

UNIVERSITY HONORS IN PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

A Communication Strategy for Roxanne Conlin

Candidate for U.S. Senate

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Introduction

It's an interesting fact that no woman has ever run for national political office from Iowa and won. Roxanne Conlin- an Iowa trial lawyer, former US Attorney, and past Democratic nominee for Iowa governor- could be the first to break the state's highest political glass ceiling. Research has shown that women running for office face a much different electoral terrain than their male counterparts. Therefore, Conlin's campaign for U.S. Senate is an exceptional example of the delicate maneuvering that must occur whenever a woman decides to run for office, especially in a state where voters may not be familiar with women in positions of such high leadership. This project is a realistic communication plan that Conlin's campaign could use if she goes on to the general election to challenge Republican incumbent Chuck Grassley.

This project is grounded in the assumption that Conlin wins the Democratic primary and goes on to challenge Republican Senator Chuck Grassley in the general election. It is a strategic communications plan for Conlin, and makes a unique effort to balance a messaging strategy between agentic and communal traits, or otherwise risk alienating voters by seeming either too "aggressive" or too "passive." Because women have rather recently integrated into American politics, women running for office face additional gender stereotyping from the media, voters, and even party establishments. In addition to the sexism that occurs in the traditionally male-dominated field of politics, women must establish a solid, well-balanced message that will resound with voters.

Literature Review

While much of the proposed communications plan for Roxanne Conlin is based in theory, it is important to note that this plan is grounded in the research of political communication scholars and their analysis and recommendations from other historical political campaigns and elections. The situations specific to Conlin's background and the potential problems the campaign could face are based on historical events and the media coverage surrounding those events. These are sensitive and personal topics, and are the types of issues that the campaign is actually dealing with on a day-to-day basis, and will continue to confront until Election Day. In the current twenty-four hour news cycle where almost nothing is taboo and the mass-media relies on conflict and sensationalism, politicians and pundits are forced to "pick their shots and choose their audiences" in an effort to control the message (Lynch, 164). In this environment, every candidate is forced to deal with the realities of increasingly ugly politics. Dealing with these issues may be uncomfortable, but having an effective communications plan can help alleviate any crisis before the opposition is able to take advantage of your misfortune. Therefore, it is the communications component of a campaign- or the strategy, theme and message- that is arguably the most important element. The other aspects of the campaign (including fundraising, scheduling, debate preparation, advertising, and voter mobilization) all rely on the message plan that has been established. As a result, a well-run campaign requires a well-established message (Thurber, 6).

Additionally, the media plays a critical role in shaping voters' opinions on issues, and essentially has the power to define the public's expectations of officeholders. As a result, it is up to campaigns to influence the media, which then has the capacity to influence voters by framing candidate images and their positions in a way that resounds with public opinion and the current political climate. While a small number of voters are more actively engaged politically than others and therefore less likely to be exclusively influenced by the media, average voters use what is known as "low-information rationality," the kind of practical thinking that combines information from past experiences, daily life, the media, and

political campaigns to make decision about candidates. The ability of campaigns and the media to influence voters' frame of reference is dependent on their ability to utilize the most cognizant communication strategies and messages in order to effectively sway votes in their favor (Popkin). Because most Americans rely so heavily on the media for their political information, candidates who are able to buy advertisements and attract positive earned media benefit from increased name recognition and are able to better frame issues, set the news agenda, raise more money, and influence voters on a greater scale (Lynch, 167).

Because the communication strategy of any campaign is so important when it comes to effectively reaching voters, the research segment is incredibly vital when it comes to creating the right message strategy. The research conducted by campaigns, both the primary and secondary types, is a prerequisite to forming the message strategy that will best resonate with voters and the media. It is imperative that elected officials be able to anticipate the public sentiment in order to advance an effective issue frame that will evoke the desired response from voters. Because campaigns are so constrained by the public mood, any misinterpretation of the political climate can be devastating and give an unwanted benefit to the opposition (Gabrielson, 80).

Creating a cohesive message strategy for a female candidate requires a greater understanding of the special gender-based challenges they face. While voters verbally express high levels of support toward women candidates, many continue to be influenced by gender stereotypes. Research shows that the public tends to see female candidates as kind, compassionate, and passive (Dolan, 41). This view can be traced back to Carol Gilligan's legendary 1982 work, *In a Different Voice*, in which she found that men and women use different approaches when making moral judgments. Through interviews with boys and girls and young adults, Gilligan was able to demonstrate that men base their moral judgments on individual rights and abstract principles of right and wrong, while women's moral

understanding is "contextual" and places emphasis on relationships (Gilligan). While this may seem like an added bonus, this generalization is actually a setback for female candidates because of the fact that people are accustomed to men in management positions. So since men have traditionally dominated the public sphere and leadership positions of our society and women have customarily represented the more nurturing roles of caretakers in the domestic and familial sphere, people tend to view successful professional women in leadership who embody traditional leadership characteristics as more deceitful, pushy, selfish, and abrasive than men in similar positions (Eagly & Carli).

So when women take on a management role, like that of a politician running for office, they must find a way to exhibit the demeanor required by a person in control, which often requires an exhibition of toughness, and balance that with the traditional expectation of women as the more compassionate gender. This clash between two sets of associations is further complicated by a long history of male domination of leadership roles, which makes it difficult to separate the "leader" associations from the "male" associations (Eagly & Carli). The biggest struggle for women then is their ability to balance two different types of guidance methods, which are known as the transformational and transactional approaches to leadership (Burns).

Transformational leaders are those who establish themselves as role models by gaining the trust of followers by establishing goals and acting as innovators. Such leaders work to empower their followers by encouraging them to develop their full potential. These followers, or in this case constituents, are then able to contribute more effectively to their cause, making the final product one of a more productive society. By contrast, transactional leaders establish "give and take" relationships and manage in a more conventional manner. This includes identifying subordinates' responsibilities, rewarding them when they meet their objectives, and correcting them when they fail (Burns, 4). By using the former of the two styles, women who are transactional leaders are better able to bring other people into the decision-making sphere, therefore using collaboration to help invalidate any conflicts

that might arise from followers who are unfamiliar with women in leadership. By using cooperation to authenticate any decisions, politicians who are transformational leaders are able to better understand their publics and avoid resistance from those who may otherwise reject women in leadership positions. For a woman running for office, this means they must establish their leadership style and rhetoric in a way that constituents deem collaborative and use a message that embodies voter empowerment and an understanding of their needs.

