

## 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

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.<sup>3</sup>

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).<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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."<sup>13</sup>

### *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."<sup>14</sup> 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."<sup>15</sup> 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."<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup> Debicella seemed less enthusiastic about the prospect of turning the country over to the Afghanis, 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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

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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."<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.