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# Riding Obama's Coattails: The Democrats Finally Take the Ohio 1st

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*Riding Obama's Coattails:  
The Democrats Finally Take the Ohio 1st*

Randall E. Adkins and Gregory A. Petrow

In 2006 the Democratic Party swept both houses of Congress. It was a tidal wave. For the first time since 1994, both branches of the legislature were under Democratic Party control. While many of his Republican colleagues lost in 2006, Steve Chabot survived by narrowly defeating Cincinnati City Council member John Cranley by roughly 9,000 votes. The political environment favored the Democrats again in 2008, and this year the Democrats believed that Steve Driehaus, the Minority Whip in the Ohio state legislature, was the person to unseat Chabot.

### **The First District**

The 1st congressional district of Ohio includes most of Hamilton County and the southwest corner of Butler County (Figure 1). These counties are in the corner of Ohio and border Indiana on the west, with Hamilton County bordering Kentucky to the south. More than three-fourths of the residents of the city of Cincinnati (primarily those who traditionally vote Democratic) live in the 1st District; it also includes with the majority of the middle-class suburbs such as Forest Park, White Oak, and Norwood. The more affluent suburbs in the eastern part of the city are part of the neighboring 2nd District.

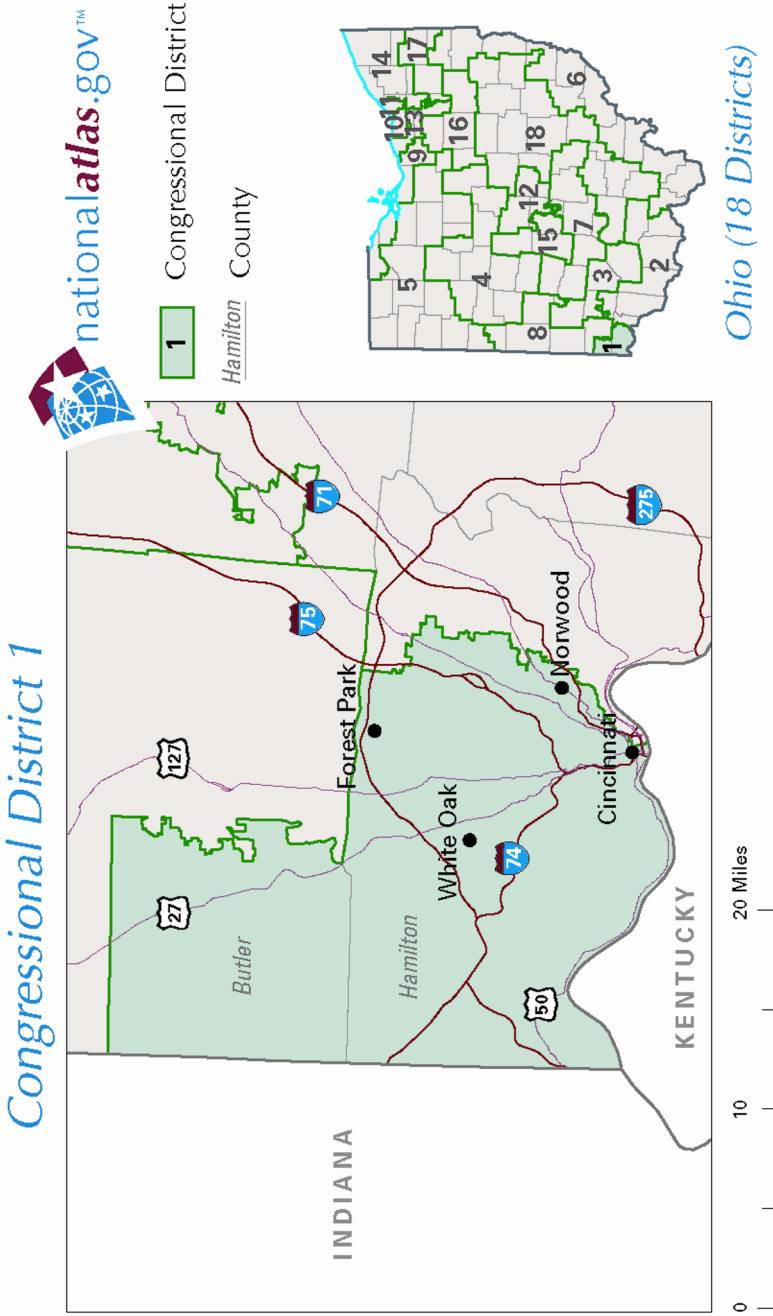
A highly diversified economy bolsters the Cincinnati metropolitan area against downturns in the economy. A majority of those employed in the 1st District, 60.5 percent, work in white collar jobs. Cincinnati is a national leader in consumer market research, consumer product development, and manufacturing. A number of different corporate entities are headquartered in the city, including Proctor and Gamble, the retail giant Federated Department Stores, and the Kroger supermarket chain. Manufacturing is also important to the district. Blue collar jobs make up 23.2 percent of employment,

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Figure 1. The Ohio 1st Congressional District



including General Electric's aircraft engine factory. The remaining 16.3 percent of the district work in the service industry.<sup>1</sup>

After the redistricting in the 1990s, the African-American population in the district almost doubled. In 2008, the 1st District had the second largest African-American population of any congressional district in Ohio and the largest African-American population of all congressional districts in the country that were held by a Republican incumbent.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the 1st District is 69 percent white, 27 percent black, and about 1 percent each Asian and Latino. Racial tensions were strong even before the riots in 2001 (in response to the fatal shooting of an unarmed black male by a white police officer). In spite of the drop in crime since then, Cincinnati was still ranked by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the City Crime Rankings as one of the 25 most dangerous cities.<sup>3</sup> Higher crime rates in the city have led to a boom in new suburban housing construction to the north of the city and to the south across the Ohio River in northern Kentucky.

