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Case Study of a Winning Tea Party Campaign

Every election is a reflection of the political environment in which the campaign takes place and is an extension of the candidates taking part. The 2010 Senate race in Kentucky, to fill the seat of retiring Senator Jim Bunning, was not an exception. In a conservative democrat state - that typically goes Republicans on the national level - the race presented an opportunity for either party. As is often the case the central question was not who would win, but would the party and candidate with the generic political winds at their back not lose the race.

KENTUCKY 2010 – THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

From the outset two politicians dominated the race. Neither was on the ballot. On the one side was President Barack Obama whose political operation saw an opportunity to pick up a seat held by Republicans in a state he had lost in 2008. On the other was Kentucky's senior Senator, Mitch McConnell, who has dominated Republican politics in the state for nearly two decades. A victory by the democrats would be seen as a major insult to Senator McConnell who serves as Republican Minority Leader. At the same time, a victory by the Republican's candidate was imperative for him to have a Republican controlled Senate and a chance to be Majority Leader.

In each of his prior two elections, in 1998 and in 2004, Senator Jim Bunning had faced difficult elections. In 1998 the former Hall of Fame baseball player and member of the House of Representatives was pitted against fellow Congressman Scotty Baesler. The seat was open due to the retirement of four-term democrat Senator Wendell Ford. On election night, Bunning defeated Baesler by just over one-half of one percent. Six years later, Bunning defeated little known State Senator Dan Mongiardo only a single percentage point despite the fact President George W Bush carried the state by more than 20%.

By April 2009, serious questions were arising in Kentucky and Washington whether Senator Bunning would and should seek reelection. If he chose to run many believed he would have a primary opponent. Polling showed Senator Bunning's approval ratings to be around thirty percent. His campaign committee had raised only \$250,000 in the first quarter. Most of it came from out of state sources. Moreover, the same polling found Bunning trailing his likely democratic opponents, in some cases by double-digit margins. On April 30, 2009, Republican Secretary of State and McConnell confidant Trey Greyson announced his intentions to form an exploratory committee to seek the seat. While Bunning continued to suggest he was running, he eventually announced he would retire at the end of his term. However, in announcing his intentions to retire he slammed Senator McConnell, calling him "control freak."¹

¹ http://www.politico.com/blogs/scorecard/0509Bunning_calls_McConnell_a_control_freak.html

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With Bunning out of the race, the Republican primary quickly turned into a two horse race among the five candidates seeking the seat. The presumptive frontrunner was Greyson who appeared to have the backing of Minority Leader. Most made this assumption based on the fact that his campaign team was comprised of numerous veterans of McConnell's 2008 re-election effort. The Minority Leader was also rumored to be helping Greyson with making important fund-raising contacts both in Washington and in Kentucky.

The dark horse in the race was a Bowling Green physician. Dr. Rand Paul is the son of former Republican and Libertarian Party candidate for President, and current member of Congress Ron Paul. While the senior Paul was not considered a serious candidate to win the Republican nomination during the 2008 primaries, he did demonstrate a highly loyal national following. While Rand Paul was a first time candidate for public office, he was not a novice to politics or to Kentucky voters. For several years he had been a regular on Kentucky television as the head of a taxpayers group. His campaign team was made up of anti-establishment forces that had issues with the McConnell team. He also benefitted from a small team of political professionals who had been a part of his father run for the Presidency. From the outset of the race it became clear the Paul campaign would not be a push-over for the Greyson, even with the support and political apparatus of the McConnell and his team.

During his 2008 Presidential campaign, Ron Paul raised unexpected large sums of money via the Internet using a tactic referred his campaign called money bombs. In fact, at one point early in 2007, Congressman Paul out raised the eventual Republican nominee Senator John McCain. The strategy behind the tactic was to encourage donors to go to the campaign's website during a single twenty-four hour period to give donations. On August 20, 2009, Rand Paul's campaign held its first money bomb and raised over \$400,000 in less than twenty-four hours. Such a total, in a single day, was viewed as a record for Kentucky politics. It demonstrated Paul's campaign would not be underfunded in comparison to Greyson.

From the outset, the Paul campaign focused its messaging and campaign as a threat to the establishment in Washington. While never specifically attacking Senator McConnell, the Paul effort played to both anti-Obama sentiments among conservatives, as well as a small group of Kentucky Republican Party activists who were unhappy with McConnell's leadership and his conflict with Senator Bunning. In its first web of the campaign the Paul campaign stressed his outsider credentials and used the line "what is extreme is the size of the national debt." Greyson meanwhile pushed his experience and attempted to suggest he was the candidate best positioned to keep the seat in Republican hands.

In September 2009, the Paul campaign again used the money bomb to its advantage. While Greyson was in Washington, DC, for a fundraiser hosted by twenty-three Republican Senators, Paul's campaign hosted another money bomb calling out Greyson for accepting money from seventeen of these Senators who supported the bank bailout. This money bomb raised just over \$150,000, but more importantly it provided Paul an opportunity to pledge not to accept donations from Senators and lobbyists who were part of the bailout. His campaign utilized the issue to drive media coverage via both the blogosphere and cable new channels. Meanwhile it put Greyson on defensive for several weeks.

In late December 2009, the Paul campaign received the first of several national endorsements. The conservative website RedState.com, who editor Erick Erickson is influential in conservative circles, tweeted support for Dr. Paul just after Christmas. Soon to follow were Tea Party and conservative groups like FreedomWorks, Concerned Women for America, and

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Gun Owners for America. In early January, prominent fiscal conservative and former Presidential candidates Steve Forbes backed Dr. Paul and begin raising money. On February 1st, Sarah Palin joined the chorus in announcing her support. A few days later, the Paul campaign released a YouTube video, which featured Greyson admitting he voted for Bill Clinton while in college.

By the middle of March polling in the state showed Paul was in a dead heat with Greyson, or potentially even leading. Moreover, Greyson's principle argument - he was the electable candidate - was being undermined by the polls showing Paul leading the challengers on the democrat side. On television the two campaigns battled with ads focusing on their conservative credentials. As the election drew closer Paul's lead on Greyson began to expand. Moreover mainstream Republican leaders within Kentucky were beginning to publicly back his effort.

