

CHAPTER 5

HELP - WANTED AND UNWANTED

On Friday, November 19, 1993, after attending a fund raising cocktail party in south suburban Denver in his honor, Mike Bird caught a late evening airplane to Phoenix, Arizona. He spent the night at the Marriott Mountain Shadows, a luxury resort motel in an upscale section of Phoenix. The next day he attended a campaign seminar for would-be Republican gubernatorial candidates sponsored by the Republican Governor's Association.

The conference was being held long before most states held their Republican state conventions or Republican primaries. As a result, some states had candidates present who would be competing against each other at future state conventions and in future state primaries. In the case of Colorado, however, Mike Bird was the only one of the three men campaigning for the Republican nomination for governor who attended the conference.

The headline speakers at the campaign seminar were five of the Republican Party's most well-known governors - George V. Voinovich of Ohio, William Weld of Massachusetts, John McKernan of Maine, John Engler of Michigan, and Mike Leavitt of Utah. Also attending the meeting was Haley Barbour, chairman of the Republican National Committee. There were plenty of refreshment breaks between the formal meetings at which Mike Bird was able to talk briefly with all five of the Republican governors as well as Haley Barbour.

Bird heard many things at the campaign seminar, some of which he had heard many times before. Most valuable, however, was the presentation of polling and election data that indicated 1994 was probably going to be a good year for the Republicans - and that included Colorado as well as the rest of the country.

In six special elections in the year since the 1992 presidential election, the Republicans had won two U.S. Senate seats (Paul Coverdell in Georgia and Kay Bailey Hutchinson in Texas), two mayoral elections (Richard Riordan in Los Angeles and Rudolph Guliani in New York),

and two gubernatorial elections (Christine Todd Whitman in New Jersey and George Allen in Virginia). The Republican governors said they were hoping to keep this trend of GOP victories going. In private conversations with Mike Bird, they made it clear that Colorado was one of the currently Democratic governorships they hoped to pick up for the Republicans in 1994.

There was good news about issues. One survey showed that Republicans had a 22 percent advantage over Democrats where tax issues were concerned. This indicated that most voters thought Republicans were more likely than Democrats to cut state taxes. Mike Bird's frequently repeated charge that "Roy Romer never met a tax he didn't like" appeared to be right on target for 1994.

Recent public opinion polls also showed that crime was rapidly moving up as the most important issue where most voters were concerned. The state of the national economy - the issue that had been so helpful to the Democrats in 1992 - was rapidly fading in voter importance. Here again Mike Bird was right on top of a major national issue. He was criticizing Roy Romer for appointing judges who did not enforce Colorado's death penalty and for not building enough prisons to keep Colorado criminals off the street.

William Weld, the governor of Massachusetts, pointed out that his bumper sticker from his last campaign had perfectly emphasized the important twin issues of high taxes and rising crime rates. His bumper sticker read: "William Weld - Tough on Taxes, Tough on Crime!"

There was an important wrinkle to the tax issue. One speaker said that most voters are *not* opposed to tax increases per se. The problem is that most voters do not believe the money raised through increased taxes will be spent effectively. Mike Bird was in great shape on this subtle aspect of the tax increase issue. As the longtime chairman of the Joint Budget Committee in the Colorado state legislature, Bird had developed a strong reputation for knowing how to budget and spend state funds in an economic and efficient manner.

Two other issues that were back in the national public consciousness

for 1994 were honesty and morality. Honesty had become important because voters were mad at Democratic president Bill Clinton for keeping so few of his 1992 campaign promises. Morality was important because of recent revelations of Clinton's repeated acts of marital infidelity. Above all, Mike Bird and the other Republican gubernatorial hopefuls were told, project an image of honesty and integrity. In addition, make promises that voters believe you can keep.

Over and over again Mike Bird heard this simple message. Raise plenty of money, spend most of it on radio and television advertising, and spend it as close to election day as possible. One of the most entertaining parts of the conference came when the meeting room was darkened and some of the more successful TV commercials from winning 1992 election campaigns were played on a giant television screen. This aspect of the conference was bipartisan in nature. Good Democratic commercials were played right along with good Republican commercials.

Republican Governor Mike Leavitt of Utah had a particularly important piece of advice. Person-to-person campaigning - shaking hands, speaking to lunch and dinner clubs, meeting people in receiving lines - is very important, Leavitt said, but it must be backed up with good television advertising. He saw a dynamic relationship between television ads and personal campaigning. He concluded: "Television ads make your personal campaigning much, much more effective."¹

This idea was further supported by Paul Mifsud, the campaign manager in George Voinovich's winning campaign in Ohio in 1990. Mifsud counseled putting 50 percent of every dollar contributed into a special fund for TV advertising. Under no circumstances, he said, should this fund be allowed to be "raided" for campaign purposes other than producing and buying TV ads.