In the decades preceding the 2008 election the population of Cincinnati was declining. For more than a century the city was identified by the careful, conservative character of the German Catholic immigrants, who in recent years moved outside of Cincinnati to the suburbs. As Hamilton County's Republican base moved toward the beltway that encompasses Cincinnati and northern Kentucky, the city became noticeably more Democratic. In fact, in 2008 the city of Cincinnati itself was 43 percent black, and the more heavily black neighborhoods tend to vote very consistently for Democrats. In contrast, the Republicans in the 1st District knew how to flex their political muscle too. The portion of Butler County that sits in the 1st District was strongly Republican, and the heavily Republican suburbs in Hamilton County cast more votes than the city.

Because of the tension between the urban downtown and the suburbs, the 1st District has proven to be one of the most competitive electoral districts in the country at the presidential level. George W. Bush carried the district with 53 percent and 50 percent of the vote in 2000 and 2004, respectively. In 2004, Bush lost Hamilton County by a very narrow margin, but his larger margin in southwestern Butler County allowed him to carry the district by less than one percentage point. In 2008, the district swung over to the Democratic column as Barack Obama won handily with 55 percent of the vote.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the 1st District has a rather rich tradition at the congressional level. Former president William Henry Harrison was one of the first representatives from this district. He was elected in October of 1816 to succeed John McLean who was elected to the Ohio Supreme Court (McLean would later be appointed by President Andrew Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court and serve there for over 30 years). His time in the House was short,

-serving until the election of 1818 when he left Congress to run for a seat in the Ohio state senate.

Later in the 19th century the district was represented by Republican George Pendleton, the author of the famous Pendleton Act of 1883, establishing the United States Civil Service Commission. Written in response to the assassination of President James A. Garfield by Charles Guiteau (who was upset with the president for not offering him a political appointment), the Pendleton Act ended the patronage system of employment in the federal government as the Democratic and Republican presidents who alternated in office used the civil service system to protect those they appointed.

Probably the most notable representative from the Ohio 1st District was Nicholas Longworth IV, the husband of Alice Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt's oldest daughter. Longworth was elected to the House as a Republican in 1902. In the 1912 election, however, the Republican Party split into two factions, the Conservatives and the Progressives. Longworth's father-in-law, the former President, led the Progressives who bolted from the Republican convention in Chicago in June of 1912 and held their own convention a month later. Most of the former president's closest allies, including Longworth, continued to support President William Howard Taft. For those that expected to remain in politics, leaving the Republican Party was just too radical. Of course, this caused stress between Longworth and his wife. The Progressive Party ran a candidate in 1st District, which allowed Democrat Stanley E. Bowdle to defeat Longworth by only 105 votes. Longworth returned to office, however, defeating Bowdle in both 1914 and 1916. He became the Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1925, where he remained until the Democrats took control of the House after the 1930 mid-term elections. Longworth is best known for strengthening the power of the Speaker while remaining very popular among members of both parties. Today, the Longworth House Office Building is named after him.

Until the 1970s, the district remained almost exclusively in the hands of the Republicans. Democrats temporarily wrestled control away from the Republican Party in the 63rd, 75th, 89th, and 93rd Congresses, but Thomas Luken was the only Democrat to hold this district for more than one term in the 20th century. After the district lines were redrawn following the 1980 census, Luken defeated incumbent William Gradison in the 1982 mid-term elections and held the seat until his retirement in 1990 when he was replaced in office by his son Charlie.

In the 1994 mid-term election, Republican Steve Chabot defeated freshman David Mann. Steve Chabot had previously run for the office, losing to Luken, in 1988. Since 1994 Chabot has won reelection, but sometimes by very narrow margins. Given the competitive partisan nature of the district, Chabot's political fortunes appeared to be tied closely to the perception

of the Republican Party nationally, winning less than 55 percent of the vote every year, except in 2002 and 2004 when Republicans did very well.

### **The Incumbent: Republican Steve Chabot**

Born in Cincinnati, Chabot was educated at the College of William and Mary. After graduating in 1975, this cultural and fiscal conservative returned to Cincinnati and worked as a school teacher while he attended Northern Kentucky University law school at night. Early in his law career Chabot decided to get involved in politics, running for Cincinnati City Council in 1979 and again in 1983. He eventually won in 1985 and was reelected in 1987 and 1989.

After serving a short time on the Hamilton County Commission, Chabot was poised to run for Congress again in 1994. This was the same year of the Republican “revolution” when the G.O.P. picked up 54 seats in the House and wrestled control from the Democrats for the first time in 40 years. Chabot embraced the House Republican’s “Contract with America” and defeated Democratic incumbent David Mann fairly handily with 56 percent of the vote. During his two years in the House, Democrats were angered by Mann’s votes in support of President Bill Clinton’s fiscal policies. In particular, organized labor was frustrated by his vote in support of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Mann was challenged in the Democratic primary in 1994, which left him susceptible to Chabot in the general election. Chabot’s campaign focused on attracting voters in Cincinnati’s white, working class neighborhoods and the western suburbs by emphasizing his humble, blue-collar beginnings. With Chabot cutting into his base of support, Mann ran television ads effectively running against President Clinton, with Mann bragging that he voted against the president’s “government takeover of healthcare.” Chabot’s campaign answered back with an ad morphing Mann’s face into Clinton’s while the announcer asserted that a vote for Mann was a vote for Clinton.<sup>5</sup> In the end, the national trends that favored the G.O.P. allowed Chabot to emerge the victor, winning the support of suburban voters and many labor Democrats in the district.

In 1996, 1998, and 2000, Chabot defended his seat successfully, but never really won convincingly. By 2002 and 2004, however, his seat began to look safer as he won with 65 percent and 60 percent of the vote, respectively, against Democrat Greg Harris. Harris was a community activist and director of the Hamilton County Democratic Party. In the 2004 race, however, Harris received more than 116,000 votes, including 63 percent of the vote in Cincinnati. This number represents a higher raw vote total than any Democrat had ever received in this district.<sup>6</sup> Of course, numbers like this triggered Chabot’s opponent from the 2000 election, Cincinnati City Council

member John Cranley, to take another shot at picking off the seat. Even though it was a mid-term election, voter turnout was only slightly lower than it was in 2000 and Cranley yielded almost as many votes in 2006 as he did in 2000. In this tough year for Republicans Chabot held on to win narrowly with 52 percent of the vote.

