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Amy Rathfelder

Madison Swoy

Naman Jain

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Naman Jain, Amy Rathfelder, and Madison Swoy

Professor A. Bos

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Draft Communications Plan: Proposal for Representative Betty Sutton's Campaign Advertisement

Basic Overview of the Race

Our group is working to create a campaign ad for Democratic candidate Betty Sutton. Sutton is running against Republican Jim Renacci for Ohio's 16th district seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Although Representative Sutton is the incumbent of the 13th district, the recent redistricting in Ohio cost the state two seats. It has also shifted seats in the Northeast districts of Ohio to accommodate this change. The new district now consists of the entire of Wayne County, and also encompasses parts of Cuyahoga, Medina, Summit, Portage, and Stark Counties. Reporter Sabrina Eaton comments on the change by saying that "Renacci and Sutton were put into the same congressional district last year by Republicans in Columbus who had to eliminate two of Ohio's eighteen congressional seats because of slow population growth" (Eaton, 2012).

One of the most important elements of running for office in Ohio is its reputation as a major battleground state. Writing in an article entitled "The Critical 2012 States," David Paul Kuhn states that "[i]t's the swing states that describe the outcome for every state" (Kuhn, 2012). Kuhn points out the impact that election results in swing states like Ohio have on the rest of the country. Results from battleground states in this midterm election cycle could have major effects on how the nation chooses to vote in the upcoming presidential election as well.

The upcoming presidential election imposes additional elements in a midterm election that would not be present in an election cycle two years from now. President Barack Obama, a Democrat, currently holds office. However, the end of his term is quickly approaching and he will be seeking reelection in November. Due to the poor economy and an average approval rating, political analysts are predicting a slightly more Republican bias in both national and statewide politics going into the next election cycle. This means that Sutton, a Democrat, could be at a disadvantage to her Republican rival. It will also put serious pressure on her ability to run a campaign that convinces her constituents to elect a Democrat to stay in office.

Sutton's campaign stems from the work that she has been doing in Congress up until now, with an emphasis on the middle class. "Betty Sutton : A Fighter for the Middle Class" is her slogan. The focal points of Sutton's campaign are middle class rights, the rights and welfare of women, and the rights of the elderly and of veterans. She has recently been working to appeal

to Ohio's population of veterans, meeting with members of the Paralyzed Veterans of America: Buckeye Chapter to discuss important issues within the disabled veterans' community, including increased access to quality healthcare and jobs. Additionally, she is planning a launch of a Seniors Listening Tour to talk about the importance of social security and Medicare, and to give seniors an opportunity to ask questions about the future of those programs (U.S. Representative Betty Sutton, 2012). In addition, the biographical section on Sutton's campaign website states that "she has made a career putting the greater good of the many ahead of the special interests of the few" (U.S. Representative Betty Sutton, 2012). A hallmark of many liberals, this statement and slogan not only play to her more Democratic constituents, but also highlights her feminine side in emphasizing her compassion for the common man.

Like Sutton, Renacci has made his own campaign about things that are generally considered to be Republican-owned. Renacci focuses on certain issues, some of which are the pro-life stance, lower taxes and tax cuts for the rich, and proactive job creation. The "Issues" page on Renacci's website also shows his stance on issues like spending, national security, social security, and the United States' relationship with Israel. Naturally, as a Republican, Renacci's focus on certain issues is not the same as Sutton's. While his aim of connecting to the common man mirrors Sutton's campaign (his slogan announces his intent: "Let's create new jobs and better opportunities for today and tomorrow"), Sutton has noted that Renacci holds one of the highest net worth of any current congressional candidate. His critics also complain that many of the things Renacci claims to believe in his campaign are based off of personal desires as opposed to the greater good.

While divided on most issues, Democrats and Republicans can usually agree that the state of bipartisan relationships in our current Congress and federal government is at an all-time low. The issue of political polarity and the promotion of more bipartisan bills would be a good campaign tactic for both candidates and is extremely relevant in this election. Sutton has already chosen to attack it, writing on her website in favor of a bipartisan healthcare plan and balanced budget: "We need a budget that protects the Medicare guarantee and incentivizes companies to create jobs in America while asking millionaires and billionaires to pay their fair share. I call on Speaker Boehner to reach across the aisle and work with Democrats to create a budget that benefits all Americans, not just those privileged few at the top" (U.S. Representative Betty Sutton, 2012).