Repeatedly the would-be Republican gubernatorial candidates were warned to be on their guard against what was called *the hidden liberal agenda*. This was the idea that Democrats had learned to campaign as moderates and conservatives but still intended, once elected to office, to

implement liberal programs and policies. This idea seemed to apply very well to the gubernatorial race in Colorado. As noted earlier, Democratic governor Roy Romer had what could be viewed as a weak record on the crime issue, but lately he had been telling the voters what a strong anti-crime governor he had been.

The candidate seminar devoted considerable attention to Ross Perot's independent candidacy for president in 1992. Perot, a billionaire businessman from Dallas, Texas, had run against both Democrat Bill Clinton and Republican George Bush and finished with a phenomenal, for an independent candidate, 19 percent of the vote. Any Republican who wanted to be elected governor of his or her state in 1994, it was said, would have to carry at least two-thirds of the Perot voters to win. Because Perot had done very well in Colorado in 1992, garnering 21 percent of the state's presidential vote, this advice clearly applied to Colorado. To win Perot voters, it was argued, Republican candidates for governor needed to present themselves as businessman types who knew how to run things and thereby would protect people's jobs and run state government more efficiently.

The day after the Republican gubernatorial candidate seminar, Sunday, November 21, 1993, was set aside for playing golf, hitting tennis balls, swimming in the pool, sun bathing, and otherwise enjoying the pleasures of the Mountain Shadows resort and the Arizona sunshine. Sadly for Mike Bird, he had to catch an early morning airplane back to Denver, where he was picked up by wife Ursula and driven to a fund raising brunch on a ranch near Fort Collins, Colorado.

The brunch took place in a scenic location. The ranch house, which was large and spacious, sat on a hilltop overlooking a small lake the size of a football field. Beyond the lake the Rocky Mountains, already covered with snow, were visible in the distance. Fenced meadows filled with grazing cattle surrounded the ranch house, and as the brunch went on the cattle herd slowly moved ever closer, so that at one point it seemed there was a cow munching grass just a little way from every window.

In addition to a delicious meal and a short speech by Mike Bird, brunch attendees were entertained by a well-known Colorado cowboy humorist and poet. The guests found the jokes to be funny and the poems witty. Most important, a nice sum of money was raised with which to implement some of the campaign techniques Mike Bird learned about at the Republican Governors Association candidate seminar.

DEALING WITH REPUBLICAN HEADQUARTERS

On Tuesday, November 23, 1993, a meeting of the campaign staffs of the various Republican candidates for governor was held at state Republican headquarters in Denver. Michael Hesse, the executive director of the Colorado Republican Party, had called the meeting to let the various campaigns know the details of the state party's plans for the 1994 elections in Colorado.

A heavy snow was falling all along the Front Range of the Colorado Rocky Mountains that afternoon. Despite that fact, representatives of the various candidates for the Republican nomination for governor braved slippery highways and iced-up windshields to get to the meeting. It began at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, just as it was getting dark and colder and the snowstorm was intensifying in fury.

Mike Hesse announced that the Republican Party in Colorado was planning to do a number of things to enhance the party's image in the minds of voters. Some of these things were fairly routine, such as installing a large television screen at the Republican State Assembly in June of 1994 and letting each candidate for the Republican nomination for governor play a two-minute video for the assembly delegates. Another commonplace activity announced was that the state party was going to do "opposition research" on incumbent Democratic governor Roy Romer. Unsavory and unpopular facts dug up about Romer would be provided to all the Republicans competing against each other for the party nomination for governor. And, in an effort to build party unity following the August primary election, all the candidates for governor -

the primary winner and the primary losers - would make a campaign swing around the state together.

Then Mike Hesse announced an unusual and innovative idea. During the first week of December 1993, the Republican Party was going to conduct some polls to see which of the various candidates for the Republican nomination had the highest name recognition among voters. It also was going to see which of the would-be Republican candidates had the highest approval/disapproval ratings. These poll results would not be released to the press or the public, but each candidate could see the results of the polls concerning his particular candidacy.

