the Vietnam war that contributed to Lowell P. Weicker’s election to Congress in 1968. Congressman Irwin was a “hawk” who supported the Vietnam war, while Weicker did not. Weicker’s anti-war message resonated among fourth district voters, resulting in his election.

I had the good fortune of conducting a lengthy phone interview with Weicker at his home in Virginia. Although Weicker had served only one term in the House prior to his election to the Senate, the interview still centered on his recollections of the fourth congressional district and his days as a member of the House of Representatives. Weicker's responses were at all times sharp and very direct reflecting the bold style of political leadership for which he was known. He recalled that "The main reason I defeated Irwin in 1968 had little to do with the economics or demographics of the district. It was because Irwin was a proponent of the war in Vietnam and a big supporter of President Johnson. It was not a local issue, but instead a national issue which resulted in my election. At the same time, Irwin was critical of Connecticut's Democratic Senator Abe Ribicoff, which seemed to cool some of his political support."⁴¹ Although Richard Nixon won the fourth district in 1968 with 51 percent of the vote to Hubert Humphrey's 43.1 percent, Weicker, a Republican, did not attribute his congressional election to Nixon's political coattails.⁴² The war, in Weicker's view, was clearly the deciding factor. Weicker does note in his autobiography, however, that Nixon did visit the district and helped with fundraising.⁴³

Weicker also reflected on the political character of the fourth district. He noted that in 1968 the district was very different geographically, much larger in land mass than the current configuration, with boundary lines based on the lines of Fairfield County. Weicker also recalled how the cities such as Bridgeport and Norwalk were Democratic "bastions" while the smaller suburban towns in the district predictably supported the Republican Party. He also stated that many residents within the district were more concerned with "Wall Street and national issues rather than with issues facing the state of Connecticut."⁴⁴ In this regard, the fourth district, in Weicker's view, was always a political anomaly compared to other congressional districts within the state. During Weicker's short stint in the House of Representatives he was forced to work with a Democratic Congress. He recalled how difficult it was for a Republican congressman to legislate. He did, however, sponsor an amendment to an urban renewal bill which protected the rights of

low income people. Weicker's amendment required that homes targeted for demolition had to be rebuilt so that people would not become homeless. Weicker described his effort to amend the housing bill with considerable pride. In 1970, Weicker was elected to the U.S. Senate in a three-way contest. The election was between himself, Democratic Senator Tom Dodd, who had been denied his party's nomination but who had still decided to run as a Democratic-Independent, and the Reverend Joseph Duffey, an anti-war Democrat and head of Americans for Democratic Action.⁴⁵ Duffy had defeated Dodd for the Democratic nomination. Weicker prevailed with 41.7 percent of the vote. Duffey received 33.8 percent while Dodd won 24.4 percent of total votes cast.⁴⁶

Towards the end of the interview, I asked Weicker about the current state of American politics and what, in his view, were the most apparent changes that had occurred from the days when he was in politics. Without hesitation, Weicker cited the rise of intense partisanship and personalized politics, a development he attributed to the style of politics endorsed by the former Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich. As Weicker put it, "It's no longer about issues, but name calling." Weicker also expressed dismay over the Republican Party's close association with the religious right. He voiced concern that the Republican Party in Connecticut, known historically as a moderate and centrist party, would eventually fall prey to doctrinaire religious conservatives. Despite the absence of evidence suggesting Connecticut's Republican Party is becoming captive to right-wing religious ideologues, the former senator still perceived this development as a very real possibility.

When asked about the old versus the new style of election campaigning, Weicker was adamant that the "old shoelather shaking hands" style of campaigning is still superior to the technology based campaigning, which now involves various forms of media, including the Internet. Weicker recalled the time when he defeated Irwin for the fourth district congressional seat in 1968. He noted how Irwin, the incumbent, rode in a car during the annual Barnum Day Parade in Bridgeport. Weicker, however, walked the parade route, almost alongside Irwin's car, and shook hands with

hundreds of parade watchers. He said that the experience had a lasting effect on his politics and he never forgot how important face-to-face grassroots campaigning was for the purpose of winning votes. Weicker noted how frustrated Irwin appeared as he watched his congressional challenger shaking hands and personally speaking to many of his constituents.⁴⁷

Stewart B. McKinney (1971-87)

Following Weicker's election to the U.S. Senate, the voters of the fourth congressional district elected another Republican, Stewart B. McKinney. A former member of the Connecticut House of Representatives, where he also served as the Republican minority leader, McKinney would represent the fourth district for sixteen years. He would die in office after becoming infected with the HIV virus during heart surgery. McKinney, like several Republicans before him who represented the fourth district, would also be known as a political maverick.

McKinney compiled a series of impressive election victories and for all intents and purposes had established for himself a very safe congressional seat. Throughout his career, he was perceived as an entrenched incumbent. A review of McKinney's election results from 1970 to 1986 reveal routine landslide victories. On average over the course of nine elections, McKinney received in the vicinity of 65 percent of the vote. The most decisive victory was in 1984, when McKinney defeated Fairfield University's political science professor John M. Orman by close to a 40 point margin. The most competitive contest McKinney encountered was the following election in 1986. In that election, he was elected by a 7 point margin over state representative Christine M. Niedermeier.⁴⁸ The fourth district during McKinney's tenure in Congress routinely supported the Republican candidate for president, although in presidential election years McKinney never rode the coattails of his party's presidential nominee. Election results during presidential election years show that McKinney always ran ahead of his party's presidential candidate.⁴⁹

During his many years in Congress, McKinney was identified as one of the key figures associated with the informal Republican caucus of lawmakers known as the “Wednesday Group.” Unlike the growing and increasingly powerful conservative element of House Republicans, the Wednesday Group was a distinct faction of moderate to liberal Republicans who would often band together with Democrats in opposition to their conservative Republican counterparts. This faction of Republican lawmakers, mostly from Northeastern and Midwestern states, often opposed the social and moral conservatism of Sunbelt Republicans. From time to time, the Wednesday Group would join forces with congressional Democrats to oppose the goals of the Reagan Administration. Congressman McKinney and other members of the Wednesday Group were at times perceived as renegades within their own party. But McKinney’s landslide victories over the span of his congressional career demonstrated quite clearly that his constituents admired and appreciated his moderate and maverick behavior in Congress.

To learn more about McKinney’s style, I conducted an e-mail interview with Joseph J. McGee, who served as Staff Director for Congressman McKinney from 1971-78. McGee suggested that McKinney’s popularity was due to several attributes, including the Congressman’s “empathic personality,” his “astute balancing of the needs and political values” of a very diverse constituency, along with his “relentless focus” on constituency casework.⁵⁰ McGee recollected the time when a Bridgeport mother in great distress over the violence in Bridgeport came to McKinney’s office. The mother was in tears and described how her daughter was sleeping in a bathtub to avoid stray bullets. Rather than turn his back on this woman, McKinney spearheaded a congressional investigation into the safety of federal housing projects, which included Father Panic Village in Bridgeport. Due to safety concerns, residents in housing projects deemed hazardous were relocated to more secure and protective housing. With respect to Bridgeport specifically, McKinney’s efforts resulted in a substantial HUD grant for both the demolition of Father Panic Village and the relocation of the

Village's residents. McKinney's focus on quality of life issues is something McGee believes the late Congressman must be remembered for.⁵¹

McKinney served on the House Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs, as well as the Small Business Committee. He also served on subcommittees associated with these standing committees. A review of McKinney's legislative record while in Congress reveals several major accomplishments. The Congressman's most far reaching legislative accomplishment, co-sponsored with Democratic Congressman Bruce Vento from Minnesota, was the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The Act was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1987. This is a comprehensive law which originally provided fifteen separate programs designed to help homeless people.⁵² The McKinney-Vento Act is regarded as the most comprehensive law ever passed by Congress for the express purposes of assisting homeless Americans. Closer to home, and reflective of McKinney's passion for environmental protection, one discovers the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge located along seventy miles of Connecticut's coastline. The refuge serves as a safe haven for endangered species of birds, such as "wading birds, shorebirds, songbirds, and terns, including the endangered roseate tern."⁵³ The Refuge is the direct result of McKinney's legislative efforts. McKinney also was responsible for passage of the Amerasian Immigration Act which allowed for children of American military personnel in Asia to obtain visas.⁵⁴

Among the many bills supported by McKinney, the one that McGee believes demonstrated exceptional courage on the Congressman's part was an amendment related to the Vietnam War. Although during his 1970 election campaign McKinney supported President Nixon's goal of a gradual withdrawal from Vietnam and his pledge to establish "Peace with Honor," it did not take long into his first congressional term to realize that the war was a lost cause and that the American people had been misled regarding the war's progress. McKinney soon concluded that an American withdrawal from Vietnam should be imminent. Thus, in June of 1971,

McKinney abandoned his support of the President's war agenda and cast his support for the controversial Nedzi-Whalen Amendment to the Defense Procurement Appropriation bill. The Amendment cut funding for the war effort. McKinney's support for the Amendment, according to McGee, not only infuriated Nixon, but also veterans groups and congressional "hawks." But despite pressure from the President and those who supported the war, McKinney stood his ground. Moreover, he was reelected in 1972 with 63 percent of the vote. As McGee put it, "That vote had cemented McKinney's reputation as an independent voice that was highly valued by the voters of Fairfield County."⁵⁵

Support for homeless Americans, a wildlife sanctuary along the coast of Connecticut, a deep concern for the safety of urban residents, support for Amerasian children, a bold and politically courageous stance on the Vietnam War, and constituent service, are what Congressman McKinney is most remembered for.

Christopher Shays (1987-2009)

Following the death of Congressman McKinney, voters in a special fourth district election selected yet another Republican maverick to serve as their representative in Congress. His name was Christopher Shays, and for the next twenty years the Congressman from Connecticut's fourth congressional district would personify the moderate, independent, and contentious brand of politics associated with congressional Republicans from New England. Shays quickly emerged as an outspoken and somewhat mercurial member of the United States Congress.

Like McKinney, Shays secured for himself a very safe seat in Congress. His social and moral values, votes on key issues, and excellent record of constituent service contributed to a wide base of political support throughout the fourth district. It should also be noted that Shays's safe seat increasingly seemed like an island within the fabric of Republican national politics. Social conservatives within the Republican Party had started to target moderate and liberal Republicans in favor of the more doctrinaire conservatives,

yet during this period Shays seemed virtually untouchable. Over the course of eleven congressional elections, Shays on average won 63 percent of the vote. Many of Shays's victories, particularly from 1988 to 2002, were landslides. And like McKinney, Shays ran well ahead of Republican presidential candidates in the fourth district.⁵⁶ Whether or not the Republican candidate for president carried the district made little difference. The fourth congressional district in no uncertain terms belonged to Chris Shays, and he never depended on presidential coattails. According to Robert D. Russo, who served as Deputy Chief of Staff to Shays in his Washington office, Shays's popularity and political longevity were in large part due to the fact that he "was hard to vilify." At the same time, according to Russo, Shays's bipartisan approach to governing had much to do with his electoral appeal: "Chris believed if he wasn't working both sides of the aisle then he wasn't doing his job. He never had a second thought about working with a Democrat."⁵⁷

Anyone who studied Chris Shays's background, political views, and legislative conduct while he served in the Connecticut General Assembly from 1975-87 could have predicted a rather unique and independent style of behavior once he was elected to Congress. He was a Christian Scientist who attended Principia College in Illinois. The small liberal arts college was established for the express purpose of serving the Christian Science religion. He was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, had served in the Fiji islands as a Peace Corps volunteer, and had established a reputation as an independent-minded and combative lawmaker during his years in the Connecticut General Assembly. He was known for abiding by a fixed set of personal principles, rather than those principles articulated by the party to which he belonged. His independent and principled conduct was evident in settings beyond the state legislature. One of the most dramatic examples of this was in 1986 when he was held in contempt of court for his steadfast refusal to relinquish the witness stand during a trial. Shays concluded that the trial was being conducted in a corrupt and flawed manner. He registered his protest by remaining on the stand. As a result of his "misconduct," Shays was sent to jail for seven days.

While a member of the U.S. Congress, Shays served on the Government Reform Committee, the Homeland Security Committee, and the Financial Services Committee. He was the ranking member on the Government Reform subcommittee for National Security. Shays's political opponents often claimed that his many years in Congress should have resulted in more prestigious committee assignments and more substantive legislative accomplishments for both the district and the nation. GovTrack.us, a site which tracks the legislative behavior of members of Congress, notes that from January 6, 1987, when Shays first took office, to November 19, 2008, when he was preparing to leave office, Shays sponsored a total of 172 bills. Of this number, 156 never made it out of committee. Moreover, of those bills he sponsored, a total of only 3 were enacted into law.⁵⁸ His pattern, according to GovTrack.us was to cosponsor bills, rather than initiate legislation. And lawmakers, according to this source, were less likely to join forces with Shays as cosponsors of his bills. His reputation as a maverick politician, along with the fact that his party for his first seven years in Congress was in the minority, limited his legislative success. At the same time, however, Shays had excellent attendance as a member of Congress. Data from GovTrack.us indicates that during his many years in Congress, Shays missed only 2 percent of roll call votes.⁵⁹

One of Shays's bills that did make it into law, and in this author's view is the bill that Congressman Shays will and should be most remembered for, pertained to campaign finance reform. In the House of Representatives it was known as the Shays/Meehan bill. In the Senate it was identified as the McCain/Feingold bill. More formally, the bill was titled the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act. There is no doubt whatsoever that Congressman Shays was a principal proponent and architect of this monumental and profound campaign finance reform law. The new law, passed in 2002, banned soft money contributions. Soft money was money that could be donated to the national party committees in unlimited amounts by individuals, corporations, and labor unions, ostensibly for the purpose of "party building" activities. The unregulated money, however, would find its way into campaign

coffers. Thus, what may have started as legitimate “soft” money evolved through circuitous routes into “hard” money. The abuse of soft money prompted Shays and Congressman Martin Meehan, a liberal Democrat from Massachusetts, to spearhead the reform effort in the House. Republican members of Congress, who were clearly the chief beneficiaries of soft money contributions due to corporate contributions and support from wealthy donors, viewed Shays’s reform effort with great disdain. Indeed, Republican leaders in Congress tried their best to block passage of his reform effort. If there was a time in Christopher Shays’s career during which he was the most at odds with his political party and when the moniker of “maverick” seemed most appropriate, it would had to have been during his widely publicized efforts related to federal campaign finance reform. In the Senate, Senators John McCain from Arizona, also known as a “maverick” lawmaker, and Senator Russ Feingold, a liberal-to-moderate Democrat from Wisconsin, carried the torch of reform. Roger H. Davidson, Walter J. Oleszek, and Frances E. Lee capture the arduous yet successful, reform effort in these terms:

The drive for reform began in the mid-1980s and raged through four presidencies, multiple floor votes, a 1992 veto by President George H.W. Bush, and repeated parliamentary setbacks. In the mid-1990s, the cause was taken up in the Senate by John McCain, R-Ariz., and Russell D. Feingold, D-Wis., and in the House by Christopher Shays, R-Conn., and Martin T. Meehan, D-Mass. The growth of unregulated “soft money” and scandals associated with the 1996 and 2000 elections kept the issue alive. And a final scandal in 2002 – involving Enron, an energy firm whose political connections kept it in business despite its economic collapse – pushed the bill over the top.”⁶⁰

Not surprisingly, the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act (2002) was challenged before the United States Supreme Court on the grounds that the law’s provisions violated the free speech clause

of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. The case was *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* (2003). But rather than follow the precedent set in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), in which the Court concluded that that political money was the equivalent of free speech, the Court in a 5-4 decision upheld the constitutionality of the law. In the end, Congressman Shays's vision of a more equitable and fair system of campaign finance not only passed into law, but survived a major constitutional challenge. Efforts to overturn the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act continued after the McConnell ruling, resulting in yet another ruling concerning the constitutionality of federal regulations on the use of political money. This time, however, the Court declared a portion of the Act unconstitutional, in particular the prohibition that had been placed on the use of corporate and labor union treasury money. The case was *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* (2010). The ruling was a 5-4 decision. The Court ruled the ban unconstitutional, thus allowing funds from corporate and labor treasuries to be used for "electioneering communications." Shays's campaign reform law was not dismantled by the Court, although the ruling has most certainly weakened key provisions of the legislation.

Yet it is important to note that Congressman Shays was not always at odds with his party. His unpredictable style was further evident during the Iraq War. In light of his conscientious objector status during the Vietnam War and his stint in the Peace Corps, one might have expected vocal and strident opposition to our nation's controversial invasion and occupation of Iraq. But this was not the case. In fact, Shays, quite surprisingly, emerged as one of the strongest proponents of the war effort. And while in office, Shays made more trips to Iraq than any other member of Congress. On several occasions, he publicly defended President Bush's foreign policy in the Middle East. At times it seemed as if Shays was the administration's principal spokesperson for the Bush Doctrine.

Shays's position on the war and what seemed at times like his unwavering support for both the Bush administration and his party's leadership in Congress resulted in a very strong challenge in both 2004 and 2006. The Democratic Party's congressional

candidate in both of these elections was Diane Farrell. Farrell was the former first selectwoman of Westport, a wealthy suburban town in lower Fairfield County. She was an articulate, poised, and dynamic candidate who was well-versed on domestic and foreign policy issues.

Both elections were intense, particularly 2006. Unlike 2004, in 2006 the *New York Times* endorsed Farrell's candidacy and political pundits considered the contest in Connecticut's fourth congressional district to be the most hotly contested congressional election in the U.S. Unlike many congressional challengers, Farrell had name recognition and was very well financed. In the 2006 campaign, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, Farrell was able to raise \$3 million dollars.⁶¹ Although Shays raised close to \$4 million, the challenger nevertheless had ample resources to wage a well organized and media-based campaign. The intensity of the 2006 campaign becomes even more apparent if one considers the fact that on average the winners of House seats in 2006 spent \$1.3 million, while challengers spent \$492,000.⁶²

Throughout much of the campaign, Farrell made a concerted effort to link Shays to the Iraq war, which by 2006 had become a very unpopular military endeavor in the minds of voters. Some analysts went so far to suggest that that Connecticut's fourth district contest was becoming a referendum on the war. Opposition to the war was quite high in the state of Connecticut, with 70 percent of persons polled disapproving of the manner in which President George W. Bush was handling the situation in Iraq. Moreover, 63 percent of the Connecticut electorate expressed the view that the U.S. was wrong to wage war against Iraq.⁶³ It was, of course, rather unusual to see a foreign policy issue frame a congressional mid-term election. The Iraq war as an election issue was also evident in Connecticut during the widely publicized race for the U.S. Senate. In that particular contest, anti-war Democrat Ned Lamont, a political neophyte, defeated senate incumbent Joe Lieberman in a Democratic primary election conducted during the month of August. Lieberman subsequently formed his own political party known as the "Connecticut for Lieberman Party." In doing so, in the three-way general election

contest he was able to assemble a coalition of Republicans, Independents, and moderate Democrats resulting in his reelection.

