

CHAPTER 27

ELECTION DAY - AND BEYOND

The November 8, 1994, general election was one of the most interesting in United States history. A great Republican tide swept across the nation, driving large numbers of Democratic incumbents out of office. For the first time since the early 1950s, the Republicans won a majority of the seats in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. The GOP also took control of the United States Senate and won a majority of the gubernatorial elections, particularly in heavily populated states. It was a great night to be a Republican running for political office - almost any political office.

The strong 1994 Republican tide swept into Colorado, too. GOP candidates were elected state attorney general, state treasurer, and state secretary of state. The Republicans gained seven seats in the state House of Representatives, which they already controlled. The Republicans neither gained nor lost seats in the state Senate, which they already controlled.

The only down note for Colorado Republicans in 1994 was the governor's race. Democratic incumbent Roy Romer defeated Republican challenger Bruce Benson in a walk. Romer polled 55 percent of the vote compared to only 39 percent for Benson, a 16 percentage point spread.¹

Most of the post-election day analysis attributed the national Republican sweep to the unpopularity of incumbent Democratic president Bill Clinton. Roy Romer, although a loyal Democrat and a personal friend of Bill Clinton's, went out of his way during the Colorado gubernatorial election campaign to distance himself from Clinton and his, at that time, ill-starred presidency. Romer also was helped by the fact that it was Bruce Benson's character, and not Roy Romer's or Bill Clinton's, that was the defining issue in the Colorado gubernatorial election.

Election night for Roy Romer included the customary victory celebration in the ballroom of the Radisson Hotel in Denver. As ever,

the Romer grandchildren were much in evidence. For 15 minutes of that joyous evening the newly reelected Colorado governor had a cellular telephone against his ear. President Bill Clinton had called from the White House in Washington, D.C. The U.S. chief executive wanted to talk with Colorado's chief executive about why things were going so badly for the Democrats and why Roy Romer had been able to stem the tide - and stem it very well.

"People had expectations that [Clinton] didn't deliver on," the victorious Romer told *Time* magazine. Governor Romer said he told President Clinton to "get out with the people more," something which Romer had done and which Romer thought was a big part of his winning campaign in Colorado.²

"We were swimming against a nationwide tide that was not favorable to Democrats," Romer said in his victory speech. "We were swimming against a tide favorable to newcomers.... I feel very grateful for people saying, 'We want you to do it again.'"³

BENSON ATTACKS THE PRESS

When the pre-election day newspaper polls showed that Bruce Benson was going to lose the election, the Republican candidate openly criticized the Colorado political press corps. Benson accused the news media of playing up his shortcomings and, at the same time, playing down Roy Romer's. The GOP candidate argued that the sensationalized news coverage of his drunk driving and difficult divorce would discourage qualified people from running for political office in the future. "After what's happened to me," Benson said, "people just shake their heads and say, 'Boy, you've got to be crazy to run for office.'"⁴

Benson made it clear that he blamed the media, particularly KUSA-TV Channel 9, for opening his divorce file and making it such a prominent issue in the campaign. Three days before election day Benson told the *Rocky Mountain News*: "If my divorce papers hadn't been opened, I'd be 10 points ahead today."⁵

Benson's family, campaign staff, and supporters gathered at the Sheraton Hotel in the Denver Tech Center, a large office park close by Denver's upscale southern suburbs. Benson gave an unemotional concession speech and, as if to show the news media what he thought of them, refused to answer any questions. When a television reporter shoved a microphone in Benson's direction to try and get a live comment, some of the youthful campaign workers standing with Benson moved to keep the TV reporter away. A brief scuffle ensued between Benson's campaign workers and some of the reporters. Observers said a news photographer was pushed into an elderly man, who fell to the floor. At the end, the animosity between Bruce Benson and the press became briefly physical.⁶

WHY BENSON LOST?