Clearly this is a complex issue that female candidates have to approach, and there are countless issues that can arise when dealing with such a delicate messaging balance. So while it is important that campaigns make an effort to reach out to voters who may not be familiar with women in leadership positions, they must be realistic when it comes to the probability of changing attitudes that may be generationally engrained in the minds of voters. Therefore, female candidates must remember to focus on the voters most likely to identify with them, who research shows are other women. While it is somewhat simplistic to say that women always vote for candidates of the same gender, when it comes to Democratic women like Roxanne Conlin, party identification coupled with shared gender identity makes it more likely that women will vote for another woman running for office (Dolan, 57-58).

Currently, women voters in the United States are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than the Republican Party, and more women run for office as Democrats than Republicans. It could be that women voters may just be choosing candidates of their own party, many of whom happen to be women (Cook). But in a state like Iowa where a woman has never been elected to statewide office, there is no previous candidate that has been able to run successfully on what I call the “gender-blind platform.” So while this may be true in regions that have historically elected women to office and see no difference between female and male Democratic candidates, someone like Roxanne Conlin must rely on further research that shows people’s predisposition to vote for candidates of a particular sex. This provides support for the notion that constituents do in fact take gender into account when choosing a candidate,

which is how the Conlin campaign must frame their strategy (Sanbonmatsu, 21). Additionally, if women are more likely to identify as Democrats, share a sense of group identity, and have a unique understanding when it comes to issues like sexual harassment, abortion, and childcare, women voters will see women candidates as better situated to deal with these issues than a male candidate (Paolino 297, 302). This idea of having a “unique perspective” is one component of the message strategy that the Conlin campaign can use to present itself to voters regardless of their gender because of her uphill challenge against an established Washington politician.

Historical Context

Roxanne Conlin, candidate for the Democratic primary in Iowa and probable challenger to incumbent Republican Senator Chuck Grassley, faces a unique situation in her bid for Senate. If elected, Conlin would be the first woman ever elected to U.S. Congress, let alone Senate, from Iowa. The state is one of only two in the entire country that has yet to elect a woman to the office of Governor or to either of the two houses of the U.S. Congress. The only other state in such a position is Mississippi, which parallels the seemingly progressive Midwestern state with the likes of an overwhelmingly evangelical conservative state in the South.

Because no other Iowa woman has ever been elected to statewide level, the Conlin campaign must find a way to present the candidate to Iowans who are not familiar with high-level female political representation. There is no doubt that Conlin faces several obstacles that her male counterparts are able to easily avoid. Recent scholarship shows that an overwhelming majority of Americans no longer believe that men are better suited emotionally for politics than women, but Iowa voters may be unique on this sentiment. It is interesting to consider the 2008 Presidential election, in which the frontrunner for the Democratic primary, Hillary Clinton, lost the Iowa caucus to Barack Obama. While there are several possible contributors to the upset, including her lack of campaigning in the state and a campaign message based on experience in a 'change' election, there may have been an underlying attitude about Clinton based solely on her gender that could have contributed to her loss. It would be beneficial to scholars of women and politics to conduct further research into this theory, which could provide proof of sexism, or at least a wariness toward women, on behalf of the Iowa voting population. This would be very difficult to measure because oftentimes respondents are not likely to report feelings that may be considered sexist, therefore giving a false report on the attitudes of voters and indirect measures are often inconclusive.

Message Strategy

Because men have traditionally dominated our political institutions throughout time, female candidates generally have to overcome several obstacles when running for office. A 2001 *USA Today* poll indicates women running for office must address three particular concerns that voters have about women in charge:

1. Solid political background
2. Executive experience
3. Ability to balance ‘toughness’ with ‘compassion’¹

Conlin can specifically address these issues by focusing on the following attributes of her candidacy. First, the campaign will be able to establish Conlin’s solid political background by emphasizing her activism in the Democratic Party. In 1982, she earned the Democratic nomination for Governor of Iowa, was elected the first woman to serve as the President of the American Association of Justice, and served as a United States Attorney in Iowa. Second, Conlin is able to address the issue of executive experience by focusing on her leadership background, which includes the 25 years that she has owned and managed a successful law firm. Finally, Conlin can use her experience as Assistant Attorney General for Iowa and career as a winning trial lawyer to exhibit her toughness. At the same time, she can highlight her empathy for others as evident in her volunteering, community service and victim advocacy. She can also draw from her role as wife, mother, and grandmother; all which typically invoke images of caretaker.

Another important frame that Conlin should use in this strategy is grounded in the anecdotal success of other female candidates from Midwestern states like Senator Claire McCaskill of Missouri and Kathleen Sebelius, former Governor of Kansas and current Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. Both acknowledged their gender during their campaigns but were also able to balance

the expectations of voters who may not have been familiar with women in high political leadership positions. Therefore, Conlin should embrace her gender and explicitly acknowledge that she could be the first Iowa woman elected to national political office, but conversely attempt to neutralize the issue of gender by turning the focus back onto the fundamental issues Iowans face. For example, Conlin would say the following: “Iowans are well aware that we have never elected a woman to the U.S. Senate. While I would love to be the first, this campaign is not about me; it’s about representing Iowans on the important issues in Washington.” This specific message will be tailored through the use of polling and focus groups in order to determine the exact phrasing and whether or not it tests well with voters. The following chapter addresses the current political environment as evident through the use of available polls conducted by outside agencies as well as a research plan that the Conlin campaign should undertake.

