

CHAPTER 3

OPPONENTS - REAL AND RUMORED

As Mike Bird conducted his early campaigning around Colorado during 1993, two additional candidates for the Republican nomination for governor appeared. Similar to Bird, both Dick Sargent and Phil Klingsmith did not formally "announce" their candidacies but simply let it be known they were running. By the fall of 1993, Sargent and Klingsmith were being invited to all the same candidate forums and candidate debates that Bird was being invited to.

DICK SARGENT FOR GOVERNOR

Dick Sargent twice ran as the Republican nominee for treasurer of Colorado - and lost both times. He worked at turning those negatives into positives, however, arguing that his two losing efforts in statewide races had "prepared" him for winning the governorship. Sargent also cited his extensive military experience as training him for "executive leadership."

Sargent was born in China, the son of Presbyterian missionaries there. In May of 1941 he, his mother, and his younger brother caught the last boat out of China, thereby escaping possible internment by the invading Japanese at the start of World War Two. Back in the United States, Sargent attended a private boarding high school, the Cranbrook School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, graduating in 1952.

After briefly attending Bowdoin College, in Brunswick, Maine, Sargent entered the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Graduating in 1957, he joined the Marine Corps and served as a "single engine-single seat" jet fighter pilot. He also flew fighter-bombers. After five years of active duty, Sargent went into the Marine Reserves, where he eventually rose to the rank of full Colonel. Sargent was available to fly combat missions in the Vietnam War, but he was not called to duty in Vietnam.

Following his five years of active duty in the Marines, Sargent

became a stock broker and investment adviser. In 1975 he and his wife, Kathy, and their two daughters settled in Golden, Colorado, a western suburb of Denver. Sargent quickly embarked upon a career in local politics, sitting on the city Planning Commission in Golden from 1979 to 1981. He then moved up to the City Council in Golden, serving from 1981 to 1985.

Dick Sargent was 59-years-old at the time he ran for governor. He frequently noted that "modern military flying requires the skill to operate complex systems - and that's the same skill that's required to operate a modern state government."¹ To show his military toughness, Sargent once put on his leather Marine Corps aviator jacket and told the press: "Roy Romer has never come up against a warrior like me!"²

Sargent's family credentials were particularly strong. He and wife Kathy had been married 35 years. Their two grown daughters had married and there were three grandchildren. Sargent liked to spend his spare time gardening and was a beekeeper with 10 working hives in his backyard.

Sargent argued that unstinting and persistent effort on his part would carry him to the Republican nomination and enable him to defeat Roy Romer in the general election. "I'm a (Vince) Lombardi football type of guy," Sargent said, referring to a revered former head coach of the Green Packers professional football team. "Two and three yards at a time. We've got no passing on this team. We don't do anything big and flashy. It's steady, steady, steady."³

Sargent said he decided as early as November of 1985 that he would run for governor of Colorado in 1994. His campaign strategy was based mainly on the idea that attending a large number of campaign events around the state would build him a substantial reservoir of support in the more rural areas of Colorado. He noted that he was "out of the house" four nights a week for nine years giving talks and going to meetings in his effort to attain the Governor's Mansion in 1994.

The Sargent campaign organization consisted primarily of Dick Sargent himself. At various times during the campaign he had one paid

assistant. All the rest of the workers in his campaign organization were volunteers.

Sargent targeted a variety of voting groups in Colorado which he felt could be persuaded to vote for him. He believed the state's 400,000 military veterans would support his candidacy because of his military experience. He also said he had spent much time speaking to black church congregations in Denver. He claimed he enjoyed strong support from Republicans and Democrats alike in Adams County, the big industrial suburban county northeast of Denver.⁴

PHIL KLINGSMITH FOR GOVERNOR

The third Republican running for governor in the fall of 1993 was Phil Klingsmith, a lawyer from the small western Colorado city of Gunnison. He was also an educator, serving as chairman of the business and accounting department at Western State College in Gunnison.

Similar to Sargent, Klingsmith was distinguished by previous electoral defeat rather than victory. In 1984 he ran for the Republican nomination to the U.S. House of Representatives from western Colorado and was defeated in the primary.

The Klingsmith campaign never seemed to really get off the ground. Unlike Mike Bird and Dick Sargent, who were very faithful about showing up at candidate forums and debates, Klingsmith only sporadically attended such events. He concentrated most of his campaigning in western Colorado and promised, if elected, to remember his rural roots. "In rural Colorado, there's a real sense that maybe state government has to get back to the people," Klingsmith told the press. "I think one of the things that happens to our leaders is they get too far away from their roots and they get too far away from the people who make them."⁵

Phil Klingsmith saw Colorado politics as distinguished by a battle between Front Range interests - centered in Denver and Colorado

Springs - and Western Slope interests - found in every city and town in the western part of the state. His campaign was oriented to seeing that urban interests in Colorado did not forget the rural interests. "If things are going well in Rangely or Mancos or Julesburg [small towns in rural Colorado], things are going to be going well in Denver," he once said. "But the opposite is not necessarily true, unless you have a vision for the whole state."⁶