There was no shortage of opinions available after the election as to why Roy Romer won and Bruce Benson lost. Almost all observers gave Romer credit for being a popular and successful governor, projecting a moderate-to-conservative image in a moderate-to-conservative state, and, although a Democrat, successfully separating himself from unpopular Democratic president Bill Clinton. "Romer got reelected," opined *Denver Post* political columnist Fred Brown, "chiefly because his Republican opponent, Bruce Benson, could not credibly paint him as a 'Clinton liberal'...."⁷

Most observers, however, saw Bruce Benson's entanglement in character issues as more critical to the outcome of the election than any positive steps taken by Roy Romer. Denver talk show host and political columnist Mike Rosen attributed Benson's defeat to "the Four D's: DIA, DUIs, Divorce, and Debates."⁸ Denver International Airport was a bad issue for Benson to try to use against Romer because it was so easily shown that Benson had supported DIA himself. The Driving Under the Influence charges began to cast a negative light on Benson's character, a negative light which was greatly strengthened by the revelations in the

divorce file. Cutting off the debates with Roy Romer, after saying publicly that he would debate, completed the job of destroying Bruce Benson's credibility with Colorado voters.

A fifth "D" can be added to Mike Rosen's list: detouring around the Republican precinct caucuses and county assemblies. Two *Denver Post* editorial columnists, Bill Hornby and Tom Gavin, saw this as contributing to Benson's electoral demise. Hornby wrote: "Voters turned down a gubernatorial candidate in Bruce Benson who had openly scorned the Republican Party procedures for nomination."⁹ Tom Gavin's comment was somewhat more direct: "So what did Bruce Benson do? He gave his own political party organization - the people who ring doorbells - the finger by getting on the ballot by petition, not the party nominating process."¹⁰

Another reason cited in the Colorado press for Benson losing the election was the television ad where he walked away from the camera and talked apologetically about the DUIs and the divorce file. Benson also was criticized for turning to negative television ads - such as the one accusing Romer of being a "liberal" on tax issues - in a state that had shown its dislike for negative television advertising in the past. An additional problem - Benson relied too openly and too heavily on out-of-state political advisors who never seemed to understand the special nature of Colorado politics and elections.

"At times, it seemed that Benson's campaign was woefully out of touch with Colorado voters," wrote *Denver Post* editorial editor Chuck Green. "He was relying too heavily on advisers who were out of touch with the state. That shouldn't have been any surprise since his top campaign adviser, Ed Rollins, was calling the shots over long-distance phone lines while juggling campaigns in other states, and his advertising campaign was designed by still another out-of-state consultant."¹¹

The Colorado political press corps was divided over whether the revelation of the contents of Benson's divorce file was the "defining event" of the 1994 governor race. The divorce papers were just "gossipy but hardly devastating," wrote Gil Spencer, a former editor of the

Denver Post.¹² "The media didn't defeat Benson," said Gene Amole of the *Rocky Mountain News*. "Publicity about his DUIs and his divorce was insignificant."¹³

On the other hand, Peter Blake of the *Rocky* saw the divorce as a critical factor. In a column telling Colorado Republicans what they could learn from the many failures of the Benson campaign, Blake wrote: "A final lesson: If you've had a bad divorce and quick remarriage, let the situation cool before rushing into politics.... It's not the divorce that hurt Benson; lots of politicians have them now. But the wounds were still open, and polls showed the image of the aggrieved ex-wife rankled voters, particularly females."¹⁴

Some observers argued that, given the great extent of Republican victories throughout the United States on election night 1994, Bruce Benson may have been the *only* Republican candidate who could *not* beat Roy Romer for the Colorado governorship. Roy Romer implied as much a few days before the election when he told a magazine writer that "people came to this race ready for any reasonable alternative." It was lucky for Roy Romer, the magazine writer wrote, that "what they got was Bruce Benson."¹⁵

A DEFINING EVENT

It is the author's opinion that the forced unveiling of Bruce Benson's divorce file was the "defining event" in the 1994 Colorado gubernatorial election. Benson's standing in the public opinion polls collapsed the minute the contents of his divorce file were made public. It was a blow from which the Benson campaign never recovered. A Benson campaign poll, taken 10 days after the Republican primary, put Bruce Benson a solid 5 points ahead of Roy Romer.¹⁶ Even Romer's own polls showed Benson with a 2 percentage point lead prior to the revelation of Benson's "messy divorce."¹⁷ After the divorce file hit the headlines and television screens, Benson dropped more than 20 percentage points behind Romer and stayed in the trailing position right through election day.