Polling and Research

Current research done by an independent organization shows Grassley polling well ahead of Conlin, although this poll was conducted by a Republican-biased poll and thus reflective of a worse-case scenario for the Conlin campaign. The recent Rasmussen Reports poll of a Conlin/Grassley match up shows Grassley ahead by 19 points. The Conlin campaign obviously has a lot of ground to make up in order to win in the November election. On the bright side, Conlin is doing better than the other potential challengers. Grassley is polling ahead of Krause and Fiegen by 26 and 29 points, respectively.²

Grassley vs. Conlin	Rasmussen Reports	Grassley 55, Conlin 36	Grassley +19
Iowa Senate - Grassley vs. Krause	Rasmussen Reports	Grassley 57, Krause 31	Grassley +26
Iowa Senate - Grassley vs. Fiegen	Rasmussen Reports	Grassley 57, Fiegen 28	Grassley +29

The more recent Research 2000 Iowa Poll, released by KCCI News in February, shows Grassley's approval rating at 59% and unfavorable rating at 35%. The poll shows Conlin's favorable rating at 41% and unfavorable rating at 36%, with a margin of error of +/- 4% points.³ The Research 2000 Iowa Poll was conducted from February 15 through February 17, 2010. A total of 600 likely voters who vote regularly in state elections were interviewed statewide by telephone, and were selected through random variations of the last four digits of telephone numbers. A cross-section of exchanges was utilized in order to ensure an accurate reflection of the state. Quotas were assigned to reflect the voter registration of distribution by county.⁴ These numbers are discouraging at first glance, but Grassley's sinking poll numbers and the current anti-incumbent sentiment sweeping the country are good indicators that Conlin has a chance at defeating Grassley in the November election.

Another important aspect of the research shows that the Iowa women polled view Conlin more favorably than do men, although Grassley still has an advantage. When asked who they would vote for

if the election were held today, 62% of men said they would vote for Grassley and only 30% said they would vote for Conlin, while 50% of women said they would vote for Grassley and 40% said they would vote for Conlin. Because women are more likely to vote Democratic and run for office as Democrats, and are also more likely to identify with female candidates than men and use gender-related issue positions in determining their vote choice when there is a woman candidate, this finding is not surprising (Freeman, 1986; Dolan, 1998). Therefore, the Conlin campaign should focus significant resources towards targeting and turning out female voters, who are more likely to identify with Conlin and the issues of the Democratic platform in general.

To more effectively target women, the campaign will need to conduct research on the messages that resound with women voters. Polling will be a crucial element of the entire campaign plan and will essentially determine the message strategies that are employed. Several phases of primary research will be executed in order to accurately gauge public opinion and attitude regarding issues, issue saliency, prominent state and national politicians, political parties, and current events. The campaign will conduct a baseline poll, midway poll, and two focus groups in preparation of the general election. Looking at various demographic and geographic groups of women, the campaign can target not just “women” but a variety of female constituencies that span economic demographics, urban and rural demographics, and age.

Research Program

The information that needs to be gathered must include material on both Conlin and Grassley’s supporters so that the campaign can determine its most effective target audience. The target audience will include voters who already support Conlin as well as those who can be swayed to support her, including independents and moderate Republicans. Based on information from the Cook Political Report Partisan Voter Index, Iowa’s 2nd congressional district in the Eastern/Southeastern part of the state leans distinctly Democratic, with a D+7 (strong Democratic) and D+5 (likely Democratic) score; but

Iowa's 5th congressional district, which covers most of Western Iowa, leans strongly Republican, scoring R+9. The central districts of the state are rated more neutrally.⁵ These ratings indicate that information should be extracted from Democrats, independents, and moderate Republicans from specially targeted regions around the state. The research groups will focus on key voter districts in the Democratic strongholds and swing district, including Eastern and Central Iowa, in addition to women voters' reactions to messaging strategies.

Specifically, the sampling frame will use random digit-dialing of all Iowans (including cell phone users), with a screen for women, men, youth ages 18-35, baby boomers, seniors, independents, Democrats, and moderate Republicans from areas around the state. The questionnaire will ask general questions about the population's interests as well as their level of interest and knowledge of Roxanne Conlin.

Focus Groups

Focus groups will be used to help determine the questions that the polling should incorporate into the survey and as a follow-up to the survey's administration to help facilitate effective language for the campaign messages. These will also be used to test the effectiveness of the campaign's message and the language used in possible television and radio advertisements. A professional focus group moderator will be hired and the studies will be conducted in easily accessible locations around the state, such as public schools and libraries if accessible to the campaign. Various messages will be tested with groups of respondents. The focus group participants will give their opinions on issues regarding jobs and the economy, health care, crime, energy and the environment, foreign policy, immigration, gun control, abortion, and gay marriage. Once information is collected, the campaign can better assess what questions to test as possible frames for its message to promote Conlin against Grassley. Once the focus groups are conducted, the focus group moderators will present the information to the Conlin

media advisors for review. The moderator will write a report on the data from the study, which will be presented approximately two weeks after the focus groups are conducted.

Polling

After the focus groups, we will also conduct multiple polls via telephone throughout the campaign. The campaign will poll the public's reaction to media coverage of Conlin, with an emphasis on the reactions of women voters in particular and the message strategies mentioned in the previous chapter. The evaluation of respondent's answers will include their thoughts regarding her positions on the issues, their responses to her ideas for the state, and will test various message strategies unique to her candidacy as a woman. Our polling audience will be representative of the population in the regions in which we are polling. Two specific types of polls will be conducted; a baseline poll and a midway poll.

Baseline Poll: The baseline poll will be designed to gauge the political environment, Iowan's opinions on issue areas, and topics listed below. Information gathered in the poll will help shape the theme and messaging of the campaign. This portion of the research would have taken place during the primary election campaign so that Conlin's image and messaging strategies would already be in place for the general election.

