

PART VI

THE 1994 GUBERNATORIAL GENERAL ELECTION

CHAPTER 23

THE POWERS OF INCUMBENCY

Roy Romer officially announced his campaign for reelection as governor of Colorado in late March of 1994. With a great deal of hoopla and the Colorado political press corps in tow, he headed back to his hometown of Holly, a community of just 900 souls only four miles from the Kansas border in eastern Colorado. He visited the Southeastern Colorado Cooperative, the giant grain elevators rising above the flat, endless prairie where he got his start in business. He stopped by the John Deere tractor dealership that still bears the Romer family name, being careful to show the news media and anyone else who would listen that he could still do "tractor talk" with the best of them. He ate an oatmeal breakfast, a Romer "trademark" whether he was in Holly or downtown Denver.¹

Political schmaltz was the order of the day, and the Colorado news media played along accordingly. Almost every newspaper in the state ran a large color photograph of Roy Romer, dressed in his worn leather bomber jacket and sporting an orange-and-black "Holly, Colorado" baseball cap, standing in front of those "prairie picturesque" grain elevators.² As is traditional with formal announcements for public office, every word Roy Romer said was reported directly with virtually no criticism or analytical comment.

For his actual announcement speech, Romer returned to the room where he had attended Sunday school at the Holly United Methodist Church. "Holly made me what I am," Romer told the small crowd of

townspeople and reporters and photographers who were following him around. Earlier that morning, the incumbent governor paid a quiet visit to the cemetery outside of town where his father was buried. With both of his parents deceased, Romer said, his friends in Holly had become his hometown extended family.

There was a walk down, of course, Main Street in Holly, with a side trip to the house on a tree-lined street where Romer spent his childhood and early youth. There also was a potluck supper at the local high school, where Roy Romer graduated in the class of 1946. Most of all there were Romer's reminiscences about growing up in a small agricultural town like Holly - meeting girls at box lunch socials when he was sixteen, hanging out with the other kids at the farm on Dead Man's curve just outside of town, watching his father scratch a living out of a dry eastern Colorado farm during the Depression and Dust Bowl years.

BACK TO "CORE VALUES"

But the purpose of this trip was politics, not nostalgia, and Roy Romer hit the politics hard. His main goal seemed to be to clearly establish his credentials as a "conservative" Democrat and separate himself as much as possible from "liberal" ideas. He asked the question: "How do we pass on a core set of values to the younger generation?" When talking about crime, he said: "The core of it is behavior." In a letter he said he wrote to his grandchildren, Romer spelled out a philosophy of life based on individual effort and responsibility. He wrote:

"It's important that Colorado's children learn that effort counts, that hard work is rewarded. That skills are important. That education is the key to a successful future for every individual. That you need to care for your neighbor, and to permit your neighbor to care for you. That your word is your bond. That you need to respect yourself and your neighbor and your property."³

Governor Romer said his campaign for reelection would be based on

four major themes: jobs, education, the environment, and crime. On jobs, he said: "You can't keep the economy healthy unless you have jobs and better education." On education, he opined: "We need to work on education in Colorado - be sure we're defining what children need to know - set the right performance levels, and we need to give parents more opportunity in participating in the education of their children." On crime, he stated: "We will never solve crime with building prisons," and concluded that it is the behavior of the individual criminals that needs to be changed, which brought him back to his overall theme of "core values."⁴

Even though it was only late March, and Bruce Benson had not yet officially announced for the Republican nomination for governor, Roy Romer was not above taking a potshot or two at a likely opponent with a lot of money. Romer said: "You don't run for this office like it was [a thing] you're going to...buy.... You run for this office because it's a wonderful opportunity to help others to have access to a rewarding life, the best life they can have."⁵

Romer also sniped at Bruce Benson's money by suggesting that each candidate limit total campaign expenditures to only \$2 million. This was a direct challenge to Republican Benson's statement that he intended to spend \$5 million to win the governorship from the Democrats. Romer noted that he spent only \$1.3 million in his 1990 reelection campaign.