The end result of the divorce file destroying Benson's gubernatorial campaign so completely was that Roy Romer essentially got a "free ride" back into the Colorado Governor's Mansion in 1994. All Romer had to do, once Benson sank so far behind in the polls, was to continue to campaign energetically and be careful not to say anything that would offend anyone, i.e., not commit a major campaign "gaffe." Commented Chuck Green of the *Denver Post*: "Romer should not have gotten off so easily."¹⁸ Concluded Denver talk show host Mike Rosen: "It's a shame [Romer] wasn't put to a stiffer test."¹⁹

According to Katy Atkinson, the Benson campaign manager, the Colorado news media focused in on Bruce Benson's divorce "and that focus was never removed." At that point, Atkinson opined, "the press stepped in and took over the campaign." The polling numbers instantly got "very bad," Atkinson continued, and "the campaign 'went South' for us." Unfortunately for the Benson forces, Atkinson said, there simply was not enough time do undo the destructive effects of the Benson divorce story.

"KUSA-TV Channel 9 set a nasty precedent in this election," Atkinson concluded. "Their actions practically eliminated divorced persons from ever running for major political offices in Colorado in the future. It is unfair for the news media to take only 'one look' at a candidate - and for that 'one look' to be in one of the most private corners of the candidate's life."²⁰

Given the crucial role played by Bruce Benson's divorce file in the final outcome of the election, Benson clearly should have taken a tip from Mike Bird and made his divorce file available to the press the day he dropped the first hint he was running for governor. Bird had a somewhat similar problem to Benson's "messy divorce." That was Bird's previous membership on the board of directors of a failed savings and loan association. Bird skillfully mentioned the savings and loan connection in all his early campaign biographical materials, thereby sapping press interest long before the primary election really got going. If Benson had done the same thing with his divorce file and his DUIs,

they would have been old, dull news by the time Benson got to the general election with Roy Romer.

In addition to the crucial importance of the divorce file, the author also sees the following factors contributing to Bruce Benson's defeat:

* Bruce Benson and his campaign advisers miscalculated the extent to which petitioning on to the Republican primary ballot would open Benson up to criticism from within the Republican Party. Clearly Benson hoped to avoid the charges and countercharges that fly back and forth between candidates running in a hard-fought party primary election. Ironically, the minute Benson made it official that he was petitioning on to the ballot rather than go the caucus/assembly route, Mike Bird and Dick Sargent concentrated their attack on Bruce Benson rather than each other. Most importantly, Bird and Sargent began raising questions about Benson's "judgment" and "operating style" that subsequently hurt Benson in the general election.

* There are many economic interest groups in Colorado - wheat farmers on the Eastern Plains, fruit growers on the Western Slope, etc. These groups expect all public officials, and especially the governor, to be familiar with their problems and be able to discuss them intelligently. Bruce Benson failed badly on this score. It turned out that he could only discuss the four main issues handed him by his campaign consultants - crime, welfare, education, and government bureaucracy. When asked specific questions about specific problems in specific parts of Colorado, Benson either had to admit he did not know the answer or try to get by with meaningless generalities.

Benson could have solved this problem by going to the caucuses and county assemblies rather than petitioning on to the ballot. One of the redeeming features of the caucus/assembly system is that it encourages candidates for statewide office in Colorado to visit almost each and every county, to talk to the people who live in almost each and every county, and to become familiar with the particular problems and concerns of almost each and every county. Submitting one's candidacy to the discipline of the caucus/assembly nominating system is a great

way of getting a good education in what is going on in every remote corner of Colorado. Bruce Benson passed up this chance to get educated by the people - at caucuses, at candidate forums, at county assemblies, etc. He ended up looking like a man who knew very little about the state and the people he proposed to govern.

* Bruce Benson had one main reason for voters to choose him over Mike Bird or Dick Sargent in the Republican gubernatorial primary. The reason was summed up in the short phrase: "Bruce Benson has the money to beat Roy Romer." That phrase, so devastating to Bird and Sargent in the primary, had no utility in the general election. There, Roy Romer had almost as much money as Benson did, and voters were looking for a knowledgeable governor rather than someone with a lot of cash to pour into a future election campaign. Thus it was that the issue that won Bruce Benson so many votes in the primary - "I have the money to beat Roy Romer" - won him no votes at all in the general election.