- Name ID's of Roxanne Conlin and Chuck Grassley
- Issue importance questions regarding jobs and the economy, health care, crime, energy and the environment, foreign policy, immigration, gun control, abortion, and gay marriage
- Issue saliency of those issue areas
- Opinions about President Obama, Congress, and strength of those opinions
- Opinion on whether Grassley is a "part of the problem or part of the solution"
- Favorable/unfavorable opinions of key political rhetoric, including their sensitivity to terms like "Washington," "politicians," whether the government is a "broken system," and "Washington outsider"
- Whether the country is moving in the right direction or is on the wrong track

- Favorable/unfavorable ratings of prominent state and national politicians like President Obama, Speaker Pelosi, Governor Culver, Senator Harkin, and Senator Grassley
- What Iowans believe are the most pressing issues facing the state
- Whether Iowans think the problems facing the state are national problems
- Opinions regarding Grassley's length of time holding office in the Senate
- Level of enthusiasm regarding the general election
- How they feel about women in leadership positions
- Who respondents would likely vote for in the Senate race if it were held today
- Levels of approval regarding the Democratic party and Republican party both statewide and nationally
- Levels of approval regarding President Obama's handling of the economy and healthcare
- Demographic and regional information
- Conlin's image

Midway Poll: The August midway poll will follow up on the questions asked in the baseline poll. As the campaign develops and issues and events rise to the forefront, the midway poll will provide the campaign with an updated read on the political environment of the campaign as the election has progressed. In addition to asking some of the same questions from the baseline poll, the midline poll will determine what issues are important to respondents as the general election heats up. The information gathered from this poll will inform and direct media decisions (such as television and radio spots, direct mail content and earned media events) in following weeks. The polling results will help determine which strategies are working and which strategies are not. This research will also help Conlin choose her messages and position the campaign against Grassley, as well as tell where to send specific messages in the state according to political leanings and issue opinions and which demographics in particular the campaign should be targeting with what messages.

Strategy, Theme, and Message

A major factor in the campaign's strategy is the use of targeting data to determine which areas of the state are important and contain the most potential voters. Targeting data will be used to determine where to buy media, and the different types of speeches and events that will occur. Voters will be targeted to what fundraising and political mail they receive as different parts of Iowa have different political views. In an election year where a Democratic candidate must fight hard for every vote, this is critical for efficient allocation of campaign resources.

In addition to message targeting regionally, the campaign must also use specific messaging strategies based on already compiled research, including opposition research done on Roxanne Conlin, her business, and her family. This research was conducted in order to determine negative issues early so the campaign is prepared to react if necessary and avoid any chance that they will get off message. The following possible issues arose during extensive database searches on Roxanne Conlin through the use of Lexis Nexis. The following are possible strategic solutions that could be used in addressing the possible problematic issues that arose.

Opposition Research

Roxanne Conlin

The following are negative points about Conlin that may affect the campaign that were found through extensive opposition research. Presumably these issues will have already been addressed during the primary election, but since the campaign is facing such a difficult general election against Grassley, it is critical to stay on message and have well-established responses for the following issues. Focus groups will be presented with these issues and reactions will be used to evaluate the campaign's responses.

- **1992 arrest:** Conlin was arrested for drunk driving in 1992. It is crucial that the campaign take action early on and establish Conlin as a regular person that makes mistakes and take ownership




of the isolated incident. Since her arrest, Conlin has been an outspoken advocate against drunk driving, and on the ten-year anniversary of her arrest published a lengthy article on her firm's website- "Something to Celebrate: How I came to grips with alcoholism."⁶ In the article, she describes the circumstances surrounding the night of her arrest, the shame that ensued, and the recovery process that followed. According to the article, Conlin has been sober since that night.

- **Trial lawyer:** Conlin is a well-known trial lawyer, and won a multi-million dollar trust lawsuit against Microsoft. Some see her as too aggressive, and her firm was criticized for spending exorbitant amounts of time and money on the trial, which she ended up winning. To counter this, the campaign should use a message similar to that of her law firm; that Conlin speaks up for those who can't speak for themselves." The hope is that this will in turn establish her as a populist and someone who understands and fights for the working class, an important portion of the Democrat voters and unions she needs for endorsements. Before this message strategy is put to use, the campaign will test variations with women in the focus groups.
- **1982 tax issue:** Many attribute Conlin's loss in the 1982 campaign for governor to her decision to disclose her family's tax records, and Conlin then said she and her husband were exempt from paying state taxes in 1981 because of the recession and her husband's real estate business allowed the use of a tax shelter. This made it easy for her opponents to attack her as a hypocrite because of her earlier opposition to the very same tax shelter. A post election poll found that a quarter of voters "cited Conlin's handling of the tax issue as a reason for backing Branstad," who won the election and is currently running for governor again.⁷ Because Conlin's own husband had used the same loophole she had fought to close, Conlin was seen as a hypocrite, and this resonated with voters that viewed Conlin as a benefactor of a double standard that somehow did not apply to her husband and in turn supported her own wealthy lifestyle. This issue can be dealt with by releasing Roxanne Conlin's tax records early on in the

campaign and by filing Roxanne’s taxes separately from her husband James’ to ensure there are no political implications from any tax issues that he may have that could negatively affect her campaign.




- **Personal wealth:** It is vital that the campaign establish her as a “rags to riches” candidate and secure features in local and even national publications that tell the story of her childhood. A perfect example of this was done by Des Moines Register columnist Rekah Basu in the 2009 column “How Roxanne Conlin learned to stand up for herself, and for others.” In the article, Conlin’s childhood is described as having “periods with no income, food, health insurance, transportation, and long walks to class in the cold...” Her hardships were established in vivid detail, Basu writing that “she has slept under layers of clothing because there was no heat, and worked full time after school when she was the only member of her family of eight to be employed.”⁸ The most obvious way to address Conlin’s immense personal success is to establish her as familiar with the struggles people face today. The hope is that by sharing her personal story as often as possible, voters will not have as much trouble seeing the wealthy trial lawyer as someone who has been through some of their same problems.
- Additionally, even though Conlin herself has acquired personal wealth, Conlin the candidate has raised a mere \$609,481 to Grassley’s \$4,811,780. A breakdown of the two candidate’s total money raised and spent is below.