As the primary campaign drove into the home stretch Dr. Paul's lead continued to expand. Polling conducted in early April by Survey's USA showed Paul opening up a fifteen-point lead on Greyson (45% to 30%). With little other in the way of options, the Greyson campaign began attacking with an emphasis on foreign policy and Paul's opposition to the Patriot Act. The Paul campaign quickly struck back with an ad blunting Greyson's line of attack and questioning his ethics for running such attack ads. They even went so far as to suggest Greyson was violating Reagan's eleventh commandment - Republican's should not attack each other. All the while, the Paul campaign continued using online money bombs to thwart what should have been an advantage in fund-raising for Greyson. Moreover, Paul's campaign received an additional boost when retiring Senator Jim Bunning formally endorsed his candidacy.

On May 4th, just two weeks before Election Day, the Greyson campaign received a major coup when Senator Mitch McConnell formally announced his endorsement. Traditionally, McConnell didn't formally endorse during Republican primaries, instead he would use his substantial influence behind the scenes to insure the candidate he was backing won. The Greyson campaign quickly attempted to capitalize on the endorsement by running television ads featuring McConnell appealing to Republican primary voters. In the end the endorsement came too late to save Greyson's campaign. He was soundly defeated with Dr. Paul winning by a margin of over eighty thousand votes.

THE GENERAL ELECTION

As was the case in US Senate races across featuring Tea Party back candidates the campaign in Kentucky quickly became a referendum on Rand Paul. Throughout the primary election, and during his years prior to running for office, Dr. Paul had a long history of staking out positions that would have been politically fatal in just about any election year other than 2010. As head of a Kentucky Taxpayer's United, Dr. Paul had, among other things, called for raising the deductible on Medicare and changing Social Security benefits. National Democrats portrayed his opponent in the general election, Kentucky Attorney General Jack Conway, as young moderate in the mold of Bill Clinton.

A Bumpy Start

The day after winning the Republican primary, Rand Paul was a phenomenon on cable news shows across the country. While most of the appearances were uneventful, his campaign's decision to go on liberal leaning MSNBC's Rachel Maddow show lead to an eruption of controversy that enveloped his entire campaign. Ironically, it was on the same show that Dr. Paul had announced he would be a candidate for the US Senate should Senator Bunning decide not seeking another term nearly one year earlier.

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While being interviewed by Maddow, Dr. Paul got bogged down in a line of questioning about whether he supported the Civil Rights Act. A bill that had become law in 1964. In particular, Dr. Paul was nuanced in an answer about whether he supported a provision of the Act that forced private business to integrate. Within hours the interview had ignited a firestorm in the national media and online threatening not only his campaign, but also, potentially, the Tea Party movement. National Democrats and liberals in the media jumped on the interview to reinforce a narrative that the Tea Party had racist overtones and its candidates were dangerous because they wanted to fundamentally change America.

Two weeks later, just as the Maddow interview was beginning to finally die down, the Paul campaign found itself in the middle of another national media storm based on an unforced error. This time the issue was British Petroleum (BP) and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. While on Good Morning America, Dr. Paul was asked about the Obama Administration's response to the crisis. He responded statements by some officials regarding BP were "un-American." As the quote spread via the Internet it was quickly picked up by journalists in the White House press corps who asked White House Spokesman Robert Gibbs for a comment during his daily press briefing. Once again Paul was national news, in the unenviable position of battling with the White House while defending BP at time when the company was public enemy number one.

A week later Dr. Paul was back in the national news. Allegations had surfaced the American Board of Ophthalmology had not certified him to practice medicine. In initially responding to the accusations, the campaign hedged by suggesting a number of details of the case were inaccurate without either clarifying or denying the accusation. They also cited Dr. Paul's certification from the National Board of Ophthalmology without acknowledging Dr. Paul was the founder of the group. The story didn't go away until several days later when the Lexington Courier-Journal editorialized, "There is no indication that Paul is qualified to practice ophthalmology."

Staying Out of The National Media – Building Support

After six weeks of controversies, many of which were self-inflicted, the Paul campaign made a strategic decision to avoid national media appearances and focus on Kentucky based events. The model for the campaign would be the first event it had held after winning the primary. On the weekend following the primary election, the Republican Party of Kentucky had held a major unity event that featured Dr. Paul, Senator McConnell, Secretary of State Greyson and other prominent state party leaders. The event, while open to the press, was carefully choreographed to limit uncomfortable questions. For the Paul campaign this tool of the establishment was about to become the model.

During the primary the Paul campaign was small, relying heavily on volunteer supporters and tea party activists, with just a few paid staff. The campaign needed time to raise depleted financial resources and to build a larger staff, with more capabilities for the general elections. The constant need to respond to attacks in the press was problematic as it was taking time from these efforts. Dr. Paul's schedule throughout July and August became focused on fund-raising and uniting elements of the Republican base. During this period the campaign began receiving direct, on the ground, help in Kentucky from the National Republican Senator Committee (NRSC).

While attending events around the state, the Kentucky based media, as well as some national media would show up and try and ask Dr. Paul questions. Typically he would avoid having to answer more than one or two queries. However, at a campaign stop during the opening of a Republican Party Victory Center in Lexington, Dr. Paul got bogged down in a series of questions by one of the state's leading Associated Press reporters. When respond-

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ing to query about the importance of the issue of drugs in the elections, Dr. Paul stated, "he didn't think drugs were a pressing concern in western Kentucky when compared to issues such as the deficit and Obamacare." When the story ran the next day in the newspapers he was quoted as saying "he didn't believe drugs are a pressing issue."

Aqua Buddha Part #1

While the campaign was attempting to refocus media attention to Kentucky based media, the national attention on Dr. Paul continued. Though out early July the campaign was aware a reporter for GQ Magazine was working on a story. The reporter claimed its emphasis would be on the foundation of Dr. Paul's political views. Given the nature of the questions the reporter was asking, the campaign made a decision to not assist him. On August 9th the GQ story, "Rand Paul's Kooky College Days" was released in the magazine's online version. While the majority of the story rehashed previously reported material, it contained a new accusation from an unnamed anonymous source. According to the story, while in college in the early 1980's at Baylor Dr. Paul had participated in coming a fellow student's dorm room, tying her up, abducting her, and forcing her to knell down and say, "My god is Aqua Buddha." Driven by bloggers, online media, and left wing cable news the story spun, within hours into an accusation Rand Paul, while using illegal drugs had kidnapped a woman in college.