The poll would include the names of the three candidates actively running for the Republican nomination for governor - Mike Bird, Phil Klingsmith, and Dick Sargent. It would not stop there, however. The Republican Party poll would also test how other leading Republican politicians rated with the voters. One of the names on that list was Attorney General Gale Norton, who was being mentioned in the press as a possible Republican candidate for governor.

By this time the snow had turned to sleet, which was blowing noisily against the windows of state Republican headquarters. The sound of the sleet striking the windows was almost as chilling to some of the candidate representatives present as the news that the state Republican Party was going to do gubernatorial candidate approval polls. The candidate representatives were going to have to drive home through a heavy Colorado snowstorm bearing bad news to their candidates.

When Mike Bird learned of the state Republican party's plans to do candidate polling, he immediately feared a public relations disaster for his campaign. Because he was only a state legislator, and not the state attorney general, Bird would probably score much lower in the voter recognition poll than Gale Norton. Although this information would not be formally released to the press, state Republican leaders all would see it, and there just might be an accidental "leak" to the press. Even if there was no leak, the poll results might be used in Republican inner circles

to harm Bird's image as a potential winning candidate.

Moving quickly, Mike Bird asked state Republican headquarters to remove his name from any candidate polling it planned to do. In a personal letter to Don Bain, the state chairman of the Colorado Republican Party, Bird explained his concerns, both for his own campaign for governor and for the state Republican Party:

"I am concerned that the Colorado Republican Party conducting a candidate poll prior to the June state assembly and the August Republican primary might be misinterpreted by voters and other political observers as the Colorado Republican Party intervening in the assembly/primary candidate selection process. Although no one can say what might or might not happen, I am particularly concerned that things might turn out in such a way that people view the Colorado Republican Party intervening on my behalf. Of course, the same perception could be created regarding other candidates depending on the outcome. Either way, the result could call into question the objectivity of the state party organization."

Bird then noted that "there is a tradition in Colorado for the state party organization...to stay completely neutral in assembly and primary struggles...." He said he was removing his name from the poll so that this tradition would "be carefully upheld during the 1994 assembly/primary period."²

State Republican headquarters gracefully accepted Mike Bird's decision not to participate in candidate polling prior to the state assembly or the gubernatorial primary.³ The entire incident illustrated a problem frequently faced by candidates for major offices. The state party organization is supposed to remain scrupulously neutral until the time one Republican candidate for governor has been selected in the party primary election. In many cases, however, state party organizations do not stay neutral, and official polls or official endorsements can badly hurt one party candidate and greatly strengthen another.

The Bird for Governor campaign made it a point to constantly

remind state Republican headquarters of the need for strict neutrality. Following the incident over candidate polling, that neutrality was generally forthcoming in the 1994 Colorado gubernatorial election campaign. The Bird campaign was pleased, for the most part, with the manner in which state party headquarters tried not to favor one Republican candidate over the other.

THE "BIG MONEY" IN THE COLORADO REPUBLICAN PARTY

Mike Bird spent a considerable amount of time, often at lunch or dinner, meeting with well-known and well-connected Colorado Republicans who, it was said, could help him in his campaign for governor. One such person was Jean Tool, a former Republican county chairman in Denver and a key supporter of John Love, the popular GOP governor of Colorado during the 1960s.

Jean Tool stressed to Mike Bird there were four major ingredients in a statewide campaign in Colorado: (1) the party organization, (2) the candidate, (3) the money, and (4) the issues. According to Tool, the strength of the party organization, the quality of the candidate, and the amount of money the candidate could raise were all much more important factors than the issues.

It is generally assumed in Colorado Republican politics that there exists a group of very rich people, most of them living in the Denver area, who have the money and the willingness to finance Republican campaigns for statewide office. These people, it is believed, will not only give tens of thousands of dollars themselves but will arrange for hundreds of thousands of dollars to be given by their families, friends, acquaintances, and business associates. These people, rarely identified by name, are generally referred to as the "big money" or the "financial heavy hitters" in the Colorado Republican Party.

Whether this group actually exists or not, the Bird for Governor campaign made a number of attempts to reach out to it. One Bird

volunteer, Bill Sinclair of Colorado Springs, made a particular effort to put the Bird campaign staff in close touch with some of the better-known Republican big contributors in Denver.

Bill Daniels, who made millions of dollars in the cable television industry, was one of the more publicly known financial supporters of Republican candidates. His associate, Robert Lee, made it his business to meet and give advice to all the Republicans who said they were running for governor in 1994. He met with Mike Bird at a luncheon in Denver. On January 12, 1994, Bob Lee briefed a selected group of Mike Bird's campaign staff on what it takes to get elected governor of Colorado. The meeting was held at the headquarters building of Bill Daniels's cable television company, located along Cherry Creek Parkway in southeast Denver.