Chuck Grassley (R)

Raised:  \$4,811,780
Spent:  \$1,682,176
Cash on Hand:  \$5,092,181
Last Report: December 31, 2009

OpenSecrets.org

Roxanne Conlin (D)

Raised:  \$609,481
Spent:  \$106,648
Cash on Hand:  \$502,832
Last Report: December 31, 2009

OpenSecrets.org

- **Her fundraising ability:** On the other hand, the reported finances of this quarter could be used to show Conlin’s aggressive and effective fundraising skills and the support from individual donors. A further breakdown of either candidate’s spending shows that all of Conlin’s campaign donations come from individual donors because she has pledged not to accept money from federal lobbyists or political action committees (PACs). During the third financial quarter, when Grassley played a high-profile role in healthcare reform negotiations, he raised \$864,622 total, of which \$364,295 came from PACs. In other words, in two months Conlin was able to raise more from individuals than Grassley was able to in the entire third quarter.⁹ To address voter’s concerns with Conlin’s seriousness of a fundraiser (due to either her gender, Grassley’s long-term incumbency, or whether she has enough support to win) Conlin’s viability as a candidate can be established with the use of these numbers aligned with a message that suggests Iowans are motivated to fight Chuck Grassley.
- **Husband’s campaign contributions:** Conlin’s husband James donated a total of \$1,500 to Chuck Grassley during his last reelection campaign. The payments were made on three separate occasions in the form of \$500 each time in 2003.¹⁰ This is a unique possible setback; although Conlin’s husband operates as a separate entity and both he and his wife are both strong donors to Democratic candidates and political groups, the campaign could either downplay the contributions, or use the possible frame that Grassley has become increasingly partisan. By utilizing his voting record and outspoken role in the recent healthcare debate, the campaign can establish that Grassley is much more partisan than he was in 2004, and for this reason James would not contribute to his campaign today.
- **Conlin’s role in the Pierre Pierce case:** Conlin served as a mediator in the 2002 Pierre Pierce sexual assault case that enabled him to make a plea deal, and who subsequently assaulted a former girlfriend in 2005.¹¹ By pleading guilty, Pierce avoided trial on a Class C felony charge of

third-degree sexual assault and possible placement on the state's sex-offender list. In addition, he was allowed to remain on the University of Iowa campus, play basketball during their next season, and keep his scholarship.¹² Conservatives and the Grassley campaign might try to characterize Conlin's involvement with the mediation as a negative, but Conlin was a representative of the victim, and her courtroom successes and expertise on sexual discrimination and harassment establish Conlin as a strong voice for women's rights. Therefore, the Conlin campaign must establish her accurate role as a women's rights advocate, which includes a background of volunteering at the Polk County Rape and Sexual Assault Care Center in addition to her positions as founder and director of the Iowa Women's Political Caucus. Conlin was also named to the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame in 1981.¹³

Opposition Research

Charles 'Chuck' Grassley

Although Grassley has been known to be bipartisan and has cosponsored legislation with a number of Democrats including Ted Kennedy, his voting record shows an increase in votes along party lines. He still goes home every weekend to farm, and will be 78 this year. In 2004, Grassley captured 70 percent of the vote, beating Arthur Small (D), a longtime state legislator, by more than 40 points. According to a recent interview with Tom Beaumont, DSM Register political staff writer, he doesn't plan on campaigning until August. Therefore, the Conlin campaign must be well-positioned for heavy competition late in the campaign. Focus groups and surveys will test the following possible messaging strategies in order to effectively target Grassley:

- Grassley has joined the rest of the GOP in an endless Washington gridlock; nothing is getting done while the country suffers.
- Grassley has been in elected office for 51 years; it's time for a change and he is out of touch with Iowans.

- Grassley is a part of the problem in Washington, not the solution.
- National polling shows that there is currently an anti-incumbent sentiment sweeping the country. It's possible that the Conlin campaign can capitalize on Grassley's recent obstructionist politics and attribute this to the partisan gridlock in Washington.
- If reelected, Grassley plans to step down from his leadership post on the Finance Committee to become GOP leader on the Judiciary Committee at a time when President Obama could have many Supreme Court vacancies to fill, putting Grassley at the forefront of the GOP's likely opposition on an incredibly partisan committee. It is critical that the Conlin campaign stress the importance of the Supreme Court when it comes to women's rights, the recent repeal of campaign finance laws, and the preservation of individual liberties. Because of his future position on the Judiciary Committee, Grassley will be unable to revert back to the somewhat partisan Senator he once was (20th most Republican voter out of 40) if he sits at the top of the most partisan committee in the Senate.¹⁴
- In the Iowa Poll last November, almost 30 percent of Iowans surveyed said Grassley's tone and approach to issues had changed.¹⁵
- Also, Grassley's overall job approval hit 54 percent in February, which is his lowest rating since 1982, his second year in the Senate. As the anti-incumbent sentiment grows around the country, he may find himself facing an increasingly hostile constituency that Conlin will be able to take advantage of in the general election.¹⁶
- Grassley also was the author of controversial CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) legislation, which labor organizations staunchly oppose.

Earned Media

The major intent of the earned media plan and the proposed events is to familiarize Conlin with voters and situate her in the community with voters frequently each week. Because name recognition and positive press coverage is a crucial part of any successful campaign, having Conlin meet as many Iowans as possible and relate to them on a personal basis will establish her as a figure Iowans can relate to. Due to Grassley's incumbency advantage and impressive war chest, the success of the Conlin campaign hinges on garnering positive earned media.

As a challenger to an incumbent with a fairly strong approval rating and enormous name recognition from serving in elected office for over half a century, the Conlin campaign needs every possible vote in order to win. Therefore, it is important to make contact with as many voters as possible to both increase name recognition and allow Conlin a platform to discuss her positions on the issues and listen to voters' concerns. It will also be critical that the campaign conform to one overarching message and solid stances on the most significant issues, including the economy and healthcare, in order to avoid any chance for the opposition to frame her as a "flip-flopper." Also, because Iowa has such a large aging and rural population, we must tailor messages to specifically resonate with these voters whenever appropriate, whether through direct mail, get out the vote efforts, or at speeches and events. Strategically, the campaign will need to both increase Democratic performance and persuade many independents and moderates to vote for Conlin through genuine face-to-face contact. The final messages we use will be established through polling responses and tailored with focus groups of different Iowa demographics.

