



TO: Democratic Colleagues
FROM: DCCC Chairman Chris Van Hollen
RE: Memorial Day Work Period Update
DATE: May 21, 2008

When I accepted the job as Chairman of the DCCC, my goal was to defend our threatened incumbents and aggressively challenge Republicans so we could expand our 15 seat majority. Our challenge was to beat history because, following a wave election like 2006, the majority party loses seats. (The only counter example was in 1976 when, following the Watergate wave of 1974, Democrats picked up one seat.) If we hold the three seats we just won in special elections we will have broken the historical pattern.

In a change election cycle, House Republicans are the party of no, veto, and status quo – they have no new ideas, veto legislation focused on the middle class, and offer nothing more than the status quo. There has been much media coverage of the anti-Bush mood of the country and Republicans' disarray contributed to their losing special elections in Illinois, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Certainly this was helpful to our efforts, but it was not enough. It would be a mistake to take the wrong message from Democrats' special election wins.

Democratic special election wins were in large part a result of recruiting strong candidates and our focus, preparation, and organization. Representatives Bill Foster (IL-14), Don Cazayoux (LA-06), and Travis Childers (MS-01) are a testament to how well their values fit their districts and the strong aggressive campaigns they ran. It is also a testament to the planning and hard work of the Members and staff who work with me at the DCCC.

At the beginning of the cycle, I explained the structural and strategic changes we were making at the DCCC so we could stay on offense and successfully handle our unique challenges this cycle.

Research: the DCCC has the largest and most aggressive research shop in town. So far this cycle, DCCC Research has produced more than 60 comprehensive research books against Republican incumbents and Republican challengers. We have also produced more than 290 documents vetting Democratic candidates and developing our top hits against Republican candidates. The DCCC also greatly expanded our rapid response operation this cycle. Our aggressive research deterred some top Republican candidates from entering races.

Field: we have moved the field program in house to provide strategic and tactical support to our campaigns. The DCCC is doing aggressive voter contact, effective persuasion, and putting boots on the ground in our targeted districts. We're also providing in-house voter file and data management and analysis this cycle to campaigns earlier than ever before.

These changes paid huge dividends in IL-14, LA-06, and MS-01. We used research to create a political environment favorable for Democrats and hostile for Republicans; we deployed massive grassroots field operations to persuade and turn out our voters; and when our colleagues were hit, we hit back harder with a paid and earned media strategy.

Outside Groups

As we saw again in the most recent special elections, our main competition is Republicans' outside groups, not the NRCC.

- In Louisiana, the NRCC and three outside groups – Freedom's Watch, Club for Growth, and Lane Grigsby (a local developer) – advertised against Cazayoux. The Republican outside groups spent more than \$875,000 that we had to match. Only the DCCC and SEIU did paid advertising on Cazayoux's behalf.
- In Mississippi, we were on our own. The NRCC and Freedom's Watch advertised against Childers. Freedom's Watch spent nearly \$500,000 that we had to match. Only the DCCC advertised on Childers' behalf.

There are no Democratic 527 organizations dedicated to the election of congressional Democrats. Clearly, House Democrats must be prepared to defend ourselves from outside conservative groups' attacks and learn from these special elections as we prepare for 2008.

Freedom's Watch – the shadowy outside group funded by casino magnate Sheldon Adelson and run by former NRCC strategists and staffers – has shown a willingness to bend and break the law when targeting Democratic candidates in LA-06 and MS-01 – and the DCCC is aggressively fighting back.

- On April 16, 2008, the DCCC filed an FEC complaint against Freedom's Watch and the NRCC for illegal coordination of their attack ads. A script from one of Freedom's Watch's ads contained electronic identifiers linking it to the NRCC. The message, images, and citations in both the Freedom's Watch ad and NRCC ad are nearly identical.
- On April 23, 2008, the DCCC filed an FEC complaint against Freedom's Watch for running a political attack ad that directly and illegally advocates the defeat of a Democratic candidate and also for failing to disclose the names of the donors funding that ad.
- On April 29, 2008, the DCCC requested that the Internal Revenue Service investigate Freedom's Watch. Freedom's Watch violated its tax exempt status by running political attack ads against Democratic candidate Don Cazayoux in the LA-06 special election, designed to benefit the NRCC and the Republican candidate. Freedom's Watch meets five of the six criteria the IRS uses to determine that a group is political – not a tax exempt 501(c)(4).
- On May 8, 2008, the DCCC filed a third FEC complaint against Freedom's Watch for failing to report its spending on television ads it was running against Democratic

candidate Travis Childers (MS-01) and ran against Congressman Don Cazayoux (LA-06).