Bob Lee saw incumbent Democratic governor Roy Romer as "Governor Ineffective." Lee rattled off a long list of things Romer said he was going to do and then failed to achieve. Romer said he was going to have the U.S. Government build a giant atom smasher, the Super Collider, in Colorado; it went to Texas instead. Romer said he would get United Airlines to locate a major aircraft maintenance facility in Denver; it went to Indianapolis instead. The same was true about a Continental Airlines maintenance facility and a future Winter Olympics. Romer said he would get these facilities or events for Colorado, but they went elsewhere.

Roy Romer's only success, Bob Lee pointed out, was to help the City and County of Denver get the financing and the political approval to build a new airport - Denver International Airport (DIA). The airport was getting behind on its construction schedule and going way over its projected cost, however, thus turning into a political liability rather than a political asset. Roy Romer could be portrayed, Bob Lee said, as not being able to deliver on his promises and, when he did deliver, the promises - such as DIA - did not turn out very well.

Bob Lee said the quest for the Colorado governorship was divided into three phases. Phase one was getting support in the precinct

caucuses and the county assemblies and qualifying for the primary election ballot at the Republican State Assembly in early June. Phase two was winning the Republican primary in early August. Phase three was winning the general election in early November against Roy Romer. Bob Lee noted that each of the three phases was distinct, each required a different set of organizing techniques and skills, and each had to be carefully planned for ahead of time.⁴

"The candidate is the one thing that cannot be replaced in a Colorado election campaign," Bob Lee pointed out. Colorado's complex nominating process required the candidate to meet voters, talk to assembly delegates, attend party political meetings, etc. Because only the candidate could do this person-to-person style of campaigning, no one else could be sent in his or her place. "To make maximum time for the candidate to be out campaigning," Bob Lee said, "the staff must do as much of the campaign organizing as possible." Bob Lee made it clear that a Colorado style campaign required a high level of synchronization between the candidate and his or her staff.

For most Colorado voters, Bob Lee suggested, the 1994 Colorado gubernatorial election campaign would center around the issue of *socialism*. Roy Romer represented "more government" to most people, Lee said. It was essential that Mike Bird be presented to the electorate as representing "less government." Such a dynamic contrast between Romer and his Republican opponent would put the Republican candidate well down the road to victory.⁵

Bob Lee made no financial commitments to either Mike Bird or his campaign staff. Try as they might, the Bird campaign team was never able to raise significant amounts of money from the reputed "financial heavy hitters" in the Colorado Republican Party in Denver. Later on in the campaign, there were rumors that the "big money people" in the Colorado GOP could be relied on to see that there was adequate campaign financing for whichever candidate won the Republican primary election in August. In other words, Mike Bird would have to win the Republican primary before he would see any GOP "big money"

contributed to his campaign.

A CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS IN COLORADO SPRINGS

In mid-January of 1994 the Bird for Governor campaign organization began to change. The part-time volunteer atmosphere that had characterized the campaign up to this point was rapidly replaced with an aura of full-time professionalism. Michelle Provaznik, who had been helping out with specific projects on a part-time basis, went to work as the full-time scheduler and fund-raiser, based in Colorado Springs. Brian Shaw, a young man who had worked in a number of previous statewide Republican campaigns in Colorado, opened up and staffed a "satellite office" in Denver. Sherman Griffin, the young man who had done some early campaign work for Jim Nicholson before Nicholson dropped out of the race for governor, joined Brian Shaw in the Denver office to help with issues research and writing.

The major indication of this change in the character of the Bird campaign was the opening of the Colorado Springs headquarters. A Springs businessman and his wife, close friends of Mike and Ursula Bird, gave the campaign a large unrented office space in a downtown building. There was ample space for six desks around the outside edge of the room and more than enough space in the center for two large work tables. Off in one corner was a storage closet, a coat rack, and a coffee maker. The room was large enough to encompass the full-time paid staff and their desks and telephones as well as the daily volunteer activities of addressing and stuffing envelopes, making signs, telephoning potential voters, etc.

Once this commodious office space became available, the campaign's computers and office files and fax machines were all moved into it from the Bird home in northeast Colorado Springs.