The Conlin campaign should continue the "Fight to Fix It" tour of each of the 99 Iowa counties that was launched during the primary election. For each county, Conlin should attend various events, including town-hall style question and answer forums, small and large-scale meet-and-greets, and tours of Iowa-owned businesses. The hope is that the Conlin campaign will have access to a variety of venues

which ideally will include small businesses, manufacturing plants, union halls, farms, and schools among other places.

In addition to the “Fight to Fix It,” 99 county tour, Conlin must participate in scheduled community activities and volunteer throughout Iowa. While she already devotes much of her time to volunteering at the Polk County Rape and Sexual Assault Care Center and role as an advocate for the humane society and animal adoption, she should branch out to communities in need of special assistance, like the Eastern Iowa communities still struggling with the effects of extreme flooding. The campaign should also distribute a weekly electronic newsletter that addresses Conlin’s stance on selected weekly issues, including healthcare, jobs, the war in Afghanistan, education, the environment, energy, immigration, and any other pertinent issues that may arise during the course of the campaign. The newsletters, which will be distributed electronically to limit cost, will enable the campaign to communicate directly with voters on the issues. The campaign should also participate in several speeches throughout the state and a few structured debates with Grassley.

In terms of earned media efforts online, the campaign can use social media platforms like YouTube videos and Twitter to communicate their message to internet users. The campaign is already effectively using Facebook to connect with voters and create an online presence. In addition to these internet tactics, the campaign should hold Town Hall events much like the speeches and debates, but that are specifically conducted in question and answer format to encourage a dialogue with voters on the issues and establish Conlin as a transformational leader.

Finally, the campaign must work to secure positive feature stories in publications throughout the state that tell Conlin’s personal story of triumph. Throughout her life, Conlin has faced adversity that allows her to relate with the issues many people across Iowa face due to the current economic climate. Therefore, securing interviews for the candidate where she is able to share her personal story and vision for Iowa will enable Conlin to connect with voters on a personal level that she otherwise

might not be able to during a classic speech-type situation. Securing Conlin's story in trusted news publications will make it more likely for voters to be positively influenced in her favor.

Paid media

The paid media portion of the campaign includes all media and press that the campaign buys, including print, TV and radio advertisements, any and all direct mail initiatives, as well as the website.

While there is obviously a cost to maintaining the website and domain name, using the internet to distribute information and connect with voters is a cost-effective way to communicate their message.

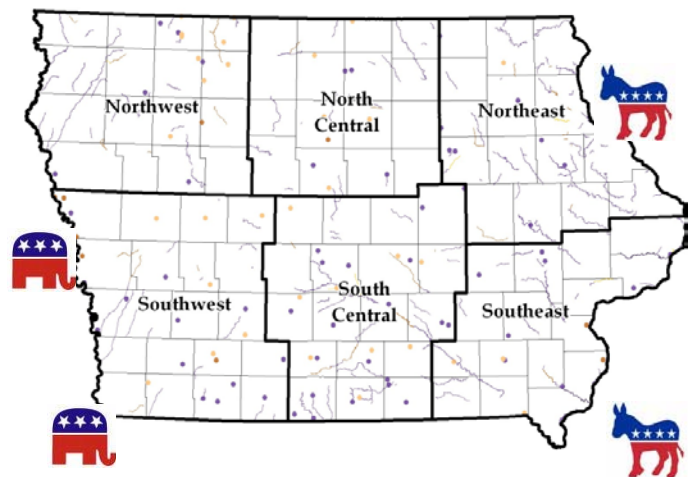
Specifically, the website can be used much like the Obama for America campaign's website, which served as an effective platform for voter engagement. The Conlin campaign website should include similar content, such as personal blogs about voters and their reasons for supporting Conlin and the issues that matter to them.

Print, TV, and radio advertisements during the beginning months of the general election should focus on securing name recognition for Conlin, frame her as a credible expert on the issues, and distinguish her as relatable to average Iowans. Because Grassley plans to begin campaigning in August, Conlin's strategy should be focused on establishing name recognition and securing issue platforms with voters in the summer months prior to Grassley's August campaign launch. Subsequently, the Conlin campaign should be prepared for attack ads in the later months of the campaign and have response materials ready for release once Grassley's campaigning begins. Because the Conlin campaign will have already addressed any potential problems the opposition could take advantage of, the likelihood of a successful attack by the Grassley campaign is less likely than if the campaign had not prepared for the issues that arose during the opposition research done on the Conlins.

Regional Dynamics

To increase the effectiveness of the above paid and earned media strategies, Conlin must maintain an intense schedule focused on raising large amounts of money and making appearances around the state to spread name recognition and persuade potential voters. As previously stated, the candidate should visit each of Iowa's 99 counties at least once, with campaign stops heavily concentrated in key counties with large blocs of voters and districts that favor Democrats. Therefore, Conlin should spend large amounts of time in the Des Moines (pop. 198.7k), Cedar Rapids (120.8k), Davenport (98.4k), Sioux City (85k), Waterloo (68.7k), Iowa City (62.2k), Council Bluffs (58.3k), and Dubuque (57.7k) media markets. These media markets have by far the highest vote goals. Large newspaper publications in these major media markets include the Des Moines Register, Quad City Times, Cedar Rapids Gazette, Waterloo Courier, and Sioux City Journal.

According to Cook Political Report, Iowa's Eastern/Southeastern part of the state leans heavily Democratic, but most of Western Iowa leans strongly Republican. Upon completion of polling to confirm these findings, the campaign should focus efforts on the possible toss-up areas of the state, which are likely to include Central, West Central, and the Northeastern areas of the state. The campaign will also solidify the Democratic base in the Eastern and Southeastern parts of the state. More narrowly, the candidate's stops will be planned by county. In September, Conlin will be making persuasion stops in swing counties, which will be defined by the polling and research done earlier on in the campaign. In the weeks closer to the election, Conlin should engage voters with "motivation events" in the base regions and cities to ensure low voter turnout does not pose a risk.