One online publication linked to the story under the headline, "Rand Paul Kidnapped Woman in College." The campaign began pushing back as it moved around the Internet. However, it was spinning so fast it was impossible for the campaign's small media operation to keep up. The campaign's response strategy was twofold. First it suggested it was considering taking legal action against GQ or any other publication implying or stating Rand Paul kidnapped anyone. At the same time, the campaign pushed hard such allegations were nothing more than "left-wing drive by journalism." While the story continued for nearly a week, the push back by the campaign began to work its way into the coverage and mitigated the damage.

Fancy Farm – An Organizational Test

Fancy Farm, Kentucky, in an unincorporated community in Graves County just off of Kentucky Route 80. St. Jerome's Catholic Church, which is located in the center of Fancy Farm, has been, since 1890, the site in early August of the annual Fancy Farm picnic. Traditionally, the event attracts upwards of a thousand people and serves as the start of the political campaign season. The 2010 version of Fancy Farm received national media attention, it was broadcast live on CSPAN, because it was the first time in the general election Dr. Paul and his democrat opponent, Jack Conway, would share the same stage. While not a debate, the event would feature speeches by the Democrat Governor Steve Beshear, Senator McConnell, the two Senate candidates, and a host of other candidates running for public office.

For campaigns in Kentucky, the Fancy Farm picnic provides a tremendous opportunity to mobilize supporters. While the location favors democrat candidates, as their supporters are clustered in areas around Graves County, this year's event was expected to draw an even larger crowd as usual. As the Paul campaign begin to prepare, it decided to focus on four distinct tactics that would be critical throughout the remainder of the campaign. First, Dr. Paul needed a speech that would demonstrate, in spite the negative stories in the press, he was qualified to serve in the United State Senate. Second, the campaign wanted to mobilize supporters so as to insure the audience would be equally balanced between the two campaigns. Third, the campaign need to make sure it had trackers with video cameras taping both Conway and Dr. Paul to document any provocations or missteps. Finally, the campaign wanted to put in place a solid plan for driving message via the media and responding to attacks or missteps by Conway.

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On the day of the event signs for the candidates lined all roads leading to Fancy Farm. As buses begin to arrive with supporters it was clear the Paul campaign was not going to be outnumbered and might even have more supporters in attendance than the Conway camp. The campaign made a strategic decision to have Dr. Paul travel to and from Fancy Farm with Senator McConnell, who has a Capitol Police escort due to his Senate leadership position. The hope was this would limit the potential for the Conway campaign, or its supporters, to create provocation. Upon arrival McConnell and Dr. Paul quickly moved back stage and successfully avoided a chanting group of Conway activists.

Via a flip of a coin it was determined the Governor would speak first, then Senator McConnell, followed by Conway and Dr. Paul. In their speeches both the Governor and Republican leader hammered on the respective Republican and Democrat candidates for Senate. With each barb the cheering, booing and chanting of the over one thousand people crammed around the stage grew louder. As Conway stepped to the podium the focus of his speech was directed at Paul. He suggested over and over again "accident's happen." While the speech highlighted several of the recent media stories about Dr. Paul, it failed to connect Paul to specific policy issues and was focused nearly in its entirety on personal attacks.

As Dr. Paul took the podium, to cheers and jeers from the assembled partisans, he began his speech with an attack not on Conway, but on the size of the national government and national debt. Throughout the speech he continued the theme of focusing on national issues and the policies of the Obama Administration and Democrats in Congress. With the speeches of the main candidates having ended, McConnell and Paul quickly exited the stage and got into a waiting SUV. They were headed to a post Fancy Farm rally. The decision to exit quickly was predetermined and was coordinated with a press narrative - "Dr. Paul believed his speech should speak for itself." Meanwhile, the Conway campaign held an informal press conference to attempt to spin his speech. While the press complained about a lack of access to Dr. Paul, they were left with nothing to cover except for the speech.

The Paul campaign also got a self-made break at Fancy Farm. Throughout most of the day, one college-aged guy was acting strange, making radical comments, while holding a sign saying he supported Rand Paul. On his head he had a hat made of aluminum foil. Smelling a rat a Paul campaign tracker, armed with a video camera, engaged the supposed Paul backer. He asked him his name and whom he supported? He responded he was Tyler Collins and he was there for "Rrrrrand Paaaaul."

However hours later as Conway was preparing to leave – while being escorted by chanting supporters – Mr. Collins was now wearing a Conway shirt and regular clothes. He was chanting, "We back Jack...We Back Jack" When comforted by the same tracker about his change in allegiances, Collins' quick became defensive, stammered for an answer and then ran away.

Recognizing a major opportunity, the Paul campaign quickly started doing research. Within hours it was discovered, not only was Mr. Collins a Conway supporter, he was informally affiliated with the Conway campaign. Using screen shots of his Facebook page together and the video evidence obtained by the tracker, the NRSC and Paul campaigns quickly pushed the information to Fox News. In the days that followed the Internet, including the Drudgereport, picked up the story as an example of dirty tricks towards the Tea Party and Republicans. Within hours the story was dominating the news and Conway's campaign was forced to his own activists. Suddenly a draw between the two campaigns at Fancy Farm between had become the Paul campaigns first major victory of the general election.

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As the middle of August rolled around both campaigns were heavily focused on raising money and watching to see which side would move first to place advertising on television. The Paul campaign believed it was critical to match the Conway campaign ad for ad. From a strategic standpoint the campaign felt, given its lead in the polls, the only way the Conway team could close the gap would be to drive down support for Dr. Paul via television. At the same time, the campaign believe it would have a major advantage if the campaign directly - or some outside group - were to begin linking Conway to President Obama and Congressional Democrats before Conway had a chance to introduce himself.

The Paul campaign got a major break in implementing this strategic goal when the outside group American Crossroads began advertising across Kentucky on August 23rd. The size and scope of the buy was unprecedented for an outside group in Kentucky at such an early stage of a statewide campaign. The focus of the ad linked Conway to support of Obamacare in an attempt to associate him both with Obama, who was highly unpopular in the state, as well as the healthcare reform legislation that was viewed as out of step with Kentucky values. Internal polling conducted for the Paul campaign in late July had shown that 77% of Kentucky voters were less likely to support a candidate who backed healthcare reform, with only 19% saying they would be more likely. Moreover, among those who were more likely, nearly ninety percent were already "definitely supporting Conway."

