

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 *McCannell 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 *McCannell* 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.