REFORMING THE NOMINATING PROCESS IN COLORADO

The Colorado state legislature should change the primary election laws so that all candidates for nomination to statewide political office have to go through the caucus/assembly nominating process. This would automatically subject every candidate for governor, state attorney general, state treasurer, etc., to the "Colorado-izing" effect of campaigning in almost every county in the state in order to win delegates to the Republican or Democratic state assemblies. It would have the additional effect of encouraging candidates for statewide office to use advisers and consultants who know something about problems and issues in Colorado rather than relying exclusively on high-paid, high-powered out-of-state consultants who know little or nothing about Colorado.

The option of petitioning on to the primary election ballot in

Colorado should not be totally eliminated. It should be limited, however, to those candidates who put their names in contention in the caucus/assembly process and fail to get 30 percent or more of the delegate votes at the party state assembly. In other words, petitioning on should be a way to get on the primary ballot after failing to get on at the party state assembly. It should *not* be, as it was in 1994, a way of bypassing the caucus/assembly process altogether.

The most important reason to make every candidate for a partisan elected office in Colorado go through the caucus/assembly nominating system would be to strengthen and enhance a party nominating system that has been in use in Colorado for over a century. As early as the 1860s, caucuses and assemblies (conventions) were widely used in Colorado by the various political parties to nominate candidates to elected office. Strengthening that existing system by requiring all would-be candidates to go through it is a better option than encouraging candidates to bypass the caucus/assembly system altogether by petitioning on.

Bruce Benson may have done a large, unintended favor for the people of Colorado. He demonstrated clearly the pitfalls that can occur when most candidates for a statewide office submit to the caucus/assembly nominating system but another candidate petitions on. Bruce Benson lost to Roy Romer by a landslide in Colorado in 1994, and his misuse of the petitioning on process was a part of that loss. The Colorado state legislature should move to correct the situation as rapidly as possible, limiting petitioning on to only those candidates who have been through the caucus/assembly process.

THE ROLE OF THE PRESS

There has been much comment in the national press in the United States that the news media are coming to play an increasingly significant role in election campaigns. Rather than just passively reporting the

activities of the various candidates for political office from an objective point of view, it is argued, the news media now actively intervene in election campaigns, consciously advancing the fortunes of this particular candidate and just as consciously demolishing the character and reputation of that particular candidate. The role of the press in election campaigns has now become so central, it is said, that candidates mainly run "against the press" rather than against their primary election and general election opponents.²¹

The Colorado political press corps was particularly avid during the 1994 election campaign at stereotyping the various candidates for governor. The news media would slap a "label" on a particular candidate and then repeat that label over and over again. In the general election campaign Bruce Benson was repeatedly referred to as the "millionaire" candidate with "the DUIs and the messy divorce." In the Republican primary Dick Sargent, somewhat at his own instigation, was continually portrayed by the news media as "feisty," "combative," and "aggressive."

In this author's opinion, a conspicuous case of stereotyping in the 1994 gubernatorial election was the news media's insistence on describing Mike Bird as "quiet," "mild-mannered," and "gentlemanly." These words were used in a large number of stories about Bird, and they were always presented in such a way as to suggest Bird was "too good" to be governor. Much as the national political press corps in 1988 repeatedly described presidential candidate George Bush as a "wimp," the Colorado political press corps in 1994 sought to deprecate Mike Bird with the words "mild-mannered."

This stereotype of Bird was completely the creation of the Colorado news media. Bird never sought to generate this image of a "gentleman's gentleman." In fact, once the press began hammering on the "mild-mannered" stereotype, the Bird campaign worked very hard to get the press off of it. It was all to no avail. Perhaps one reason Mike Bird threatened to punch Bruce Benson in the nose during the KVOR-AM radio debate in Colorado Springs was Bird's desire to get the Colorado

news media out of its "he's such a gentleman" rut.

The Colorado political press corps should give some thought to avoiding stereotypes such as "millionaire," "feisty," and "mild-mannered." It should work at giving more full-bodied and in-depth descriptions of Colorado political candidates.