The nostalgic, values-oriented visit to Holly was just the beginning of Romer's "official" announcement for reelection as governor. He visited 22 communities in Colorado over a five-day period, eating oatmeal at every breakfast and spreading the "core values" gospel wherever he went. In each place he visited, Roy Romer made it a point to meet with the local Democratic political organization and get it fired up for the tough election campaign ahead. Whenever possible Romer, a licensed pilot, flamboyantly flew himself from place-to-place in his own airplane, leaving his staff and the news media to trail along behind by automobile.

CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION

By early May of 1994 Roy Romer had his campaign staff organized and ready to go. Alan Salazar, a longtime professional Democratic staff member in Colorado, was named campaign manager. Salazar, 36, was a native of Leadville, a former silver mining camp located high in the Colorado Rockies that more recently survived on the jobs created by a nearby molybdenum mine. Salazar held a staff position with Colorado's Democratic U.S. Senator Tim Wirth from 1987 to 1992. From 1992 to 1994 he was on the state payroll, serving as director of Governor Romer's policy office.

The other key person on Roy Romer's campaign team was Mike Stratton, who served as Romer's principal media spokesperson but held the title of campaign general consultant. Back in 1990, when Roy Romer won reelection to the governor's chair by defeating Republican gubernatorial candidate John Andrews by a huge majority, Stratton served as Romer's campaign manager.

Television advertising for the Roy Romer reelection campaign was handled by Mandy Grunwald of Grunwald, Eskew, and Donilon, a national political consulting firm. Mandy Grunwald had worked hard in Democrat Bill Clinton's successful campaign for the presidency in 1992. Following that victory, she and some consultant colleagues formed a new firm and advised a number of Democratic candidates for governor and U.S. Senator in the 1994 elections. According to Scott Chase, Roy Romer's deputy campaign manager, the Romer campaign consulted with Mandy Grunwald on a daily basis in its efforts to defeat Republican Bruce Benson.

In addition to a national political consultant, the Romer campaign used a national polling firm. Geoff Garin, of Garin Hart Strategies and Research Group in Washington, D.C., was the person in charge of keeping the Romer forces informed on what the Colorado electorate was thinking and how it would be voting.

If Mandy Grunwald and Geoff Garin represented a "national"

influence in the Roy Romer campaign for governor, there was one "Colorado" consulting influence. Eric Sondermann, a Denver-based political consultant and a native of Colorado Springs, wrote and produced all of Roy Romer's radio advertising.

In fact, the Romer campaign staff made much of the fact that the five key campaign decision makers were all native Coloradans. Those decision makers were Roy Romer (the governor himself), Alan Salazar (campaign manager), Mike Stratton (campaign general consultant), Scott Chase (deputy campaign manager), and Jim Carpenter (press secretary). "You have to have local people in final control of your campaign," said Scott Chase. "Out-of-state consultants, not knowing the particulars of any one state, need the 'locals' to take that final look at all campaign ideas and make sure they meet 'state specifics.'"

Scott Chase also drew attention to the fact that Roy Romer himself, with his extensive personal experience in Colorado government and politics, was a major part of the campaign decision-making apparatus. "On many occasions," Chase said, "the governor often had better instincts about what was going on than all the rest of us."⁶

Roy Romer, Alan Salazar, and Mike Stratton pursued a strategy of "immediate answer" where any *major* charges against Romer by Republican candidates for governor were concerned. They tended not to remain silent when Romer was attacked in a significant way, and they were particularly vehement when answering charges from Bruce Benson. This policy was most clearly demonstrated when both Roy Romer and Mike Stratton got on Bruce Benson's case on the Denver International Airport issue. Both Romer and Stratton strongly criticized Benson for attacking Romer on the DIA issue when Benson had contributed his own money to DIA.⁷

ROMER'S FUND-RAISING

Similar to most incumbents in major political offices, Roy Romer was raising - and spending - money for his reelection campaign all the time. He had a broad base of contributors throughout Colorado, most of them Democrats, but many of his best-known financial supporters were Republicans. A case in point was Jerry McMorris, owner of a trucking line, NW Transport Services Inc., but better known as president of the new Colorado Rockies major league professional baseball team. McMorris co-hosted a fund-raising dinner for the Colorado Republican Party - "Salute to our 1994 Candidates" - but adamantly remained publicly committed to Democrat Roy Romer for governor. McMorris backed up his public statements in behalf of Romer with a \$20,000 contribution early in the incumbent governor's reelection campaign.