By the late fall of 1993 most observers of Colorado campaign politics saw Mike Bird as the clear front-runner over Dick Sargent and Phil Klingsmith for the Republican nomination for governor. Peter Blake, the political columnist for the *Rocky Mountain News*, touted Bird as the top GOP candidate and then analyzed the situation this way: "Gunnison lawyer Phil Klingsmith and perennial candidate Dick Sargent are still running, but are bound for nowhere."⁷

RUMORED CANDIDACIES

Throughout the summer and fall of 1993, the Mike Bird for Governor campaign was disturbed by periodic rumors that this or that well-known Republican was going to run for governor. A number of these rumors involved potential candidates who would have made formidable opponents for Bird. Some of the best days for the Bird campaign staff were when these rumored candidates "announced" they would not be running for governor after all.

One of the rumored candidates was Colorado state Senator Tom Norton, a Republican from Greeley who was serving his first term as president of the state Senate. Norton possessed legislative credentials almost as impressive as Mike Bird's. Norton's campaign never got out of the talking stage, however, and he eventually told news reporters that the heavy press of business in the state legislature would keep him out of the governor's race.

Another potential candidate was Doug Fain, an executive at Martin Marietta, one of the largest and most influential business concerns in

Denver. In 1992 Fain had run unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination for a U.S. Senate seat. Similar to Norton's abbreviated campaign, Fain's was all talk and no concrete organization or serious fund-raising. In November of 1993 Doug Fain told Peter Blake of the *Rocky Mountain News* that he was "kinda backing away" from running for governor.⁸ A truly serious threat to the Mike Bird candidacy was persistent and strong rumors during the summer of 1993 that Colorado Springs real estate developer Steve Schuck was going to put his name in the gubernatorial sweepstakes. Schuck had run for governor eight years earlier, in 1986, and had reportedly spent over \$1 million in an unsuccessful attempt to garner the Republican nomination.

Schuck was a two-pronged threat to Mike Bird. The first prong was that, as a successful businessman, he would have plenty of money with which to finance his own campaign. The second prong was that he was from Colorado Springs, the same city Bird was from, and thus would steal votes from Bird in his "home base."

The rumors of a Schuck candidacy were substantial. Schuck talked to large numbers of politically important people in the Republican Party in Colorado about the possibility of his running for governor. He even held a number of social gatherings at which his potential gubernatorial candidacy was the main topic of conversation. For a short period of time, a number of people in the Bird for Governor organization believed that Schuck was definitely going to run - and greatly reduce Bird's chances of winning the Republican nomination.

In the late fall of 1993 Steve Schuck sent a letter to key Republicans throughout the state. He said the economic downturn in Colorado in the late 1980s had greatly weakened his real estate business. He had not been able to rebuild his business, he said, to the point where he could comfortably take the time needed to mount a serious campaign. Steve Schuck, who apparently had really wanted to run for governor a second time, quit the race and "put it in writing."

When word reached the Mike Bird for Governor campaign that Steve Schuck had withdrawn, a key Bird advisor, greatly relieved by the

news, said: "I'm so happy I'm doing handsprings around the office."

Whenever the Colorado press corps would write about potential Republican candidates for governor, the name of Colorado attorney general Gale Norton would always come up. Many of the Republican cognoscenti saw her as the strongest candidate the GOP could put in the field against an entrenched Democratic incumbent such as Roy Romer. Gale Norton was relatively young, a good campaigner, and as a woman candidate could potentially draw a higher percentage of the women's vote against a male opponent.

For her part, when asked if she was going to run for governor, Gale Norton would neither confirm nor deny the rumor. She clearly played it so that she could get the extra publicity of being a possible gubernatorial candidate while at the same time being very careful not to make a firm commitment. As time went by, however, the talk about Gale Norton running for governor died out and she let it be known she would run for reelection as attorney general. As Mike Bird had calculated when he was making his plans to run for governor in 1994, Gale Norton decided to wait until 1998 and run for governor when the seat was "open" and there was no strong Democratic incumbent.⁹

In the late fall of 1993 Paul Tauer, the mayor of Aurora, Colorado, said he was seriously considering running for governor and would make the race if he could build enough support and raise enough money. Tauer was a somewhat credible candidate for the 1994 Republican nomination. The city of Aurora is a large and fast growing suburb of Denver. It sprawls out from the eastern boundary of Denver, occupying large amounts of territory in both Arapahoe and Adams counties. After Denver and Colorado Springs, Aurora is the third largest city in Colorado. Only its close proximity to Denver keeps it from being more widely known throughout the United States.