Throughout the campaign for the fourth district, Farrell did her very best to paint Shays as a supporter of a misguided foreign policy, as well as a rabid Republican partisan who supported not only President Bush, whose public approval ratings had plummeted, but also the controversial and arch conservative Republican House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, aka "The Hammer." Shays routinely defended his position on Iraq as well as his maverick, moderate, and bipartisan credentials. One very interesting development in the campaign which surprised election watchers occurred in the summer of 2006, approximately three months prior to election day. Although Shays had voted in 2003 for the resolution to authorize military force against Iraq, and had for several years been an ardent defender of the war, he began to express support for an American withdrawal based on defined timetables. He apparently had come to this conclusion during one of his fact finding trips to Iraq. Shays's new position on the war led Farrell to accuse Shays of changing his position based on recent polling results which demonstrated his vulnerability and voter disillusionment with the war. Shays of course denied that polls and politics had anything to do with his current position.

Nevertheless, despite a very heated and nationally publicized election, Shays prevailed, with 51 percent of the vote against Farrell's 48 percent. The results were almost identical to those in the 2004 election, in which Shays won 52 percent of vote while Farrell secured 48 percent. Farrell was able to make important inroads into towns which historically have served as Republican strongholds. Moreover, the competitiveness of the 2006 election, as well as the 2004 race, suggested that Congressman Shays, although still supported by a majority of voters within the fourth district had become a vulnerable incumbent. Despite Shays's reelection, it seemed that the fourth congressional district was on the verge of change. Election year 2006 also suggested that not only Connecticut's fourth congressional district, but also the entire New England region was moving toward the Democratic Party. Indeed,

every House Republican throughout New England, with the exception of Chris Shays, had been defeated. Shays was now the lone Republican in the U.S. House of Representatives from the six New England states. Moreover, the Republican Party lost control of Congress in 2006. But Chris Shays's status as the "lone New England Republican" would be short-lived. In 2008, voters in Connecticut's fourth congressional district elected a young Democrat to Congress, Jim Himes, thus ending the long and intriguing political career of Congressman Chris Shays.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dawn of a New Era

When Democrat Jim Himes (2009-present) announced that he would challenge Chris Shays for the fourth congressional district, few analysts, including this author, believed Himes would have much of a chance against the more experienced and seasoned Republican maverick. Many predicted that the power of incumbency would likely prevail and that once again Shays would be returned to Congress. After all, Himes had neither name recognition nor the sort of political experience one would expect of a serious congressional candidate. Himes's political experience was essentially limited to his service as board chairman of the Greenwich Housing Authority and a stint on the Greenwich Board of Finance. He also served as chairman on the board of Aspira of Connecticut, a Bridgeport-based organization that assists young Latinos with educational opportunities.¹ Himes was not in any way a public figure, nor had he served in the Connecticut General Assembly. Yet despite a shallow political resume, Himes did bring to the table a very impressive set of professional credentials. He was a former vice president with the Wall Street investment firm Goldman Sachs. He therefore had considerable expertise regarding financial and economic policy. He left his career as a Wall Street executive to lead a non-profit organization that helped companies secure financing for affordable housing projects. He was thus very familiar with the interplay of housing and banking policy. He was a graduate of Harvard University and a former Rhodes Scholar.

Born in Peru to American parents and having lived in Latin America for the first ten years of his life, Himes was fluent in Spanish. His language proficiency would prove to be an asset when he appeared before Latino groups within the fourth district. Himes was at ease speaking in front of large audiences. He was articulate, and at 42 years of age appeared much younger and more vibrant compared to the 63-year-old Shays.² Shays's hair was thinning and had turned pure white, while Himes's hair was brown, thick, and nicely combed. In his V-neck sweater, Himes had a somewhat boyish and collegiate look about him. He also had a very attractive family which included two young daughters. The energy level and youthfulness associated with the Himes campaign contrasted rather dramatically with the campaign of Congressman Shays. Himes was the overwhelming choice of his party's convention and became the Democratic Party's official nominee after defeating Lee Whitnum in an August primary. The primary was non-competitive. Figures compiled by the Secretary of State's Office recorded Himes winning 12,260 votes to Whitnum's 1,840.

By 2008, the Iraq War had receded as a primary campaign issue in the minds of many voters. Iraq appeared to be stabilizing politically. Moreover, despite the fact that American soldiers and marines were still dying, the monthly death toll had declined. The military "surge" authorized by President Bush in 2007, which increased the number of American combat units in Iraq, had achieved its objective. The enemy "insurgents" had been neutralized and Iraqi security forces were assuming increased responsibilities. America seemed to be winning the Iraq war.

This is not to suggest, however, that the election of 2008 was devoid of a campaign issue, as the American economy in 2007, without much warning, plunged into a severe recession. Some economists described the recession as the worst in our nation's history. Thus, within the space of only two short years, the burning campaign issue across the land shifted like quicksand from Iraq to the economy. By 2008, the American economy was not only the number one issue according to voters, but the vast majority of voters were also extremely angry and unhappy with political incumbents.

Voter frustration over economic conditions was more than evident in the state of Connecticut. According to the Quinnipiac Poll released on July 1, 2008, only four months prior to the fall election, 59 percent of persons polled were either “somewhat” or “very” dissatisfied with the way things were going in the state. This was the worst dissatisfaction rate recorded by the Quinnipiac Poll since July 31, 2003. At the same time, 60 percent of persons polled indicated that they were “worse off” in 2008 compared to 2007. Forty-four percent of respondents suggested that the economy would likely become worse, 39 percent indicated that it would stay the same, while only 12 percent expressed optimism. Sixty percent of voters replied that they were worse off financially compared to the previous year, and sixty percent of respondents expressed the view that the rise in gas prices was causing a financial hardship for their family. Across the board, in 2008 the Connecticut electorate expressed great dismay and pessimism towards the economy as well as their family’s financial well-being.

In congressional districts that had grown more competitive with time, such as Connecticut’s fourth congressional district, incumbent congressmen were now ripe targets for congressional challengers. Regardless of the fact that Congressman Shays had little to do with the recession, he was nevertheless accused by Jim Himes of being part of a political establishment under whose watch the recession occurred. Moreover, Himes’s relentless criticism of Shays resonated with voters in the fourth district due to the fact so many residents in Fairfield County were (and continue to be) employed in the field of financial services. The bedroom communities of New York City located along Connecticut’s “gold coast” in lower Fairfield county are home to bankers, traders, managers of hedge funds, lawyers, and Wall Street executives, most of whom had been adversely affected by the recession. Himes, like so many Democratic challengers across the land, blamed the economic policies of President George W. Bush and the Republicans in Congress for the recession. “Change” was therefore the dominant theme in the race for the fourth district and in many congressional districts controlled by Republican incumbents. Like the 2006 campaign between Shays and Farrell,

fundraising by Shays and Himes during the 2008 election cycle far exceeded the average House race. Himes, the challenger, raised \$3.8 million while Shays, the incumbent, raised \$3.7 million. On average, the winners of House races in 2008 raised \$1.3 million.³ This was not by any means a textbook contest in which the incumbent typically raised three or four times as much money compared to the challenger. The incumbent's fundraising advantage was effectively neutralized by the challenger.

A review of the two campaign finance reports reveals that both candidates depended heavily on individual contributors to finance their campaigns. Seventy-two percent of Shays's campaign funds and 78 percent of Himes's money had been generated from individual contributions. Twenty-five percent of Shays's war chest consisted of PAC contributions compared to 11 percent for Himes. With regard to personal money employed for the campaign, the figures show that Shays's campaign fund consisted of only 1 percent of his own money, while 10 percent of Himes's campaign fund was self-financed.⁴

Although a common impression is that Republican candidates are supported by the business community and Democrats by organized labor and "the common people," the fact of the matter is that Wall Street executives and Wall Street PACs were important contributors to both congressional campaigns. As reported by the Center for Responsive Politics, the top five contributors to Shays's campaign included persons and PACS associated with UST Inc. (\$26,500), Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (\$25,500), JP Morgan Chase & Co. (\$23,600), New York Life Insurance (\$21,150), and Goldman Sachs (\$18,400). Himes's top five contributors included persons or PACs connected to Goldman Sachs (\$155,098), ActBlue (\$45,733), Deutsche Bank AG (\$33,550), Sullivan and Cromwell (\$25,850), and JPMorgan Chase & Co. (\$19,800). With regard to broad categories of industries that donated to both campaigns, the record shows that campaign money from individuals and PACs associated with securities and investment firms constituted the most prominent source of funding for both candidates. Shays received \$477,395 from securities and investment firms, of which \$403,075

was in the form of individual contributions and \$74,320 from PACs. Himes received \$579,454 from securities and investment companies. Individuals employed in this industry donated a total of \$569,954 to his campaign, while connected PACs contributed \$9,500. Within the fourth congressional district, the relationship between politics and Wall Street is obviously quite profound.

Throughout the fall campaign, Shays and Himes debated several times. The economy, not surprisingly, remained the principal point of contention. As in 2006, the challenger waged an offensive campaign, while the incumbent was routinely on the defensive. What was particularly intriguing and perhaps perplexing to many observers was that despite the severe recession, Shays disagreed with Himes that the American economy was in dire straits. The contrast in economic views surfaced during a debate conducted in the city of Stamford. Although Shays acknowledged the fact that the country was in a state of financial crisis due, as he put it, to "dumb lending and dumb borrowing," he nevertheless argued that the overall state of the economy was still sound. As Shays put it, "I believe with all my heart and soul that the fundamentals of the economy are in fact really strong. I think the financial sector is sick. I do not define the financial sector as the fundamentals of our country and our economy."

Himes, not surprisingly, issued a forceful rebuttal and stated that the economy in no uncertain terms was "on its knees." Himes also attributed the recession to both President Bush and Congressman Chris Shays: "None of this is an accident. It is not the result of the business cycle or of bad luck. Where we are today is the result of bad policies and bad decisions made by the Bush administration, supported by Chris Shays."⁵ Himes would repeatedly use Shays's words regarding the state of economic affairs to portray the veteran Congressman as out of touch with reality from having worked inside the Beltway for far too long.

As the fall campaign progressed, both candidates would receive strong endorsements from nationally recognized and popular political figures. The most prominent individuals to make their presence known within the fourth district were the Democratic

Party's presidential candidate Barack Obama and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Both political figures had what could best be described as "celebrity" status. On October 13, Bloomberg endorsed Shays by attending a fundraiser held in Westport at the home of Barry and Carol Asness. Speaking to the cameras outside the Asness residence, the mayor spoke in laudatory terms about Shays's sense of "rock solid" judgment and his moderate bipartisan approach to governing.⁶ Two weeks later, on October 31, Obama delivered a 31-second radio ad in which he endorsed Himes. Obama spoke of Himes's work with a non-profit corporation, the fact that he was raised by a single mother, and that if elected to Congress he would be an effective agent for change.⁷

As election day approached, polling results suggested an exceptionally close race and not one political pundit could confidently predict the outcome. Of the five congressional races in the state Connecticut, the fourth district was clearly the most competitive. One could observe the fourth district contest rapidly evolving into an even race. The Sacred Heart University Poll of 400 likely voters conducted from September 22-25 indicated that 41 percent of voters expressed support for Shays and 31 percent supported the challenger. Shortly thereafter, however, the University of Connecticut Poll conducted from October 8-15 with a sample of 501 likely voters recorded a perfect tie, with 44 percent of voters for Shays and 44 percent for Himes. The SurveyUSA Poll conducted from October 13-14 generated similar findings, with 45 percent of likely voters supporting Shays, and 48 percent supporting Himes. It was apparent that undecided voters and perhaps those who were at best lukewarm supporters of the incumbent Congressman were breaking towards the challenger as election day drew near. There is an axiom in American politics, although it has never been empirically confirmed, that undecided voters eventually cast their votes for the challenger. Whether or not this is accurate, there is reason to believe that undecided voters in the fourth district supported Himes at the eleventh hour, thus determining the outcome of the election. The polls suggested such movement. On election day, Himes won 51 percent of the vote while Shays received 48 percent.

The Presidential Election and the Fourth Congressional District

Any discussion and analysis of what transpired in the fourth congressional district during the election of 2008 must necessarily take into account the effects of the presidential election on the congressional election's final outcome. A cursory examination of voting behavior within the fourth district reveals rather convincingly that Jim Himes was the political beneficiary of Barack Obama's coattails. Had Obama not been the Democratic Party's presidential nominee and had he not been so popular in the fourth district, it is quite likely that Congressman Shays would have been reelected, albeit by a razor-thin margin.

The large voter turnout and support for Barack Obama in the fourth district's urban areas contributed in a significant way to Himes's victory. The data in table 10, which compares the 2004 and 2008 elections, clearly underscores the impact that Barack Obama had on voting behavior in the cities of Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Stamford.

Table 10
Voter Support in Three Urban Communities
in the Fourth Congressional District for
Democratic Presidential and Congressional
Candidates, 2004-2008

	Bridgeport	Norwalk	Stamford
2004			
Kerry/Edwards	26,280=70%	20,615=58%	27,588=58%
Diane Farrell	23,760=70%	17,720=53%	23,063=52%
2008			
Obama/Biden	33,978=84%	24,485=65%	31,733=64%
Jim Himes	31,276=80%	21,000=59%	27,074=57%

Source: Compiled by author from data archived in Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.

Obama's political coattails were very long in the district's three major cities, Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk. Voter turnout was impressive in the three urban communities. The Secretary of State's office reported that 59 percent of registered voters cast ballots in Bridgeport, 75 percent in Norwalk, and 82 percent in Stamford. Moreover, voters in large numbers supported Obama and continued to support the Democratic ticket. Split-ticket voting in the three cities was minimal. Although voting machines have been replaced by optical scantrons and the party lever is nothing more than a distant memory, many voters in the three urban communities voted a straight Democratic ticket, as if the lever was still in existence.

To begin with, the Obama/Biden ticket did considerably better in the three cities compared to the 2004 presidential ticket of Kerry/Edwards. In each of the three communities Obama was a more popular and more widely-supported candidate compared to John Kerry. Obama received substantially more votes and a markedly higher percentage of the presidential vote compared to Kerry in each community. And how the Obama phenomenon carried over into the congressional race within the three communities is apparent when the 2004 and 2008 congressional elections are compared. As the data show, Himes benefitted to a much greater extent from Obama's presence at the top of the ticket compared to the benefit Farrell received from Kerry. Although Shays did not win any of the three communities in 2004, he was nevertheless competitive against Farrell in Norwalk and Stamford. But this was not the case in 2008. Obama's appeal effectively suppressed the viability of Shays's reelection campaign within the three urban communities. It should also be noted that Himes in 2008 was cross-endorsed by the left-leaning Working Families Party, which added to his margin of victory in each of the three cities. Collectively, the cross-endorsement netted Himes an additional 5,606 votes. Had this party fielded its own congressional candidate, Himes's margin of victory within each of the three communities would have been slightly less, but impressive nevertheless.

Within the surrounding and outlying suburban communities in the fourth congressional district, Shays was able to win every

community by at least 5-9 points, or in several cases by 10 or more points. As table 11 shows, the suburban communities in 2008 were clearly in Shays's column.

Table 11
Voting Behavior in the Fourteen Suburban Communities
in the Fourth Congressional District: 2008
In Percent

Town	Shays	Himes	Victory Margin
Darien	69	29	+40
Easton	58	39	+19
Fairfield	53	46	+7
Greenwich	56	43	+13
Monroe	55	43	+12
New Canaan	68	31	+37
Oxford	52	46	+6
Redding	53	45	+8
Ridgefield	60	38	+22
Shelton (Part)	52	47	+5
Trumbull	54	45	+9
Weston	54	44	+10
Westport	53	46	+7
Wilton	58	41	+17

Source: Compiled by author from data archived in Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.

Tables 10 and 11 demonstrate rather convincingly that the surge in voter support for Barack Obama in the district's three cities was an important factor behind Jim Himes's election to Congress in 2008.

Although straight ticket voting was evident in Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Stamford, the incidence of split-ticket voting was somewhat pervasive in several of the district's suburban communities. Indeed, voters in seven of the fourteen suburban communities split their ticket between the presidential and congressional candidates. More specifically, a number of towns supported Obama for President, and then Shays for Congress.

There were no incidents of towns splitting their votes between McCain and Himes. Table 12 shows the communities in which straight or split-ticket voting occurred.

Table 12
Straight and Split-Ticket Voting in Fourth
Congressional District Communities: 2008

Town	Presidential	Congressional
Bridgeport	D	D
Darien	R	R
Easton	R	R
Fairfield	D	R
Greenwich	D	R
Monroe	R	R
New Canaan	R	R
Norwalk	D	D
Oxford	R	R
Redding	D	R
Ridgefield	D	R
Shelton	R	R
Stamford	D	D
Trumbull	R	R
Weston	D	R
Westport	D	R
Wilton	D	R

Source: Compiled by author from data archived in Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.

Although voters in every one of the suburban communities in the fourth district continued to support Shays's bid for reelection, the appeal of Obama at the top of the ticket was still evident. As a result of Obama's presence, Shays's margins of victory were considerably smaller in practically every suburban community compared to the previous presidential election. Table 13 compares Shays's margins of victory in 2008 with those of the the 2004 presidential election, in which John Kerry headed the Democratic ticket.

Table 13
Shays's Margin of Victory over Democratic Opponents
in Suburban Communities: 2004 and 2008

Town	2004	2008	Change
Darien	+43	+40	-3
Easton	+20	+19	-1
Fairfield	+12	+7	-5
Greenwich	+20	+13	-7
Monroe	+24	+12	-12
New Canaan	+40	+37	-3
Oxford	+8	+6	-2
Redding	+14	+8	-6
Ridgefield	+14	+8	-6
Shelton (part)	+18	+5	-13
Trumbull	+18	+9	-9
Weston	+2	+10	+8
Westport	-2	+7	+5
Wilton	+22	+17	-5

Source: Compiled by author from data archived in Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.