The 1st District is a textbook example of a marginal district, but the close elections that Chabot faced did not seem to have a mitigating influence on his policy positions. As the data in Table 1 suggest, Chabot was far from a moderate. According to both the American Conservative Union (ACU) and Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), he was among the most conservative members of Congress. Further, he was a strong supporter of the Republican Party in the House, and was among the strongest supporters of President Bush (until 2008 when he took positions opposing the president much more frequently). Throughout his tenure in office, Chabot consistently maintained a hard-line conservative voting record and acted as an advocate for conservative causes.

First, Chabot was a true fiscal conservative. His consistent voting record in opposition to tax increases led to very high ratings among anti-tax political advocacy groups. In addition, Chabot's criticism of government

**Table 1. Congressional Vote Scores for Steve Chabot, 1995-2008**

Year	ACU	ADA	Party Unity	Presidential Support
2008	100	15	94	64
2007	100	10	94	80
2006	96	10	89	95
2005	96	0	95	89
2004	96	10	95	79
2003	96	10	95	91
2002	96	0	96	85
2001	100	5	94	81
2000	100	5	94	21
1999	96	10	89	22
1998	96	0	91	27
1997	96	20	87	27
1996	100	15	84	34
1995	100	0	94	20

Source: 1995-2007 scores from various editions of CQ's *Politics in America*; 2007-08 American Conservative Union (ACU) and Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) scores from the organization websites; 2007-08 party unity and presidential support scores from CQ Weekly Report.

spending for both social welfare programs and “corporate welfare” were controversial even among the more moderate factions of the Republican Party. He regularly voted against programs like the State Children’s Health Insurance Plan (S-CHIP), highway funding bills he claimed were full of wasteful “pork,” and subsidies or tax breaks to support business.

Second, given his strong Catholicism, it is no surprise that Chabot was very conservative on social issues. During his 14 years in the House, he consistently voted against legislation that would expand abortion, receiving a 0 percent rating from National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League<sup>7</sup> and an 85 percent rating from the National Right to Life Committee.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Chabot sponsored the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003, which was signed into law by President Bush. It is no surprise that Chabot’s record is similarly conservative on other social issues like the teaching of intelligent design along with evolution in schools. He is also a staunch opponent of both gambling and gun control.

Finally, Chabot was a critic of both the Democratic and Republican leadership. In 1999 he stepped into the spotlight to serve as one of the floor managers of the Senate’s impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton. Likewise, he was one of the first and loudest to call for Speaker Newt Gingrich to step aside after the disastrous 1998 mid-term elections, when the Republicans actually lost five seats.

### **The Challenger: Democrat Steve Driehaus**

Steve Driehaus is another local product. He graduated from nearby Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, served in the Peace Corps in West Africa, and returned to the U.S. to earn an M.P.A. from Indiana University. He eventually settled in Cincinnati, working in community development. While holding similar policy positions to Chabot on the budget and abortion, Driehaus was able to position himself as a more moderate alternative on issues where Chabot tended to take a less compromising policy stance, such as sustainable environmental policies and the expansion of government health benefits for children.<sup>9</sup> Overall, political analysts such as Stuart Rothenberg of the Rothenberg Political Report recognized Driehaus as a candidate to watch in 2008. Specifically, Rothenberg took note of Driehaus’ proclamation that he was a ‘raging moderate.’ His positions suggested that he rode the fence on many issues. For example, Driehaus is pro-life, but supports embryonic stem-cell research. He opposes a federal constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, but he voted in support of Ohio’s Defense of Marriage Act. Driehaus also believes that forces in Iraq should be withdrawn, but opposes setting timelines for withdrawal.<sup>10</sup>



In 2000, Driehaus got into electoral politics by winning an open seat in the Ohio House of Representatives. He represented the 31st state legislative district, which is incidentally completely contained within the boundaries of the 1st congressional district. In campaigns that followed, Driehaus was never opposed in a primary and won reelection each time with at least 57 percent of the vote. He developed a reputation as a pro-life, fiscal conservative, and his strong work ethic in Columbus left him highly regarded. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* named Driehaus legislative “Rookie of the Year” and the Ohio Association of Election Officials named him Democratic Legislator of the Year in 2008.<sup>11</sup>

After Chabot’s narrow victory margin in 2006, Driehaus smelled blood in the water and decided to take the plunge and jump into the race. In 2006, he was recruited by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) to challenge Chabot, but sat on the sidelines. That year Chabot ended up winning narrowly and the Republicans held onto two of the other three Republican seats in Ohio that were targeted by Democrats. Given that he had been elected as the Minority Whip in the Ohio House of Representatives in 2005, Driehaus chose instead to run for reelection. In 2008, however, term limits barred him from running for a fifth term. So, after the 2006 election cycle was over, Driehaus started planning his campaign against Chabot.

Driehaus officially announced his intent to run on May 3, 2007. In response to the question of whether he could defeat Chabot, Driehaus argued that although John Cranley (the 2006 challenger to Chabot) had wider name recognition, he was actually better positioned to defeat Chabot. Like Chabot, Driehaus resided in Cincinnati’s West Side neighborhood. This part of the city makes up almost one-third of the district. It is very middle-class and heavily Catholic. Of the West Side Driehaus claimed, “I think that will be critical to us succeeding in the fall. We don’t need to win in those areas, but we need to do well.”<sup>12</sup> After winning the Democratic primary (he was unopposed), Driehaus was ready to challenge Chabot.

### **The Race**

Early polls showed Chabot clearly leading the contest. The Chabot campaign commissioned a poll of 400 likely voters conducted June 30-July 2 and the results showed Chabot leading Driehaus 50 percent to 37 percent.<sup>13</sup> The results of the poll, conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, were leaked to *The Politico*, along with Chabot’s favorable/unfavorable ratings. In the 1st District, 63 percent of voters viewed Chabot favorably compared to 23 percent unfavorably.<sup>14</sup> Even though Chabot had a target on his back, he still had some room to breathe.