Timeline

In order to allocate resources effectively throughout the five months of the primary election, the Conlin campaign should utilize the following schedule.

JUNE:

The Democratic primary is on June 8th. Conlin is expected to win, and the campaign should hold a victory press conference on the night of the primary. In the days following, Conlin should be readily available for interviews and actively pursue any avenues that will increase positive earned media coverage. During this month, the campaign should also conduct the first poll of the general election and use the baseline poll responses to shape messages for use throughout the general election. Also, Conlin must continue her statewide tour of each county, and reach out to Iowans who may not have been involved in the primary process. The campaign should also begin heavily pitching profile stories for both TV and print as well as meeting with editorial boards of main newspapers to spread Conlin's story and inundate the media with the tested message frames. According to the 2000 Census data and PoliData's Iowa info, our target media markets should be Des Moines (pop. 198.7k), Cedar Rapids (120.8k), Davenport (98.4k), Sioux City (85k), Waterloo (68.7k), Iowa City (62.2k), Council Bluffs (58.3k), and Dubuque (57.7k).¹⁷

JULY:

In July, Conlin should begin the direct mail campaign with new general election language chosen by examining survey and focus groups responses to the baseline research. This month the campaign should also begin sending the weekly electronic issue-based newsletter to supporters registered through the website voter engagement platform and who have signed up for email alerts. Additionally, the campaign should release a biography advertisement to reintroduce voters to Conlin following her primary win.

AUGUST:

Because Grassley intends to begin campaigning this month, the Conlin campaign must be prepared for possible attacks. It is important that Conlin reach out to big names in the Democratic Party nationally and begin pursuing support from the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee to bring recognizable political affiliates to visit Iowa and appear with Conlin at events to help drive fundraising and media efforts. The midline poll should also be conducted this month for the campaign to be able to reevaluate the political climate and reshape any framing and messages if necessary. As is customary for any candidate running for office, Conlin should plan to speak at the Iowa State Fair and participate in the traditional political straw poll and fair competitions popular to Iowans to increase visibility before the last eight weeks of the campaign.

SEPTEMBER:

In September, the campaign must continue efforts to bring DSCC headliners to events. Additionally, getting positive earned media from the targeted media markets should continue to be a top priority. Paid media efforts (including commercials, press releases, and events) should still be conducted to keep Conlin supporters energized and continue to inform voters who may still be undecided. The campaign should also hold the first debate with Grassley of the general election during this month.

OCTOBER:

In the final weeks leading up to the general election, the Conlin campaign should facilitate a huge get-out-the-vote strategy and schedule even more events to solidify any undecided voters to vote in our favor. These “motivation events” will be focused on heavily encouraging Iowans to register to vote and show up at the polls for Conlin on November 2. The campaign should directly reach as many people as possible, through phone calls, door-to-door canvassing, and electronic communication combined. The campaign should take a personal approach with each supporter of Conlin, and confirm

that they have childcare options for Election Day, are registered voters, know where their polling places are located, and have transportation to and from the polls. Any possible issues that could inhibit committed supporters from casting their vote should be addressed; if Conlin continues to poll behind or close to Grassley, having every available vote is critical. The campaign should also continue to utilize the internet organizing platform and increase press releases and media advisories for the last eight weeks until Election Day. In the final few weeks of the campaign, both television and radio airwaves must be targeted with Conlin's unique messaging on the issues, through advertisements and positive media coverage. In the final days leading up to the election, Conlin should participate in the second and final debate with Grassley.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the plan proposed, if enacted, would be measured by the electoral victory or defeat of the Conlin campaign on Election Day- November 2, 2010. With the ultimate goal being the defeat of Republican incumbent Senator Chuck Grassley, there are many other smaller goals that could be reached even if the majority of voters' choices on Election Day are not favorable to the Conlin campaign. The effectiveness of the communication strategy also depends on more measurable goals, such as media impressions and voter turnout. However, follow-up research on behalf of the voters surveyed at the beginning of the campaign – both through the use of polling and focus groups – could test for a change in attitudes regarding female candidates and women in elected office. Even if the election outcome was unfavorable, there could still be a positive change in voter attitudes, creating a more favorable environment for women who run for office in the future. If there is a positive change in voter's attitudes regarding women in politics, the proposed message strategy would be successful in the long term, even if on a less-noticeable scale than an actual November 2 win.

Appendix A

The following are examples of possible scripts for the Conlin campaign to use for television, radio, and print advertisements. These could be used for the paid media portion of the communication strategy during the general election following the positive testing of the frames and rhetoric through the previously proposed research program.

Roxanne for Senate Radio Ad Script

FOR RELEASE - June 8

RADIO ADVERTISEMENT: 60

MALE VOICE: REPUBLICAN SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY HAS SPENT OVER FIFTY ONE YEARS IN WASHINGTON, ALL THE WHILE GROWING FARTHER AND FARTHER AWAY FROM IOWANS. CHUCK GRASSLEY VOTED AGAINST HEALTHCARE REFORM EVEN THOUGH HE KNEW IT WOULD GIVE NINETY FIVE PERCENT OF AMERICANS AFFORDABLE HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS. HE HAS VOTED IN FAVOR OF PROTECTING WALL STREET WHILE THE REST OF US LOSE OUR JOBS AND HOMES. THAT'S WHY I'M VOTING FOR ROXANNE CONLIN THIS NOVEMBER. SHE'S WILLING TO STAND UP FOR IOWANS WHO CAN'T STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES, AND HAS BEEN WORKING ON BEHALF OF REGULAR IOWANS HER ENTIRE LIFE.