What emerges from the data is that Obama's popularity suppressed support for Shays in the suburban communities. Although Shays won the suburbs, Obama's presence at the top of the ticket definitely narrowed the gap between himself and Himes, thus accentuating the significance of the surge in the three Democratic cities.

Himes: The Freshman Lawmaker

It should be clear that political coattails explain why Himes was elected to the United States Congress. How well he performed as a member of Congress during his first term and how well he served his constituents is, of course, a very subjective judgment and one beyond the purview of this particular work. We can, however, objectively examine what Congressman Himes achieved as a freshman member of Congress and what his ideological orientation towards policy issues appeared to be.

Following his election to Congress, Himes was appointed to two standing committees in the House of Representatives. These included the House Committee on Financial Services and the House Committee on Homeland Security. Serving on the Financial Services committee was an excellent fit for Himes in light of his professional background with Goldman Sachs. Why he was appointed to the Homeland Security Committee and what expertise he brought to this committee is not clear.

Himes's attendance record during his first term was excellent. As of July, 2010, of the 1,345 roll call votes that took place from January 6, 2009, Himes missed only 2 percent.⁸ His attendance record during his first term was identical to that of Shays. GovTrack.us identified Himes during his first term in office as a "follower" rather than an innovator or leader of legislation. To be fair, this is to be expected of a freshman member of Congress. Indeed, few, if any, freshmen are, or can be, prominent lawmakers. Overall Himes's legislative activity during his first term was respectable. GovTrack.us identifies eight bills that he personally sponsored and one hundred and seventy-five bills that he cosponsored. Himes's eight sponsored bills included formal commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Federal Credit Union Act; a new means for financing energy conservation for public housing; a prohibition on travel visas to the U.S. for high ranking Iranian officials; the creation of sister-city relationships between cities in the U.S. and cities in Haiti; an expanded role for the U.S. Coast Guard; a limitation on taxes that states can impose on nonresident telecommuters; grants and loans to assist with "green" improvements in federal housing projects; and a competitive grant program to help with early learning of low-income children.⁹

How many of Himes's bills that have actually been passed into law is somewhat difficult to calculate. GovTrack.us summarizes the status of bills based on a bill's House number. For those familiar with the legislative process, it is well understood that bills once introduced into committee do have ways of becoming merged with other bills which may in fact become law. Thus, the nuances and

subtleties of lawmaking are not completely disclosed by simply tracking bills based on a bill's number. Himes's legislative accomplishments, according to his chief legislative aide, have however been more impressive than what is identified by GovTrack.us. Himes's co-sponsorship of bills, it was noted, is also something that should not be downplayed, particularly regarding his original co-sponsorship of the Home Star Energy Retrofit Act (H.R. 5019), which provides tax credits for persons who retrofit their homes with green technology. The Home Star Act passed the House of Representatives on May 6, 2010. Nevertheless, legislative committees are notorious for "killing" more than 90 percent of proposed bills. For a bill to travel beyond the committee stage of the legislative cycle is rather uncommon.

GovTrack.us currently identifies Himes as a "moderate" Democrat, although he normally receives very high ratings from liberal advocacy groups. For example, concerning the highly contentious and divisive issue of abortion, NARAL Pro-Choice America (National Association for Repeal of Abortion Laws) assigns Himes a perfect score of 100. Conversely, the National Right to Life Center gives Himes a score of 0 on this policy issue. Himes receives a rating score of 83 from the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), while the American Conservative Union offers a score of 4. Concerning public health policy, the American Public Health Association gives Himes a perfect score of 100. With regard to fiscal policy, the conservative National Taxpayers Union rates Himes a 10 out of 100. Regarding defense and peace issues, the liberal organization known as Peace Action rates Himes in the middle of the road with a score of 54. Environmental organizations apparently appreciate Himes's position with respect to environmental protection. The League of Conservation Voters gives Himes a perfect score of 100.

On a scale of A-F. Numbers USA, an anti-immigration organization gives Himes an A-. This is the only conservative organization that rates Himes highly. With respect to educational policy, the National Education Association assigns a grade of A to Himes. Although not every advocacy organizations has issued a rating for Congressman Himes, it is evident that most liberal

lobbying organizations appreciate his voting record on key policy issues. Conservative organizations, for the most part, are unimpressed with Congressman Himes's legislative behavior.¹⁰

During his first term of office, Himes could not under any circumstances be regarded as a maverick lawmaker who crossed the aisle on roll calls. The record shows that Himes voted with his political party in Congress 94 percent of the time.¹¹ Although Himes and four other freshman members of Congress expressed support for a spending cut in the federal budget, thus challenging the position of his party's congressional leadership, he more than often supported the major legislative initiatives of President Obama, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and his fellow congressional Democrats during his first term of office. Himes supported his party's legislative effort concerning the economic stimulus bill as well as health care reform. Both bills were opposed by Republican lawmakers. Votes for and against were cast along party lines. Speaking to constituents during a teleconference, Himes's partisanship was apparent:

When I came into office with Obama, we were losing hundreds of thousands of jobs. Now we are not in that world. Not close to it. . . . The [\$890 billion] stimulus bill and other initiatives really helped turn things around. The stimulus [represented] the biggest federal commitment to public education. We're moving forward on an energy bill. We are very proud of the health-care reform. It's not perfect but reality is we took an historic step forward. The president has done some terrific things, lifting the stem-cell ban, reversing the travel ban on people with HIV. . . . It's a more humane and just world.¹²

Himes's Political Vulnerability

Freshman members of Congress who seek reelection, as practically all do, are often vulnerable to a serious political challenge and possible defeat. Although the freshman who seeks reelection is now the incumbent, he or she does not enjoy the

extraordinary advantages associated with incumbency. Unlike members of Congress who have served several terms, the name recognition of a freshman incumbent is not that impressive, as he or she has yet to become a household name. The fundraising advantage enjoyed by long-term incumbents is also less impressive for a freshman member of Congress. Moreover, the freshman's district staff is also relatively new, and it normally takes several months for the newly-hired staff to become acquainted with the district and to begin serving the multiple needs of the congressperson's constituents. Thus, constituent service, often regarded by political scientists as one of the keys to an incumbent's reelection, is not as refined in the district office of a freshman member of Congress.¹³

Additionally, a freshman member of Congress is also susceptible to what is practically an "iron law" in the world of congressional politics. In this respect, it is the "surge" and "decline" effect associated with presidential coattails that needs to be considered. Newly-elected presidents often have political coattails, and as a result a number of freshmen members of Congress owe their election to the president. Because of presidential coattails, the president's party gains seats in Congress. This is precisely what happened in 2008. There was a "surge" in the number of Democrats elected to Congress as a direct result of Obama's popularity. Two years later, however, there is a "mid-term" election in which the president is not on the ballot. During a mid-term election, members of the president's party in Congress do not enjoy the luxury of presidential coattails. At the same time, the popularity of the newly-elected president will also experience a decline with the result being a loss of congressional seats for the president's party. The number of seats held by the president's party in Congress will therefore "decline" to what in reality is the more normal level of partisan distribution within Congress. In essence, what the "surge and decline" effect suggests is that those members of Congress who were swept into office on the president's coattails are part of a false congressional majority. Thus, the mid-term election tends to return the distribution of congressional seats to a more realistic reflection

of a party's congressional strength. On average, a president's political party will lose between 25-30 seats during a mid-term election.

During the months prior to the 2010 congressional election, Congressman Himes, compared to the other four members of Connecticut's congressional delegation, all of whom were Democrats, was deemed the most vulnerable incumbent, due to his freshman status. This along with the fact that the fourth congressional district with only a few exceptions had historically voted Republican suggested that he could potentially lose his seat. Although election forecasters still suggested that Himes had the advantage, not one forecaster was willing to classify his seat as "safe" or "solid" Democrat. For example, as the election season approached, the Charles Cook Report rated the fourth district race as "likely Democrat." The *New York Times*, *Real Clear Politics*, and *Congressional Quarterly Politics* were even less convinced of Himes's longevity and rated the seat as "leaning Democrat." Thus, sensing an opportunity to unseat a freshman member of Congress who had been elected largely on the basis of President Obama's political coattails, along with the fact that the public's support of President Obama, as well as the Congress, had declined precipitously since the election of 2008, a number of Republicans decided to seek the fourth congressional seat. The recession and the recent election of Republican governors in New Jersey and Virginia along with the stunning election of Republican Scott Brown in the Massachusetts Senate race further energized Republican efforts in the fourth congressional district.

CHAPTER FIVE

The 2010 Republican Nomination Contest

In early spring of 2010, six Republicans announced their intention to compete for the congressional seat occupied by Jim Himes. The plethora of Republican candidates suggested a wide open nominating contest within the GOP. It was apparent that no Republican candidate would be anointed as their party's nominee. The candidate who won the Republican nomination would have to do so through sheer determination and skillful strategizing.

The Nominating Process

Connecticut has a rather unusual, perhaps archaic, system of nominating candidates for public office. The congressional nominating process begins with a nominating convention in May. The convention is attended by delegates selected from the district's towns and cities. With regard to the Republican Party, the number of delegates apportioned to each local community is based on a formula outlined in Article III, Section 2 of the Republican by-laws. Towns are awarded one delegate per 750 votes cast for governor in the preceding gubernatorial contest. A bonus delegate is also awarded to towns in which a plurality of voters supported the Republican gubernatorial candidate in the preceding contest. Towns in which the local government is under the control of the Republican Party are awarded additional delegates depending on the population of the town. The Republicans in 2010 also sent

“superdelegates” to their nominating convention. Superdelegates are those Republicans who hold state or federal elected office in Connecticut, serve on the Connecticut Republican State Central Committee, or serve on the Republican National Committee from Connecticut. A community’s support for Republican gubernatorial candidates is thus a prime consideration in the Republican apportionment formula, as well as the community’s support for local Republican office holders, such as town councilors, mayors, and selectmen. This explains why a city such as Bridgeport, which routinely votes for Democratic gubernatorial candidates, has fewer delegates at a Republican state nominating convention compared to some of the less populated suburban communities within the district, such as Fairfield or Greenwich. Convention delegates are chosen in local caucuses, which are largely dominated by the town committees within the district. The party organization therefore controls to a large extent, although not entirely, who the delegates will be at the party’s nominating convention.

Not surprisingly, candidates will spend many hours courting members of town committees and meeting with the chairs of the party in order to cultivate support of convention delegates. In some instances, delegates will pledge their support to candidates prior to the convention, although there is always a number of delegates who withhold their support and attend the convention unpledged to any candidate. Roll calls are taken at the convention, with spokespersons from each community within the district announcing the number of delegates awarded to each candidate. The candidate who wins a majority of the convention delegates is designated as the party-endorsed candidate. But this by no means secures the nomination, as Connecticut law allows any candidate who wins at least 15 percent of the convention delegates to force a primary election in August. This is known as a “challenge primary.” At one time in the not-too-distant past, winning a minimum of 15 percent of the delegates at the convention was the only way in which a challenger to the party-endorsed candidate could wage a primary. But due to popular pressure, election reformers modified the primary law by allowing candidates who fail to meet the 15 percent threshold to

force a primary by petitioning their way onto a primary ballot. Thus, irrespective of the convention vote, a candidate can still wage a challenge primary. Compared to previous decades, the nominating process is now more fluid and less under the control of the formal party organization. Indeed, in some instances candidates will forego the convention and decide from the very start that they will force a primary by way of petition.

The six Republican candidates who sought their party's nomination and who had intended to challenge Congressman Himes were quite diverse with respect to age, ideological orientation, and political experience. Several of the candidates also had a base of support from which to launch a competitive congressional campaign. In alphabetical order, the six candidates who decided to challenge Congressman Jim Himes included Dan Debicella, Will Gregory, Tom Herrmann, Rob Merkle, Rob Russo, and Rick Torres. Informative and colorful websites were constructed by each candidate, fundraising commenced, and the candidates began the challenging task of securing convention delegates and/or petition signatures. The biographical information that follows was gleaned from the websites posted by the individual candidates.

Dan Debicella

Dan Debicella was a businessman and two term state senator. Debicella held the senate seat that had been represented by the legendary George "Doc" Gunther, who represented the district from 1966 to 2006. Gunther's legislative service was the longest in Connecticut history.

Debicella was a graduate of the very prestigious Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. He also earned an MBA at Harvard. He worked for a Fortune 500 company, served as a business consultant, and managed his own private business. In the state senate, he served as the ranking Republican on the Appropriations Committee. He was known at the state Capitol as having impressive expertise on finance and budgetary matters. He was also considered by political insiders to be a rising star within the Republican Party. Prior to the nominating convention, Debicella

had received numerous endorsements and pledges of support from state lawmakers and convention delegates. His connections within the Republican Party immediately positioned him as one of the frontrunners for his party's nomination.

Pundits predicted that Debicella would likely win the endorsement of his party at the nominating convention. He identified himself as a fiscal conservative but very moderate with regard to social and moral issues. He was pro-choice on the abortion issue and supported state funding for stem cell research. In some respects, Debicella reflected the values of the traditional New England Republican; fiscally conservative, but moderate and tolerant with respect to social and moral policy. However, Debicella's position on social issues, it should be noted, seemed to become more moderate as he entertained the prospect of a congressional candidacy. During his days as a state senator, he was endorsed by the conservative Family Institute of Connecticut for his voting record on social issues.

Will Gregory

The first impression one might have had upon meeting Will Gregory was that he was an intern for one of the other congressional candidates. Gregory, after all, was twenty-four years old when he launched his campaign. When queried about his age, he was quick to note that he would be twenty-five, the legal requirement to serve in Congress, at the time of his swearing in. Gregory's youthful persona exuded energy and enthusiasm, and one could not help but admire his unbridled passion to enter the political arena. At public functions, he distributed small candy bars wrapped in gold with his name on the wrapper. This was an interesting and effective gimmick which seemed to amuse those persons he greeted. Gregory received his bachelor's degree from Gettysburg College where he was elected and reelected as class president and class senator. He also received a Master's degree in Global Governance and Diplomacy from Oxford University. Gregory was an educated young man who subscribed to a very fixed set of conservative principles. His professional

background included working as a non-profit executive. His political resume identified a stint in the “War Room” as a campaign aide for Senator John McCain’s 2008 presidential campaign. Gregory’s conservative platform included support for free enterprise and limited government.

Tom Herrmann

Tom Herrmann was a late entry into the nominating contest, but there was reason to believe that Herrmann’s campaign could quickly gain traction. He was the second term First Selectman of Easton. His expertise was in the areas of finance, taxes, and budgeting. His resume suggested that as the First Selectman he was able to hold taxes to the lowest level in all of Fairfield County. He was known in Republican circles as a fiscal conservative, but moderate on social issues. Herrmann was also an exceptionally wealthy individual who had made a fortune in the private sector. His extensive business and investment background combined with his public sector experience quickly elevated Herrmann to the top tier of viable candidates. Like many Republican candidates, Herrmann suggested that his experience in the private sector would prove to be a major asset once he was elected to Congress. He would apply business principles to public policy making. Herrmann’s fundraising ability quickly outpaced the other Republican candidates, which further served to elevate his status as a frontrunner for the nomination. Herrmann earned a bachelor’s degree in Accounting from the University of Massachusetts and his MBA from Harvard. In May, Herrmann released a public opinion poll of 400 likely Republican voters within the fourth district. The poll indicated that Herrmann had the highest name recognition compared to the other candidates and that he was the preferred candidate of his party’s rank and file. The poll was conducted by the Republican polling firm of Wilson Research Strategies. Herrmann used the results of this poll to underscore his viability and to cast doubt on Debicella’s electability. Herrmann’s opponents questioned the objectivity of the polling results.

Rob Merkle

Rob Merkle was clearly the most conservative among the six Republican challengers. He was formally endorsed by the Tea Party Patriots and Right Principles. Both organizations were very active factions of Connecticut's growing Tea Party movement. Both organizations were based in Fairfield County. A review of Merkle's platform revealed a conservative stance on practically every policy issue. Like many conservative Republican candidates across the country, Merkle identified himself as a "Ronald Reagan conservative." In addition to his blunt, no-nonsense speaking style, Merkle's candidacy attracted considerable media attention due to the fact that his candidacy would serve as the first true test of the Tea Party's influence within the context of congressional politics in the state of Connecticut. Similar to Tea Party candidates across the land, Merkle called upon voters to "take our country back." Merkle received his bachelor's degree in Finance from the University of Notre Dame. He also played linebacker on the University's football team as a walk-on, which is unusual for a team of Notre Dame's caliber. His professional background, like several Republican candidates, was in the private sector. He was the founder and owner of an executive search firm based in Westport. Like his competitors for the nomination, Merkle emphasized the virtues of free enterprise and how his experience in the private sector would contribute to effective law making. But unlike several of his Republican competitors, Merkle's views on social and moral issues were far to the right. In one interview with a reporter from the *Norwalk Hour*, Merkle unabashedly described himself as "pro-life, pro-gun, and pro-family." Rob Merkle was not a typical New England Republican.

Rob Russo

When Rob Russo declared his candidacy for Congress, there were those who quickly considered him the likely nominee. Russo had served as Deputy Chief of Staff for Congressman Chris Shays. He also had served as Director of Governor M. Jodi Rell's Fairfield

County Office. He was intimately familiar with the politics and personalities of the seventeen communities within the fourth congressional district. Indeed, Russo's knowledge of the district's voting trends and political personalities within the district seemed encyclopedic. In 2008, Russo had been elected to the state senate in a special election. For several months, before losing his seat in the regularly scheduled general election, he had represented constituents from Trumbull, Monroe, and Bridgeport at the state Capitol. He had run, albeit unsuccessfully, for the state senate in 2004 and 2006. He had excellent name recognition within the fourth district and was well-liked among many Republican town committee members. Moreover, according to most accounts, Russo had a deep reservoir of family money that would prove beneficial for funding a congressional campaign. Russo received his bachelor's degree from Georgetown University and his law degree from Fordham University. As an attorney, he specialized in real estate, land use, small business, and aviation law. He was also a licensed pilot. In the early stages of the campaign, it appeared that the nominating contest would be between Debicella and Russo. Both had served together in the state senate, both had strong political connections within the fourth district, both were highly educated, and both were young and energetic. And both were good friends.