In one conspicuous case in the 1994 gubernatorial election campaign, the Colorado news media bought the "spin" of an out-of-state political consultant. It is well known in Washington, D.C., that campaign wizard Ed Rollins always works to cast his candidates in the role of the "front-runner," thereby building electoral momentum for his candidates. Rollins and the Benson for Governor campaign staff worked very hard at selling this idea that "Bruce Benson is the front-runner," and the Colorado news media bought this "spin" totally.

There was nothing wrong with the Colorado political press corps touting Benson as the front-runner. That was their decision to make. The important point the voters of Colorado should understand is that it is the political press corps, and no one else, that possesses this important power. Without one vote ever having been cast for any Republican candidate for governor - at a caucus, at a county assembly, at a state assembly, or in a primary - the press corps in mid-January of 1994 declared Bruce Benson the front-runner for the Republican nomination and never changed its collective mind.

It did not have to be that way. The Colorado political press corps declared Bruce Benson the front-runner mainly because he had \$5 million of his own money to spend to get elected. It should be noted, however, that the press corps could have just as easily decided, and put in print, a completely different spin. That would have been the spin that Mike Bird - with eight years as a Colorado Springs city councilmember, 12 years in the Colorado state legislature, and three terms as chairman of the legislature's Joint Budget Committee - was by far the front-runner over Bruce Benson, who had never held a public elected office. The Colorado news media could have spun it that way. They chose not to, and that was their right.

There were five instances in the gubernatorial election of 1994 when members of the Colorado political press corps actively intervened in the election on behalf of one candidate or the other. During these five "media frenzies," control over the election rested in the hands of the news media rather than any of the candidates. Those five instances were:

1. Robert Kowalski of the *Denver Post* dug up the story that Bruce Benson contributed money to winning voter approval of Denver International Airport (DIA). This story completely discredited Benson's attempt to blame the expensive cost overruns and delayed opening at DIA on incumbent Democratic Governor Roy Romer. It was a story and a series of charges that should have been developed by the Romer campaign, or the Bird campaign, or the Sargent campaign, not the local newspaper.

2. Fred Brown of the *Denver Post* trapped the Benson for Governor campaigners into admitting they were the ones doing anonymous push-polling in El Paso County (Colorado Springs) just prior to the Republican primary election in August. This story greatly aided the Bird for Governor campaign in its efforts to discredit Benson and his overly-aggressive campaign style. In the ideal situation, Colorado voters would have learned of Benson's push-polling shenanigans from the Bird or Sargent campaigns, not from the news media.

3. Katie Kerwin of the *Rocky Mountain News* got the story on how Governor Romer arranged for the state to lease a nicely equipped new car for his wife. In running this story, the *Rocky* put the Romer campaign on the defensive, something Republican opponent Bruce Benson was never quite able to do. Here again, it should have been the Benson campaign's job to reveal this shortcoming of Romer's, not a Denver newspaper's job.

4. KUSA-TV Channel 9 scored the biggest media hit of the campaign, severely damaging Bruce Benson's candidacy by going before a judge and getting a court order to open Benson's divorce file. As previously noted, this action made KUSA-TV a significant actor in the

election, perhaps more significant than Roy Romer, Bruce Benson, Mike Bird, Dick Sargent, or Phil Klingsmith. Clearly, Roy Romer and company should have undertaken this important legal task, not a Denver television station.

5. Katie Kerwin of the *Rocky Mountain News* gave the Romer for Governor campaign its most significant media whack with the story about how Romer and his wife were using state patrol officers to run errands, pick family and friends up at the airport, make minor repairs to the family summer home, etc. If the Benson campaign staff was not smart enough to find this out on their own, the *Rocky* should not have done their work for them.