The ad by Crossroads was a defining moment because it provided a full week of television advertising, with negative messaging about Conway, before his campaign put up an ad to introducing himself to Kentucky voters. All the national media attention of Rand Paul had created an environment in which, by the end of July, he was known to over 91% of Kentuckians. While the negative nature of much of the coverage of Paul had increased those who had an unfavorable opinion of him (32%), it had also solidified support among those who had a favorable impression (47%). Conway on the other hand had begun the general election campaign with only 78% of Kentuckians having heard of him. Moreover, he was less defined with 39% having a favorable opinion and 20% viewing him negatively. Never the less, the head-to-head ballot test between the two candidates was only slightly in favor of Paul 49% to 42%.

Conway's campaign began its advertising efforts on August 30th with an ad entitled "Darn Good." The ad's focus was on Conway's record as Attorney General and his effort to combat the drug problem in the state. When compared to the ad being run by American Crossroads the size and scope of the Conway was small. For every ad that Conway's campaign was running in the state, American Crossroads was running three ads attacking Conway. At the same time it released its introductory ad, the Conway campaign seized on the earlier press reports that "Dr. Paul didn't believe that drugs were a pressing issue." Once again, the Paul campaign was on defense, trying to explain that Dr. Paul understood drugs were a serious problem in Kentucky. The Conway campaign, for its part, attempted to use this skirmish to as part of its campaign's boarder narrative – Rand Paul didn't understand Kentucky or its values.

The Paul campaign's first ad of the election cycle began running on August 8th. It was entitled the "Gift of Sight." The Paul campaign believed it was critical to soften Dr. Paul's image and to remind voters he was, as it said in the ad, "a physician not a career politician." Internally there was a debate in the campaign whether the initial ad should be the Gift of Sight, or a second ad which featured his wife Kelly talking about the Rand she knew and loved. Ultimately, the campaign decided to go with his record as a physician and to soften the ad by having it narrated by an older woman's voice. Meanwhile it was determined the ad with Kelly Paul would be tweaked so it could be used as the final ad of the campaign.

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The Conway camp's second ad continued to focus on the issue of drugs. This time, however, it featured a number of law enforcement officials talking about Jack Conway. It was clear Conway's team had made a decision to make drugs a central issue. Internally, the senior leadership of the Paul campaign and the NRSC team were perplexed by this approach. While drugs were a pressing concern in Kentucky, there were not near the top of the issues voters said they would be using to determine their votes. Thus, the Paul campaign team decided to ignore the Conway messaging. Instead the campaign focused on continuing with advertising featuring positive messaging about Dr. Paul combined with contrast between his values on national issues with those of Conway.

While the two campaigns were focusing on introducing themselves, outside conservative groups continued to pound on the narrative that Conway was a liberal who would go to Washington to support Obama and Congressional Democratic leaders. On September 13th the NRSC Independent Expenditure unit launched an ad asking, "Who's Horse is Jack Conway riding?" The ad concluded Conway was backing Obama and liberal values at the expense of Kentucky. Meanwhile, the US Chamber of Commerce hit Conway by tying his position on the issues to President Obama and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. While the Conway camp tried to push back, particularly on the ties to Nancy Pelosi, the reality was this association was incredibly damaging given her high unpopularity in the state (55% of Kentuckians viewed her unfavorably, with 44% saying they viewed her very unfavorably).

By mid to late September the Conway campaign was under siege. For every ad his campaign was running on television, the combined forces of the Paul campaign and supportive outside groups were running five ads. Moreover, with the exception of the Paul campaign itself, all of the ads running were straight attack ads on Conway – defining him as a liberal supporter of the highly unpopular Barack Obama and Nancy Pelosi. Conventional wisdom was beginning to emerge if Conway's team didn't change the direction of the race it might be over by early October. Several pundits began moving the Kentucky from a toss up to leans Republican. Conway was clearly feeling the effects as he was spending more and more time outside Kentucky attempting to raise money. Despite the positive news, the Paul campaign team understood there a long way to go until Election Day.

The Fox News Sunday Debate

Just after winning the primary elections the Paul campaign issued a press release challenging Conway to six debates. These included a national debate on Fox News Sunday, as well as five debates in Kentucky. The decision to issue the challenge was predicated on two strategic principles. First, the Paul campaign generally preferred fewer debates rather than more. Second, by proactively issuing the challenge the Paul campaign was putting down a marker that would allow it pick which national debate it would attend. In particular, the campaign's leadership preferred avoiding a debate on Meet the Press as it felt the host would be unwilling and unable to insure a balanced format for Dr. Paul. At the same time, it was assumed the Conway camp would not accept a debate on Fox News Sunday. Internally, the Paul campaign's leadership was fine with the idea there might not even be a nationally televised debate between the two candidates.

The Conway campaign waited until early September to formally announce which debates it would attend. The Conway camp caught the Paul team by surprise when it announced it would accept the challenge to go on Fox News Sunday. Suddenly the first debate was set for Sunday, October 3rd in Louisville. The Paul team was left with a major challenge. Ahead in the polls the campaign team was not relishing going into a debate with Chris Wallace moderating – he was considered to be the toughest interviewer on television. It was clear Dr. Paul was going to have to be at his best and prepare because if he didn't the race could

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get a whole lot closer. At the same time, the campaign felt the debate could be an opportunity to put Conway away for good.

Given the stakes the Paul campaign, together with the NRSC, quickly built a team to begin preparing for the debate. The team included: The NRSC field consultant to manage the overall process; a member of the NRSC Communications team to understand and study how Chris Wallace questions candidates as well as to play him during debate preparations; the general consultant to the Paul campaign to focus on studying Conway and playing him during mock debate sessions; a policy expert to develop an issue briefing document for Dr. Paul including both answers and rebuttals to Conway; and a senior member of the Paul campaign to focus on advance and logistics. Meanwhile, the Republican Party of Kentucky agreed to oversee rapid response in coordination with the campaign and NRSC.

Over the course of three weeks the debate prep team began setting up a formal schedule to prepare Dr. Paul. This included tasks such as advancing the debate site, building a mocked up replica of the studio where the debate would take place, having the general consultant and policy expert work regularly with Dr. Paul on how to answer various questions and, finally, holding a series of mock debates with Dr. Paul conducted in the exact format and timing of the actual event. As the various practice sessions took place it became clear the best strategy would be for Dr. Paul to be aggressive from the outset of the debate.