Rick Torres

Perhaps one of the more unique political figures among those battling for the Republican Party's nomination was Bridgeport native Rick Torres. Torres had once run for mayor of the beleaguered city in a race which drew national attention. He was also known as an outspoken critic of the Democratic Party and the Democratic administration's management of city affairs. He was also a former chairperson of the Republican Party in Bridgeport. Torres owned and operated Harborview Market in the Black Rock area of Bridgeport. He was visible, had name recognition, was controversial, and had a base of support. His personal background was intriguing. Although born in Bridgeport, he lived in Cuba

during his youth. His website indicates that after Castro came to power it took his father five years to leave Cuba and return to the United States. Torres's experience with Castro's communist regime, like many Cuban-Americans who fled Cuba after the communist revolution, deeply influenced his views on politics and government. Torres, not surprisingly, was opposed to big government and centralized power. He described his congressional candidacy as the "third choice" within the context of the highly contentious nominating contest. In Torres's view, he was the clear alternative to both the establishment Republicans and the candidate favored by the Tea Party. Nevertheless, despite his position as the "third choice" for voters, Torres's campaign rhetoric still seemed very similar to the rhetoric espoused by Merkle. For example, Torres's website proclaimed that "in this election the very fabric of our freedoms are under direct assault" and that "it is time to send an authentic American conservative to Washington." The headline on his website advocated "Restoring Liberty and Prosperity by Shrinking Government." Torres's conservative credentials earned him a formal endorsement by the recently formed Conservative Party of Connecticut. He was also endorsed by the Libertarian Party of Connecticut, the Independent Caucus, as well as Peter Schiff, the Libertarian Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate. Torres was an excellent athlete and popular student at Bullard Havens Technical high school in Bridgeport. He attended Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where he graduated with a degree in biology, studied Biochemistry at the UConn Health Center, and at one point had plans to become a medical doctor. He was initially a Democrat, but changed his party affiliation to Republican after becoming disillusioned with the Democratic Party's liberal agenda and support for government programs.

Chris Shays Redux

As the nominating contest was beginning to take shape, former Congressman Chris Shays attended a fundraiser and roast in his honor. The event was held in Fairfield County. It was at this event that Shays suggested, much to everyone's surprise, that he would

like to once again become involved in Connecticut politics. Shays indicated interest in running for governor in light of what he perceived as a weak field of Republican candidates. At the same time, pundits and journalists began speculating that Shays might even consider running for his old congressional seat, particularly since 2010 was a mid-term election without Barack Obama at the top of the ticket. To add fuel to the gossip and speculation, Russo released a surprising poll which showed Shays defeating Jim Himes in a rematch by 19 points. The speculation continued when Shays, who had moved to Maryland, placed a down payment on a condominium in Bridgeport. Shays's reputation as an unpredictable political maverick led one to believe that a political comeback was a distinct possibility. But in the end, Shays chose not to seek the governorship or his former congressional seat. From all indications, he did not want to engage once again in the arduous task of fundraising and experience the stress associated with a gubernatorial or congressional campaign. Following his defeat in 2008, Shays was appointed by President Obama as the Chairperson of the Government Wartime Contracting Commission, which oversees military contracts. Shays has apparently enjoyed his new job and both he and his wife enjoy their new residence in Maryland. He briefly probed the possibility of reentering politics, weighed the pros and cons, and decided against it. It is doubtful if Chris Shays will ever again pursue elected office, although one can never predict what this political maverick will do from one year to the next.

And Then There Were Four

As the nominating contest progressed and the convention scheduled for May 21-22 drew near, it became increasingly clear that Dan Debicella was gaining the necessary momentum required to win his party's endorsement at the convention. As noted, a number of state lawmakers had endorsed him and the evidence suggested growing support among the town committees. As a result of Debicella's momentum, on April 29 Russo abandoned his bid for the nomination. Shortly thereafter, on May 13, Will Gregory also withdrew his

candidacy. Russo would likely have crossed the 15 percent threshold at the convention, yet saw no point in waging a fractious primary against his friend and former senate colleague. In his press conference announcing his decision to withdraw, Russo graciously acknowledged that Debicella had emerged as the strongest and best candidate in the race. He also stated that Debicella had the best chance among Republicans to unseat Himes in the general election. He then publicly endorsed Debicella for Congress. According to data recorded by the Center for Responsive Politics, Russo's last financial report revealed that he had raised \$94,674. Of this amount, only \$2,960 remained. Ninety-eight percent of Russo's campaign money was raised through individual contributions.

Gregory did not have anywhere near the required 15 percent of delegates necessary to qualify for a primary election, nor was he interested in gaining access to the ballot by way of petition. In his e-mail announcing his decision to withdraw, Gregory cited the financial advantage of his Republican opponents, but stopped short of endorsing any one particular candidate. As reported by the Center for Responsive Politics, Gregory had raised only \$19,008, of which \$8,298 remained. Individual contributions accounted for 99 percent of his campaign funds.

The Nominating Convention

The Republican nominating convention was conducted at the Hartford Convention Center on May 21-22, 2010. Unlike previous nominating conventions for Congress, the Republicans nominated all of their congressional candidates at the state convention, rather than conduct five separate district conventions. With respect to the fourth district nomination, the delegate tally from the seventeen communities within the district was overwhelmingly in favor of Debicella. Debicella, whose name was placed in nomination by state senator John McKinney, the son of the late Congressman Stewart B. McKinney, won a majority of delegates on the first ballot from fourteen of the district's towns, resulting in 78 percent of the delegate vote. Neither Herrmann,

Merkle, nor Torres won the necessary 15 percent to automatically qualify for a primary. The delegate vote by each community is shown in table 14.

Table 14
Republican Delegate Tally for Fourth District Nomination

Town	Debicella	Herrmann	Merkle	Torres
Bridgeport	6	0	0	9
Darien	14	1	0	0
Easton	0	6	0	0
Fairfield	24	1	1	0
Greenwich	27	0	1	0
Monroe	10	0	0	1
New Canaan	6	2	4	0
Norwalk	18	2	4	0
Oxford	7	0	0	0
Redding	6	0	0	0
Ridgefield	4	1	8	0
Shelton	16	0	0	0
Stamford	32	2	0	0
Trumbull	17	0	2	0
Weston	6	0	0	0
Westport	8	0	5	0
Wilton	3	0	9	0
Total Number	204	14	34	10
Total Percent	78	5	13	4

Source: Thomas Lambert, “Inside the 4th District Congressional Caucus,” May 21, 2010. Available online at <http://blog.ctnews.com/election2010/2010/05/21>.

Although Debicella had dominated the convention, Herrmann, Merkle, and Torres each indicated that they would petition their way onto the primary ballot. It was clear that the fourth district nominating contest was far from over. Immediately after the convention, the petitions were in circulation and a four-way primary

contest was underway. Primary day for both parties and for all offices was scheduled for Tuesday, August 10. State election law required candidates to collect 1,988 petition signatures by June 8 in order to gain access to the fourth district Republican primary ballot. This number represented 1 percent of the votes cast in the previous fourth district election. The required percentage of signatures is prescribed by state election law.

And Then There Were Three

Approximately two weeks after the May convention, the field of contenders for the fourth district nomination was unexpectedly reduced from four candidates to three. Easton's First Selectman Tom Herrmann, who was the leader in fundraising and, if one accepts the validity of the poll that he released, in voter support, abruptly withdrew from the race due to a controversy involving forged petition signatures in the city of Norwalk. Upon checking the validity of Herrmann's petition signatures, Norwalk's Republican Registrar of Voters Karen Doyle Lyons noticed the name of Patricia Risely. Risely was the wife of Norwalk's Republican Town Committee chairperson, Art Scialabba. The signature itself was described as illegible, the printed name barely legible, the date of birth incorrect, and the street address inaccurate.¹ Lyons noted that additional signatures on Herrmann's petition also raised "red flags." Risely emphatically stated that she never signed Herrmann's petition. Her husband immediately filed a complaint with the state Election Enforcement Commission charging the Herrmann campaign with fraud.

Initially the Herrmann campaign went into a defensive mode, noting that the campaign had collected approximately 2500 signatures, which was well beyond the number required for ballot access. It was suggested that a few aberrant signatures, although unfortunate, were inconsequential. It soon became clear however, that while on average 83 percent of Herrmann's signatures were verified in most of the towns within the district, the verification rate was considerably lower in Norwalk. Thus, the verification rate in

Norwalk, combined with discrepancies in surrounding towns, called into question whether or not Herrmann did in fact have enough valid signatures to qualify for the August primary.² Due to the controversy which cast aspersions on his candidacy for Congress, and rather than wait for final verification of his petition signatures which could be time consuming, Herrmann saw no reason to continue what had now become a tarnished candidacy for Congress. On June 16, Herrmann announced that he was withdrawing from the congressional contest. Herrmann's statement to the media was clear, forthright, and very cognizant of what had transpired in Norwalk: "Despite the hard work of dedicated volunteers and other staff throughout the district, it appears that we will not be able to satisfy the procedural requirement to be on the Republican primary ballot. Although we collected well over 1,988 signatures required from qualified Republican voters, we do not believe enough will be validated to meet the threshold."³ Herrmann's once-promising candidacy was now over due to the reckless conduct of a campaign worker. At the time of his departure from the race, the Center for Responsive Politics reported that Herrmann had raised a total of \$571,294, with \$496,362 still on hand. Seventy percent of his reported money was his own, with 29 percent from individual contributions. Herrmann had by far the most money in his war chest compared to the other candidates. He subsequently endorsed Debicella for Congress.

Thus, by the third week of June, the field of Republican congressional candidates had been cut in half. The contest was now between Debicella, who clearly had the support of the Republican establishment, outsider Rob Merkle, a very conservative candidate formally backed by the Tea Party, and Rick Torres, also a conservative who perceived himself as the "third choice" among Republican primary voters. Moreover, a three-way primary seemed certain in light of the fact that both Merkle and Torres had each secured enough validated signatures to appear on the primary ballot in August. Although Debicella had easily dominated the convention and was still regarded as the frontrunner for the nomination, there was still reason for the state senator to be concerned. After all, both

Merkle and Torres had acquired enough signatures for the primary ballot with relative ease, and there appeared to be a respectable amount of support among conservative Republicans within the district for both candidates. At the same time, although he was not a congressional incumbent, DeBicella was a state senator and thus depicted by his opponents as part of the “political “establishment.” In election year 2010, voters, particularly Republican voters, were restless, angry, and hardly enamored with establishment politicians. Would such a pervasive attitude affect the outcome of the fourth district nominating contest?

Despite the misgivings some voters had towards establishment politicians, DeBicella was clearly in the strongest position as the campaign moved closer to primary day. As reported by the Center for Responsive Politics, DeBicella’s fund raising report as of July 21, 2010, less than three weeks prior to the August 10 primary, recorded that he had raised \$819,617 with \$492,572 cash on hand. One hundred percent of DeBicella’s funds had been raised through individual contributions. Neither Merkle nor Torres were remotely close to DeBicella with regards to fundraising. Merkle’s report indicated that he had raised \$81,044 with \$4,351 cash on hand. Ninety-five percent of Merkle’s campaign money had been raised through individual contributions, with 2 percent raised from PACs. Torres had raised only \$54,021 and had \$3,041 cash on hand. One hundred percent of his campaign money had been raised from individual contributions.

As primary day approached, the federal campaign finance reports of the three candidates suggested a tremendous advantage for DeBicella. In addition to his fundraising advantage, another advantage for DeBicella was that both Merkle and Torres were essentially fighting for the same slice of the Republican primary electorate. Merkle and Torres were both endorsed by conservative organizations and in many ways were almost identical to one another on key issues. Thus, it was quite likely that both candidates would be dividing what potentially could be a decisive conservative voting block on primary day. With voter turnout likely to be low on August 10, the turnout among energized conservatives could sway

the primary outcome. But the potential of the conservative vote would likely be neutralized with two strident and controversial conservatives in the race.

Despite ominous prognostications for Merkle and Torres, both candidates continued to express optimism regarding their prospects for victory. Both candidates were confident that an upset was in the making that would likely stun the Republican establishment and political pundits. Approximately one month prior to the primary, Torres, in a personal phone interview with this author, believed that debates could be the key to his success in the primary election.⁴ However, as of mid-July, only one debate among the three candidates had taken place. The debate held in Danbury was aired on Comcast. Torres felt that more “facetime” as he put it, would demonstrate to primary voters that he was the most knowledgeable candidate. Moreover, Torres felt that more televised debates would demonstrate that he, rather than Rob Merkle, was the only true conservative in the race.

It was apparent that Merkle was banking on the support of an energized Tea Party movement in the fourth district. This was clearly Merkle’s base of support, and it was well understood that his chances of winning the Republican primary depended heavily on the extent to which Tea Party activists could be mobilized. Merkle was confident that Tea Party voters would put him over the top in the primary election. Merkle also stated that he had a “virtual” organization in each of the district’s seventeen communities. In an interview with AP reporter Pat Eaton-Robb, Merkle put it this way: “There are 3,000 to 5,000 Tea Party members in the fourth district alone. These are passionate volunteers that are willing to be organized and go out there and do the heavy lifting and the retail politics.”⁵ It was clear that the August 10 primary would be the first major and visible test of the Tea Party’s strength in the fourth congressional district. There was, however, a minor test of the movement’s strength prior to the Republican primary which deserves comment. This contest, which was largely conducted under the radar of the mass media, provided a glimpse into the emerging influence of the Tea Party within Fairfield County. A concise summary of this “under the radar” contest follows.

The Republican Nominating Contest for the 132nd Legislative District

In 2010, two candidates competed for the Republican Party's nomination for the 132nd state legislative district. This district, like all house districts in Connecticut, consists of approximately 30,000 residents. The 132nd district is contained within a portion of the town of Fairfield. The two Republican candidates competing for their party's nomination were Brenda Kupchick and Christopher DeSanctis. Kupchick had been a constituent service representative on Congressman Shays's district staff, a businesswoman for many years, an elected member of Fairfield's Representative Town Meeting (RTM), and a member of several committees and commissions in the town of Fairfield. At the time of her candidacy she was a constituent service representative for state senator John McKinney. Like Shays and McKinney, Kupchick was known as a moderate and centrist Republican. Her candidacy was endorsed by a number of moderate Republicans, including Shays and McKinney, the former Republican first selectman of Fairfield, and several former state representatives also from Fairfield.

DeSanctis was a former Communications Aide to the former mayor of Jersey City, New Jersey. He had also been appointed by Connecticut Governor M. Jodi Rell to a transportation council and by the state house minority leader Lawrence Cafero to a property tax commission. He was an adjunct political science professor at Sacred Heart University and worked as a development and communications professional for private schools and other non-profit organizations. DeSanctis was an evangelical Christian and known in Republican circles as a very principled conservative. He was the Republican Party's nominee for the 132nd district in 2006, but lost the election to Democratic incumbent Tom Drew.

Although the 2010 nominating contest was between two Republicans, there was nevertheless a fairly stark contrast between the two candidates with respect to ideology. What also made this race different from many other state legislative primaries in Connecticut was that the Tea Party was making its voice known by

formally endorsing DeSanctis. The Tea Party at this point in time was active primarily in national politics, but within the context of Connecticut politics, it had yet to make its presence felt. DeSanctis was endorsed by two Tea Party organizations, Right Principles, headed by the controversial and outspoken Fairfield resident Bob MacGuffie, as well as the Fairfield Tea Party. MacGuffie was one of the central figures of the Tea Party movement in the United States and had authored the statement of principles subscribed to by many Tea Party groups across the country. Thus, at the risk of oversimplification, it seemed as if the Republican nominating contest for the 132nd district would serve as the first serious test of the Tea Party's electoral influence within the confines of Fairfield County. Because any registered Republican within the 132nd district was allowed to participate in the caucus, there was reason to believe that Tea Party activists would make a concerted effort to dominate the caucus proceedings. The caucus was scheduled, for May 18, 2010.

The Caucus Results

As the Republican nominating caucus for the 132nd legislative district concluded, it was evident that the Tea Party's presence had been pronounced, although not enough to overcome the establishment's support for Kupchick. The final caucus vote was 206 for Kupchick and 178 for DeSanctis. There were five polling places within the district where registered Republicans were allowed to vote. In some respects, the Fairfield caucuses had the appearance of a primary election. Five polling places which provided opportunities for any registered Republican to participate seemed a far cry from the more typical closed caucuses dominated by party organization officials. There was a certain robustness to the caucuses, unlike caucus contests in many other communities. The ballots were officially counted at the Roger Sherman School, which also served as one of the five polling places. Although there were no exit polls conducted, it was evident that Tea Party activists did participate in the caucus proceedings and were very attracted to DeSanctis's

conservative message. As DeSanctis noted in an interview with this author, “Going up against such a strong and experienced candidate with tremendous establishment support, such as Brenda, and yet coming so close to winning, was almost seen as a victory of sorts.”⁶ In a conversation between DeSanctis and state senator McKinney following the caucus, McKinney noted how “shocked” he was when the final votes were tallied. He did not expect the contest to be as competitive as it was. Despite encouragement from Tea Party activists and other supporters for DeSanctis to wage a primary, he chose not to do so. Rather than contest the nomination, he instead published a letter in which he thanked his supporters and endorsed Kupchick’s candidacy.

As noted, few journalists devoted much coverage to the dynamics of this Republican nominating contest. This was understandable, as state legislative nominating caucuses are not the subject of prime time newscasts. Nevertheless, this seemingly low profile nominating contest did provide insight into the rising power of the Tea Party movement in Fairfield County. An important question was thus raised. Did the Republican nominating caucus for the 132nd state legislative district help prepare and motivate the Tea Parties for the forthcoming congressional primary scheduled for August 10? The results of the congressional primary would shed more light on the Tea Party’s influence.