By the end of September the race closed to a statistical dead heat. Chabot led Driehaus 46 percent to 44 percent.<sup>15</sup> In a poll conducted by SurveyUSA for *Roll Call*,<sup>16</sup> the candidacy of Barack Obama appeared to be having a very positive influence on Driehaus' prospects. SurveyUSA projected that if black voters made up 28 percent of the voters on Election Day (as they do in the district overall), then Obama would get 52 percent of the vote (remember Bush received 53 percent and 50 percent in 2000 and 2004, respectively). Black voters, therefore, might also determine the winner of the congressional race. According to SurveyUSA, if black voters made up only 26 percent of the voters on election day, Chabot's lead would grow from two to four percent, but if black voters made up 30 percent of the electorate, Chabot and Driehaus would be dead even. Not surprisingly, the job approval rating of President Bush was only 29 percent in the district and the job approval of Congress was only 12 percent.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, his association with both was not helping Chabot. Within two weeks Driehaus led in the polls, although the results were still within the statistical margin of error.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, Driehaus needed the vote of African-Americans in order to defeat Chabot. As noted above, the 1st District has the second largest black population of any congressional district in Ohio and it had the highest black population of any congressional district in the country that was held by a Republican. Still, this district is historically conservative, and in order to win Driehaus hoped that a higher than average black voter turnout fueled by the candidacy of Barack Obama might be the push that he needed. In 2006, City Councilman John Cranley lost to Chabot in Hamilton County by a mere 6,000 votes. Democrats that year were hesitant, however, to encourage the black vote in Cincinnati. Ken Blackwell, the Republican gubernatorial nominee who also happens to be African-American, won Hamilton County while losing the state by 25 percent. The Executive Director of the Hamilton County Democratic Party said of 2006, "I think that, while I could never quantify it for certain, but I think for African-Americans particularly here in Hamilton County, they found themselves quite conflicted." Thus, voter turnout in some black neighborhoods was expected to almost double in 2008, which is important because that would not happen in the predominantly white precincts in the district.<sup>19</sup>

The Driehaus campaign developed a plan for courting black voters. First, many months prior to the election Driehaus started spending Sunday mornings attending services at prominent black churches in Cincinnati. After each service his staff passed out campaign materials, which included photographs of Driehaus with Senator Obama.<sup>20</sup> Second, during the campaign many prominent members of the Congressional Black Caucus visited Cincinnati to campaign with Driehaus. House Majority Whip, James Clyburn (D-SC), visited the 1st congressional district in June to stump for Driehaus

and attended a prayer breakfast for community leaders and ministers.<sup>21</sup> During the campaign Driehaus brought other African-American members of Congress including Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas and Gwen Moore of Wisconsin to campaign with him.<sup>22</sup>

Republicans in the 1st District were worried. Regarding the possibility of elevated turnout among African-Americans, the Executive Director of the Hamilton County Republican Party, Alex Triantafilou, stated, “Scared wouldn’t be the right word, but we are aware of the potential for a higher than normal African-American turnout and have told our candidate to prepare for that. We are aware that it’s a phenomenon that exists, and I think Steve Chabot is aware as well and will run the kind of campaign that he needs to be successful.”<sup>23</sup>

As Barack Obama’s presidential campaign increased their presence in the 1st District, the images in Chabot’s advertisements grew more diverse. In one television ad entitled, “Independent Voice,” the campaign used a photo of Chabot taken during his earlier career as a teacher in front of a class of primarily black students and another, more recent photo of him speaking with a black constituent.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to turning out the African-American vote, Driehaus needed to make inroads with other voting blocs in the district, particularly social conservatives. In recent election cycles social issues dominated the campaign discussion in the 1st District. The Democrats recognized that the Republicans were better-positioned to win the battle. In fact, Republicans in southwestern Ohio led the fight against abortion and gay marriage. In 2004 the Cincinnati offices of the Citizens for Community Values, a conservative Christian group, led the effort to get the ban on gay marriage on Ohio’s ballot. This move increased voter turnout among social conservatives and helped George Bush win a narrow victory in Ohio. In response, Democrats chose to nominate Driehaus, a pro-life Catholic, in 2008. Democrats employed this strategy in socially conservative districts across the country. While most of the country was focusing on the economy, Driehaus saw his Catholicism and pro-life position as a form of “baseline” necessary for any candidate to have a chance of winning Cincinnati’s West Side.<sup>25</sup> In support of this, Driehaus spokesman Joe Wessels argued that, “It’s not like [voters] are making a radical departure from the type of politician that they’ve elected from the West Side of Cincinnati before. They just see somebody [in Mr. Driehaus] who is maybe a little safer in these difficult times.”<sup>26</sup>

Chabot introduced an additional aspect of uncertainty late in the campaign when he voted against the \$700 billion financial bailout package known as the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). Chabot, along with seven other highly endangered Republican members of Congress voted against the bailout not only the first time on September 29, but again on

October 3 as well.<sup>27</sup> Chabot claimed the legislation would place a burden on taxpayers. Further, Chabot defended his votes, arguing that the legislation did not include sufficient reforms to prevent similar financial emergencies in the future. He said, "While I believe we must work to stabilize our financial markets as quickly as possible, this legislation would have placed an enormous burden on taxpayers. In my view, this bill would set a dangerous precedent by forcing hardworking families to pay for the mistakes of businesses that acted irresponsibly."<sup>28</sup>

Even though Driehaus initially refused to take a position on the bailout, he quickly questioned Chabot's opposition stating, "The congressman has a history of inaction on the issue. People are beginning to connect the dots. Yesterday's vote was just the latest example of the cost of his inaction."<sup>29</sup> Driehaus called the financial bailout the most important issue facing greater Cincinnati. His spokesperson, Joe Wessels eventually admitted that if he were the incumbent Driehaus would have voted for the bailout "very reluctantly."<sup>30</sup> Given the anxiety he found among his constituents, Chabot decided to hold three telephone town hall meetings. According to campaign spokeswoman Katie Fox, the meetings attracted more than 15,000 callers.<sup>31</sup> Apparently, this issue was a double-edged sword and many constituents were paying attention to how Chabot handled it.