On the evening before the debate the campaign team arrived in Louisville to setup a rapid response center together with the Republican Party of Kentucky. The center would be directly connected to the communications and research teams the NRSC via phone. At the same time an advance team, including Dr. Paul's driver, physically went over the route from the hotel to the television station. The campaign's political team worked with local supporters in the Louisville area to get organized a show of signs along the route where Dr. Paul would be driving to the station. As dawn broke, the Paul operation swung into motion. While driving to the studio Dr. Paul avoided a large group of Conway backers who had gathered outside the other entrance to the station. The Paul campaign's rapid response center began sending out a series of prepared press releases before the debate had even started.

As the debate began Dr. Paul was asked to give the first answer to a question from Wallace about what was at stake in the election. It was a question he had already answered several times before in the mock debates. He was ready. He began with a discussion of the national debt and then linked into specific items of President Obama's agenda where he differed with Conway. He ended by setting a frame for the remainder of the debate. It was designed to put Conway on defense. "The question in this election is do you support the President's agenda or are you concerned about it?" Conway responded by trying to get the debate back on to issues relating to Kentucky (i.e. the drug problem) and the various negative stories about Dr. Paul than had run in the press. As the debate moved into the next line of questioning it was framed and to Dr. Paul's advantage. From that point on Dr. Paul was aggressive in questioning Conway and driving home his message - a vote for Conway would be a vote for President Obama and his agenda. As the debate ended, Conway looked like a candidate who had been beaten. Meanwhile Dr. Paul was fired up and ready to go.

The Ad War Escalates

In the last days of September, just days before the Fox News debate, the Conway campaign had began shifting its campaign narrative and messaging. The campaign unveiled a new ad featuring video of Dr. Paul saying on camera he would "support a \$2,000 deductible for Medicare." The ad ended with an older woman saying "Rand Paul is off the wall, with a \$2,000 deductible for Medicare." The Paul campaign's senior leadership and the NRSC team on the ground recognized this was an attack needed a quick response. The Paul campaign

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immediately went to work with both an earned media and paid media response plan. On the earned media side the campaign put out a statement from Dr. Paul saying he did not support such a deductible for those currently receiving, or near to receiving, Medicare benefits. At the same time, the campaign produced and released an ad saying "Rand Paul has never supported high Medicare deductibles for seniors." The Conway team pounced quickly.

The day after the Paul campaign's response ad went up on television, the Conway campaign released a revised ad featuring part of the Paul campaign's ad saying he had "never supported higher Medicare deductibles for seniors." They then ran several clips, from over several years, in which Dr. Paul was essentially saying the same thing. At the same time they sent out a press release including ten years worth of quotes from Dr. Paul in which he had said the same thing. It was clear to this hit; couple with a semi-botched response was going to hurt Dr. Paul's standing in the polls. The question was how much?

Conway Closes

By the second week of October, with just three weeks to go until Election Day, the race between Jack Conway and Dr. Rand Paul was beginning to close. By October 13th, the internal tracking polling by the Paul campaign showed the race 47% to 43% in favor of Dr. Paul among all registered voters and 49% to 42% among likely voters. More troubling was the fact voters - particularly those over 55 who are most likely to vote - were citing Conway ad messaging about Dr. Paul supporting a \$2,000 deductible for Medicare as a reason they were concerned about supporting Dr. Paul.

The Paul campaign was doing its best to try and confront the Medicare deductible issue, including running a new response ad featuring a patient of Dr. Paul's who told viewers "she knew him as her doctor and she trusted him to protect Medicare." The problem was it wasn't sticking. The good news, the campaign assumed, was Conway was going to have to change his advertising as it was beginning to run its course in terms of time and impact. The question making the campaign nervous was which direction would the Conway campaign go next?

Aqua Buddha Part #2

Around 4 pm on Friday, October 15th the race for the Kentucky Senate seat was dramatically and irreversibly changed when Jack Conway released a new ad entitled "Why." The ad was straight negative attack of the ugliest kind, focused entirely on a few select elements of the story from GQ. It featured an ominous voice and a less than flattering picture of Dr. Paul while asking a series of questions beginning with "why."

"Why was Rand Paul a member of a secret society that called the Holy Bible a hoax...that was banned for mocking Christianity and Christ?" (Graphic: pictures of Dr. Paul, the Bible, and words "a hoax").

"Why did Rand Paul once tie a woman up" (Graphics: Picture of Dr. Paul, tied hands, and words "Rand Paul ...tied me up...") "tell her to bow down before a false idol" (Graphic: pictures of Dr. Paul, tied hands, light photo of man in a mask morphing into an aqua Buddha, and words "Rand Paul...made me bow down...") and say his god was Aqua Buddha (Graphic: words change to "Rand Paul "...His God was 'Aqua Buddha'...")

"Why does Rand Paul want to end faith-based initiatives?" (Graphics: pictures Dr. Paul, Church and words "Rand Paul END faith-based initiatives") and even end the deduction for religious charities?"

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The ad ended with, "Why are there so many questions about Rand Paul?" (Graphic: picture of Rand Paul and an Aqua Buddha).

From the moment the ad was first seen at the Paul headquarters it was clear to the campaign's leadership only one candidate was going to walk away from this battle with their reputation intact. A conference call was quickly put together for 10 pm to bring together the senior members of the Paul campaign, the NRSC, and the main outside consultants including the pollster and the media creation team. Adding to the campaign's challenges was the fact it was a weekend so the earliest a response ad could be placed on the air was Monday. Moreover, Conway and Dr. Paul were scheduled to debate at the University of Louisville on Sunday in an event that would be covered statewide and nationally on television. The call was contentious but ultimately constructive.

As the call wrapped up around an hour after it began, an agreement had been reached to push back hard at Conway for even running such an ad. The campaign's messaging going forward would be "Conway's decision to even run such an ad disqualified him from holding public office." The team also decided the ad was directly calling into question Dr. Paul's faith, a point on which the candidate and his family were adamant. Tactically, the campaign agreed it would immediately begin taking the following steps. First it would produce a counter ad called, "False Witness" asking why was Jack Conway bearing false witness against Rand Paul by attacking his faith. Second, the campaign would confront Conway at the debate about the personal nature of his attack and its implications on Paul and his family. Finally, it was agreed the campaign would mount, beginning on Monday in conjunction with the release of the False Witness, a full-scale earned media counter assault on Conway's judgment for using an attack on Dr. Paul's faith.