The newspaper and television personnel who developed these five stories were quick to defend their work and their profession. Robert Kowalski, who covered the DIA story for the *Denver Post*, pointed out that "leaks" about political candidates by their opponents are an integral part of all election campaigns. "Newspapers could not cover elections," Kowalski said, "if stories were not fed to them on the quiet. The result is we have to scrupulously protect our sources."²²

Fred Brown, the political editor and columnist for the *Denver Post*, said he believed the "push-polling" in Colorado Springs was "symptomatic of the Bruce Benson campaign and the secretive way in which it sometimes operated." Brown said he believed it was "very necessary for a responsible journalist to get that fact out to the people."²³

Katie Kerwin, who wrote the two critical stories about Roy Romer for the *Rocky Mountain News*, said that news reporters try to be fair to both sides. She explained: "The Benson people did not give us our Romer stories. We developed them from sources of our own. We ran the stories, not to be vicious or tear into the governor, but because voters need to know about the person who is a candidate for high public office. I knew the state trooper story would be damaging to Roy Romer and that the remainder of the Colorado press would pick up on it. Roy Romer knew it, too, and spent a lot of time with me trying to counter it."²⁴

Dave Lougee, vice-president and news director at KUSA-TV, vigorously defended his television station's right and duty to get a court order to unseal the Bruce Benson divorce file. "As journalists, we are obligated to get the story," Lougee stated, "and we should not be concerned with whether that story helps or hinders a particular candidate's campaign for public office. When it comes to the question of the public's right to know, journalists have to act whatever the particular political consequences."

"Bruce Benson made a mistake when he resisted our effort to open the divorce file," Dave Lougee concluded. "If he had released the file to us at the time we asked for it, shortly after the Republican gubernatorial primary in early August, it might not have been such a big factor in the election. The divorce file was opened in late September, about four weeks before the general election, only because Bruce Benson fought our efforts to get it opened earlier."²⁵

In the final analysis, there was a grim irony to the way the Colorado news media performed in the 1994 Colorado gubernatorial race. Bruce Benson's campaign was specifically based on the idea of *not* using the news media to get the word to the voters. Benson chose instead to conduct a campaign in which paid advertising would be heavily used in order to go around the traditional press whenever possible. Unfortunately for Benson, the Colorado political press corps turned out to be a more formidable obstacle than he had originally figured. The Colorado political press corps developed its own stories - particularly the divorce story - completely separate from what Benson was trying to communicate with his paid advertising.

What is happening in Colorado, as elsewhere in the United States, is that the Colorado political press corps has become so aggressive it is replacing the candidates as the principal sources of negative information about their opponents. Instead of hurling charges themselves, and taking responsibility for those charges, political candidates often find it much easier to let an overly aggressive press do much of their "dirty work" for them. The end result is to reduce the importance of the

candidates in the election process and greatly enhance the importance of the news media. All of a sudden, what the news media is doing in a Colorado election is much more important than what the candidates are doing.

Should it be that way?

Yes, it should, because the Colorado news media have a direct responsibility, under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, to dig out and report the news exactly the way the news media see it. This is a principle, both of government and journalism, that should never be compromised in any way.

It is important, however, that the voters of Colorado have a clear understanding of the way a supposedly "objective" news media now intervenes in the conduct and the outcome of Colorado elections. The Colorado news media might follow the example of the national news media and devote more newspaper space and TV time to explaining and discussing this expanded, and continually expanding, role of the news media in Colorado politics.

One additional merit of Colorado's caucus/assembly nominating system is that it reduces the influence of the news media over at least one part of the nominating process. Candidates seeking delegate votes at party state assemblies can appeal to the individual delegates through direct mail, personal telephone calls, and person-to-person campaigning. They do not have to make a heavy appeal to the news media, as candidates running in primary and general elections have to do. The caucus/assembly nominating system sets up a process which, at least in its early stages, allows candidates for statewide office to go around the news media and appeal directly to delegates for state assembly votes. In emphasizing this kind of person-to-person campaigning, the caucus/assembly nominating system in no way limits the First Amendment rights of the Colorado political press corps.

Howard Kurtz, whose beat at the *Washington Post* is the activities of the news media, argues that the press goes through three basic stages with "rising star" candidates for political office. Those three phases are

*infatuation, reappraisal, and attack-dog.*²⁶ The Colorado political press corps went through all three stages with Bruce Benson in the 1994 gubernatorial election campaign.