While Chabot was swimming against the tide, Driehaus turned out to be a formidable challenger who could raise money from individuals, PACs, and the DCCC. Due to the expected competitiveness of the race, Driehaus found assistance in fundraising from congressional leaders like Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and other Democrats like Rep. John Murtha of Pennsylvania. Murtha traveled to the Cincinnati area three times to campaign for Driehaus, but he was in Cincinnati primarily to campaign against Rep. Jean Schmidt of the 2nd District who insinuated in a floor speech that Mr. Murtha, a Marine Corps veteran, was a coward.<sup>32</sup> Although the \$1.45 million that Driehaus raised was not as much as the \$2 million raised by John Cranley in 2006, it was far more than Chabot's challengers earlier in the decade (see Table 2). In addition, Driehaus raised 43 percent of his funds from PACs, which represents an unusually high amount for a challenger.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the DCCC spent just under \$2 million to level the playing field with approximately one-half of that spent to support Driehaus and the other one-half spent to oppose Chabot.<sup>34</sup> Of that money, 89 percent was spent on the production and distribution of advertisements.<sup>35</sup> By early October the DCCC had spent over \$650,000 attacking Chabot and reserved almost \$1 million in airtime in the Cincinnati area.<sup>36</sup>

To keep pace, Chabot raised \$2.35 million and spent slightly more, with 48 percent of funds raised coming from PACs.<sup>37</sup> In an analysis of where the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) chose to

**Table 2. Campaign Finance Data for First District, 2000-2008**

	Disbursements		Receipts	
	Chabot	Challenger	Chabot	Challenger
2008	\$2,410,292	\$1,447,544	\$2,349,745	\$1,489,648
2006	2,991,572	2,021,495	2,669,976	2,024,604
2004	610,087	81,663	479,225	85,170
2002	490,317	23,388	702,171	25,975
2000	1,099,555	465,745	1,083,178	469,185

Source: <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.php?id=OH01&cycle=2008> (accessed on May 14, 2009).

spend money in the final days of the campaign, *Roll Call* determined that spending in the Ohio 1st District was certainly warranted given the competitive nature of the district. *Roll Call* noted that while the district went narrowly for Bush in 2004 and the black population was among the largest in the country, Driehaus simply looked formidable.<sup>38</sup> NRCC ended up coming to Chabot's assistance by spending just over \$1 million, mostly in opposition to Driehaus.<sup>39</sup> Approximately 80 percent of those funds were spent on advertising production and distribution.<sup>40</sup> By early October the NRCC had reserved \$500,000 in airtime to spend on either the 1st or 2nd District seats, both of which were considered competitive.<sup>41</sup>

While Driehaus and the DCCC ran a number of positive, biographical advertisements introducing the challenger to the voters outside of his state legislative district, both were quick to attack Chabot. The attacks on Chabot tended to emphasize three themes. First, they were critical of Chabot for his support of the policies of President Bush, such as the privatization of Social Security. For example, in one ad the DCCC argued that Chabot was too closely aligned with President Bush and "Didn't Get the Memo," emphasizing the theme of change popularized by Senator Obama's campaign.<sup>42</sup> Second, early in the summer energy was an important issue as gas prices were very near or even above \$4 per gallon. As a result, Driehaus ran advertisements contrasting his views on energy policy with those of Chabot (i.e., alternative fuels versus drilling). Third, both Driehaus and the DCCC repeatedly linked Chabot to the economic crisis. In one ad run in October by the DCCC entitled, "What a Comedian," Chabot was criticized for his support of policies that led to tax breaks for Wall Street, record trade deficits, and the loss of jobs overseas.<sup>43</sup>

For his part, Chabot's campaign also ran many positive, biographical advertisements that emphasized his early childhood, growing up in a trailer park, cutting lawns, and pumping gas to make ends meet.<sup>44</sup> Later in the

campaign, however, his advertisements and those of the NRCC were clearly designed to portray Steve Driehaus in a highly negative light, thereby increasing his unfavorable ratings. As a result, Driehaus was forced to respond often to advertisements he claimed were false or misleading. In August, Chabot's campaign released an ad criticizing Driehaus' stance on energy,<sup>43</sup> which the *Cincinnati Enquirer* claimed distorted Driehaus' position.<sup>45</sup> Another ad claimed Driehaus did not approve of making English the official language of the state of Ohio, but Driehaus was forced to respond that he did.<sup>46</sup> The NRCC also aired an ad attacking Driehaus for "opposing tax cuts for the middle class" and missing a vote in the state legislature concerning home foreclosures in Ohio.<sup>47</sup> In many cases, Driehaus seemed to get the better of the exchange. For example, in early September prior to the economic emergency, Chabot ran an ad critical of Driehaus entitled, "All over the Place," for allegedly changing his position on a number of issues.<sup>48</sup> In response, Driehaus ran an advertisement critical of Chabot for paying for his ad with campaign contributions from "big oil" companies.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, while Driehaus benefitted from Obama's frequent campaign stops in southwestern Ohio, visits by John McCain simply were not as electric. Chabot needed the draw of celebrity, but there was no rock star in 2008 like Barack Obama. Former Speaker Newt Gingrich campaigned with Chabot in September, but Gingrich was not exactly the type of celebrity who could reach out to many people beyond the solid Republican base.<sup>50</sup> A few days before the election Chabot stopped by a restaurant in the Price Hill neighborhood with Joe Wurzelbacher, who is better known as "Joe the Plumber." Senator McCain made him a household name in the third presidential debate after Wurzelbacher stepped up and questioned Senator Obama about his tax plan on a campaign stop outside of Toledo, Ohio. Price Hill is another heavily Catholic Cincinnati neighborhood that also tends to be very white and very Republican. Outside the restaurant a protester yielding a plunger screamed at Wurzelbacher to get his plumber's license, which incited a confrontation with a Chabot supporter.<sup>51</sup> It was a tough race for Chabot.