Paul Tauer was a Republican who had served on the Aurora City Council for 14 years. His fellow councilmembers had chosen him to be mayor for six of those 14 years. His name and photograph had appeared occasionally in the Denver newspapers. He had the potential to generate

some Republican voter support in the Denver metropolitan area, although discussion of his candidacy "was hardly audible outside the GOP luncheon clubs."¹⁰

Early in 1994 Paul Tauer withdrew his candidacy for governor. Although he never formally announced his candidacy, he somewhat formally announced his withdrawal. Speaking to the Elephant Corral, a group of Denver Republicans who meet monthly for lunch and political conversation, Tauer said he was not ready to give up being mayor of Aurora. He explained: "I still feel there are some things I would like to do as mayor."¹¹

There were some financial incentives that may have convinced Paul Tauer to stay on as mayor of Aurora rather than run for governor of Colorado. In the fall of 1993 Aurora voters had approved raising the mayor's salary from \$12,000 a year to \$40,000, effective in 1995.

In the fall of 1993 the rumored candidate for the Republican nomination for governor who most worried the Mike Bird for Governor team was Jim Nicholson, at that time the Republican national committeeman from Colorado. Nicholson was a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and a Vietnam veteran. Trained as a lawyer, he had gone into real estate development and was the president of Renaissance Homes, a major builder of upscale residential housing in the Denver metropolitan area.

Jim Nicholson was well-positioned. He had numerous financial connections in the Denver area and, over the years, had raised a great deal of money for GOP candidates for statewide office. He also had secured a large amount of Republican National Committee money for Colorado Republican candidates in his role as national committeeman. Jim Nicholson had money of his own and would be able to raise substantial sums of money if he decided to run for the Republican nomination for governor in 1994.¹²

Nicholson was thinking very seriously about jumping into the race. He hired Sherman Griffin, a recent political science graduate from the University of California at San Diego, to travel the state with him, do

research, and write position papers on possible major issues in the upcoming gubernatorial campaign. He talked very openly with newspaper reporters and political columnists about his potential candidacy. He told Peter Blake of the *Rocky Mountain News*: "I've been quietly working, traveling around the state, meeting with party people and doing due diligence." Columnist Blake felt constrained to explain to his readers that "due diligence" was a legal phrase left over from Nicholson's earlier career as an attorney.¹³

But like so many others who heard the siren song of a possible gubernatorial candidacy, Jim Nicholson decided not to get into the contest. He had received the approval of his wife, Suzanne, but he finally concluded that he could not give up the time from his housing development business.

Thus it was that many credible, and in some cases formidable, Republicans considered running for the Colorado governorship in 1994 but, in the end, did not formally enter the race. The Bird for Governor campaign did everything in its power to help them decide not to come in. In every speech he gave throughout the summer and fall of 1993, Mike Bird made it very clear he was in the race to stay. A statement similar to the following was included in Bird's remarks at every appearance he made: "I will leave no hand unshaken, no county fair unattended, no speech ungiven, no baby unkissed - in short, I will leave no stone unturned in my quest to be elected governor of Colorado."

Everywhere he went Mike Bird stated firmly he was in the race to stay and would campaign as hard as he possibly could. Did this statement scare any of the other would-be Republican candidates out of the race? Bird himself was skeptical that his frequently stated commitment to a strenuous level of campaigning had that much effect.¹⁴ But Bird kept telling the world how hard he was going to campaign, and one by one would-be competitors dropped by the wayside. Throughout all of 1993, the Republican field for governor was limited to Mike Bird, Dick Sargent, and Phil Klingsmith.

Notes To Chapter 3:

1. Author's notes, interview with Dick Sargent, Colorado Springs, 13 January 1996.
2. Fred Brown, "Sargent enters race for governor," Denver Post, 21 January 1994, 1B. "Sargent wants governor's Job," Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, 21 January 1994, B1.
3. Jeff Thomas, "Sargent sets sights on Romer," Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, 25 April 1994, B1.
4. Author's notes, interview with Dick Sargent, Denver, 21 November 1994.
5. Associated Press report, "Governor race gets 3rd GOP hopeful," Denver Post, 27 January 1994.
6. Jeff Thomas, "Candidate courts local Republicans," Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, 10 February 1994, B3.
7. Peter Blake, "Bird's last word scatters GOP foes," Rocky Mountain News, 17 November 1993, 5A.
8. Peter Blake, "Bird's last word scatters GOP foes," Rocky Mountain News, 17 November 1993, 5A.
9. See page ____.
10. Sherman Griffin, assistant campaign manager, Mike Bird for Governor, written comments to the author, May 7, 1995.
11. Renate Robey, "Aurora Mayor Tauer ends bid for gubernatorial seat," Denver Post, 1 February 1994, 3B.
12. Sherman Griffin, assistant campaign manager, Mike Bird for Governor, written comments to the author, May 7, 1995.
13. Peter Blake, "Romer's job beckons Republican operative," Rocky Mountain News, 6 October 1993, 5A.

FLAWED PATH TO THE GOVERNORSHIP

14. This view was shared by Sherman Griffin, who worked for Jim Nicholson before working for Mike Bird. Griffin argued Nicholson dropped out of the race for "purely personal" reasons and not because he was "scared" of Mike Bird. Griffin concluded: "On the contrary, [Nicholson] felt that his fund raising capacity would be able to overcome any sort of head start gained by Mike Bird." Sherman Griffin, assistant campaign manager, Mike Bird for Governor, written comments to the author, May 7, 1995.