

Case Study: How did a Republican challenger beat an incumbent Democrat in the Democratic strong hold of Gainesville, FL by 9.28%?

The Situation:

Todd Chase, a Gainesville resident, a leader of a technology company, and a Republican, expressed an interest in running for the Gainesville City Commission.

The district Mr. Chase resides in is a single member district located in the Northwest area of Gainesville, FL. Gainesville, FL is a traditional Democrat Party stronghold.

The district composition is comprised of 10 precincts, and is highly Democrat by registration and by turnout. Pulling comparable elections for the district's voting history was difficult: The last district election for the district office was held in 2008, a presidential primary year with higher turnout. The last city election held in the district was the 2010 City Election for Mayor. Mr. Chase's 2011 election would not take place in the context of a mayoral campaign or a presidential primary.

District Registration by Party

Party	% of Reg Voters
Dem	52.25%
Rep	29.57%
NPA / Ind	15.43%
Other	2.75%

District Turnout by Party for last three comparable races

Party	% of Total Turnout
Dem	55.35%
Rep	32.33%
NPA / Ind	10.11%
Other	2.19%

The seat was held by a Democrat and a 1 term incumbent. The incumbent won election in February 2008 in a run-off election with 52.54% of the vote versus a Republican candidate. At the time of the 2008 election, it was an open seat due to term-limits.

While the elections for City Commission in Gainesville are officially non-partisan elections, history shows us that the local political parties play an active role in the elections, often stripping away the “veil” of non-partisanship.

Noting the composition of the district, the campaign then turned to historical performance of the district. Analysis showed the voters in this district *could* perform slightly more conservative than the registration indicated.

Previous to the Democrat incumbent, the seat was held by a conservative Republican and the precincts generally performed better than the Gainesville baseline for other Republican candidates in campaigns. Analysis showed the district was comprised of a significant sector of swing voters that would cross party lines, if presented the correct message and candidate.

Due to the size of the campaign and its relatively small budget, a poll to measure the incumbent’s vulnerability was out of the question. However, due to Mr. Chase’s extensive community network, an informal listening tour was

embarked on. This feedback combined with Mr. Chase's innate political instincts, led him and the campaign to believe the incumbent was vulnerable.

Therefore, the conclusion was reached that the district was favorable for a Republican candidate and that the current incumbent may be vulnerable to a successful challenge.

In the final consideration, Todd Chase was an extremely credible candidate. While having no prior elected experience, he had extensive business experience in the high tech field and military experience. Mr. Chase is highly educated with long standing community networks and proved to be a dedicated fundraiser. Mr. Chase is a good public speaker, and in the final analysis is likable.

If the campaign is broken into the three traditional phases: 1 – the exploration of the demand, 2-the creation of the offer, and 3-the promotion of the offer, Todd Chase felt the phase 1 was complete and favorable to challenging an incumbent.

The Proposed Solution:

The campaign then entered into **phase 2 – the creation of the offer.**

Todd Chase and the campaign made some early decisions that eventually proved to be successful:

- **Assumption:** The incumbent did not have high personal negatives.
- **Assumption:** The campaign would have enough resources at the correct time to get its message out.
- **Assumption:** The election could be viewed as a referendum on the incumbent and could be expanded to a referendum on the Gainesville City Commission's policies.
- **Assumption:** The candidate and the City of Gainesville policies had lost touch with the voters of *this specific district*.
- **Assumption:** The core of this campaign was a call for change versus the status quo ***by offering an acceptable alternative.***
- **Assumption:** The call for change must be counterbalanced by representing mainstream values of *this specific district*.
- **Assumption:** The campaign must avoid the opposition's tactic of being labeled the "extremist."

It is worthy to note that these assumptions at the time were not made without some internal disagreement. In the early stages of the campaign, there was an additional challenger that positioned himself to the ideological right of Todd Chase. However, in the end analysis, this may have helped Todd Chase by firmly positioning himself as an acceptable alternative for change in the run-off election.

The campaign realized that in a district with such a concentration of registered and performing Democrats that a message that was successfully labeled extremist would essentially act as a disqualifier.

Phase 3 – the promotion of the offer.

The campaign planned and assumed it would have adequate resources to communicate, but in no way did the campaign anticipate unlimited resources. Early decisions would be made as to the allocation of resources. The campaign also realized that with a limited budget a strong grassroots component of the campaign would be required.

The campaign decided that the target universe at most was approximately 10,000 voters located in 10 precincts in the NW section of Gainesville.

The campaign made the decision to laser focus on those 10,000 voters.

Because of that, the campaign decided to first fully fund a direct mail campaign. The campaign liked direct mail's ability to target those voters with multiple contact points with little wasted resources.

After fully funding the direct mail campaign, other media was considered. The campaign eliminated some paid media from consideration. The campaign would not have the resources remaining to achieve a proper reach and frequency among our target audience of 10,000 voters in NW Gainesville using mass media (television & radio).

The campaign utilized resources on a phone campaign – again primarily due to the desire to target the campaign's universe of voters only.

Finally, the campaign utilized a small newspaper purchase the final days of the campaign. While the campaign realized that significant money was wasted

outside the campaigns geographical area, the campaign wanted to capitalize on the trust factor brought by newspaper.

The paid media was enhanced by the field operations of a hard working candidate and several dedicated volunteers. It is estimated that the campaign knocked on 3,500 HH (households) of swing voters during the 8 weeks leading up to Election Day. The candidate and volunteers' sacrifice, diligence, and dedication cannot be underestimated.

The Results:

Results of Regular Election – March 15, 2011

Candidate	% of Total
Todd Chase	31.40%
James Ingle	10.93%
Robert Krames	22.60%
Lauren Poe (I)	35.07%

Results of Run-Off Election – April 12, 2011

Candidate	% of Total
Todd Chase	54.64%
Lauren Poe (I)	45.36%

Summary:

How was a Republican Challenger able to beat an Incumbent Democrat in the Democratic strong hold of Gainesville, FL by 9.28%?

First, several conditions existed to enable a victory possible:

- 1) District was comprised of swing voters willing to cross party lines.
- 2) Dissatisfaction with the Gainesville City Commission's policies and the state of political affairs in general existed.

Next, with conditions favorable, Todd Chase was a credible candidate.

From that starting point, the Todd Chase campaign was able to position the election as a referendum on the incumbent and expand the referendum to the entire Gainesville City Commission's policies.

Finally, the key to the successful election was that Todd Chase was able to call for change, *while offering **an acceptable** alternative to the status quo*. Mr. Chase was able to avoid the frames of 'typical' right versus left, avoid the extremist label, and most importantly, in the end, Todd Chase matched the values of this district's voters.

Ozean Consulting congratulates Todd Chase on a successful campaign.