## **The Results**

The race was as close as everyone predicted. Overall, Driehaus defeated Chabot, winning the 1st District by a margin of 52.5 percent to 47.5 percent. That, however, was not true throughout the district (see Table 3). As expected, Chabot ran well-ahead of Driehaus in Butler County, winning with almost 73 percent of the vote. The bad news for Chabot was that Butler County represented only 4.4 percent of the overall vote cast in the 1st District. Also as expected, Driehaus ran well-ahead of Chabot in the city of

**Table 3. Election Results for 1st District, 2008**

	Total	Chabot (%)	Driehaus (%)
1st District overall	296,138	140,683 (47.5)	155,455 (52.5)
Butler County only	12,999	9,457 (72.8)	3,542 (27.2)
Hamilton County only	283,139	131,226 (46.3)	151,913 (53.7)
City of Cincinnati only	99,306	23,362 (23.5)	75,944 (76.5)
1st District minus			
City of Cincinnati	196,832	117,321 (59.6)	79,511 (40.4)
Hamilton County minus			
City of Cincinnati	183,833	107,864 (58.7)	75,969 (41.3)

Source: <http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/upload/elections/2008/gen/Report/AmendedOfficialResults/UScongress.pdf>.

Cincinnati, winning with 76.5 percent of the vote. The good news for Driehaus was that the city of Cincinnati represented just over one-third of the overall vote cast in the 1st District. The real question was whether Chabot could remain close enough in the suburbs that were outside of the city of Cincinnati, but still within Hamilton County. Chabot won 58.7 percent of the vote in the suburbs compared to Driehaus' 41.3, but in 2008 it was not enough.

In 2006, Democrat John Cranley garnered 47.8 percent of the vote and in 2008 Steve Driehaus won 52.5 percent of the vote, representing a gain for the Democrats of 4.7 percent.<sup>52</sup> The swing within Hamilton County of 5.1 percent was slightly greater than the overall swing in the district and exactly matched the 5.1 percent pro-Democratic swing in the district's Cincinnati precincts. Interestingly, however, the Republican stronghold in Butler County reacted against the pro-Democratic swing. There the Democrats lost 13.9 percent of the vote compared to 2006. Of course, Butler County is a very small part of the district, which did little to help Chabot compensate for the gains made by the Democrats in Hamilton County. In examining the underlying dynamics of how Driehaus defeated Chabot, it is more important to examine both how the political landscape of the district changed from 2006 to 2008 and the force of the tide introduced by the presidential election.

The first step in understanding the changing political landscape in the district is to examine changes in voter registration. There were 36,649 new registrants in Hamilton County, compared to only 210 in Butler County. Of course, within the 1st District there were also approximately 24 voters in Hamilton County for every one voter in Butler County. Of the new registrants in Hamilton County, 14,535 were from the precincts in Cincinnati,

which are of course part of the district's Democratic base.<sup>53</sup> Those remaining were from the more Republican suburbs inside of Hamilton County, but outside of the district.

Given that Ohio has an open primary system in which voters register without identifying a partisan preference, it is impossible to measure either party's growth by counting the number of new Democratic or Republican registrants. Still, we can determine whether new registrants were added to already strong Democratic or strong Republican precincts. If we define a strong partisan precinct as one in which the party nominee for Congress carried 65 percent of the vote or more in the previous Congressional election, we find that the differences between the parties in terms of registration are not terribly stark. Of the 36,859 new registrants, 13,165 were in strong Democratic precincts and 10,911 were in strong Republican precincts.<sup>54</sup> This differential benefits the Democrats by about 2,000 new voters, which is only about a bit more than a tenth of Driehaus' roughly 15,000 vote margin of victory. Of course, all of the voters making up the differential were not loyal Democrats, nor do we really know the partisan breakdown of new registrants in the "swing" districts. What is noteworthy is that there was no registration surge that occurred solely in the solidly Democratic or Republican precincts.

Table 4 shows the correlations between the pro-Driehaus vote swing for each precinct, and the increase in voter registrants for each precinct from 2006 to 2008. The correlation of .06 indicates that a weak relationship between the number of new voters registered in the precincts, and the size of the pro-Democratic congressional vote swing from 2006 to 2008. Barack Obama earned approximately 2.5 percent more of the vote in the district than Steve Driehaus, which suggests the presence of presidential coattails. Unfortunately, we find that the percent of a precinct's new voters in the 1st District is virtually uncorrelated with Barack Obama's share of the two-party vote. Thus, while precincts with more new voters were slightly more likely to support the Democratic congressional candidate in 2008 compared to 2006, precincts with new registrants were no more likely to support Obama than other precincts. In examining precincts within the city limits of Cincinnati, however, the correlation is better, but still a very weak .05. Again, it appears that new registrants had little to do with Barack Obama or Steve Driehaus winning the 1st District.

The second step in understanding the changing political landscape of the district is to examine the relationship of changes in voter turnout with the congressional and presidential vote. This is particularly important when considering how election outcomes shift from one election year to another.<sup>55</sup> The question is whether (and to what degree) were Democrats mobilized and Republican turnout suppressed by the electoral environment in 2008. Between 2004 and 2008 the number of voters grew marginally. In the 2004



**Table 4. Correlations**


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Correlate vote swing and new voter registration	.06
Correlate new voter registrants and Obama vote	-.01
Correlate new voter registrants and Obama vote in Cincinnati	.05
Correlate turnout change with % of vote for Obama	.49
Correlate turnout change with % of vote for Obama in Cincinnati	.54
Correlate Driehaus vote and Obama vote	.99

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election cycle 289,665 votes were cast in the 1st District, but that number increased only slightly to 296,138 in 2008. Given the very small growth in turnout, this result suggests that the outcome was not likely due to the mobilization of some new group of the electorate that had newly registered and become energized. Of course, making this interpretation is problematic because the simple difference is possibly masking changes in the electoral dynamics, which may or may not include the mobilization or suppression of sub-groups.

It is a long-established fact that voters are more likely to turn out to vote in presidential elections than in mid-term elections. In 2008, Senator Obama was a charismatic candidate at a time when the electoral environment cut strongly against the G.O.P. Steve Chabot had weathered many difficult electoral challenges in the past, but Barack Obama was not running at the top of the ticket in any of those contests. Table 4 also shows the correlation between the percent of the change in voter turnout for each precinct with Barack Obama's share of the precinct-level, two-party vote. We find that the correlation is a strong .49. In other words, larger increases in turnout in the district's precincts relative to turnout in 2006 were associated with Obama claiming a greater share of the vote in the district's precincts. In addition, the relationship is quite strong. In contrast, the correlation within the subset of precincts located in the city of Cincinnati was only slightly stronger (.54).

