

the Variable

The shift to blue

CIRULI ASSOCIATES
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Analysis by Floyd Ciruli

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Midterm voters
have decisively shifted
Colorado to the blue
end of the political

spectrum. Only four years ago Republicans dominated with two U.S. senators, five congresspersons, a governor and both houses of the legislature. Today, there are only three GOP congresspersons left, all firmly on the right of the party, and one U.S. senator, Wayne Allard, who faces a tough re-election if he chooses to go for a third term.

This political realignment first began in 2004 with voters splitting the ticket between President Bush and Senator Ken Salazar and a host of other Democratic officeholders. Salazar, running as a political moderate who emphasized working across party lines, attracted a disproportionate share of independent voters. In many ways, it presaged the national upheaval on Tuesday. Democrats, both here and nationally, recruited moderate to conservative candidates and targeted their message of change to independent voters.

Reverse Presidential Coattails

President Bush has, more than most modern presidents, campaigned for local party candidates. The 2002 midterm election was a textbook case of the White House effectively using presidential clout and the top issue – the War on Terror – to help U.S. Senate and House candidates. Sen. Allard greatly benefited in his close race.

This year, the President was politically deadly. His own job rating had collapsed the last two years, as had support for the war in Iraq. His last Colorado approval rating was 40%, and more than six in ten Coloradans believed the country was on the wrong track – among unaffiliated voters it was seven to one. Dissatisfaction with Republican performance in Washington served as a backdrop that affected races all the way up and down the ticket.

In the face of this headwind, many Republicans adopted a “Stay the Course” strategy for their campaigns. They focused on turning out their base, downplaying independents and moderate voters whom they viewed as too apathetic to vote in a midterm election. They were wrong.

Unaffiliated voters have surged to within 70,000 votes of becoming Colorado’s largest voting group. They dominated late registration and are now the largest voting bloc in high growth counties, such as Adams and Weld.

They decided early, by more than two-to-

one, to support Bill Ritter and much of the Democratic ticket in Colorado. They became the wave of voters that the vaunted Republican get-out-the-vote machine could not overcome.

Revolt of the Republican Middle

Joining independents to cause Bob Beauprez problems were moderate Republicans. After many years of skirmishes with party conservatives, Republican moderates finally revolted.

The strain became an open rupture after the bitter fight in the summer and fall of 2005 over Referendum C – the TABOR tax limitation. Beauprez was on the losing side and opposite most of the state’s business, political and media establishments, including the popular Republican governor, who was his top sponsor.

That battle was followed by a drawn out inner-party feud with primary opponent Mark Holtzman, raising Beauprez’s negative rating among voters before he even began his campaign. This scuffling also produced the moniker, “Both Ways Bob.”

Beauprez’s decision to align his campaign and public image with the most conservative party activists by endorsing Amendment 38 – the expanded petitioning initiative – was the last straw for much of the state’s political establishment. Bob Beauprez lost fundraising clout and more than a fifth of his Republican base to Ritter.

Voters Mostly Say “No” Ballot Issues

Voters picked and chose their way through 14 statewide ballot issues supporting half, but among the proposals that got the most attention and money, only a third passed. Voters mostly supported



[continued on reverse]

Owens and Hickenlooper at Top of Political Field Among Statewide Voters

Analysis by Floyd Ciruli

In the most recent Ciruli Associates voter poll, Governor Bill Owens and Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper are the state's most popular officeholders (63% and 61% favorability, respectively). U.S. Senator Ken Salazar is in third with 56 percent favorability. The favorability question probes voters' impressions of officeholders and candidates with no title or description attached to their name. A scale from "very favorable" to "unfavorable" is used, and voters are encouraged to say if they do not know the person, or just don't have an opinion. It is a good test of voter awareness and goodwill toward the elected official and candidate.

Bill Ritter, Democrat gubernatorial candidate, has a 48 percent favorability rating and a low 19 percent unfavorable rating. Republican Bob Beauprez has only a 37 percent positive rating and a nearly equal negative rating (36%). A third of voters were unable to rate Ritter and a quarter couldn't rate Beauprez a month before the election.

The statewide survey was conducted by Ciruli Associates with 500 likely Colorado voters from September 26 to October 2, 2006. The political questions were part of a survey concerning economic development sponsored by the Economic

Colorado's Best Known and Most Popular Politicians

Leader	Favorable	Unfavorable	Don't Know	Ratio of Favorability to Unfavorability
Bill Owens	63%	30%	7%	2.1
John Hickenlooper	61%	9%	31%	6.8
Ken Salazar	56%	30%	14%	1.9
Bill Ritter	48%	19%	34%	2.5
Wayne Allard	47%	25%	28%	1.9
G.W. Bush	45%	52%	3%	[1.2]
Bob Beauprez	37%	36%	26%	1.0
Tom Tancredo	35%	28%	36%	1.2

Ciruli Associates, N500, 2006

Question: As I read the following list of political leaders, please tell me your impression of each one as very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable. If you aren't familiar with a name, or don't have an opinion, just say so. [ROTATED]

Developers' Council of Colorado. The statistical range of error is ± 4.4 percentage points.

The support base for Owens and Hickenlooper is very different. Owens primarily draws partisan support among fellow Republicans around the state; Hickenlooper has more bipartisan support and is known primarily in the metro area and North Front Range.

Some other observations concerning the favorability table:

- President Bush is the most polarizing leader tested in the poll. He has near

universal awareness and 45 percent of voters are "favorable" to him. Forty-two percent rate him "unfavorable,"

- Beauprez' negative rating is largely a product of his months-long fight for the nomination with Mark Holtzman, and the 2005 controversy surrounding Referendum C.
- U.S. Senator Wayne Allard is unknown to 28 percent of the public.
- Although illegal immigration is a top issue for Colorado voters, a third of Colorado voters do not know Tom Tancredo.

["Shift to blue" continued]

the status quo. They value judicial independence more than term limits and the finality of government decisions more than expanded petition rights.

However, ballot campaigns do make a difference. After opposing campaign advertising and negative editorial positions rolled out, judicial term limits (Amendment 40) and expanded initiatives (Amendment 38), which both started with support in the mid-50 percent range, lost substantially.

The loss of marijuana legalization, the close victory of the minimum wage amendment, narrow passage of the ban on gay marriage and defeat of domestic

partnership proposal reveals the moderate to conservative side of the electorate at the same time they were electing many new Democrats.

Move to the Middle

Both voters and successful candidates took more independent positions and returned to the middle of the political spectrum. Much of the difference between Ritter's and Beauprez's vote can be explained by who was seen as closer to the center of the electorate.

While the Nov. 7 outcome empowered Democrats, voters mostly voted against what

they don't like, instead of embracing what Democrats had to offer. Although Ritter was a good candidate and ran a workman-like campaign, his opponent's mistake and the national tide made the race all but over in August. Now, Ritter's greatest challenge will be to govern from the middle with one-party control of both legislative houses.

Colorado's shift along the color spectrum – from red to purple to blue – has made it a target of opportunity for Democrats. For Republicans, a once dependable state has now become a tough challenge. For both parties, Colorado will be a battleground for 2008 – brace yourself.