The Blogosphere and a Minor Brushfire

In the days prior to the August 10 primary, the so-called “blogosphere,” not surprisingly, was home to myriad posts concerning the three Republican candidates. Supporters of the candidates would post and, of course, there would be the usual rebuttals. Political scientists have yet to empirically gauge the effect of blogs on voting behavior, and there will be no attempt to do so in this study. It was unlikely that bloggers, right or left, were in any way structuring the outcome of the Republican congressional nominating contest. There was, however, one rather tawdry episode that arose from a YouTube clip entitled “Reefer Rob” which deserves

mention. This rather distasteful clip resulted in a story published in the *Connecticut Post* on July 18, 2010. The article was penned by *Post* reporter Rob Varnon and entitled “Reefer Madness Grips GOP Congressional Race.”⁷ The story involved Rob Merkle’s arrest in Florida in 2001 for possession of a marijuana joint. He was charged with a misdemeanor and his punishment involved participation in a first time offender program, along with a stint of community service. The video clip, which gave rise to Varnon’s story, was clearly intended to cast aspersions on Merkle’s character.

The video, which contained an assortment of disparaging images of Merkle set to the tune of Afroman’s “Because I Got High,” appeared to be the handiwork of an individual whose pseudonym was “harryrockwell88.” An attempt by reporter Varnon to reach the producer of the clip for comment was unsuccessful. Merkle informed Varnon that the video, at least in his view, skated very close to libel. Merkle also suggested that Torres was likely behind the video, although he admitted that he lacked proof of Torres’s involvement. Torres denied involvement in the video, although he did tell Varnon that “Everything is fair game” and that “people want to know the character of a person.” Torres admitted to Varnon that he too had once smoked marijuana, but at a much younger age than when Merkle was arrested. The article further noted that the two candidates disagreed over the issue of legalizing marijuana. Merkle was opposed to the legalization of marijuana and believed that marijuana users should be prosecuted. Torres favored the legalization of marijuana, which is the position supported by libertarians.

In the article, Torres accused Merkle of being hypocritical on this issue, given his arrest record and lenient treatment by the court.⁸ But what made this political skirmish particularly fascinating, at least in this author’s view, was how the subject of marijuana could actually surface as a point of contention between two conservative and very principled candidates for the United States Congress. State senator Debicella probably read the *Post’s* article with much amusement and likely enjoyed watching his two primary opponents collide over such an arcane and inconsequential issue. The “reefer” issue was hardly the high water mark of the Republican nominating contest.

With respect to DeBicella, it was apparent that in the days just prior to the August 10 primary, the Republican frontrunner, rather than criticize his primary opponents, was looking ahead to the general election. He began running ads on television two weeks prior to the August primary in which he presented himself as a fiscal conservative. Not surprisingly, DeBicella criticized Jim Himes as a free-spending, big government Democrat. Neither Merkle or Torres were running television ads due to their shallow war chests. DeBicella also issued a controversial press release critical of Himes's support of signs along various Connecticut highway construction sites that had been funded by federal stimulus money. The signs read *Putting America To Work: Project Funded By The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*. DeBicella accused Himes of wasting federal dollars on the signs that had been funded by stimulus tax dollars and costing in the vicinity of \$125,000. DeBicella further criticized Himes for his support of the stimulus plan itself:

These signs are just one example of how the stimulus has been an absolute failure in Fairfield County. Congress and Jim Himes are wasting taxpayer dollars, while doing nothing to help create jobs. Every Fairfield County family has been saddled with another \$10,000 in debt as a result of Jim Himes's vote in favor of the stimulus – yet our unemployment still hovers around 10 percent.⁹

The Himes campaign immediately responded to DeBicella's press release by referring to him as a "hypocrite" who routinely took credit for publicly funded projects in his state senatorial district. It was evident that the general election campaign for both candidates had begun well before the August 10 primary.

The August 10 Primary: And Then There Was One

As expected, DeBicella won the Republican primary with relative ease. He won 16,493 votes, which accounted for 60 percent of total votes cast. Merkle won 6,578 votes, which comprised 24

percent of the vote. Torres received 4,464 votes, which was 16 percent of votes cast. Such figures included 100 percent of reported precincts.¹⁰ Table 15 presents the town-by-town results.

Table 15
2010 Republican Primary Election Results
for the Fourth Congressional District

Town	Debicella	Torres	Merkle
Bridgeport	342	448	138
Darien	1216	139	300
Easton	214	180	55
Fairfield	1,549	680	455
Greenwich	2,254	315	769
Monroe	655	160	102
New Canaan	899	251	532
Norwalk	1,171	196	704
Oxford	352	213	79
Redding	353	72	212
Ridgefield	775	190	615
Shelton (Part)	1,243	110	184
Stamford	2,607	422	233
Trumbull	1,084	684	233
Weston	333	62	83
Westport	1,001	204	241
Wilton	445	138	643
Total	16,493 (60%)	4,464 (16%)	6,578 (24%)

Source: Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.

Debicella's war chest in comparison to Merkle's and Torres's, his name recognition as a state senator, the support he received from party organizations in the various towns throughout the district, as well as his moderate brand of Republicanism which characterizes the majority of registered Republicans in the fourth district, contributed to Debicella's overwhelming primary victory. The state senator won fifteen of the seventeen communities within the district.

Torres won Bridgeport, which was his home town, and Merkle carried Wilton. In many of the communities, as the data show, Debicella received landslide victories.

Whether or not Merkle's and Torres's supporters within the fourth congressional district would rally behind Debicella in the general election was a legitimate question. Like the two candidates, supporters of Merkle and Torres, many of whom were associated with, or at least sympathetic to, the Tea Party, were "hard core" conservatives who placed principles ahead of politics. A moderate Republican willing to compromise in the interest of winning moderate voters, and hence the general election, was not the type of politician favored by supporters of Merkle or Torres. Thus, there was reason to believe that Merkle's and Torres's supporters might be inclined to stay at home on election day, rather than vote for a moderate Republican. This had to be a serious concern for the Debicella campaign, particularly since Merkle and Torres together collected 40 percent of the Republican primary vote.

However, the notion that Tea Party supporters in the fourth congressional district would stay at home on election day was not a view that was necessarily shared by Tea Party spokesperson MacGuffie. In an interview with this author, MacGuffie indicated that while Tea Party supporters were less than enamored with Debicella, it was still likely that they would support the state senator on election day simply because of their opposition to Congressman Himes. MacGuffie described the somewhat conflicted situation in these terms:

The grassroots in the 4th believe that Debicella generally buys into the big government model to some degree. Both his voting record and public statements are mixed as to whether he holds, or would fight for any conservative beliefs. While he may deliver a critical vote or two for us, e.g., repealing healthcare, he does not exude the spirit of one who will vigorously fight for conservative beliefs – he believes in compromise rather than confrontation with

failed Liberal ideology. We therefore believe he is not tough or tenacious enough to go on a relentless offensive in the campaign against Himes. The citizens need to see that Himes's philosophy, guiding stars, and voting record are all wrong for both his district and the nation. . . . We will continue to oppose Himes at his every public appearance (as we have for the past year) and weaken him in the public eye. A realistic take on the 4th district grassroots is that many will continue to protest Himes, some may take actions on behalf of Debicella's campaign, but none will stay home on Election Day. There is far too much at stake for the Republic.¹¹

The general election campaign between Himes and Debicella was destined to be a bruising political battle. It was evident from the very beginning that attack ads and negative campaigning would be employed with regularity in order to define one's opponent. This became obvious shortly after Debicella gave his primary election victory speech at the Norwalk Inn. On the very night of Debicella's victory speech, in which he proclaimed that the forthcoming election would be about "putting America back on track" and preserving "the future of our country," the Himes campaign circulated a strongly worded and caustic global e-mail that criticized the voting record of the state senator.¹² The attack e-mail, if that's what it can be called, was distributed by Mark Henson, the campaign manager for Congressman Himes. The e-mail described Debicella as "radical," due to his record of supporting insurance companies over the medical needs of children and cancer patients, "reckless," for having the worst environmental record of any Connecticut state senator, and "wrong," for being one of three senators to vote against a bill that would have required hospitals in Connecticut to provide emergency contraception for women who were raped. The extremely disparaging statements from the Himes campaign on the very night of the primary suggested rather clearly that the Congressman viewed Debicella as a formidable opponent.

CHAPTER SIX

The 2010 Election Campaign

The fourth congressional district in Connecticut was among several districts in the U.S. in which the Republican Party had serious hopes of achieving victory. In the view of Republican operatives, because the fourth congressional district in Connecticut was historically a Republican district, it therefore naturally belonged to the GOP. Himes's election victory against Shays in 2008 was viewed as an aberration attributed to the political coattails of Barack Obama. Without Obama on the ticket, Republicans were confident that fourth district voters in 2010 would once again return a Republican to Congress. Moreover, it was well understood that Congressman Himes was a freshman congressman and that he had had yet to establish himself as a household name.

National public opinion polls suggested that voters in 2010 favored political change inside the Beltway. Such polling data further served to bolster the hopes of the Republicans. Consider the national poll averages presented in August on the informative website, Real Clear Politics. Only 45 percent of Americans expressed approval of President Obama's job performance, while 51 percent indicated disapproval. Thirty-two percent of the American people felt the country was heading in the "right direction," while 61 percent believed the country was on the "wrong track." A mere 21 percent of Americans approved of the job Congress was doing, while 72 percent disapproved of Congress's performance. Also, in a generic matchup, 47 percent of

persons polled indicated that they favored Republican candidates, compared to 41 percent who supported Democrats. In practically every poll, the results suggested that the voters were disillusioned with Congress, congressional incumbents, and President Obama. At the same time, voters were not at all pleased with the direction the country was heading. Polling data, albeit national in scope, suggested that the American electorate, like 2008, was once again poised for “change.”¹ Such findings, although not specific to the fourth congressional district, had to be disconcerting to not only Congressman Himes, but also a number of Democratic congressional incumbents, particularly those with seats in swing districts. The 2010 mid-term election was unfolding within the context of a very disillusioned and angry electorate.

The First Poll of Fourth District Voters

In addition to national poll results, a poll of the fourth district was released in mid-August which most certainly raised the hopes of the DeBicella campaign. The poll was conducted by Ayers, McHenry and Associates, Inc., located in Alexandria, Virginia, a polling firm which often conducts polls for Republican candidates.² The fourth district poll was conducted on July 28, 29, 31 and August 1. A total of 400 likely voters were polled. The poll was conducted on behalf of the American Action Forum, a center-right think tank located in Washington, D.C. Because of the political leanings of both the polling firm and the American Action Forum, one was necessarily skeptical of the findings. However, in this author’s view, the questions presented in this poll seemed straightforward and the results objectively presented. Moreover, when appropriate, the questions were rotated from time-to-time in order to gather reliable data concerning policy issues.

Some of the key findings from this poll were as follows: Sixty-three percent of fourth district residents responded that America was on the “wrong track.” This finding was practically a mirror image of the nation at large. A large plurality of fourth district voters, 48 percent, replied that the economy, unemployment, and jobs were

among the most important issues facing the United States. A plurality of respondents, 27 percent, identified control over government spending as the factor that would most likely affect their vote in November. Twenty-five percent identified jobs as the issue that would guide their vote. Thirty-nine percent of persons polled indicated that the next member of Congress from the fourth district should be a Republican, while 33 percent favored a Democrat. Forty-six percent of fourth district respondents indicated opposition to the recent health care reform law, while 42 percent supported the reform effort.

With respect to the name recognition of the two candidates, 94 percent of respondents had heard of Jim Himes, while only 35 percent were familiar with Dan DeBicella. Forty-four percent of the poll's respondents had a favorable opinion of Himes, while only 14 percent had a favorable opinion of DeBicella. Thirty-one percent expressed an unfavorable opinion of Himes, while 6 percent had an unfavorable view towards DeBicella. This was not surprising. If a person being polled had never heard of a candidate, it would be difficult of course to express an opinion one way or another about the individual in question. But to the most important question – “If the election for Congress were being held today and the candidates were Dan DeBicella, the Republican, and Jim Himes, the Democrat, for which candidate would you vote?” – 46 percent stated they would vote for Himes, while 42 percent chose DeBicella. Twelve percent of the sample indicated that they were still undecided. At the same time, 46 percent of respondents expressed the view that it was “time to give someone else a chance,” while 40 percent replied that Himes deserved reelection.

It should also be noted that a careful review of the demographic profile of the 400 respondents in this poll did not suggest a bias towards one particular demographic subgroup. The sample was evenly split between males and females. Different age and income groups were also well represented, and the sample consisted of a respectable mix of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats. Poll respondents also represented a range of ideological orientations. Various religious denominations were represented, along with different ethnic backgrounds. The sample, not surprisingly, was 81 percent white. It

should also be noted that 60 percent of the respondents were pro-choice and 79 percent of the respondents were non-evangelical Christian. The poll suggested that a close race was definitely emerging.

Himes's Inherent Advantage

Although the fourth district contest seemed to be the most competitive congressional contest in Connecticut, Congressman Himes still retained some very basic advantages. As noted in a previous chapter, the fourth congressional district, like congressional districts throughout the New England states, had experienced a series of important demographic changes that served the interests of Democratic congressional candidates. At the same time, irrespective of the fact that Himes was a freshman congressman seeking reelection, he was still a congressional incumbent. As any first-year student of American politics knows, congressional incumbents have an inherent advantage over congressional challengers. Granted, many voters in 2010 were disillusioned with "establishment politicians." But this did not negate what resources were available to congressional incumbents seeking reelection. Despite a somewhat uneven start, Congressman Himes had in fact assembled a district staff which by 2010 was efficiently meeting the needs of fourth district constituents. Debicella's constituent service was largely confined to his own state senatorial district. Constituent casework, as political scientist Morris P. Fiorina empirically demonstrated in his landmark work on Congress, is among the chief reasons why congressional incumbents prevail over challengers.³

Despite a sharp learning curve for newly-assembled district staffs, particularly with respect to solving constituent problems, Himes's staff from all indications had performed remarkably well during the Congressman's first term. In addition to bipartisan constituent service, Himes, as demonstrated in the previous poll, also had more name recognition compared to Debicella. This was not unusual, as incumbents typically enjoy more name recognition compared to challengers. Although Debicella was a state senator, his

senatorial district was not an integral part of the fourth congressional district. He represented the 21st state senatorial district which consisted of Shelton, Stratford, a portion of Monroe, and a portion of Seymour. Of the four towns in the 21st senatorial district, only the town of Monroe was fully located within the fourth congressional district. The towns of Stratford and Seymour were located within the third congressional district, while the town of Shelton, which is where Debicella resided, was located in both the third and fourth congressional districts. Thus, Debicella's constituent service as a state senator extended to a sizeable number of constituents who would be voting for congressional candidates competing in the third, rather than the fourth, congressional district contest.

Another clear advantage for Himes involved his fundraising capacity. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, by mid-August Himes had amassed more than three times as much campaign money as Dibicella, \$2,618,136 compared to \$819,671. The fourth congressional district is located in one of the very best media markets within the United States, and there was little doubt that campaign ads on television would have a decisive role in conveying the image and legislative records of both candidates. Television ads are extremely expensive; thus the capacity of both candidates to raise enough funds required for a full-scale media-based campaign would prove to be of vital importance. Himes had the advantage with respect to fundraising.

Heading into September, it had become clear what the basic strategies of both campaigns would be. With unaffiliated and moderate voters comprising the largest block of voters in the fourth district, both candidates would be delivering messages which both secured their base and, more important, appealed to the center of the political spectrum. This was particularly evident with the Himes campaign, which began airing ads identifying the Congressman as "New England's Most Independent Congressman." Recognizing that the district has historically favored political mavericks, such as Shays, McKinney, and Weicker, Himes began adopting the moniker of the "independent" Congressman who, like his predecessors, was not beholden to his party's leadership or special interests. To further

demonstrate his “New England independence,” Himes broke ranks from President Obama and his party’s leadership by favoring an extension of the Bush tax cuts. Himes’s position was at odds with the other members of Connecticut’s congressional delegation, all of whom were Democrats. And to further demonstrate his independent credentials, Himes along with seven other House Democrats sent a letter to President Obama urging the president to extend the cuts.

Himes’s break from his party’s leadership on the tax issue was understandable in light of the nonpartisan Tax Foundation’s study which concluded that middle income families in Connecticut’s fourth congressional district would save approximately \$2,743 if the Bush tax cuts were extended. There was a rather stark difference in savings between fourth district residents and the residents of congressional district one (\$1,747), district two (\$1,892), district three (\$1,726), and district five (\$1,818).⁴ It should also be noted that Himes’s position on the tax cuts in 2010 was very different from his original position in 2008. Speaking to *Patch* reporter Cathryn J. Prince in 2010, Himes stated rather emphatically that “this is no time to be raising taxes.”⁵ Yet during the 2008 campaign Himes was adamantly opposed to President Bush’s tax plan. Not surprisingly, Himes was accused by Debicella of doing an election year “flip flop” on the issue.⁶ At the same time, it was clear that the Himes campaign was going to do its very best to define for the voters precisely who Dan Debicella was. Himes’s ads, which streaked across the Internet on the night of Debicella’s primary victory, routinely reiterated the same message. Himes’s ads continued to describe the state senator as “radical,” “reckless,” and “wrong” on the issues. Whether or not the Himes campaign was successfully defining Debicella as a right wing and dangerous ideologue was difficult to determine, given the absence of polling data, although it was clear that the Himes team believed that such a strategy was key to the Congressman’s reelection.

Debicella fought back with ads that attempted to present himself as the true Independent, while simultaneously depicting Himes as a far-left ideologue who marched in step with House Speaker Nancy

Pelosi. It was evident that Debicella's strategy, like that of Himes, was designed to prevent his opponent from securing the support of moderate voters. Neither candidate seemed willing to extol the virtues of their own political party, and both candidates were obviously attempting to define their opponent as one who marched with his party's ideological fringes. Both candidates were desperately attempting to seize the center of the fourth district's electorate. With unaffiliated voters comprising 40 percent of voters within the district, the candidate who was the most successful at doing this would likely be victorious in November. In early September Debicella aired a television ad aimed directly at women voters. The ad featured three middle-class white women speaking on behalf of Debicella. The women in individual segments endorsed his plan to cut federal spending and help small business owners. Debicella was also described in the ad as pro choice, in favor of equal pay for women, and in favor of legislation that increased penalties for sexual assault. It was clear that Debicella, like Himes, regarded women as a vitally important political constituency within the fourth district.