McMorris was not alone in being a leading financial supporter of GOP candidates who also contributed to Roy Romer. Bob Magness, chairman of Tele-Communications Inc., co-hosted the same Republican fund-raising dinner that Jerry McMorris co-hosted. Then, three-weeks later, he co-hosted a fund-raiser for Democrat Roy Romer. Like McMorris, Magness made an early contribution (\$12,500 from Tele-Communications Inc.) to Romer's reelection campaign.⁸

Roy Romer received strong financial support from wealthy Democrats as well as wealthy Republicans. One of his staunchest contributors was Swanee Hunt of Denver, an heiress to the substantial fortune of Texas millionaire H. L. Hunt. In addition to Romer, Swanee Hunt supported Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton in 1992 and, after Clinton was elected, was appointed U.S. ambassador to Austria.

The election of Democrat Bill Clinton to the White House in 1992 enabled Roy Romer to tap the top echelons of the Clinton administration as fund-raising attractions. President Clinton himself flew to Denver in August of 1993 and held a big fund-raiser for Romer in a giant airplane hangar at Stapleton Airport.⁹ That was just the beginning of the parade as a steady stream of Clinton cabinet members passed through Denver in an effort to help Romer out financially.

First came Clinton's secretary of commerce, Ron Brown, who appeared at a Romer fund-raiser in Denver on March 4, 1994. Close on his heels was Hillary Rodham Clinton, the president's wife, who raised money for Romer and the state Democratic Party in Denver on March 14, 1994. Next on the list was Hazel O'Leary, Clinton's energy secretary, who spoke at a fund-raising breakfast for Romer in Denver on March 24, 1994. Henry Cisneros, secretary of housing and urban development, was the featured guest at a Denver fund-raiser for Romer on June 25, 1994. Vice President Al Gore stopped by Denver to help fill Roy Romer's coffers with money in mid-July of 1994.

When a leading light in the Clinton administration could not make it out to Colorado to raise money for Roy Romer, the leading light was used to raise money in Washington, D.C. Thomas "Mack" McLarty, President Clinton's boyhood pal and the White House chief of staff at that time, was the star attraction at a party hosted by the Romer campaign in the nation's capital on June 19, 1994. National business and civic organizations with interests in Colorado sent their lobbyists to the "party with McLarty" to increase their visibility and influence with the Colorado governor's office - and to help provide the financial wherewithal to get Roy Romer reelected.

After reporting on how many Clinton appointees were doing fund-raisers for Roy Romer in the spring of 1994, *Rocky Mountain News* political columnist Peter Blake pointed out there were "plenty of cabinet members to go: Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, Secretary of State Warren Christopher," etc. When asked by Blake if additional Clinton superstars would be asked to raise money for Roy Romer, campaign spokesperson Mike Stratton replied: "We'd be thrilled to have them all do something for us."¹⁰

Clearly Roy Romer had the campaign staff and the campaign fund-raising ability to match any Republican candidate for governor, even Bruce Benson with his willingness to invest a substantial portion of his large personal fortune in the campaign. Actually, that could have been putting it backwards. Bruce Benson claimed he was running for

governor of Colorado in 1994 precisely because of Roy Romer's great organizational talents and proven fund-raising ability.

THE 1994 DEMOCRATIC STATE ASSEMBLY

Similar to the Republican candidates for governor of Colorado in 1994, Roy Romer had to put his name in contention at the Democratic precinct caucuses, county assemblies, and state assembly. There was one big difference, of course. Roy Romer did not have any opposition for the Democratic nomination for governor.

The 1994 Democratic county assemblies provided Romer with the opportunity to meet with and appear before high school auditoriums filled with activist Democrats, but there was little publicity to be obtained by attending these events. During this period in late April and early May of 1994 the Colorado news media had their attention fixed firmly on the Republicans, who were generating plenty of news in their three-way race for the GOP nomination.