Surprisingly, Saturday October 16th was a relatively quiet day at the Paul campaign headquarters. On the conference call a decision had been made not to release a statement to the press condemning the ad until the media asked it about it. It wasn't until late in the afternoon that the campaign received its first call from a reporter. The call came into the Campaign Manager. It was from a local reporter who had seen the ad with his wife. He said they were, "In shock Conway would even consider running such an ad." Ironically, this reporter, while fair, tended to be supportive of Conway. During the conversation, he admitted his wife was a life long democrat, but was not going to vote any more for Conway. The campaign released its statement and then most of the campaign team left for Louisville to prepare for the debate. It was clear to all this debate was going to be one half political and one half circus.

The Louisville Debate

Even before the release of Conway's attack ad, the Paul campaign was nervous about the University of Louisville debate. The campaign had been late in advancing the event and when the advance team arrived at the venue on Friday morning it discovered it was not setup logistically to handle the passionate supporters on both sides and the large media contingent covering the event. Moreover, the debate was being held in Conway's hometown where he had strong support. In addition, as Dr. Paul had been traveling Kentucky during the past two weeks, out of state activists from the liberal group MoveOn.org had been following him dressed in costumes and labor union activists backing Conway had been showing up at events.

On the logistical side the debate was being held in a hall where both Conway and Dr. Paul would have to walk through supporters in order to get in and out of the building and the hall. Because the seating for two hundred people was going to be first come first served both side's activists would be arriving early to get the best seats. Finally, after the debate

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was over, both candidates would have to walk directly off of the stage and through the audience and press to get out of the hall. While there was a side door in the hall that led straight outside, the organizers were refusing to allow the candidates to use it saying it would be locked by the police.

Recognizing the stakes, the Paul campaign pulled together a team of fifteen staff and interns who would be working to make sure each of these logistical issues were addressed. Each was given specific jobs and a command and control system was put in place to use mobile phones and hand held radios to keep constant contact. Every member of the Paul campaign team at the debate, including Dr. Paul himself, were briefed on where they would be and what they would be doing from the moment Dr. Paul left the hotel to drive to the event, until the moment he arrived back at the hotel after the debate. With the new Conway ad now running, the stakes and emotions surrounding this debate had become monumental.

The debate was scheduled for 7 pm and just after 3 pm the initial advance team deployed to the venue. By 5 pm supporters from both sides were already massing and ten Paul campaign staff were already in position. Two Paul advance team members were placed with the group of Paul supporters to make sure they all stayed in line and were not provoked. Two others dressed as college students were assigned to cover the Conway camp. Meanwhile, the team in charge of getting Dr. Paul into the building had made a decision to bring him into the back door of the building without telling the organizers to insure there wouldn't be any leaks to the Conway side.

By 6 pm over one hundred supporters of both Conway and Paul were massed outside the entrance to the building. Down by where the candidates were supposed to arrive a group of Conway supporters and the MoveOn.org activists were gathered waiting for Dr. Paul. In the midst were two plain clothed "university students" talking on the phone. They were connected to the Paul campaign's debate command center providing details of what was going on. Unbeknownst to them or Conway's supporters, Dr. Paul was already arriving into a back parking lot and walking across a lawn with a police and campaign escort towards the back door of the building. Waiting inside the door were two more Paul campaign staffers who opened and then relocked the back entrance once Dr. Paul was inside. Moments later the candidate's car arrived to pull into the reserved parking space. The Conway supporters started yelling and waving signs. They suddenly realized Dr. Paul wasn't in the car. They stopped as all they were doing was protesting the driver inside.

Inside the debate hall tensions were high. Activists from both camps were jawing back and forth. Just outside activists for the two campaigns were shouting slogans at each other. The Paul people were yelling "Rand Paul, Rand Paul." The Conway supporters were yelling back, "Is off the wall, Is off the wall." At the request of the Paul campaign the debate organizers had increased the level of Louisville police at the event. Each campaign was assigned a team of three officers who would provide security.

At ten minutes to seven the two candidates left their holding rooms to go and meet to be escorted into the hall. Dr. Paul and his senior leadership had been scheduled to go over last minute plans just prior, but Dr. Paul had asked to spend some time alone to collect his thoughts. As the two candidates met face to face for the first time since Conway had begun running his new ad little was said. As they walked with the organizers and a police escort up a set of stairs and entered into the debate hall, both sides erupted.

The debate would start with two-minute statements from each candidate. Conway would go first. In his remarks he focused on his record and kept to a common line that "Rand Paul is Wrong." Dr. Paul was up next. After opening with the line that he was a "physician not a politician." He then introduced his family and hit upon why he had chosen to run for office

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with a focus on President Obama's agenda. As the debate moved into its first line of questioning things quickly turned to Conway's ad. Conway attempted to defend the ad and suggested he was not questioning Rand Paul's faith. Dr. Paul quickly jumped on him over his attempt to justify the ad. "Have you no shame?" Dr. Paul asked, "Have you no decency or honor?" The crowd began to stir and the moderator had to remind them to keep quite. In the background some of the supporters of the two sides were actually yelling at each other. Fortunately, just as things appeared to be getting out of hand, a question was asked about something other than the Conway ad. The debate was tense, but it had settled down. During his closing statement Dr. Paul announced, to the shock of those in the room - and his campaign team - he, "would not be shaking Conway's hand at the close of the debate." He later told his senior staff had decided to do this about eight minutes before the debate ended. It was a high-risk move and only time would tell if it was the right one.

As the two candidates finished Dr. Paul quickly moved past Conway and down the steps of the stage. He was met by several of his campaign's advance team who quickly escorted him to the side door of the hall which the organizers had said was not for use. A member of the Paul team was on the other side and had gotten the police to unlock it just prior to the end of the debate. Once outside the building, Dr. Paul was met by the police escort. They quickly moved with him to his waiting car that had been in contact with the debate control team and had been moved as close as possible to the door as the debate ended. As the press struggled to catch up, two women in wigs ran towards Dr. Paul. As they caught up to him he was already in the car and the officers blocked their path. Dr. Paul's SUV quickly speed away.