Republican Attacks

House Republicans and their outside allies are nothing if not predictable. They used the same tired playbook in Illinois, Louisiana, and Mississippi – and we’ll see it again in our other races.

Republicans offer no solutions on the issues that Americans are most concerned about – good paying jobs, gas and grocery costs, health care costs, and the Iraq war – so they desperately tried to nationalize the special elections around personalities by focusing their extensive negative advertising on Senator Obama and Speaker Pelosi. This tactic didn’t work in IL-14, it didn’t work in LA-06, and it didn’t work in MS-01, an even higher Republican performing district. The Republican candidate in MS-01 even spent hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to tie Childers to Reverend Jeremiah Wright.

This tactic didn’t work because the Democratic candidates defined themselves early, ran races on issues their constituents most cared about, and were aggressive in responding to every attack. Even former Speaker Newt Gingrich says this tactic won’t work. “The Republican brand has been so badly damaged that if Republicans try to run an anti-Obama....campaign they are simply going to fail” [Human Events, 05/06/08]. As the Speaker tells every Member, your title “Representative” is your job description. As you know, the leadership works hard in the Caucus to come to a consensus on the issues most important to the American people.

Minority Leader Boehner and NRCC Chairman Tom Cole’s strategy is clear. We’ll hear a lot about the House Republicans “rebranding” efforts and they’ll likely take pages out of our winning 2006 playbook. Putting lipstick on a pig won’t change the underlying reality, but Republicans will try.

McCain will not be the life preserver House Republicans want him to be: they are trying to link themselves to McCain, while McCain is trying to distance himself from them. McCain didn’t even campaign for the Republican candidates in LA-06 and MS-01.

Looking Ahead

Special elections are all about turn out, but November is a different dynamic. During the 2004 cycle, Democrats won two special elections in Republican seats – Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin (SD-AL) and Ben Chandler (KY-06) – yet Democrats had a net loss of one seat in November.

This cycle, we simply have more opportunities than we can afford and without adequate resources we will not be in a position to take advantage of critical opportunities to strengthen and expand our majority.

Our special election wins in IL-14, LA-06, and MS-01 cost us more than \$5 million – and they were worth every penny to expand our majority and show that Democrats that reflect the values of their districts and run aggressive races could win in red districts. However, it’s important to keep in mind that this November many of our top races this cycle are in the most expensive

media markets in the country: Chicago, Detroit, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, and Seattle. For example:

- A 10-week media buy in CT-04 (Shays) is estimated to cost \$2.5 to \$3 million.
- A 10-week media buy in IL-11(Weller-open) is estimated to cost more than \$2.5 million.
- A 10-week media buy in NJ-07 (Ferguson-open) is estimated to cost more than\$2.5 million.

These are just three examples of the nearly 50 strong Democratic challengers running in Republican-held seats and 32 Democratic Members in challenging seats to defend. As we get closer to November, we will have more than 75 seats in play.

As we face this challenge, the lack of NRCC resources is no comfort. We are up against well funded conservative groups and competing for resources with our Democratic allies in the presidential campaigns, Senate races, and gubernatorial races. We are on our own and unless we work now to make sure we can afford our opportunities, we will not realize our potential to expand our majority this cycle.

Closing

We must not allow our funding lead over the NRCC, our early preparation, our successful recruiting efforts, and most importantly, our special election wins to lull us into a false sense of complacency. Historically, following a wave election like 2006, the majority party loses seats. We can beat history, but only if we maintain our political momentum, ensure we have the resources to win, and stay focused on our agenda of change.