The 1994 Democratic State Assembly was a different story. Even though Roy Romer had little or no opposition and was routinely voted in as the 1994 Democratic nominee for governor of Colorado, the press did cover the Democratic confab, held at the Colorado Convention Center in downtown Denver. The event mainly provided an opportunity for Roy Romer to publicize his gubernatorial candidacy before a captive audience.

As a result, the 1994 Democratic State Assembly in Colorado resembled recent national conventions of both the Democratic and Republican parties. Because the party nominees for president now are determined in state presidential primaries, the national conventions have become "advertisements" for the party candidates rather than the place where the nomination is made. Since there was no competition for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in Colorado in 1994, Roy Romer followed the national model and used the Democratic State Assembly as a showcase for his reelection campaign.¹¹

The best part of the show was Roy Romer's young grandchildren. They all came dressed in outfits made out of the same material, an eye-catching print. The granddaughters were in dresses and playsuits made of the material; the grandsons in shirts and shorts made of the material. Just so no one would miss the point as to just whose grandchildren they were, Roy Romer wore a necktie made out of the material. A warm and fuzzy newspaper photograph of Roy Romer and his wife, Bea, and a number of the grandchildren was sent to newspapers all over the state of Colorado by the Associated Press.¹²

Roy Romer showed up at the Democratic State Assembly in a dark suit and white running shoes. The running shoes could have been to symbolize that he was running hard for reelection. Romer called the Democratic ticket in Colorado for 1994 "the best running team the state has ever seen." The Democratic State Assembly nominated Gail Schoettler, the incumbent state treasurer, to run for lieutenant governor on the Romer ticket.

In his acceptance speech to the 1994 Democratic State Assembly, Roy Romer repeated once more the major themes of his reelection campaign. He cited Colorado's surging economy, improvements in public education, and progress in environmental cleanup as the major achievements of his governorship. But much remained to be done, he noted, where reducing crime and aiding troubled children were concerned. He concluded: "We've come a long way, but we've got further to go."¹³

Once the 1994 Democratic State Assembly was over, one might have thought that Roy Romer was going to sit back and watch while the Republicans - Bruce Benson, Mike Bird, and Dick Sargent - fought it out in the 1994 Republican primary election campaign. Anyone who thought that did not know Roy Romer very well.

CAMPAIGNING FROM THE "BULLY PULPIT"

Even when engaged in a hard-fought reelection campaign, the

governor of Colorado remains the top executive official of the state. His or her more important actions and major pronouncements are, by the very nature of his or her high office, always news. Roy Romer did an outstanding job during the 1994 Colorado gubernatorial election campaign of exploiting his ability, as governor, to make news and draw attention to himself.

President Theodore Roosevelt once described the presidency of the United States as a "bully pulpit" from which to make speeches and attract attention. In Colorado it is the state governorship that serves as the "bully pulpit," and Roy Romer used that "bully pulpit" to the best of his ability during his 1994 reelection campaign.

Case in point: in late June of 1994 Roy Romer had his staff compile figures comparing his record on pardoning criminals and shortening criminal sentences with the record of his three predecessors as governor. The figures revealed that Romer was much tougher than his predecessors where granting clemency to criminals was concerned, even though one of those predecessors was Republican John Love, who sat in the governor's chair in the mid to late 1960s.

Romer set up a conference call with political reporters and commentators from throughout the state of Colorado. He bragged on his record, noting that the statistics showed him to be "tough on criminals" and "tougher than the previous three governors by about eight times." Because it was the governor talking about an area of state government where the governor had clear authority, the story received widespread play in Colorado newspapers.¹⁴

Roy Romer liked to make his gubernatorial pronouncements during conference calls with reporters because, he said, it gave news people from outlying parts of Colorado the chance "to take a whack at him." Romer used the conference calls for a variety of campaign purposes - for instance, to dissociate himself from President Bill Clinton's increasingly unpopular health care reform plan and to state his support for amending the state constitution in order to strengthen the death penalty in murder cases.¹⁵