Media Madness

As Dr. Paul and his campaign team gathered to have a post debate dinner all were in high spirits. As dinner was about to be served, Dr. Paul took a call from Senator McConnell who congratulated Dr. Paul on his debate performance. While in the primary the two had been on opposite sides they were quickly developing a friendship built on mutual respect. The intellectually curious Dr. Paul seemed fascinated and had great admiration for Senator McConnell's understanding of the art of politics. McConnell, meanwhile, recognized Dr. Paul's message was resonating with a group of voters who had not been politically active and in a manner that was important for him to understand as the Republican Party leader in the Senate.

The morning after the Louisville debate, the Paul campaign caught a break when democrat Senator Claire McCaskill was on MSNBC's Morning Joe program. The topic of Conway's ad and Paul's refusal to shake hands after the debate became a central topic of her appearance on the show. After playing the ad, the host asked Senator McCaskill if it crossed a line. At first, the experience politician struggled and suggested the ad did in fact cross a line. As she tried to recuperate given the fact she had just questioned a top Democrat Senate candidates tactics, other members of the shows panel begin trashing the ad. Throughout the day, more and more democrats and prominent liberal pundits condemned Conway's tactics.

Meanwhile, back at the Paul campaign headquarters, with the help of the NRSC, a communications war room was beginning to take shape. Earlier that morning a senior Republican communications expert had arrived along with two mid-level colleagues. They immediately went into action setting up opportunities for Dr. Paul to appear on various Fox News programming and talk radio. They also begin driving out to journalists and friendly bloggers quotes from various pundits and politicians who had condemned the Conway ad. Meanwhile, the campaign's general consultant and campaign manger were working on getting Kelly Paul to agree to do a press conference to talk about how hurtful the ad was to her and her family. It was not a difficult sell - she wanted to speak out.

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With the Paul's campaign's response ad now hitting the airwaves and the positive debate the previous night, the senior leadership was beginning to assume things were going to be ok. However, on Tuesday morning they awoke to new tracking polling numbers suggested Conway's ad was having a major impact in favor of Conway. The ballot test among all voters now had Conway in the lead 45% to 43%; moreover, even among those most likely voters the Paul lead had been sliced to just 4% - the lowest to date during the general election campaign. The trend was moving completely against the Paul campaign and if it didn't stop soon Conway would be well positioned to win. Moreover, some senior staff at the Paul and NRSC were concerned they didn't have any way to stop Conway's momentum unless they could turn the spot against him.

Throughout Tuesday, the Paul campaign's war room kept pushing hard to get national conservative media to pound on Conway for the ad. Dr. Paul did a number of television and radio interviews. Fox News had over one hundred segments about the ad. A conference call was organized with conservative leaders who condemned the ad. Former Presidential candidate and Baptist minister, Mike Huckabee, recorded a phone call that was sent to over 200,000 homes across Kentucky. The press conference featuring Kelly Paul was setup to move forward on Wednesday. Instead of panic, there was a renewed sense of urgency among the entire campaign team.

Wednesday morning's tracking polling showed little change from the previous night. Conway was maintaining a slight lead among all voters and Dr. Paul was still up by only 4% among those most likely to vote. He was also under 50% in total support among these voters. Throughout the day the Paul campaign's media onslaught towards Conway continued. Dr. Paul went on the Meghan Kelly's show on Fox and pounded on Conway. Fox continued to run segments questioning Conway's tactics. The NRSC released a web video featuring all of the various politicians, journalists and pundits who had questioned Conway on his ad. The Paul response ad False Witness was now running full steam on television stations across the state.

However, the most important event of the day was a press conference with Kelly Paul. Organized quickly the press conference was being covered not only by all the major Kentucky press, but also by Fox News and CNN. As she stepped to the podium at the Bowling Green Holiday Inn the Paul campaign's leadership held their breath. The heart of her remarks, which she had written herself with the aid of the Campaign Manager and the General Consultant focused on how hurtful the Conway attack had been on her family. Near the end of her remarks she said, "Jack Conway has a family too. And while I am sure he isn't thinking about it right now, these personal, gutter attacks hurt people's families. I would have thought someone who had a beautiful baby daughter would have taken that into account no matter how desperate he is to win this campaign." She ended her by saying, "At the end of the day we all have to look ourselves in the mirror and I am proud my husband will be able to do that." As the campaign team exhaled it was clear she had delivered a shot right into Jack Conway's gut. National and local media quickly picked up her remarks and Conway now had to play defense.

On Thursday the Paul campaign's senior leadership team awoke to the first good news in nearly a week. The new tracking polling conduct over night showed amazing movement – voters were now viewing Conway in an extremely negative light. On Tuesday 37% of Kentucky voters had said what they had recently seen read or heard about Jack Conway made them think less positively about him. By Thursday that number had increased to 48%. Moreover, Dr. Paul had moved back to even with Conway among all voters and was beginning to see his lead among likely voters increase. In particular women, seniors, and soft democrats were turning dramatically against Conway. Given the new data, the Paul campaign team realized they had Conway on the ropes. The messaging for the final week and a

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half of the campaign was simple – Jack Conway Is Unqualified to be a United States Senator. Within the campaign headquarters the entire operation was pushing to knock Jack Conway's campaign out. The war room continued pushing out stories that questioned Conway's credibility. On the trail, Conway was struggling to answer questions about the ad and become hostile to reporters who asked. Dr. Paul meanwhile was pushing hard across the finish line and occasionally taking a day off to make sure his patients could still see him. The Paul campaign jumped every time Conway spoke and pushed out the same questions over and over again.

By Saturday morning, tracking polling from the night before showed that Dr. Paul was now back on top leading by over eight percent among likely voters. His support among all voters was not higher than it had ever been in the previous polling. In just one week the campaign had gone from up to down and was no poised to win. All that was left for the Paul campaign was one more debate on Monday the 25th. While some in the campaign wanted to pull out of the debate after the events at the debate in Louisville, Dr. Paul had already decided he was going to attend out of friendship to the host. The campaign waited until the weekend to announce its decision.

The Curb Stomp

Going into the final debate the Paul campaign had opened up a twelve-percentage point lead on Conway who was reeling from his decision to run what had become known across the country as the Aqua Buddha spot. Some in the media were even saying it was the worst ad and decision by a campaign in years. Surprisingly, the final debate of the Kentucky Senate election of 2010 was a mild and rather boring affair. Both candidates were relatively gracious to each other and stuck exclusively to the issues. However, as was the norm in the Kentucky Senate campaign, events occurring outside the studio made national news.