It appears that a surge in turnout fueled by Obama's candidacy played a major role in Driehaus' victory. This is only true, however, if Driehaus' share of the precinct-level vote is closely related to Obama's. Not surprisingly, we found that they are almost perfectly correlated (.99). Although Obama ran about 2.5 percent ahead of Driehaus in the district overall, the fall-off from the Obama vote to Driehaus was very, very small across the hundreds of precincts in the 1st District. Driehaus was clearly considered to be a palatable alternative to Chabot, and it appears he hung onto virtually all of the Obama voters.

## Conclusions

Following the 2004 election cycle the electoral environment turned against the Republican Party throughout the nation. The Democrats won control of both chambers of Congress in 2006 and were looking to build larger majorities in 2008. In order to do so, they targeted a number of congressional districts that were competitive and, given Steve Chabot's narrow escape in 2006, his seat was one that they targeted. As a result, Steve Driehaus enjoyed early attention from the Democratic leaders in the House: Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Majority Whip James Clyburn, and Chris Van Hollen, the Chair of the DCCC. Three weeks before Election Day the Rothenberg Political Report wrote that the 1st District was a tossup. According to Nathan Gonzales, Chabot knew he had a target on his back, and so he ran a tough race. He wrote, "If he loses, it says more about Republican problems nationally than it does about something specific that the congressman has done wrong."<sup>56</sup>

In the November 4 election, Steve Driehaus defeated incumbent Steve Chabot with 52.5 percent of the vote. Driehaus ran very well in the heavily Democratic city of Cincinnati getting 76.5 percent of the vote and he ran well enough in Cincinnati's more Republican suburbs to win a close victory. In addition to the national current flowing in favor of Driehaus, Chabot faced tough challenges unique to his district. A poll by SurveyUSA indicated that African-American turnout would probably determine who won the race. Although the district is considered a leaning-Republican district, 27 percent of the district's voters are African-Americans. Former Ohio Democratic Party Chairman, Jim Ruvulo, said, "That Chabot seat we dreamed about for years, but we never could get enough black voters and young voters to come out and care enough about it."<sup>57</sup> Steve Chabot said of his defeat, "The Democrats were saying about my district in particular that it would see a significant Obama factor. Apparently, they were right."<sup>58</sup>

Many of the seats targeted by Democrats in 2008 were similar to the seat held by Steve Chabot. They were Republican-leaning districts or Republican-leaning states where crossover appeal brought by the candidacy of Barack Obama at the top of the ticket could provide the additional votes necessary for a Democratic challenger to take the seat. Without this appeal, Democrats across the country would be forced to rely on voters to split their tickets without a strong impetus to do so.<sup>59</sup> The analysis clearly indicates that this is, in fact, what happened. While at the margins voter registration patterns benefitted Driehaus, the most important factor, by far, was that the turnout surge benefitted him. The greater the swing in turnout over 2006, the higher the vote total for Driehaus in those precincts. The data indicate that the principal reason for the surge is the candidacy of Barack Obama.

Driehaus then held onto almost all of the Obama voters. In the end, a few of the Obama supporters certainly defected to Chabot, but he simply did not give voters enough reason to split their ticket. Perhaps he will in 2010. Chabot has already declared his intent to challenge Driehaus to win back his old seat and he has raised over \$232,000 in the first quarter of 2009.<sup>60</sup> This time, however, Barack Obama will not be running at the top of the ticket.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup><http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=profile-000000027942> (accessed May 26, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>Obama Success Boosts Other Democrats. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. October 16, 2008.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.daytondailynews.com/n/content/oh/story/news/local/2007/11/18/ddn111907riskycityglance.html> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>4</sup><http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=profile-000000027942> (accessed May 19, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>*Politics in America*. 2002. Congressional Quarterly: Washington, D.C. p.1017.

<sup>6</sup><http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/council/pages/-35528/> (accessed April 16, 2009).

<sup>7</sup><http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/choice-action-center/us-gov/congressional-record-on-choice/stevechabot.html> (accessed May 20, 2009).

<sup>8</sup><http://capwiz.com/nrlc/scorecard.xc?chamber=H&state=US&session=110&x=12&y=6> (accessed May 20, 2009). Chabot voted in favor of H.R. 4, the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act. Typically, his NRLC scorecard was 100%.

<sup>9</sup>New to the House. *The Washington Post*. Thursday, November 6, 2008. p. A41.

<sup>10</sup>Rothenberg Calls Attention to Some Notable House Candidates. *The Frontrunner*. Monday, March 31, 2008.

<sup>11</sup>[driehaus.house.gov/about/index.shtml](http://driehaus.house.gov/about/index.shtml) (accessed May 18, 2009).

<sup>12</sup>Toeplitz, Shira. Driehaus Says he Can Beat Chabot. *Roll Call*. Wednesday, June 4, 2008.

<sup>13</sup>[http://www.politico.com/blogs/thecrypt/0708/Poll\\_shows\\_Chabot\\_leading\\_by\\_13.html](http://www.politico.com/blogs/thecrypt/0708/Poll_shows_Chabot_leading_by_13.html) (accessed May 19, 2009). The poll of 400 likely voters was taken June 30-July 2 and had a 4.9 percent margin of error.

<sup>14</sup>Chabot Poll Puts Him 13 Over Driehaus. *The Frontrunner*. Friday, July 18, 2008.

<sup>15</sup>OH: Democrats Have Pickup Opportunities In State. *The Frontrunner*. Tuesday, September 23, 2008.

<sup>16</sup><http://www.surveyyusa.com/client/PollReport.aspx?g=1b9d8d99-bbbd-4d78-b8f7-70964ce21002> (accessed May 19, 2009). The poll of 645 likely voters was taken Sept. 19-21 and had a 3.9 percent margin of error.