The Colorado news media clearly were *infatuated* with Bruce Benson when he first announced for governor. His money, his experience as a state party chairman, and his rugged good looks made him the "this guy can beat Roy Romer" candidate the press had been looking for. The *reappraisal* began when Benson's previously hidden support for DIA was revealed and the press began picking up on Mike Bird's and Dick Sargent's criticism of Benson for "ducking debates" and "bypassing the caucus/assembly nominating process." Once Bruce Benson's DUIs and divorce file were revealed, the Colorado political press corps went into full *attack-dog* status, mentioning the DUIs and the divorce file in virtually every news story presented about Bruce Benson.

THE NATIONALIZATION OF COLORADO STATE ELECTIONS

Anyone closely involved with the 1994 gubernatorial election in Colorado could clearly see the increasing "nationalization" of the Colorado election process. Incumbent Democratic Governor Roy Romer "nationalized" his financial support, going to Washington, D.C., to hold fund-raisers for his reelection campaign. He also brought prominent Washington officials, such as President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, into Colorado to raise money. Roy Romer and Ann Richards, the incumbent Democratic governor of Texas who was defeated in 1994, were the two top recipients of money from the Democratic Governors Association, the group that raises money nationally for Democratic gubernatorial candidates.²⁷

Of course the most "nationalized" of the gubernatorial candidates in Colorado in 1994 was Republican Bruce Benson. Instead of basing his campaign on traditional Colorado issues - such as water rights or

environmental problems - Benson concentrated on issues known to be of national importance, mainly crime and welfare. As the *Denver Post* pointed out, Benson got his issues from "national GOP strategists" rather than local Colorado political experts.²⁸

If nothing else, Benson was charmingly outspoken about the extent to which national political consultants were now "required" to win a statewide election in Colorado. Benson talked about his two principal out-of-state consultants, Ed Rollins and Russo Marsh + Associates, so frequently that their existence became something of an issue in the election.

In a way it was a shame that Benson was knocked out of the race by character issues - the DUIs and the divorce file. It prevented his high-priced national political consultants from showing what they could really do in Colorado.

Even the Mike Bird campaign, hard as it tried to be an "all-Colorado" effort, was forced to go out-of-state for experienced political talent to write and produce a campaign television commercial. It seems likely that, as TV ads become more and more the principal means by which statewide election campaigns are conducted, national political consultants based far away from Denver or Colorado Springs are going to be designing and organizing the major campaigns in Colorado.

AN UNUSUAL ELECTION

"It has been a strange election year, indeed," wrote John Sanko of the *Rocky Mountain News*. Sanko's comment was seconded by retired lobbyist and Colorado historian Roger Walton, who said: "This has been one of the more bizarre election years in my memory, and certainly since I have been alive."²⁹ These comments were a good way to sum up the 1994 governor race in Colorado. The election included all of the following:

* The last minute entry in the Republican primary of a millionaire candidate who refused to debate his opponents and petitioned on to the

ballot rather than going the caucus/assembly route.

* A mysterious person in a chicken suit who was a major factor in the Republican primary campaign but whose identity was never learned.

* A rational and thoughtful college professor who threatened to punch one of his opponents in the nose.

* An open and uncoerced admission of Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol (DUI).

* An incumbent governor who arranged for the state to drive his wife around in a fancy automobile - and sent the automobile back when the word got out.

* A forcibly-opened divorce file that included extensive manipulations to deprive a former mate of common marital property.

* An incumbent governor who was chased down the highway at speeds up to 110 miles per hour by a red Chevrolet. The identity of the driver and his/her companion was never learned.

* A candidate who ran a TV ad about his own negative characteristics.

* A candidate who - in the general election as well as the primary - made not debating a conscious part of his campaign. For the general election, he even gave a debating award to his opponent the day he ended the one-on-one confrontations.

* A person dressed as a duck - identity known - who crashed campaign events to publicize the fact that one of the candidates was "ducking debates."

* Late revelations that the incumbent governor had state troopers run personal errands, drive his daughter to an out-of-state college, and help fix the plumbing at his summer home.

There was no question that the voters of Colorado had themselves quite a gubernatorial election in 1994. When it was all over, one thing was crystal clear about the electoral system in use in Colorado. It had produced a winner - incumbent Democratic governor Roy Romer - and that winner was clearly the first choice of a majority of Colorado voters.