But being a sitting governor gave Roy Romer much more to do than just make gubernatorial pronouncements to the press. Expressing concern about the 434 convicted criminals who walked away from "halfway house" rehabilitation centers in Colorado in 1992, Romer used his executive powers to order the formation of a "fugitive-apprehension unit" to hunt down these escapees. The governor said he would start with a two-person fugitive-arrest team working under the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI). In telling the news media about this latest "executive action," Romer was able to create an aura of purposefulness and authority. He said:

"We're going to create a network from our own resources with a hotline patched into the CBI and reports of escapes sorted out to identify those with violent records." The news media took down every word and dutifully reported Governor Romer's decisive actions to the reading public.¹⁶

STORM KING MOUNTAIN

Sometimes sitting governors do not have to think up new ways to look action-oriented and decisive. Sometimes the natural course of events presents them with honest opportunities to demonstrate leadership and, coincidentally, generate favorable news for themselves. Such an opportunity was presented to Roy Romer in late July of 1994, and he took full advantage of it.

Colorado was having a dry summer in 1994, and a series of wild fires had broken out in a number of places in the mountains. One of those fires was at Storm King Mountain near Glenwood Springs, a resort community famous for its hot springs. Late in the day, when there was a major wind change, the Storm King Mountain fire "blew up." The resulting raging inferno raced up a heavily wooded hillside, killing more than ten men and women fighting the forest fire who could not get out of the way in time.

As he should have, Roy Romer raced to the scene. He expressed the

condolences of the people of Colorado to the families of the dead fire fighters, all of whom were from out-of-state. He surveyed the scene of the tragedy, repeating the common sentiment that every possible step must be taken to reduce the possibility of such a terrifying event occurring in the future.

Roy Romer's Republican opponents had no choice but to step back and let the sitting governor play his assigned role as "official spokesperson for the people of Colorado." The Republican gubernatorial primary took the back seat for a week to Roy Romer "doing his duty" at Storm King Mountain.

Charles Roos, a political columnist at the *Rocky Mountain News*, summarized the delicate situation of a sitting governor responding to a great natural tragedy during an election campaign. He wrote:

"No one around here thinks any of Roy Romer's challengers would play politics with a natural crisis, even if they could. And nobody thinks the governor would do so either.... But recent events do show how an incumbent can at times dominate the local press and TV and even make national headlines without half trying and without saying a single political word."¹⁷

MORE POWERS OF INCUMBENCY

Throughout the summer and fall of 1994 Roy Romer took every opportunity to use his powers as governor to do things and attract media attention. He proclaimed a Colorado "Kid's Crusade" that would jail youths caught in school with a gun, build new reform schools for children kicked out of their local schools, and would expand the famous "Scared Straight" program that shows kids what life is like in Colorado prisons.¹⁸ He implemented a new state program that made it easier for parents with small children to inspect state records on the quality of child-care centers.¹⁹ He proposed that state lottery profits be used to preserve open space and create a greenbelt between Denver and Colorado Springs.²⁰

In mid-September of 1994, just as the 1994 gubernatorial election in Colorado was really starting to heat up, Merrill Lynch & Company announced plans to build a \$112 million customer-service center employing 5,000 people in southeast suburban Denver. Roy Romer arranged for the announcement to be made from the governor's office. As a Merrill Lynch spokesperson laid out the details of this giant economic plum, a "smiling Governor Roy Romer" stood by and took part of the credit. "These are the right kind of jobs for Colorado," Romer told the press, "and the right kind of company for Colorado."²¹

Right up until election day Roy Romer continued to take advantage of being the sitting governor. On October 20, 1994, Romer went to Pueblo to help 200 of that city's citizens dedicate a new community center. The \$1.4 million center had been built with funds raised locally in Pueblo. Roy Romer grabbed a big portion of the spotlight, however, by formally presenting a check for \$136,000, the state government's contribution to the project.²²

There was no question that Roy Romer was a master of the powers of incumbency. He exploited every opportunity to use his position as governor to inflate his own importance and draw attention to himself. The governorship of Colorado is indeed a "bully pulpit," and few had ever used that "pulpit" as skillfully and effectively as Roy Romer.