Potential Variables

The Order of Candidates on the Ballot

Whether or not the top of the ticket would affect the fourth district contest was a legitimate question as the fall campaign commenced. Although election year 2010 was a mid-term congressional election, there was still speculation that the top of the ticket, despite the absence of a popular presidential candidate, could still affect voting behavior in the congressional election. State statute clearly identifies the order in which the various offices are to be listed. For 2010, the horizontal listing of offices would be as follows:

Governor/Lieutenant Governor
United States Senate
United States Congress
State Senate

State House
Secretary of State
State Treasurer
Comptroller
Attorney General
Judge of Probate

The two offices at the top of the ticket were particularly intriguing. The Democrats had nominated Dan Malloy as their party's gubernatorial candidate. Malloy was the former mayor of the city of Stamford, one of the three urban communities located in Fairfield County. The Republicans had nominated Tom Foley as their gubernatorial candidate. Foley was a wealthy businessman who had been appointed as the U.S. Ambassador to Ireland under President George W. Bush. Bush had also appointed Foley to oversee private sector development in Iraq. Foley was from Greenwich, a prosperous "gold coast" community also located within Fairfield County. However, it was the U.S. Senate race, not the gubernatorial contest, which was attracting the most attention among Connecticut voters. Richard "Dick" Blumenthal, Connecticut's longtime Attorney General, had been nominated as the Democratic Party's candidate for the senate seat that was being vacated by the long term incumbent Senator Chris Dodd. Linda McMahon, the former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment, was the nominee of the Republican Party. Like Malloy and Foley, both Blumenthal and McMahon were from Fairfield County, and Greenwich in particular. Moreover, both the gubernatorial and senate races were characterized by open seats, with no incumbent seeking reelection for either office. It was difficult to predict precisely how the gubernatorial election and the very high-profile and nationally watched U.S. Senate contest would structure congressional voting behavior within the fourth district.

State law mandates that the party that controls the governorship will automatically have the top row on the election ballot. The Republicans would therefore have Row A and the Democrats Row B. Although there is no empirical research to

suggest that the top row on an election ballot provides an inherent advantage to candidates, the placement of the parties' candidates in relation to one another was nevertheless worth pondering. Would Row A candidates have an advantage compared to Row B candidates? Also, because of the Help America Vote Act, which passed in the aftermath of the controversial 2000 presidential election, Connecticut voters were now using optical scan ballots rather than casting votes in a voting machine. Since 2006, voters in Connecticut were now filling in circles with a pencil and then feeding the sheet into a machine which recorded the vote. Did using a pencil to fill in circles on a scantron sheet in any way affect the choice of candidates who were not at the top of the ticket? Did paper ballots increase or diminish the chance of coattails? Although seemingly trivial, this was a question worth considering.

Voter Turnout

Another variable that affects the outcome of elections is voter turnout. Mid-term elections are notorious for recording much lower rates of voter turnout compared to presidential elections. Without a presidential candidate at the top of the ticket, it was more than likely that voter turnout in each of the fourth district's seventeen communities would be substantially lower compared to 2008. It was also reasonable to expect much lower voter turnout in Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk, given the fact that President Obama would not be on the ticket. Lower voter turnout in the district's cities would elevate the importance of the district's suburban communities, which normally have higher rates of voter turnout due to higher educational and economic levels. Although a number of suburban communities have many unaffiliated voters and several of these communities have been voting more Democratic compared to past years, there was reason to believe that a lower level of voter turnout would likely help the Republican candidate. The electorate would be a smaller electorate compared to 2008. It would also be a more educated and wealthier electorate, characteristics that tend to favor Republicans. The electorate would

likely be a “whiter” electorate as well, which translates into Republican support. In short, the potential of partisan coattails, the use of paper ballots, the placement of a party’s candidates on either Row A or B, along with lower levels of voter turnout, all seemed to have potential consequences concerning the outcome of the forthcoming contest.

The Role of Outside Organizations

An additional variable that could potentially affect the election outcome involved the role of outside organizations. As the general election campaign commenced in late August, it was not at all clear how much influence special interest groups would have in this particular contest. As of September, Debicella had not received any funding from Political Action Committees. Congressman Himes, on the other hand, had received a sizeable chunk of money from special interest PACs. As reported by the Center for Responsive Politics, 35 percent of Himes’s campaign war chest was comprised of PAC dollars. Whether or not Debicella would turn to PACS to close the wide chasm in fundraising was a legitimate question. Moreover, it was also unclear what role corporations and labor unions would play in the approaching fourth district contest. The 2009 U.S. Supreme Court ruling of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* raised the possibility that campaign ads sponsored by corporations and labor unions might flood the airwaves as election day drew near. If corporate and labor union money should pour into the district, which of the two candidates would be the political beneficiary? Although labor unions have historically supported Democrats and corporations Republicans, it is also true that corporations have enjoyed supporting incumbents of both parties due to their perceived chance of winning. Thus, there was no guarantee that the Republican challenger would benefit from corporate-sponsored advertising. It was also unclear if non-connected ideological PACs would begin airing ads for or against either candidate.

The Hill Committees

It was also not clear if the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and the National Republican Congressional Committees (NRCC), also known as the “Hill Committees,” would assist the two candidates with funding and campaign ads. The word that was circulating in late August was that the Hill Committees in 2010 were going to be extremely judicious with respect to helping members of their party involved in congressional contests. Because of the recession, the Hill Committees had less success compared to previous years with congressional fundraising. As a result, only the most competitive races and the most viable candidates would be assisted. With respect to the Democrats, there was talk of a “triage” strategy, suggesting that the DCCC would help only those Democratic congressional candidates who seemed to have a realistic chance of winning.⁷ Those Democrats who according to polls appeared to be losing their seats to a Republican challenger or who seemed incapable of unseating a Republican incumbent would essentially be “cut loose.” The race for Connecticut’s fourth congressional district was a competitive race, hardly in the “triage” category, and there was ample reason to believe that the DCCC would assist Congressman Himes with resources. And there was reason to believe that the Republican “Hill Committee” would help DeBicella.

Endorsements

In addition to the prospect of Hill Committee involvement, one could not help but wonder if personalities and political figures would appear in the fourth district on behalf of the two candidates. For example, would President Obama make an appearance on behalf of Congressman Himes? The President, after all, did attend a fundraiser in Stamford during the month of September for Dick Blumenthal. Although the President’s public approval ratings had precipitously declined, he was not by any means kept at arms length by the Blumenthal campaign. Thus, there was reason to

believe that Himes too would welcome the President's presence in the fourth district. Surrogates for the president were also a very distinct possibility.

On the Republican side, it was quite conceivable that the Republican Party's former presidential candidate Arizona Senator John McCain might appear on behalf of Debicella. Former Massachusetts governor and former presidential candidate Mitt Romney was also among the possible high-profile political figures who might make an appearance. Both candidates would benefit from the help of high-profile political personalities.

A Second Poll of Fourth District Voters

In addition to the previously cited Ayers, McHenry and Associates Poll which was conducted during the month of August, the Debicella campaign released an internal poll conducted in late September.⁸ The poll was conducted by National Research, Inc., which, like Ayers, McHenry and Associates, is a leading Republican polling firm. The poll was conducted in late September among 300 likely voters with a margin of error of plus or minus 5.66 percent. Thirty-six percent of the sample consisted of registered Democrats, 34 percent were registered Republicans, and 30 percent were registered Independents. The poll revealed a virtual tie between Himes and Debicella. Forty-two percent of persons polled expressed support for Himes, while 42 percent indicated support for Debicella. Fourteen percent of the sample were undecided. According to the release, Debicella led Himes 47 percent to 28 percent among unaffiliated voters. He also led Himes 44 percent to 42 percent among voters who were most likely to vote on election day. Debicella also led Himes 45 percent to 42 percent among voters who had heard of both candidates. At the same time, Debicella led Himes 53 percent to 38 percent among voters who had formed an opinion of both candidates. Whether or not the internal poll was an accurate portrayal of voter preferences was of course difficult to ascertain in light of the polling firm's connection to the Republican Party. Yet it was not surprising that the Debicella campaign would enthusiastically tout the results of his internal poll.

Six Debates in October

As the campaign progressed into the month of October, debates between the two candidates took center stage. With the election appearing more and more competitive, there was reason to believe that the debates might determine the outcome of the fourth district contest. Although debates for congressional contests are normally low profile events, the Himes versus Debicella debates received considerable media coverage and were fairly well attended by fourth district residents. The candidates had agreed to a series of six debates during the month of October.

The First Debate

The first debate was held at the Holiday Inn in Bridgeport, on October 13 at 7:00 P.M. The debate was sponsored by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). According to reporter Cathryn J. Prince, the first debate involved serious and substantive discussion concerning several domestic policies.⁹ Debate topics included social security, health care, the federal deficit, and the economy. Other than both candidates expressing opposition to the privatization of social security, an understandable position particularly in light of the debate sponsor, there seemed to be fundamental disagreements between the two candidates on practically every domestic issue. For example, Congressman Himes defended his support of the stimulus bill and cited the number of police and firefighter jobs that were created in fourth district communities. Debicella expressed opposition to the bill, which he believed was passed at taxpayers' expense. Himes again accused Debicella of hypocrisy by reminding the viewers that Debicella was willing to accept stimulus money for the purpose of preserving jobs in his own state senatorial district. Several times in the debate, Debicella, in order to paint the Congressman as a strident liberal, attempted to link Himes's policies with those of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Himes expressed regret over Debicella's repeated comments and accused the state senator of "obnoxious

partisanship.” The two candidates also sparred over health care reform and what effect this legislation will have on taxes and Medicare. Although Debicella’s positions reflected a conservative posture, he was quick to suggest that his political orientation was quite similar to that of former Congressman Chris Shays.

The Second Debate

A second debate occurred on October 21 at 7:00 P.M. at the Stamford Holiday Inn, sponsored by the World Affairs Forum. Although national security issues were supposed to be the focus of the ninety-minute debate, the clash of views inevitably drifted into domestic issues as well as questions of personal character. As reporter Elizabeth Kim, who covered the debate, noted:

On questions related to Mexican drug cartels and China, Republican challenger state Sen. Dan Debicella, R-21, managed to squeeze in his criticism of Democratic incumbent Jim Himes for his support of the administration’s stimulus program, while Himes sought to stress signs of recovery and associate his opponent with the failed policies of Republican President George W. Bush.¹⁰

According to Kim, the two candidates expressed some differences about national security matters, such as the war in Afghanistan, but on most foreign policy issues, such as trade with China and the establishment of relations with Cuba, there seemed to be a consensus.

The Third Debate

Shortly after the second debate, a third debate was conducted on October 24 at 4:00 P.M. at Wilton High School, sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Foreign policy issues were included in the third debate, and for the most part both candidates expressed similar views on such issues as Afghanistan and Iraq. But as reporter

Paul Schott noted, a substantial portion of the debate centered on domestic issues, such as the stimulus bill, health care reform, and taxes.¹¹ With regard to domestic issues, the candidates once again espoused contrasting policy perspectives. Congressman Himes expressed support for the efforts of the Obama administration, while Debicella accused the Democrats of incurring more debt and engaging in reckless spending. Both candidates assailed one another's voting record. Debicella cited Himes's routine support of Nancy Pelosi's agenda, while Himes countered with a scathing critique of Debicella's voting record as a state senator, in particular his record on the environment. Both candidates also accused the other of accepting money from special interest groups.

Regarding health care, Himes cited the benefits of the recently passed health care reform bill. The Congressman identified various virtues of the new law, such as the prohibition that is now placed on insurance companies from denying coverage for individuals with preexisting conditions, and the new law's provision which allows persons up to the age of twenty-six to remain on their parents' health care plan. Debicella, on the other hand, stated that health care reform should have included tort reform, more competition between health care providers across state lines, as well as more attention directed towards preventive medicine.

The Fourth Debate

The fourth debate occurred on October 26 at Housatonic Community College. This debate was sponsored by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council, and perhaps to no one's surprise, centered primarily on the stimulus bill, although the subject of educational reform was also discussed. Debate points seemed to echo those articulated in previous debates, with Debicella criticizing Himes for irresponsible spending and Himes countering with the virtues of the stimulus bill, as well as Debicella's willingness to take credit for stimulus projects in his state senatorial district. Reporter Genevieve Reilly captured one of the exchanges:

DEBICELLA: The pork barrel stimulus package has done nothing to stimulate the economy. . . . It's not working.
HIMES: Nobody rode that pork barrel with more happiness than Dan Debicella. . . . You can't have it both ways.¹²

According to Reilly, both candidates cited their various newspaper endorsements and both attempted to link their opponent with unpopular leaders within their party. Debicella accused Himes of supporting the agenda of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, while Himes attempted to connect Debicella with the failed policies of George W. Bush. While the debate turned largely on the stimulus bill and the state of the economy, the two candidates did debate educational reform and the environment. Fairly sharp contrasts were presented by both candidates on these issues, although the debate kept returning to the stimulus bill. As Reilly put it, "The stimulus package and the economy was front and center at the debate, even when the topic was education."¹³

The Fifth Debate

The fifth debate was held on the University of Connecticut branch campus in Stamford at 9:00 A.M. on October 28. This debate was hosted by the Fairfield County Community Business Council/Bar Association. As reporter Cathryn J. Prince, who covered the debate, noted, "It wasn't exactly CNN's *Crossfire*" but nevertheless the debate "did touch on policy differences."¹⁴ Tort reform appeared to be a central issue in the fifth debate. Congressman Himes recognized that it was a controversial issue but cited the Congressional Budget Office report that only one or two percent of health care costs are actually affected by litigation. Debicella took issue with Himes's somewhat dismissive observation and stressed that tort reform needed to be included as part of any health care reform effort. Debicella stated that doctors frequently perform multiple tests in order to protect themselves from potential lawsuits. This, in his view, does in fact adversely affect the costs associated with health care.

Following tort reform, the debate focused on transportation policy. Debicella favored a widening of I-95, particularly at exits 35, 41, and 44, while Himes seemed to favor modernizing train service in Fairfield County. The Congressman noted how improved the Wilton train station was as a result of stimulus money. As the Congressman said, "Let's think in a visionary way. Lets really make Metro North work. Let's get people on trains."¹⁵ In addition to tort reform and transportation, this debate, like previous ones, became accusatory. Debicella continued to link Himes with House Speaker Pelosi, suggesting that he was a left-wing Democrat, while Himes continued to portray Debicella as a right-wing extremist Republican. The strategy, of course, was to appeal to moderate unaffiliated voters. The debate also became heated and somewhat personal when Himes mentioned Debicella's vote against legislation that required Catholic hospitals to allow a third party to provide emergency contraception to women who had been raped. Debicella defended his anti-abortion position and became very defensive when Himes continued to criticize him for his conservative stance. As Debicella put it, "Jim, you just said in my heart I like rape. You are out of line. He just said I hate rape victims."¹⁶ The strain of a very long, wearing, and hotly contested election was more than apparent in the fifth debate.

The Sixth Debate

The sixth and final debate occurred at noon on the same day as the fifth debate. The candidates squared off for the last time at the Doubletree Hotel in Norwalk. This debate was co-sponsored by the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, along with Earthplace and Sound Waters. The final debate seemed to be a potpourri of issues which included the stimulus plan, housing, Afghanistan, Iran, and TARP (Troubled Assets Relief Program). Reporter Cathryn J. Prince, who covered the debate, noted that the two candidates anticipated their opponent's "political barbs" and seemed well prepared to rebut what by now had become predictable accusations and charges.¹⁷ The stimulus bill was once

again a central point of contention in the sixth debate. The two candidates disagreed over how much of the stimulus bill remained. Congressman Himes suggested that \$50 billion remained in the stimulus budget. Debicella disputed this figure and argued that \$400 billion had yet to be spent. Both candidates, of course, disagreed regarding how many jobs had been created by the stimulus money.

Foreign policy and the subject of Afghanistan also separated the two candidates. Himes stressed that our nation's primary concern was with an Al Qaeda base of operations in Afghanistan, not with the existence of the Taliban. Efforts therefore should be directed to eliminating only Al Qaeda. He also favored the President's plan to extricate U.S. forces from Afghanistan and stressed that it was in our nation's interest to "leave Afghanistan to the Afghanis."¹⁸ Debicella seemed less enthusiastic about the prospect of turning the country over to the Afghans, particularly because the Taliban might bolster its political power and eventually gain control of the military. The debate also involved TARP, which included the bailout of General Motors and the Chrysler corporation. Debicella argued that TARP money only served to "kick the can down the road" and thus served to solve very little.¹⁹ Himes defended TARP and the auto bailout, even though the program was enacted before he was elected to Congress in 2006. According to Himes, TARP was a success and as a result of this program between one and two million jobs related to the auto industry were saved, most notably in the Midwest.

Although the issues and responses of the two candidates were predictable, the sixth and final debate was nevertheless a substantive and informative exchange of different and rather partisan viewpoints. As the debates came to a close, the question that remained on the minds of pundits was whether or not the candidates' performance during the six debates would in any way affect the voting behavior of fourth district residents. The race in late October had become a dead heat and there was reason to believe that the collective performance of the two candidates in the six debates could very well be the tie breaker.

Eleventh-Hour Campaign Developments

In mid-October a new television ad appeared on behalf of Debicella. The speaker and person in the ad was none other than former Congressman Christopher Shays. Shays spoke highly of Debicella and suggested that Debicella was, like himself, an independent law maker not beholden to anyone. Shays also lambasted Congressman Himes for voting so often with Nancy Pelosi. Himes's voting record, according to Shays, was hardly the mark of an independent Congressman. The ad was crisp and compelling. And having Shays, who was still admired by many fourth district voters, speak in glowing terms about Debicella while at the same time criticizing Himes's record, was quite strategic.

The question concerning whether or not outside organizations would make their presence known was answered when a television ad highly critical of Congressman Himes's support for the health care reform bill appeared in mid-October. The commercial was sponsored by the American Action Network, which is headed by Norm Coleman, the former Republican U.S. Senator from Minnesota. The ad, set to unsettling music, accused Himes and Nancy Pelosi of "ramming" health care through Congress. Moreover, the ad indicated that members of Congress did not actually read the bill, which included \$500 billion in Medicare cuts. The ad also stated that the bill included free health care for illegal immigrants and Viagra for convicted sex offenders.