As Dr. Paul arrived for the debate two large crowds had gathered and were lining the street. On the one side stood the Paul supporters. On the other were chanting Conway backers. As Dr. Paul's SUV approached he lowered the window of his car to wave at his supporters who had come out to greet him. Along the way a young woman in a wig who had been wearing a Paul sticker early at the event came charging at the car and successfully attempted to stick a sign into the front passenger seat where Dr. Paul was sitting. She was quickly pulled back from the moving vehicle by some Paul supporters. As the car came to a stop at the front entrance Dr. Paul got out and walked in to the building followed by several top aids.

Behind him, running from around his car was the same woman who moments earlier had pushed the sign through the window. Alarmed by a woman charging at Dr. Paul whose back was turned she was tackled by one of campaign's volunteers. As she was held on the ground people were yelling for someone to get the police. Another Paul supporter, and older gentleman who was a county coordinator for the campaign, placed his foot on her shoulder and stomped her head into the curb. A television news crew was filming. Before the debate had even ended the video was being played on cable television news.

Back in the Paul campaign headquarters reporters began calling to ask about the "curb stomping incident." The campaign's leadership was split between those with Dr. Paul inside the studio, who had not seen what had happened, and those back at the campaign headquarters that were fielding calls. Chaos quickly ensued. As the story escalated it was clear the Paul campaign had another major crisis on its hands. At the studio the debate was going well. However, outside and on the news, events at the debate were quickly becoming irrelevant.

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For two days following the debate the curb stomping incident was national news. The Paul campaign had disavowed the incident and later released video from a supporters clearly showing the woman had been acting strange, pretending to be a Paul supporter, and had pushed a sign through the window of a moving car towards the candidate. At first she had said she was ok. Later she appeared on MSNBC where she suggested she had been badly injured. As it turns out she had come to Kentucky from out of state and was an activist for MoveOn.org. As events unfolded the Paul team nervously watched its tracking polling come in early each morning during the election's final week - they remained unchanged. Dr. Paul was going to be the next Senator from Kentucky.

Election Night

Strangely, election night in Kentucky was anticlimactic event. At 7 pm eastern time, just after the polls closed, the major networks all called the race for Dr. Paul. Across the state voters had overwhelmingly supported Dr. Paul. The exit polling suggested that his victory span all major targeted demographic groups. He had won over 55% of the vote and the campaign was now over. As he approached the podium at his victory party the transition from candidate, Dr. Rand Paul, to Senator Rand Paul had already begun.

KEYS TO DR. PAUL'S VICTORY

On election day, the Paul campaign was successful in winning while several other of the most prominent Tea Party backed candidates for US Senate were defeated. Ultimately the Paul campaign's success was predicated on a number of keys to victory where it was successful in meeting the challenges it faced along the way. The following are four keys that made the difference between winning and losing for the Paul campaign effort.

Keeping the Message Focused on the National Narrative

From the outset the Paul campaign recognized that for it to be successful it needed to make the race in Kentucky a referendum on national politics and Barack Obama's policies, rather than a contest between Jack Conway and Rand Paul. While the campaign got off to a slightly bumpy start with Dr. Paul's appearance on the Rachel Maddow show, it quickly regained its footing and refocused its earned media efforts to media based in Kentucky. Through the campaign the Paul effort played to its greatest strength that was if the choice for Kentuckians were Rand Paul or Barack Obama, they would defeat the President in a landslide.

Embracing Assistance from the Establishment While Confronting It

Like many of the tea party candidates who were victorious during the primary season of 2010, the Paul campaign had gotten off to a rocky start with the Republican Party establishment. However, upon winning the primary the NRSC and McConnell teams were quick to reach out to the Paul campaign to find ways to work together. This required both sides to admit they understood the primary was over and that the sole goal of all involved was seeing Dr. Paul elected. Through out the campaign the NRSC and the Paul campaign worked side by side to do what each could to make sure this goal was achieved. While the Paul campaign at times criticized the establishment, it was done with open communications and only when it was in the best interest of getting Dr. Paul elected. Ultimately both sides ended up winning because they worked together.

Responding Rapidly to Attacks

The Paul campaign, like many successful efforts, grew over time. By the end of the campaign it was a well-oiled machine at responding to attacks that were throwing at it and turn-

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ing quickly from offense to defense. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism for the week of October 18th shows just how effective the Paul camp was at driving media. As the graph below shows, Dr. Paul and Jack Conway were the second and third most mentioned items covered in the media during that week. During that time the campaign for the Kentucky Senate seat went from 43% to 45% for Conway to 54% to 39% for Dr. Paul. Not only was Dr. Paul's campaign responding fast to events, it was getting coverage and moving voter's opinions in his favor.

Letting the Candidate Be Himself

The final key to the campaign was that throughout the election the Paul effort let him be himself. While Dr. Paul at times was going to say things that caused controversy the fact was his general inclinations were right for the environment in which the election was taking place. The Paul campaign team realized that its effort would only be successful if it allowed the campaign to be an extension of who he is and what he stands for politically.

Trygve Olson

is an American public affairs and political consultant. He is the founder of Viking Strategies LLC, a company that provides clients around the world with cutting edge strategy, implementation, and tactics. Mr. Olson has worked on elections in over thirty countries and has aided some of the largest corporations on both national and global public affairs campaigns.

During the 2010 Congressional Elections, Mr. Olson was retained by the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) to provide on the ground field support during the Kentucky Senate race. In this capacity he served as a key advisor to Rand Paul's campaign and played an integral strategic role in the campaign's success.

Prior to founding Viking Strategies, Mr. Olson worked for one of top public affairs companies in the United States, serving clients in the telecommunications, technology, and quick service food industry. In addition, Mr. Olson worked as a consultant to the European People's Party during their highly successful 2009 European Parliamentary Election effort and was retained to oversee the international visitor's program at the 2008 Republican National Convention.

Mr. Olson has spent over fifteen years working on behalf of the International Republican Institute, with a focus on repressive and closed countries. He is the author of the upcoming book on the topic entitled, *The Battle for Democracy: Ten Lessons from the Frontlines*. In addition, he is the founder of AdvancingFreedom.org, a website which will be the leading sources of news, information and resources in the battle for freedom, democracy and human rights around the globe.

Trygve Olson makes his home in Arlington, VA, with his wife Erika Veberyte and daughter Ula Louise Olson