No one was more aware of this fact than the people trying to elect Republican Bruce Benson the next governor of Colorado. In fact, it was Roy Romer's adept use of the powers of the governor's office that justified Bruce Benson spending great amounts of money, much of it his own money, to defeat Romer. Benson spokesman Greg Sparrow explained: "If you're going to beat a career politician who's been in office the better part of 35 years and has the resources of the state government at his disposal, it's going to be an expensive proposition."²³

Notes To Chapter 23:

1. During his unsuccessful attempt to win the Republican nomination for governor of Colorado in 1994, Mike Bird sought to make an issue of Roy Romer's "oatmeal" breakfasts. Campaigning in Holly in early June, Mike Bird made it a point to order bacon and eggs rather than oatmeal for his morning meal. "Real governors," Mike Bird told the news media, "eat bacon and eggs."
2. "Return to Roots," photo by Shaun Stanley, Denver Post, 25 March 1994, 1B. "Politics," photo by Associated Press, Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, 25 March 1994, B1. "Home to Holly," uncredited photo series, Colorado Statesman, 1 April 1994, 9.
3. Fred Brown, "Romer seeks 3rd term," Denver Post, 25 March 1994, 1B.
4. Associated Press report, "Romer's road begins at home," Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, 25 March 1994, B1.
5. Jody Hope Strogoff, "The return trip back home....," Colorado Statesman, 1 April 1994, 2.
6. Author's notes, telephone interview with Scott Chase, deputy campaign manager, Citizens for Romer, 23 December 1994.
7. For a full discussion of Bruce Benson, Roy Romer, and the DIA issue, see pages 125-130.
8. Peter Blake, "You can't tell GOP without a program," Rocky Mountain News, 27 May 1994, 5A.
9. The Clinton fund-raiser for Roy Romer was hosted by Stephen Wolf, president and chief executive officer of United Airlines. Governor Romer had strongly supported a proposal that Colorado give giant tax breaks and subsidies to United to encourage the airline to locate a major aircraft maintenance facility in Denver. The tax breaks and subsidies were offered in vain. United eventually selected Indianapolis, Indiana, as the site for the aircraft maintenance facility.

10. Peter Blake, "No cabinet member is safe (subheading)," Rocky Mountain News, 15 June 1994, 5A.
11. For a fuller discussion of the reduced role of political party national conventions in nominating party candidates for president, see Robert D. Loevy, *The Flawed Path to the Presidency 1992: Unfairness and Inequality in the Presidential Selection Process* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 164-167.
12. "On The Ballot," photo by David Zalubowski of the Associated Press, Denver Post, 5 June 1994, 7A.
13. Steve Lipsher, "Dems show unity," Denver Post, 5 June 1994, 7A.
14. Thaddeus Herrick, "Romer tough on criminals, records show," Rocky Mountain News, 28 June 1994, 4A. Angela Dire, "Romer touts his 'tough' stand on crime, capital punishment," Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, 28 June 1994, B3.
15. Jennifer Gavin, "Romer down on Clinton plan," Denver Post, 28 June 1994, 5B.
16. Tom McAvoy, "Romer forms new fugitive-apprehension unit," Pueblo Chieftain, 7 July 1994, 5A.
17. Charles Roos, "Forest fires demonstrate power of the incumbent," Rocky Mountain News, 22 July 1994, 51A.
18. Jennifer Gavin, "Romer election focus: kids," Denver Post, 31 August 1994, 1B.
19. Jennifer Gavin, "Wider access to day-care files gets OK," Denver Post, 7 September 1994, 20A.
20. Bill Vogrin, "Romer: Protect land north of Springs," Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, 13 October 1994, C8.
21. Steve Raabe, "Merrill Lynch selects Denver," Denver Post, 14 September 1994, 1A.

22. Jennifer Gavin, "Romer gets some frank talk in Pueblo, Cañon City visits," Denver Post, 20 October 1994, 6B.

23. Jennifer Gavin, "Confessions, car chases and \$8.7 million spice up governor's race," Denver Post, 6 November 1994, 12A.