The ad concluded with a plea to support a Republican House bill that would "fix" health care. The Republican-sponsored bill, in reality, was intended to repeal health care reform. The same ad which mentioned Himes was also used against Democratic Congressmen Chris Murphy from Connecticut and Democratic Congressman Charlie Wilson from Ohio. The ad troubled the Himes campaign, which immediately issued a stinging rebuttal. The rebuttal letter was circulated on e-mail October 19 by Himes's campaign manager, Mark Henson:

Dear Friend,

We learned yesterday that The American Action Network, a shadowy, extremist organization funded by secret money, has launched a false television ad against Jim in an attempt to buy the election. The ad intentionally misleads voters with lies about the new health care law. A conservative front group called 60 Plus has also begun sending mail pieces to seniors in an attempt to scare them with false claims about comprehensive health care reform.

We won't let secret money buy this election with untrue ads funded by shadowy third party groups. We stand against secret money in our elections and demand that political ads remain accurate and fact checked.

Henson urged voters to sign a petition calling for DeBicella to remove all deceptive ads. He also provided a fact check sheet which rebutted the ad point-by-point. The appearance of this ad suggested that outside organizations perceived the fourth district race as highly competitive and that the time had arrived to enter the fray. Whether or not the ad sponsored by the American Action Network was a prelude to additional and more elaborate activity by outside "shadowy" organizations or an isolated attempt to sway fourth district voters was difficult to ascertain. The final two weeks of the campaign would be instructive in this respect.

Entering the final weeks of the campaign, it was clear that both candidates were well-positioned to make a strong run to the finish line. Yet it was also clear that Himes had a slight advantage with respect to resources. As of October 13, only three weeks prior to election day, the Himes campaign had raised a total of \$3,235,210, of which \$2,803,280 had been spent. The Congressman therefore had \$577,320 on-hand going into the home stretch of the campaign.²⁰ DeBicella's campaign finance report indicated that a total of \$1,666,550 had been raised, of which \$1,407,360 had been spent. The challenger had \$259,387 cash on hand. The incumbent had not only raised twice as much money as the challenger, but at the eleventh hour of the campaign he also had twice as much money to spend on advertising, a significant advantage.

A review of campaign contributions in the final weeks of the campaign revealed that both candidates had received a substantial share of their campaign contributions from the business community. Congressman Himes's top five contributors were associated with General Electric, Goldman Sachs, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brown Brothers Harriman Company, and Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company. Debicella's top business contributors were from Wexford Capital, PepsiCo. Inc, Haebler Capital, the Bank of America, and McKinsey and Company. Sixty-four percent of Himes's money was in the form of individual contributions, while 35 percent had been raised from PACs. Debicella was far more dependent on individual contributions compared to Himes, with 97 percent of his campaign funds collected from individuals and only 3 percent from PACs.

A Third and Fourth Poll

Two additional polls of fourth district voters were conducted by the Connecticut Capitol Report. The first poll, conducted from October 3-5 among 411 likely voters, found Himes to have only a 2 point advantage over Debicella, 49 percent to 47 percent; essentially a dead heat.²¹ Capitol Report's second poll was conducted between October 24-26, only one week prior to the election. This poll, conducted among 571 likely voters, suggested that Debicella had inched slightly ahead of Himes by two points, 48 percent to 46 percent. Like Capitol Report's previous poll, it appeared that the candidates were essentially tied with one another in the final days and hours of the campaign. Based on the two polls, the website Real Clear Politics classified the fourth district race as a toss-up. There was little reason to doubt that the contest had become extremely competitive, and for all intents and purposes the fourth district contest was simply too close to call.

On October 20, the *Connecticut Post* endorsed state senator Dan Debicella for Congress.²² Perhaps this was not too surprising in light of the *Post's* moderately conservative reputation. The *Post* endorsement stressed Debicella's potential for creating jobs, along with the fact that he was more pro-business compared to

Congressman Himes. Debicella's record as a state lawmaker was also cited along with his prestigious educational background. The *Post* emphasized that private sector jobs were the key to economic recovery, not the stimulus package. Himes, according to the *Post*, approached the task of job creation by spending government money, while Debicella more accurately understood the role of the private sector as the key to economic growth. The endorsement also noted the fourth district's long history of electing independent-minded Republicans to Congress, such as Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., and Stewart McKinney, suggesting that Debicella's orientation was consistent with this tradition. The *Connecticut Post* currently has a daily circulation of 49,244, a Saturday circulation of 37,888 and a Sunday circulation of 76,884.²³ The endorsement was issued on a weekday, and was read by perhaps more than 49,000 residents throughout Fairfield County. Whether or not the *Post*'s endorsement was able to sway undecided voters was a legitimate question and one that would be answered on election day.

President Obama Visits

The question concerning whether or not high-profile political figures would make an appearance on behalf of either candidate was answered in no uncertain terms in the headline of the October 20th *Connecticut Post*, which read "Presidential visit – Bridgeport: Himes seeks boost during Obama's trip to Park City." In what many considered a stunning announcement, President Obama had agreed to visit the city of Bridgeport on October 30 to campaign for Congressman Jim Himes. The President's announced visit underscored how much the Himes campaign was depending on the city of Bridgeport to win reelection. As noted in a previous chapter, heavy minority turnout in Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk in 2008 was the main reason why Himes was elected to Congress. It appeared once again that Himes deemed the urban vote within the fourth district as central to his success. Although President Obama would not be at the top of the ticket, as he was in 2008, his presence in Bridgeport on October 30 would likely be enough to stimulate

the Democratic base on behalf of Himes. Commenting on the President's approaching visit, Bridgeport's Democratic Mayor Bill Finch noted that "President Obama is extremely popular in our city and his visit on behalf of our Democratic candidates will make a huge impact."²⁴ Although it was expected that a range of Democratic leaders and candidates, including, among others, gubernatorial candidate Dan Malloy and U.S. Senate candidate Dick Blumenthal, would appear with the President when he visited Bridgeport, it was more than obvious that the scheduled visit was specifically intended to help Congressman Himes. The President's visit was scheduled to take place at the Harbor Yard Arena.

From all accounts the president's visit was simply extraordinary. Congressman Jim Himes, Dick Blumenthal, Dan Malloy, and many other Democrats were present for this historic rally. The president delivered a riveting speech which drew thunderous applause and enthusiastic cheers from those in attendance. Although no official attendance figure was issued, it was estimated that approximately nine-thousand persons, most of whom were partisan Democrats, poured into the arena to see and hear the President.²⁵ The city of Bridgeport, not only regarded as a bastion of Democratic support but also deemed vital to Jim Himes's reelection, had been effectively mobilized by the President's visit.

With only one day left before the election, the campaign organizations of both candidates worked feverishly to mobilize their supporters and to convince what was now a small percentage of undecided voters to support their candidacy. Phone banks continued into the night, ads saturated the airways, and both candidates were still meeting voters at strategic locations. By midnight on November 1, the long and grueling campaign had essentially finally come to an end.

As the sun began to rise at 6:00 A.M. on Tuesday, November 2, the polls throughout the seventeen communities began to open. Voters were now casting ballots and the election was underway. Given the competitiveness of the campaign, and the results of recent polls, election watchers predicted that the results would not be known until late in the evening.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The 2010 Election Results

Congressman Jim Himes won the 2010 congressional election and was reelected to Congress. He received 53 percent of the popular vote, while DeBicella won 47 percent of the vote.¹ Himes, along with his fellow Democrats from Connecticut, bucked the massive “red” wave that swept the nation on election day. All five of the Democratic congressional incumbents in Connecticut were reelected, and a Democrat was once again elected to the U.S. Senate. Moreover, for the first time in twenty years, Connecticut voters elected a Democratic governor and lieutenant governor. The four constitutional offices, which include the secretary of state, state treasurer, attorney general, and state comptroller, were also won by Democrats. Additionally, a large majority of Democrats were reelected to both chambers of the Connecticut General Assembly, further ensuring Democratic hegemony for at least another two years. With legislative redistricting scheduled for 2011, it is likely that the Democrats will rule the state for at least another decade.

The national political scene, however, was quite unlike that which occurred in Connecticut. After losing the House of Representatives to the Democrats in 2006, the Republicans were able to once again win a majority of seats. Political analysts such as Charlie Cook and Stuart Rothenberg were correct in their forecasts. Both analysts predicted large Republican gains in the House, similar to what happened in 1994 when the Republicans won an additional

52 seats. Prior to the 2010 election, the Democrats controlled 255 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Republicans 178 seats. There were two vacancies in the House. As a result of the 2010 election, the House of Representatives underwent a sea change with respect to partisan composition. The Republicans gained 63 additional seats, resulting in 242 seats under the control of the GOP, and 192 seats occupied by Democrats. By every measure, the election of 2010 was a stunning loss for the Democratic Party and President Obama. Republican Congressman John Boehner, the former House Minority Leader, replaced Nancy Pelosi as the Speaker of the House, and the chairmanships of every standing and subcommittee in the House of Representatives were now controlled by Republicans. Elections have consequences.

The red wave was also evident in Senate elections, although the Democrats were still able to retain their majority status. Prior to the 2010 election, the Democrats controlled 59 seats in the Senate (including the two seats held by Connecticut's Independent-Democrat Senator Joseph Lieberman and Vermont's Independent Senator Bernard Sanders, both of whom caucus with the Democrats), while the Republicans occupied 41 seats. The 2010 election resulted in a gain of 6 seats for the Republicans. Democrats now occupied 53 seats and the Republicans 47 seats. The two Senate seats in Connecticut, however, remained in the hands of the Democrats. Democrat Dick Blumenthal, the state's attorney general, defeated Republican Linda McMahon, a wealthy businesswoman and former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment in a widely-reported contest for the seat vacated by retiring Democratic senator Christopher Dodd. McMahon had spent close to \$50 million of her own money during the campaign, the most money that had ever been spent by a candidate for public office in Connecticut.

Also on the national scene, the Republicans made impressive gains in the 2010 gubernatorial contests. Prior to the election, 26 governorships were under the control of Democrats and 24 were controlled by Republicans. The election of 2010 resulted in 29 governorships in the hands of Republicans and 20 under the control of Democrats. The Rhode Island governorship was won by an

Independent. In Connecticut, Dan Malloy, the former mayor of Stamford, defeated businessman Tom Foley in what was a hotly-contested and close gubernatorial contest.

The Fourth District Contest

Congressman Himes had a very strong showing in Bridgeport, Norwalk and Stamford. The three cities are at the core of Himes's base and were highly instrumental in returning him to Congress. An impressive urban vote, certainly facilitated by President Obama's visit to Bridgeport only three days prior to the election, made an important difference with respect to the election outcome. In the previous mid-term election of 2006, Democrat Diane Farrell received 13,351 votes in Bridgeport. In the 2010 mid-term election, Congressman Himes won 17,644 votes in the city of Bridgeport. Himes also won more votes in Norwalk and Stamford compared to Farrell in 2006.

In addition to Obama's Bridgeport visit, which most certainly resonated with urban voters throughout Fairfield County, one must also consider President Bill Clinton's eleventh hour visit to Norwalk on behalf of Democratic candidates. Like Obama's visit to Bridgeport, the former President's rally in Norwalk further motivated the Democratic Party's urban base. In 2006, Farrell won 11,794 votes in Norwalk and 16,589 votes in Stamford. In 2010, Himes won 14,639 votes in Norwalk and 20,281 votes in Stamford. If we compare the differences in vote totals between Himes and Farrell in the three cities, we see that Himes won a total of 10,830 more votes in 2010 than Farrell in 2006.

It is clear that President Obama's visit to Bridgeport, along with President Clinton's visit to Norwalk, energized the district's urban vote, much to the benefit of Congressman Himes. Reflecting on Himes's victory, Debicella also emphasized the significance of the urban vote in the fourth district:

Jim Himes won because of the turnout of his Democratic base in the cities. . . . Unlike other areas of the country, urban Democrats turned out to vote in Fairfield County. For example, Norwalk had 59 percent turnout, higher than many of the suburbs.²

Debicella elaborated on the reasons behind the impressive urban turnout:

I believe there were two underlying drivers helping Himes in the cities. First, he had President Obama and President Clinton visit the district on his behalf in the final 72 hours of the campaign (Bridgeport and Norwalk respectively). Second, Dan Malloy and the public employee unions organized an intense get-out-the-vote effort in his hometown of Stamford and the neighboring town of Norwalk. While this effort was focused on the gubernatorial race, Himes and other down-ticket Democrats benefited from it.

Himes's margin of victory over Debicella was more than 13,000 votes. He received a total of 115,351 votes while Debicella won 102,030 votes. Himes was also cross-endorsed by the left-leaning Working Families Party, which delivered 4,605 votes to his reelection effort. This figure is included in his vote total. Connecticut election law allows for candidates to be endorsed by multiple parties. The result is that a candidate's name can appear on more than one line on the election ballot. The cross-endorsement was helpful, but not critical to Himes's reelection. In addition to handily winning the three cities, Himes also carried Fairfield (by only two votes), Redding, Weston, and Westport.

Debicella's support was clearly in the suburbs. The state senator won ten of the district's suburban communities, including Darien, Easton, Greenwich, Monroe, New Canaan, Oxford, Ridgefield, part of Shelton, Trumbull, and Wilton. His strategy was to offset the urban vote by winning the suburban communities by large margins. In some communities, this strategy was successful, but not in all of them. In several of the communities won by Debicella, his margin of victory over Himes was not vast. The state senator won Greenwich by 10 points, Ridgefield by 8 points, Wilton by 8 points, and Trumbull by only 6 points. Thus, somewhat less than impressive margins of victory in several traditional Republican suburbs, combined with losing four suburban communities, in addition to very heavy losses in the three cities, accounted for Himes's 13,000 vote margin. The Debicella

campaign was less than successful in convincing suburban voters to support his candidacy. Although it is difficult to ascertain due to the absence of exit polls, one can surmise that the electoral impact of Tea Party organizations within the district was rather minimal. Despite their strong opposition to Himes, there is reason to believe that a number of Tea Party activists, who, as previously noted, favored Merkle over Debicella in the Republican primary, chose not to vote on election day.

Table 16 shows the percentage of votes gained by the two candidates in each of the communities within the district. For comparative and tracking purposes, the results of the 2008 and 2006 congressional elections are also included.

Table 16
Congressional Election Results in the Fourth District
D=Democratic; R=Republican

	2006		2008		2010	
	D	R	D	R	D	R
Bridgeport	68	32	80	20	84	16
Darien	32	68	30	70	33	67
Easton	43	57	40	60	42	58
Fairfield	46	54	46	54	50	50
Greenwich	44	56	44	56	45	55
Monroe	41	59	44	56	42	58
New Canaan	35	65	31	69	35	65
Norwalk	52	48	60	40	61	39
Oxford	41	59	47	53	41	59
Redding	49	51	46	54	52	48
Ridgefield	48	52	38	62	46	54
Shelton (part)	41	59	48	52	35	65
Stamford	54	46	58	42	61	39
Trumbull	42	58	45	55	47	53
Weston	53	47	45	55	53	47
Westport	53	47	47	53	56	44
Wilton	44	56	41	59	46	54

Source: Statement of the Vote, Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.

The Bridgeport Debacle

As the 2010 election was unfolding, an extremely distressing news flash appeared indicating that the city of Bridgeport had, quite incredibly, run out of ballots. Hundreds of voters were left standing in line with no opportunity to vote. It was quickly learned that the city had printed only 29,000 ballots, which proved far less than what was needed to accommodate the throngs of voters who were motivated to vote due to President Obama's eleventh hour rally at Bridgeport's Harbor Yard Arena. The shortage was perplexing in light of the fact that approximately 67,000 individuals are registered as voters in Bridgeport, and that virtually every election official expected a large turnout due to President Obama's dynamic rally.³ How the city of Bridgeport could have miscalculated the number of potential voters was a mystery to say the least. The shortage of ballots prompted election officials to issue a formal request to a judge to keep the polls open in Bridgeport for an additional two hours. The request, which was processed by Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz, was formally granted and the polls were allowed to remain open until 10:00 P.M.

According to the *Connecticut Post* most of the city's twenty-five voting precincts had run short of ballots by the middle of the afternoon.⁴ Needless to say, voters were angry and accusations of fraud and corruption swirled about. In order to alleviate the problem, poll workers frantically began handing out photocopied ballots to people waiting in line, which further fueled the controversy. The photocopied ballots could not be fed into the voting machine like optical scan ballots and thus had to be counted by hand. Many Republicans, including the combative Republican state chairman Christopher Healy, immediately questioned the validity of the photocopied and hand-counted ballots. Unfortunately, many voters, rather than wait in line, returned home without voting. It was later reported that approximately 500 or so voters cast their ballots between 8:00 and 10:00 P.M. If this wasn't enough to stir suspicion and charges of fraud, the day after the election a mysterious bag containing 355 uncounted ballots was found at one of the polling precincts.⁵

Although it is likely that the shortage of ballots in Bridgeport adversely affected the vote total for Himes rather than Debicella, the Republicans nevertheless cried foul and once again questioned the legitimacy of the election results. But despite the embarrassing controversy that unfolded in Bridgeport, the city's vote was eventually tallied, albeit later than other communities, and the election results were formally announced. Quite frankly, despite legitimate questions concerning ethics and potential corruption, what happened in the city of Bridgeport likely made little difference with respect to the fourth district contest, nor for that matter, the election results in the statewide contests.

It was difficult to assign blame to specific individuals for the Bridgeport fiasco. Moreover, it was almost humorous to watch election officials point fingers at one another. The city's Registrars of Voters, the Secretary of State, political party officials, and the city's mayor were all in one form or another blamed for the problem. Precisely who was responsible for the shortage of ballots has never been fully explained. Due to the controversy, the *Connecticut Post* commissioned an unofficial recount of Bridgeport's ballots. The recount, which was vaguely reminiscent of the Florida recount in the presidential election of 2000, was conducted during the week of November 28. The ballot recount largely confirmed the initial results.

Congressman Himes and the Suburban Vote

Although it is evident that the urban vote helped propel Congressman Himes to victory, it is important nevertheless to examine his performance in the suburban communities and to analyze why he did better than expected in these white, well-to-do, and moderately conservative towns. Several hypotheses can be advanced with respect to Himes's suburban performance.

First, Himes's strategy to portray himself as New England's "most independent" Democrat apparently resonated with moderate Republican and independent voters in the suburban communities. Suburban voters in the fourth district have for many years favored candidates and members of Congress who identify themselves as

independent-minded “mavericks” not beholden to special interests or a party platform. While one can, and should, debate Himes’s claim of “independence,” it is apparent that his ads which portrayed himself in this particular light effectively connected with suburban voters, many of whom normally vote Republican.