<sup>17</sup>Kurtz, Josh. Ohio A Top House Battleground. *Roll Call*. Tuesday, September 23, 2008.

<sup>18</sup><http://www.pollster.com/polls/oh/08-oh-01-ge-cvd.php> (accessed on March 19, 2009). The poll of 400 likely voters was taken September 30-October 1 and had a 5 percent margin of error.

<sup>19</sup>Toeplitz, Shira. Black Turnout Likely to Decide Chabot's Fate. *Roll Call*. Thursday, October 30, 2008.

<sup>20</sup>Toeplitz, Shira. Black Turnout Likely to Decide Chabot's Fate. *Roll Call*. Thursday, October 30, 2008.

<sup>21</sup>Whip Cracks His Way Through the Rust Belt. *Roll Call*. Tuesday, June 10, 2008.

<sup>22</sup>Toeplitz, Shira. Black Turnout Likely to Decide Chabot's Fate. *Roll Call*. Thursday, October 30, 2008.

<sup>23</sup>Toeplitz, Shira. Driehaus Says he Can Beat Chabot. *Roll Call*. Wednesday, June 4, 2008.

<sup>24</sup>Obama Success Boosts Other Democrats. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. October 16, 2008.

<sup>25</sup>Smyth, Julie Carr. Cincinnati values vote at center of district fight. *Associated Press State & Local Wire*. Monday, September 1, 2008.

<sup>26</sup>Lengell, Sean. Democratic Wave Seen Washing over the House, *The Washington Times*. Tuesday, October 28, 2008, p. B01.

<sup>27</sup>Kellman, Laurie. At-risk lawmakers vote 'no' on \$700B bailout. *The Associated Press*, Tuesday, September 30, 2008.

<sup>28</sup>Sewell, Dan. Ohio Delegation Split on Financial Rescue Bill. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. Monday, September 29, 2008.

<sup>29</sup>Eilperin, Juliet. A Midwestern Republican Who Voted Against The Plan Is Blasted for 'Inaction' by Opponent. *The Washington Post*, Wednesday, October 1, 2008. p. A10.

<sup>30</sup>Sand, David R. Challengers slam lawmakers over bailout support. *The Washington Times*. Saturday, November 1, 2008.

<sup>31</sup>Eilperin, Juliet. A Midwestern Republican Who Voted Against The Plan Is Blasted for 'Inaction' by Opponent. *The Washington Post*, Wednesday, October 1, 2008. p. A10.

<sup>32</sup>Yachnin, Jennifer. Recess Not Relaxing for Traveling Leaders. *Roll Call*. Monday, March 17, 2008.

<sup>33</sup><https://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.php?id=OH01&cycle=2008> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>34</sup><https://www.opensecrets.org/races/indexp.php?cycle=2008&id=OH01> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>35</sup><http://www.swingstateproject.com/showDiary.do?diaryId=2803> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>36</sup>Toeplitz, Shira. No Heavy Spending Yet in Schmidt Seat Contest. *Roll Call*. Thursday, October 9, 2008.

<sup>37</sup><https://www.opensecrets.org/races/indexp.php?cycle=2008&id=OH01> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>38</sup>Rothenberg, Stuart. Choosing Winners, Losers: Did NRCC Make Right Picks? *Roll Call*. Tuesday, October 28, 2008.

<sup>39</sup><https://www.opensecrets.org/races/indexp.php?cycle=2008&id=OH01> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>40</sup><http://www.swingstateproject.com/showDiary.do?diaryId=2803> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>41</sup>Toeplitz, Shira. No Heavy Spending Yet in Schmidt Seat Contest. *Roll Call*. Thursday, October 9, 2008.

<sup>42</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Bbs2P14QkU&NR=1> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>43</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=polDmh0geVQ&NR=1> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>44</sup>Obama Success Boosts Other Democrats. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. October 16, 2008.

<sup>45</sup>Chabot Ad Said To Distort Driehaus' Stance On Energy. *The Frontrunner*. Monday, August 25, 2008.

<sup>46</sup>The New Members of the House. *Roll Call*. Monday, November 10, 2008.

<sup>47</sup>Hulse, Carl, and David Herszenhorn. G.O.P. Facing Tougher Battle for Congress. *The New York Times*. Thursday, October 9, 2008, p. A1; Obama Success Boosts Other Democrats. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. October 16, 2008.

<sup>48</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llf8TXTZ8-E&feature=related> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>49</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSxoouI9Jek&feature=related> (accessed May 15, 2009).

<sup>50</sup>Dodge, Catherine and Holly Rosenkrantz. President Spurned by GOP Candidates. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Sunday, September 21, 2008, p. A11.

<sup>51</sup>Elation, Doubts on the Day After. *Los Angeles Times*. Thursday, November 6, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup><http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=profile-000000027942> (accessed May 19, 2009).

<sup>53</sup><http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/elections/electResultsMain/2008ElectionResults/2008precincts.aspx> (accessed May 20, 2009).

<sup>54</sup><http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/elections/electResultsMain/2008ElectionResults/2008precincts.aspx> (accessed May 20, 2009).

<sup>55</sup>Carson, Jamie L., Charles J. Finocchiaro, Eduardo L. Leoni and David W. Rohde. 2001. Measuring the Effects of Differential Turnout on House Elections in the 1990s. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>56</sup>Billups, Andrea. Congressional Races Tight in the Midwest. *The Washington Times*, Friday, October 24, 2008, p. A08.

<sup>57</sup>Naymik, Mark, and Stephen Koff. He Was Strong in Democratic Areas, Cut into GOP Territory. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. Thursday, November 6, 2008.

<sup>58</sup>Smyth, Julie Carr. Ohio Democrats Win House Seats. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. Wednesday, November 5, 2008.

<sup>59</sup>Blake, Aaron. Democratic Challengers Do Not Yet Believe in Senator Obama. *The Hill*. Wednesday, March 26, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup>Giroux, Greg. Ten Non-Incumbent House Candidates Topped \$100K in First Quarter. CQ Today Online News – Politics. April 23, 2009. <http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=news-000003102075> (accessed May 26, 2009).

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