Notes To Chapter 27:

1. Chart, "State Races," *Denver Post*, 10 November 1994, 16A.
2. Romer quotes from Dan Goodgame, "Right Makes Might," *Time*, 21 November 1994, 53-62.
3. Angela Dire, "Governor credits positive campaign," *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 9 November 1994, A1. Patrick O'Driscoll, Adriel Bettelheim, and Robert Kowalski, "Romer romps to win," *Denver Post*, 9 November 1994, 1A.
4. Guy Kelly, "Benson campaign assails coverage," *Rocky Mountain News*, 9 November 1994, 4A.
5. Romel Hernandez, "Benson looks past polls, keeps eyes on the prize," *Rocky Mountain News*, 6 November 1994, 4A.
6. "Gossip: Republican Ruffians," *Colorado Statesman*, 11 November 1994, 2. See also Angela Dire, "Governor credits positive campaign," *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 9 November 1994, A1.
7. Fred Brown, "No ruts in the middle of the road," *Denver Post*, 16 November 1994, 11B.
8. Mike Rosen, "Romer survives Black Tuesday," *Denver Post*, 11 November 1994, 11B.
9. Bill Hornby, "Voters give representative government another chance," *Denver Post*, 27 November 1994, 5E.
10. Tom Gavin. "Another narrow escape," *Denver Post*, 11 November 1994, 11B.
11. Chuck Green, "The dismal self-destruction of Bruce Benson's campaign," *Denver Post*, 9 November 1994, 15B. For a further critique of the Benson campaign, see Hal Shroyer, "How did Bruce Benson foul up? Let me count the ways...", letter to the *Colorado Statesman*, 18 November 1994, 3.

12. Gil Spencer, "Aftermath: The sleaze lingers on," Denver Post, 13 November 1994, 1F.
13. Gene Amole, "Ever a maverick, state bucks trend," Rocky Mountain News, 10 November 1994, 5A.
14. Peter Blake, "Benson joins long list of GOP losers," Rocky Mountain News, 9 November 1994, 5A.
15. "Sex, booze and anti-incumbency," Economist, 29 October 1994, 28.
16. Author's notes, telephone interview with Katy Atkinson, 19 December 1994.
17. Fred Brown, "Colorado bucks angry U.S. trend," Denver Post, 9 November 1994, 1A.
18. Chuck Green, "The dismal self-destruction of Bruce Benson's campaign," Denver Post, 9 November 1994, 15B.
19. Mike Rosen, "Romer survives Black Tuesday," Denver Post, 11 November 1994, 11B.
20. Author's notes, telephone interview with Katy Atkinson, 19 December 1994.
21. See Larry J. Sabato, Feeding Frenzy (New York: The Free Press, 1991). Sabato describes the increasing tendency of the news media to attack the personal character of political candidates as "junkyard dog" journalism.
22. Author's notes, telephone interview with Robert Kowalski, news reporter for the Denver Post, December 1994.
23. Author's notes, telephone interview with Fred Brown, political editor and columnist, Denver Post, December 1994. Fred Brown's viewpoint was strongly supported by Dennis Ritchie, the Bird campaign press assistant, who believed a Mike Bird press release on Bruce Benson's push-polling would have merited little

media attention and would have been described as "yet another attack on front runner Bruce Benson...." Ritchie argued that "Fred Brown had wonderful credibility with the Colorado press corps," and that objective credibility was essential to making the story important. Dennis Ritchie, press assistant, Mike Bird for Governor, written comments to the author, March 21, 1995.

24. Author's notes, telephone interview with Katie Kerwin, news reporter, Rocky Mountain News, December 1994.

25. Author's notes, telephone interview with Dave Lougee, vice-president and news director, KUSA-TV (Denver), 27 January 1995.

26. Howard Kurtz, *Media Circus: The Trouble with America's Newspapers* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 245.

27. Peter Blake, "'Reality check' won't pay off Romer's debt," Rocky Mountain News, 21 November 1994, 5A.

28. Jennifer Gavin, "Benson ads follow national GOP strategy," Denver Post, 1 October 1994, 1A.

29. John Sanko, "An election year straight out of Ripley's," Rocky Mountain News, 6 November 1994, 31A.