

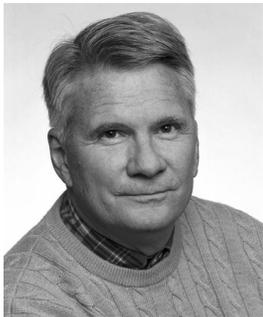
the Variable

CIRULI ASSOCIATES
November 2004

Election 2004: The Color Purple

By Floyd Ciruli

Editorial commentary for the Rocky Mountain News – Published November 6, 2004



It was as if Colorado experienced two elections on Nov. 2, handing Bush a solid victory – reaffirming itself as a “red” state, then shifting political direction

and giving Democrat candidates and issues a major boost.

President Keeps Colorado Red

Although Bush’s 2004 tally in Colorado was three percentage points below his 2000 win, he won 175,000 more votes than in 2000.

The Colorado exit poll showed Bush eliminated the gender gap by winning women by three percentage points. He lost Hispanic voters (30 percent Bush to 68 percent John Kerry), but that was 5 percent better than 2000. There continued to be more Republicans (38%) in the voter pool than Democrats (29%) and Bush carried 93 percent of them. Finally, like the country at-large, moral values were the most important issue and Bush won 83 percent of that vote.

No Presidential Coattails

Bush’s Colorado victory was his alone, and produced no discernable coattails. It was U.S. Senate candidate Ken Salazar who prevented Republicans from riding Bush’s coattails. Critical to Democrats winning control of both houses of the State Legislature were seismic shifts in the politics of formerly dependable Republican counties caused by the race for Senate. Arapahoe, Jefferson and Larimer were

three of 10 counties Bush and Democrat Salazar both carried. Salazar won all three by 25,000 votes over Pete Coors; the President won them by 30,000 votes.

Those three counties contained some of the most contested state senate races – races Democrats needed to seize control. Salazar helped in the state house races by running surprisingly well in rural counties in which Democrats picked up four of the six seats that swung the House into their column.

Salazar’s victory was key to creating the political dynamic that helped propel the entire Democrat ticket. For example, his brother John benefited from the millions

spent on advertising in the U.S. Senate race. And Salazar carried the unaffiliated vote 57 percent to 39 percent over Coors, new voters 53 percent to 44 percent and late-deciders 62 percent to 34 percent. Those voter groups drove normally outnumbered Democrats into the winner’s circle.

Salazar and Obama

A major depression has settled over Washington and New York as the Democrat party goes through its perennial assessment of what went wrong. Desperate to find some good news, national Democrats and their allies in the press are already describing Salazar as the Hispanic Barack Obama.

(continued on reverse)



Photo by Hal Stoezl. Reprinted with permission of the Rocky Mountain News.

Although Salazar is less an orator than Obama, the two share a heritage of accomplishment and an independent streak that kept Salazar separate even from Senator Kerry during his frequent visits to Colorado. For a Democrat in Colorado, distance from Kerry was essential to win statewide office.

Democrats with Money

This election also saw Colorado Democrats seize some tactical advantages. Historically, Colorado Republican legislative efforts have been centrally directed and well funded. New Colorado and national campaign finance rules helped Democrats beat Republicans in small donations. Most importantly, four Colorado multi-millionaires came forward and financed key legislative races and helped Democrats nearly topple Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave.

The Democrat legislative campaigns were lavishly assisted from Denver, including expensive television and radio advertising for races in Fort Collins and the high plains. Polling was conducted in the most contested districts. Direct mail and phone contacts flooded targeted precincts. The result was shock and awe from both parties.

Republican Party Stretched

A partial explanation for Democrat victories is the Republican party's distraction at simultaneously running presidential, Senate and Congressional races while defending incumbent legislators.

Although it is debatable whether Colorado was ever a presidential battleground state, Kerry's effort forced Republicans to focus more attention on the race than planned. The retirement of Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, who in 1995 switched to the GOP and left Democrats without a Senate seat for a decade, ironically may have created the conditions that brought Democrats back to power.

The Owens Era

Gov. Bill Owens has been the state's top politician and leader of the Republican party for a decade. But term limits, last year's failure of Referendum A (the water financing initiative), the Republican failure to unravel the state's financial gridlock and the party's legislative losses all point to a decline in Owens' clout.

The state's fiscal gridlock was an especially telling issue in this election. Although voters seldom mentioned it, state fiscal woes were the primary reason activists groups, think tanks

and campaign funders got the traction to change the make-up of the legislature.

It is ironic that the TABOR initiative, which helped launch Owens' career, has contributed to political defeats at the end of his term.

A More Competitive Politics?

The Democratic victories were a confluence of planned efforts, and a lot of good luck. It is unclear if the Democrats can sustain their good fortune. Previous Democratic legislative victories have been short-lived. In 1974 Democrats held the House for one term, then lost it for 30 years until this year. While Ken Salazar is a statewide asset he will be far away in Washington. At home in Colorado, Republicans still have a 180,000-voter registration advantage. Needless to say Republicans will turn laser-like focus on winning back the Legislature and the 3rd Congressional District. The 2006 governor's election will dominate Colorado politics in 2006; and the race will begin immediately. Democrats must use their new power to solve problems and avoid pandering to narrow special interests. Republicans need to develop issues that resonate with voters, such as the anti-tax sentiment, and their moderate and conservative wings must unify after their inevitable primary battles. Voters are watching.

Rocky Mountain Western States A Battleground

State	2000/2004 Winner	Electoral Votes*	% Hispanic
Arizona	Bush by 6%/11%	10 (+2)	25%
Colorado	Bush by 8%/5%	9 (+1)	17%
Idaho	Bush by 40%/38%	4	8%
Montana	Bush by 25%/20%	3	2%
Nevada	Bush by 4%/3%	5 (+1)	20%
New Mexico	Gore by 0.1%/ Bush 1%	5	42%
Utah	Bush by 41%/44%	5	9%
Wyoming	Bush by 40%/40%	3	6%

Four mountain states received the most attention from both parties' presidential candidates in 2004.

But all four – Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico – went to President Bush on Election Day.

*Number in parenthesis indicates new electoral votes since 2000 census

Source: Ciruli Associates 2004