Second, one can hypothesize that Himes did better than expected in the district’s suburbs because of his support for the Bush tax cuts. The Bush tax cuts included cuts for middle income as well as individuals who made over \$250,000. Himes’s support for extending the cuts to the wealthy undoubtedly generated an element of support among wealthy voters in several of the district’s high income communities. As previously noted, Himes was opposed to the Bush tax cuts in 2008, but openly favored them in 2010. His election year conversion, which seemed transparent, apparently paid dividends in terms of voter support. Many voters in the fourth congressional district have benefited from the tax cuts and it was obvious that Congressman Himes was cognizant of this fact.

A third contributing factor behind Himes’s respectable showing in the suburbs, which further suppressed DeBicella’s suburban vote, pertains to his district staff’s constituent service. The Congressman’s district staff located in Bridgeport, along with his satellite staff in Stamford, had been effectively solving constituent problems since Himes took office in January 2009. The Congressman’s staff is attentive to constituent complaints and is comprised of individuals who are both knowledgeable of constituent needs and who know many of the key political figures and policy makers in the district’s seventeen communities. Within the space of only two years, the Congressman’s staff established an excellent reputation for solving the needs and problems of many fourth district residents. The work of the Congressman’s district staff likely bolstered his reputation among fourth district voters.

A fourth reason why Himes made significant inroads into the suburbs pertains to his Wall Street background, most notably his previous career with Goldman Sachs. Himes knows this world very well, and he knows how to discuss complex financial matters such as banking and financial investment with voters who are in the

same socio-economic class as he is. Himes has developed a positive connection with many wealthy voters in Fairfield County, and from all indications he has made impressive inroads into this politically important block of voters. Unlike some of his Democratic colleagues in Congress, Himes often aligns himself with rather than antagonizes this powerful financial class. When required, he knows how to speak the language of the rich and powerful, and he is at ease within privileged social circles. Although Himes did not carry the suburbs during the 2010 fourth district contest, he did however do much better in these communities compared to what the pundits predicted.

Does Congressman Himes Have a Safe Seat?

Jim Himes won his first election to Congress in 2008 on the coattails of President Barack Obama. Although President Obama once again came to his aid during his bid for reelection, it is possible that he still would have won his bid for reelection without the President's help. Turnout in Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Stamford would have been lower, but perhaps still respectable enough for the incumbent congressman to win reelection, albeit by a much closer margin. At the same time, it is important to note that political, social, and attitudinal trends within the district are favoring the Democratic Party. Moreover, Himes's ability to positively connect with both white collar and blue collar voters, his popularity among African-American and Latino voters, including his ability to speak fluent Spanish before Latino audiences, along with his growing reputation as "New England's most independent Democrat" will likely help him in future election campaigns. Additionally, the Congressman has very strong connections to financial interests on Wall Street, and as a result will normally have an impressive campaign war chest. Additionally, he has hired an effective district staff that will continue to "fix" problems for fourth district voters.

Congressman Himes survived a major challenge in 2010 and retained his seat despite the Republican tsunami which swept numerous congressional districts across the land. It is quite possible

therefore that Himes is on his way to becoming an entrenched incumbent. He has the potential of representing the fourth district for many years, in much the same way that Christopher Shays and Stewart McKinney did.

But the operative word, of course, is “potential” and one is wise to remember that in politics nothing is ever certain. Unforeseen political developments could emerge within the space of only two short years which could have the effect of derailing Himes’s congressional career. For example, the top of the ticket in presidential election years could make a substantive difference with respect to fourth district voting behavior. It is possible that in 2012, the Republican Party could nominate a Republican presidential candidate who appeals to both moderate Democrats, independents, and Republicans within the fourth district, thus providing coattails for the Republican congressional candidate, similar to the manner in which Himes himself was first elected. Although Connecticut no longer has voting machines with party levers, the top of the ticket is still a relevant factor in congressional elections. And of course there is always the possibility that a scandal could surface involving high profile Democrats which in turn could have consequences for Democratic members of Congress, regardless of how pristine their public record is. On the other hand, it is also possible that the Republicans will nominate a less than inspiring presidential candidate to head the top of the ticket, thus negating any chance of coattails for the Republican candidate. And there is always the possibility that a scandal involving the Republican Party will doom any chance of a Republican reclaiming the fourth congressional district. Recent history continues to confirm that nominations, campaigns, and elections are inevitably unpredictable and volatile.

But generally speaking, there is reason to believe that Congressman Jim Himes is becoming a formidable incumbent. A new era seems to have commenced within the fourth congressional district. And although the fourth district can now be viewed as a “swing district” in the context of congressional politics, it will nevertheless be difficult, although not impossible, for the Republican Party to reclaim this congressional seat.

Conclusion

This study has focused exclusively on the fourth congressional district in one small New England state. As mentioned in the Introduction, this is one among 435 congressional districts in the United States. With respect to population, the fourth congressional district is home to roughly 707,000 residents, a figure that represents a mere 0.2 percent of the American population. Nevertheless, despite the very specific focus of this study, there are developments occurring within the political fabric of Connecticut's fourth district that have relevance beyond the district's borders, and which are emblematic of political trends among the New England states. This, in essence, is an added value of a case study of one congressional district. The findings, although limited in scope, are relevant to the larger study of congressional politics. Indeed, the trends uncovered in a case study often provide one not only with the opportunity to offer generalizations regarding the character of politics within the setting under investigation, but, more importantly, to make generalizations concerning trends in the surrounding region and, in some instances, in the country.

The most noticeable trend that seems to be emerging in the fourth congressional district and which is certainly portentous for the Republican Party is the slow but steady movement of wealthy, white suburban voters toward the Democratic Party. Although the wealthy suburbs are still, in general, Republican territory, the more important problem for the GOP in future elections will be the

solidification and mobilization of the Party's base among white, well-to-do voters. While the massive Republican victory in 2010 which returned Republicans to power in the United States House of Representatives might call this assertion into question, the fact of the matter is that the voting patterns examined in Connecticut's fourth congressional district over the course of the last several elections, combined with party affiliation trends, suggest a growing dissatisfaction with the GOP among upper-income and ideologically moderate voters. It is likely that such dissatisfaction is present not only in the fourth district but also in many upper-income New England suburbs that have a long history of supporting moderate Republicans. The Republican Party has not by any means lost this critical base of support, but there is reason to believe that movement towards the Democratic Party is underway.

In both 2008 and 2010, the Republican Party in the fourth district nominated congressional candidates who in many ways represented the values of moderate New England Republicans; Congressman Christopher Shays and state senator Dan DeBicella were both fiscally conservative, yet socially very moderate. Moderate Republican candidates who espouse moderate policy positions have historically appealed to suburban voters in Connecticut's fourth congressional district, as well as many congressional districts throughout the New England region. Yet Himes in 2008 and 2010 as well as Dianne Farrell in 2006 and 2004 were both able to make inroads into this key Republican voting block. As discussed in the Introduction, this can be attributed to the growing impression among highly educated, white, suburbanites that on social and moral issues the Republican Party has become too rigid and too doctrinaire. And regardless of how sincere both Shays and DeBicella were in their moderate political convictions, it was their affiliation with the Republican Party which diminished their appeal in the minds of many voters.

The "southernization" of the Republican Party has much to do with this perception.¹ In the realm of national politics, the Republican Party is now perceived by many voters as the party opposed to stem cell research, a woman's right to choose an

abortion, affirmative action, equal pay for women, civil unions, and gay marriage. Such perceptions are problematic for Republican congressional candidates in districts populated by many moderate and liberal voters. As John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira put it, the Republican Party has “rejected the new values and social structure that postindustrial capitalism is creating and nourishing.”² Moreover, as a result of ties to evangelical Christians, the Republican Party is perceived as supporting a close association between church and state. This includes support for school prayer in public schools, the posting of the Ten Commandments in public buildings, and the teaching of “intelligent design” rather than or alongside evolution. The GOP is also perceived as the party of states’ rights, which some interpret, although erroneously, as a code word for racial discrimination. And, more recently, the Republican Party has become identified as the party which subscribes to the mantra of “drill, baby, drill” for the purpose of reducing our nation’s dependence on foreign oil. The Republican Party is not perceived as the party of green technology. And while such perceptions have definitely strengthened the Republican Party’s base in certain regions of the country, most notably the South and West, it has done little to advance the Party’s appeal among voters who reside in the liberal and so-called “progressive” suburbs of Fairfield County and more generally the suburbs of New England.

Thus, what is happening in Connecticut’s fourth congressional district represents a larger regional trend. Connecticut’s fourth congressional district, like so many districts in New England, appears to be falling into the hands of the Democratic Party. The fourth district was the last in Connecticut to do so. The first and third congressional districts, currently represented by John Larson and Rosa DeLauro respectively, have been Democratic districts for many years and are essentially safe seats for Democratic incumbents. In 2006, however, Democrat Christopher Murphy was elected in Connecticut’s fifth congressional district, while Democrat Joe Courtney captured the second congressional district. Like the fourth district, the fifth and the second congressional districts were at one time represented by moderate Republicans: Nancy Johnson,

a very moderate Republican, represented the fifth district, while Rob Simmons, also a centrist Republican, represented the second district. But despite moderate positions on many issues, both of them went down to electoral defeat. Not long ago, conventional wisdom suggested that it was only arch-conservative Republican candidates who would have little chance of winning a congressional seat in Connecticut, while moderate Republicans were viewed as electable. Recent election results raise serious doubts about this long standing assumption.

The movement away from moderate Republicans in Congress and toward more liberal Democratic congressional candidates, such as Jim Himes, can be seen throughout the New England region. In 2010, of the twenty-two congressional seats up for election within the six New England states, the Democrats emerged victorious in twenty contests. This constitutes 91 percent of the congressional seats. The only exception was in New Hampshire, where the Republicans were able to capture both congressional districts. Otherwise, the five congressional districts in Connecticut, the two districts in Rhode Island, the ten districts in Massachusetts, the one at-large district in Vermont, and the two districts in Maine were all won by Democratic congressional candidates, many of whom were incumbent and liberal congresspersons. Thus, what is happening in Connecticut's fourth congressional district is in many ways a reflection of what is happening within the New England region. While some regions of the United States are clearly moving in a more conservative direction, Connecticut's fourth district, like the vast majority of districts in New England, are moving in a decidedly more liberal direction. Fourth district developments are a clear reflection of the regional realignments currently taking place at various levels of American electoral politics.³

In light of political developments in the fourth congressional district and more generally throughout New England, one very critical question that must be asked is: What will become of the Republican Party as white, moderate, and well-to-do voters continue to realign with the Democrats? One very plausible scenario is advanced by Judis and Teixeira. In their view, it is quite

possible that as Independent and Republican moderates transition to the Democrats, the smaller and more conservative elements of the Republican Party will likely gain control of the party's internal proceedings and ideological direction.⁴ As discussed throughout the previous chapters, there is an active and vocal Tea Party movement operating in Connecticut's fourth congressional district that favors very conservative Republican candidates. Thus, as moderate Republicans and Independents gravitate towards the Democrats, the "Tea Baggers," as they are known, will inevitably have more leverage in the context of Republican conventions, primaries, and caucuses. The end result of this development could very well be the future nomination of Republican candidates whose political base is closely aligned with the Tea Party but not with the majority of fourth district voters. Although the polarization of the two parties would lend itself to more distinctly differentiated choices for voters, the prospects for a Republican victory in the general election would likely be diminished. If a congressional candidate does not reflect the values of the district in which he or she is competing, then it is very doubtful that voters will find the candidate appealing. This, of course, poses a very real dilemma for the future of the Republican Party. Does the Party try to mirror the moderate and liberal views of Democratic congresspersons, such as Jim Himes, or will the Republican Party wage campaigns based on clearly defined conservative principles, regardless of political consequences?

For an example of a highly principled conservative election campaign, we might turn to the 1964 presidential election. In 1964, regarded by political scientists as a historic turning point for the Republican Party, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater was nominated as the Republican Party's presidential candidate. The Goldwater forces were able to wrest control of the Republican nomination from Nelson Rockefeller, the moderate Republican governor from the state of New York. Goldwater's controversial campaign theme, boldly proclaimed on campaign buttons, was that the Senator represented "a choice not an echo." Indeed, Goldwater's conservative and uncompromising positions were clearly summarized in his famous acceptance speech delivered at the 1964 Republican nominating

convention held at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. The highlight of his acceptance speech included the following two statements: "I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." Unfortunately for Goldwater, far too many voters concluded that he was a right-wing political extremist and thus unfit to be president. As a result, he was soundly defeated in the general election by incumbent President Lyndon Baines Johnson in one of the most dramatic landslides in the history of presidential elections. Although there is much to be said for candidates who place principles ahead of politics, as Goldwater did in 1964, the fact of the matter is that on a much smaller scale an extremely conservative Republican congressional candidate in Connecticut's fourth congressional district will have a very difficult time winning a general election contest. Needless to say, it will be fascinating to watch how the Republican Party approaches fourth district contests in the years ahead.

The present case study will, I hope, prove beneficial to our understanding of not only the political nuances and particulars of Connecticut's fourth congressional district but also how political trends in this district have much in common with developments throughout the New England region. Many features of the fourth district are unique and set it apart from virtually every other district in the United States. But at the same time, the pattern of politics that is emerging in the district coincides with and parallels patterns in several New England states that will affect the character of congressional politics for many years to come. It is through the local that we come to understand the regional and the national, and additional case studies of congressional districts in various parts of the country would shed further light on the dynamic and evolving nature of congressional politics in the contemporary era.

Notes

Preface

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31. http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/1958election.pdf.
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38. http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/1966election.pdf.
39. Telephone interview with former Congressman Donald J. Irwin, November 17, 2009.
40. See www.rjsmith.com/kiatbl.html.
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44. Weicker interview, November 17, 2009.
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46. Statement of the Vote, 1970, Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.
47. Weicker interview, November 17, 2009. The story also appears in his autobiography. *Maverick*, p. 31.
48. http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/1970-1986elections.pdf.

49. Fourth district election results for presidential election years 1972-1984:

- 1972: Nixon – 62%
McGovern – 37%
McKinney – 63%
- 1976: Ford – 56%
Carter – 43%
McKinney – 61%
- 1980: Reagan – 53%
Carter – 37%
McKinney – 63%
- 1984: Reagan – 63%
Mondale – 36%
McKinney – 70%

Source: Statement of the Vote, 1972-84, Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.

50. E-mail interview with Joseph J. McGee, June 9, 2010. McGee was the Staff Director for Congressman Stewart McKinney, 1971-78.

51. McGee interview, June 9, 2010.

52. <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/lawsandregs/mckv.cfm>.

53. “Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge,” online at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/profiles/index.cfm?id=53546>.

54. Carol Lundin, “Stewart B. McKinney: The Man” <http://homlessed.net/partners/biographies.htm>.

55. McGee interview.

56. Fourth district election results for presidential election years 1988-2008:

- 1988: G.H.W. Bush – 57%
Dukakis – 42%
Shays – 72%
- 1992: G.H.W. Bush – 42%
Clinton – 41%
Shays – 67%
- 1996: Dole – 40%
Clinton – 51%
Shays – 61%
- 2000: G.W. Bush – 41%
Gore – 55%
Shays – 57%

- 2004: G.W. Bush – 46%
 Kerry – 52%
 Shays – 52%
- 2008: McCain – 40%
 Obama – 60%
 Shays – 48%

Source: Statement of the Vote, 1988-2008, Office of Secretary of State, Hartford, Connecticut.

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12. My account of the fourth debate is drawn exclusively from the reporting of Genevieve Reilly, "Sparring Over the Stimulus," *Connecticut Post*, October 27, 2010, p. A1 and A12, from which I quote this exchange.
13. Reilly, "Sparring Over the Stimulus," A12.
14. My account of the fifth debate is drawn exclusively from the reporting of Cathryn J. Prince, "Himes, Debicella Talk Tort Reform and Transportation in Fifth Debate," *FairfieldPatch*, October 28, 2010; online at <http://fairfield.patch.com>.
15. Quoted in Prince, "Himes/Debicella Get Serious in First Debate."
16. Quoted in Prince, "Himes/Debicella Get Serious in First Debate."
17. My account of the sixth and final debate is drawn exclusively from the reporting of Cathryn J. Prince, "Himes, Debicella Run the Gamut at

Final Debate,” *DarienPatch*, October 29, 2010; online at <http://darien.patch.com>.

18. Quoted in Prince, “Himes, Debicella Run the Gamut at Final Debate.”

19. Quoted in Prince, “Himes, Debicella Run the Gamut at Final Debate.”

20. This and the following specific details about fundraising and campaign contributions are from the Center for Responsive Politics, available online at <http://opensecrets.org>; accessed November 8, 2010.

21. The results of the Connecticut Capitol Report Poll can be found at the Real Clear Politics website, <http://www.realclearpolitics.com>; accessed November 8, 2010.

22. The endorsement issued on October 20, 2010 can be found at <http://www.ctpost.com>.

23. Figures provided by Audit Bureau of Circulations, online at <http://abcas3accessabc.com/ecirc/newssearchus.asp>.

24. Quoted in Tim Loh, *Connecticut Post*, October 20, 2010, p. A1.

25. The figure of nine-thousand partisans is cited in <http://www.ctpost.com>; accessed November 5, 2010.

Chapter Seven

1. The source of all voting statistics in this chapter is Office of Secretary of State, Statement of Vote; online at <http://www.statementofvotes.ct.gov>.

2. E-mail interview with Dan Debicella, November 21, 2010.

3. Ken Dixon and Bill Cummings, “Gov Race Still Up in the Air,” *Connecticut Post*, November 4, 2010, p. A6.

4. Dixon and Cummings, “Gov Race Still Up in the Air,” p. A6.

5. Ken Dixon, Timothy Loh, and Brittany Lyte, “Chaos in Bridgeport,” *Connecticut Post*, November 5, 2010, p. A1.

Conclusion

1. The increasing role of the South within the context of Republican party politics is examined in many works on American party politics. See, for example, Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century* (New York: Viking, 2006), pp. 171-217, and Ronald Brownstein, *The Second Civil*

War: How Extreme Partisanship Has Paralyzed Washington and Polarized America (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), pp. 192-95.

2. John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (New York: Scribner, 2002), p. 173.

3. For a detailed treatment of regional partisan trends, see Brownstein, *The Second Civil War*, pp. 200-14.

4. Judis and Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, pp. 92-93.

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