ROXANNE: HI, I'M ROXANNE CONLIN, AND I'M RUNNING FOR SENATE. GROWING UP, MY FAMILY WENT THROUGH TIMES WHEN WE COULDN'T AFFORD HEALTH INSURANCE, WENT WITHOUT MEALS, AND MOVED FROM TOWN TO TOWN WHILE MY DAD LOOKED FOR WORK. I KNOW HOW DIFFICULT IT CAN BE TO MAKE ENDS MEET. BUT I KNOW THAT IF WE WORK TOGETHER, WE CAN GET IOWA BACK ON TRACK.

MALE VOICE: ON NOVEMBER FOURTH, A VOTE FOR ROXANNE CONLIN IS A VOTE FOR WORKING FAMILIES. LET'S GET IOWA BACK ON TRACK. PAID FOR AND AUTHORIZED BY ROXANNE FOR SENATE.

Roxanne for Senate Broadcast Advertisement

FOR RELEASE - July 16

“Introduction to Roxanne” 60 second spot

Video	Audio
Video of rolling Iowa hills, lush green landscape.	(soft, upbeat guitar music begins to play)
Video of an older man riding a tractor on a farm at sunrise, set against an expansive field.	V/O: Here in the heartland, we know what it’s like to live a life of quiet determination.
Video montage of Iowans at various activities; a young girl at the doctor’s office, neighbors sandbagging a river at its banks, children in a classroom.	V/O: In Iowa, we’re known for our common sense values: hard work, honesty, and independence.
Video montage of the Capitol in Washington, DC, then to a shot of “Wall Street” street sign and a shadowy photo of a businessman sitting at a big leather chair in an office.	V/O: But somehow, our representatives forgot where they came from. Instead of representing main street, they represent Wall Street.
Video of a snapshot of Chuck Grassley.	V/O: Chuck Grassley has been in elected office for over 51 years. He’s forgotten where he came from. It’s time for a change.
Quick shot of Roxanne speaking to camera, and then onto video montage of photos of Conlin as a child, then as a waitress, and as a graduate of Drake University.	On - Cam: I’m Roxanne Conlin, and I’ve been fighting for Iowans my whole life. I grew up here, and I know what it’s like to live through tough times.
Video montage of Roxanne Conlin in the courtroom, then onto her walking with farmers, reading to a classroom of children, and touring a factory with blue collar workers.	V/O: As a lawyer, I’ve taken on big business and worked hard to protect Iowans, while Chuck Grassley has grown closer and closer to special interests and away from what Iowans stand for.
Video montage of Roxanne Conlin speaking with construction workers, small business owner, people in a diner.	V/O: While Wall Street gets bailouts, Iowans lose jobs. We need a Senator who will help small businesses, not the big banks. We need to preserve the jobs we have here instead of sending them overseas.
Video of Roxanne Conlin speaking directly into camera in living room setting.	On-Cam: Join me as we fight to fix our economy. It’s time to get Iowa back on track.

**We need a Senator who will
put Iowans back to work.**

**It's time for a
change.**

Approved by Roxanne Conlin.
Paid for by Roxanne for Senate. 18



Appendix B

The following are examples of possible strategic media placement tools that could be used by the Conlin campaign to facilitate positive press coverage for the earned media portion of the communication strategy. These could be used for the earned media portion of the communication strategy during the general election following the positive testing of the frames and rhetoric through the previously proposed research program. The following examples are a press release following Conlin's primary win on June 8th and an illustration of an internet newsletter.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 8, 2010

Roxanne Conlin Wins Democratic Primary

Determined Iowan looks forward to challenging Republican incumbent Chuck Grassley in November

DES MOINES – Democrat Roxanne Conlin made history Tuesday night after defeating longtime state senator Bob Krause and bankruptcy attorney Tom Fiegen in the race for Democratic nominee for Senate. Conlin will go on to challenge longtime Republican incumbent Chuck Grassley in the November election, and if she wins will be the first Iowa woman elected to statewide level.

“Tonight, we won a battle, but the war’s not over yet,” Conlin told hundreds of supporters last night. “I will fight for Iowans every step of the way, and we will work together to build our economy and get Iowa back on track.”

Roxanne Conlin grew up in Iowa, and her family moved from town to town looking for steady employment. Since she was 14, Conlin worked to make sure her family had food on the table. At the age of 16, she entered Drake University and worked her way through college. By the age of 21, she had graduated from college and Drake Law School, and dedicated her life to standing up for Iowans against Big Business and special interests.

For 25 years, Conlin has owned and operated a small law firm in Des Moines. She served as a US Attorney in Iowa, the first woman President of the American Association of Justice, and earned the Democratic nominee for Governor in 1982. Through it all, she has raised four children and is now a proud grandparent.

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Getting Iowa Back to Work

After 51 years in elected office, Chuck Grassley has forgotten where he came from. Here in Iowa, we don't just sit by while our colleagues let the economy deteriorate and then give big bailouts to Wall Street executives while thousands of homes are foreclosed. Chuck Grassley helped deregulate Wall Street, and has promoted the unrestrained greed and reckless spending that has gotten us into this economic mess.

Now, communities across Iowa are suffering from home foreclosures, farm foreclosures and bankruptcies. People who have worked for their entire lives have lost all their retirement savings.

In November, it is up to us to send Chuck Grassley a message: We will not stand for this! Chuck Grassley is out of touch with Iowans. He needs to be held responsible for the damage that he and his Republican colleagues in Washington have done. Their greed on Wall Street has put all of us on Main Street in jeopardy. Iowans have lost their homes, jobs and dreams of retirement. It's time to get back on track.

I grew up in a family that fell out of the middle class when my father lost his job. My parents lived paycheck to paycheck. I went to work at 14 to help support my family. I know the anxiety and the stress families across our state are feeling. I'm running for the US Senate to fix the economy so it works for every family.

My plan will get Iowans back to work. We will preserve the jobs we have, while also creating new ones with the renewable energy sector- like wind, solar, ethanol, and biomass. I will help small businesses in Iowa, not the corporations who ship our jobs overseas.

Upcoming events:

August 10: Town Hall on Immigration Reform @ Des Moines Airport Holiday Inn

August 14: Iowa State Fair meet & greet



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