GIFTS-IN-KIND

The newly-opened Bird for Governor headquarters in Colorado Springs symbolized an important aspect of modern day election campaigns - gifts-in-kind. Paying the rent on such a large office space would have been a tremendous drain on the financial resources of the Bird campaign. On the other hand, since the space was sitting unrented, the gift of the office space for the six to nine months of the election campaign did not represent a major sacrifice on the part of the donors. Part of running for political office consists of knowing people who can make important gifts-in-kind to the campaign.

Among other gifts-in-kind received by the Bird campaign were the free use of a small station wagon, given by a local Colorado Springs automobile dealer. A telephone service company in Pueblo donated the free use of a statewide 800 number message service. People throughout Colorado could dial 1 800 625 BIRD and leave a recorded message for the campaign to call them back. Similar to the Colorado Springs headquarters, the office space for the Denver satellite office was a gift-in-kind.

As with monetary contributions, there are no restrictions on the size or extent of gifts-in-kind in Colorado elections. Gifts-in-kind must be reported to the secretary of state, however, just as monetary contributions must be reported. These free gifts do have an effect on the outcome of elections. People who have supporters who own office buildings and automobile dealerships and telephone service companies have a better chance of getting elected than people who do not have such valuable - and giving - contacts.

Mike Bird's wife, Ursula, went to work decorating the new Colorado Springs headquarters. In addition to the usual quota of "Mike Bird for Governor" signs, she put up on the walls a series of framed posters advertising past productions of the Colorado Opera Festival, the local opera repertory company in Colorado Springs. Ursula Bird recently had served as president of the opera board of directors. Many visitors to the headquarters commented that the opera posters added "tone."

Once the decoration of the new headquarters was completed, an

open house was held - not a fund-raiser - to let all of Mike Bird's Colorado Springs volunteers see the somewhat luxurious space in which, hopefully, they all would be working hard to put Mike Bird in the Governor's Mansion.

A PROFESSIONAL CAMPAIGN MANAGER

By this time it had become obvious that the Mike Bird for Governor campaign needed a professional campaign manager based in Denver. With 60 percent of the state's population living in the Denver metropolitan area and only 10 percent living in Colorado Springs, it was clear there had to be a strong operation in Denver headed up by someone with considerable experience in Colorado statewide election campaigns.

After a considerable search, Mike Bird hired Jim Scherer, a former colleague of Mike's in the state legislature, to take over as campaign manager. In addition to his legislative experience, Jim Scherer had worked as a regional administrator for the U.S. Government's Environmental Protection Agency during the presidential administrations of Republicans Ronald Reagan and George Bush.

Bird worked hard to track down Scherer, who was working on a short-term assignment for the Environmental Protection Agency in Prague, Czechoslovakia. To say the least, Scherer was quite surprised to get Bird's telephone call. Scherer said he could "fit in" working in the Mike Bird primary election campaign between the end of his assignment in Prague and the start of a late summer assignment in Indonesia.

Jim Scherer was highly respected and well-connected to the key people in Colorado Republican politics. His major task was to organize the Bird for Governor campaign to win votes at the Republican precinct caucuses, the county assemblies, and the state assembly. Scherer had previous experience at this task, having managed the unsuccessful campaign of Robert Leon Kirscht of Pueblo for the Republican nomination for governor in 1986.

Things were looking good for the Bird for Governor campaign by

mid-January of 1994. A professional campaign staff had been hired and was progressively expanding as the work of the campaign expanded. A large and comfortable headquarters office had been opened in Colorado Springs and an equally large satellite office in Denver. A donated blue station wagon was on the road taking Bird and his campaign staffers to a full schedule of campaign appearances. Over \$100,000 had been raised for the campaign, and it appeared that another \$100,000 to \$150,000 could easily be raised by the time of the Republican primary in August. Best of all, Mike Bird was by far the best known and most experienced of the three men running for the Republican nomination for governor.

Notes To Chapter 5:

1. Author's notes, Republican Governors Association Candidate Seminar, Phoenix, Arizona, 20 November 1993. The author accompanied Mike Bird to the seminar.
2. Personal letter from Mike Bird to Don Bain, state chairman, Colorado Republican Party, 24 November 1993.
3. Personal letter from Don Bain, state chairman, Colorado Republican Party, to Mike Bird, 1 December 1993.
4. The Mike Bird for Governor campaign staff was well aware of the "three phases" of a statewide election campaign in Colorado. The "three phases" were defined and discussed in a "campaign plan" which was distributed along with the Mike Bird for Governor biography.
5. All Bob Lee quotes from author's notes, Mike Bird for Governor campaign staff meeting with Bob Lee, Denver, 12 January 1994.