As in any race, the issue of budgets and campaign donations promises to be both present and important. Sutton has already started a running disclosure of the money she receives. Currently, she holds a total budget of \$821,024, with \$306,047 coming from individual donors and \$425,840 coming from political action committees. Unlike Sutton, Renacci has opted not to share his campaign finances for the time being, but it can be assumed that at least some of the money he will have access to will come from his own pocket. Similar to Romney's advantage in the GOP primaries, Renacci will hold the clear advantage over Sutton when it comes to monetary funds, and will most likely be using it in the coming months for the advertising and communications elements of his campaign.

The campaign race that Sutton and Renacci are running for is going to be one of the tightest races in Ohio. At the moment, Renacci leads Sutton. However, it is predicted by polls and trackers that Sutton will emerge at the top, because of a strong personal image and her strong desire to assist the middle class. The latter is a more important facet in Ohio compared to other states in America, because of the grassroots population here. In order to win, both candidates will need to develop effective and efficient campaign strategies that will appeal to voters and constituents that will help to gain their support.

Key Communication Strategies

It is no secret that women have been underrepresented in our nation's Congress. Through the 108th Congress, "11,699 people have served in the U.S. House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. Of those, only 215—or less than 2 percent—have been women" (Panagopoulos, 2004, 131). One of the greatest advantages Betty Sutton has at her disposal in this race for a new House seat is her gender. In our advertisement, we intend to make the most of having a female candidate in contention for a seat in Congress.

Much of the research we have done in order to create an effective ad has centered on communication strategies in regard to gender. In his study on this topic, author and political scientist Costas Panagopoulos (2004) identifies "male-owned" issues and "female-owned" issues, a concept similar to Democratic-owned and Republican-owned issues. However, instead of employing party affiliation to the various issues, it uses gender. Panagopoulos cites "female-owned" issues as more social problems as opposed to government issues. They include poverty, education, child-related issues, and healthcare-related issues. Countering this, "male-owned" issues encompass big business policy, military planning, and defense spending. Women, according to Panagopoulos, are thought to be stronger on social issues because their gender is perceived by the public as warmer, more compassionate, and more caring than the male gender, which in turn is thought to be more headstrong and tougher in terms of political issues. However, in their article entitled "Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates," authors Huddy, Leonie, and Terkildsen support Panagopoulos' findings, but also state that a campaign based solely around gender perceptions is a weak one. Because of research found by La Cour Dableko and Herrnson (1997) indicating similarities in female and male campaign strategies, it is even more important for a female candidate to run a balanced campaign. La Cour Dableko and Herrnson find that both sexes tend to give similar reason for running for Congress, assemble comparable campaign resources, and employ similar strategies and communication techniques. The difference is found in the character traits each chooses to focus on. In order to achieve the most effective campaign advertising, the candidate must incorporate a balanced strategy, one in which traits from both genders are emphasized. For example, a male candidate must appear not only headstrong and tough in the political arena, but also compassionate and in-touch with his constituents. Huddy, Leonie, and Terkildsen also find evidence that women are at a disadvantage when campaigns are run in an unbalanced fashion, because they find that the general voting public favors the male toughness in opposition to the female compassion. They

find that the public feels the male strength and political toughness will translate into more progress in politics, and they value that more than an empathetic trait set. Therefore, it is even more important that female candidates strive to run a balanced campaign, one that highlights their compassionate side and a strong, mentally tough side as well.

As previously stated, women are lacking in representation in the United States, especially in the federal government. Sutton should take advantage of this and use her femininity to her advantage, which will set her apart from others. It is also to her advantage that she is the incumbent because it allows her to provide examples of successes that she has had while in this particular seat in office. She can then demonstrate workable ways to have future success in this same seat. Another strategy will be to use her liberal political views as a base for her campaign, due to the large female growth taking place within the Democratic party (Palmer and Dennis 2001). Also, by creating a strong base in a political party (especially among Sutton's gender), she has a workable constituency already in place. Sutton can also use her gender to her advantage by focusing on women's issues in her campaign. Herrnson, Lay and Stokes find that female candidates stressing issues that voters associate favorably with women candidates leave a positive impression on female constituents, and make them more likely to vote for the female candidate (Herrnson, Lay and Stokes 2003).

Keeping this in mind, our group plans to implement specific features that will help Representative Sutton cater to her female supporters. For example, a female candidate will get a lot more positive feedback when running an attack ad against a male candidate than a male candidate will gain from attacking a female. Women, according to Panagopoulos, actually have the advantage in attacking opposing candidates if their opposition is a male. A woman attacking male candidates makes the woman seem stronger, while a man attacking a female candidate makes him appear cowardly and rude. Panagopoulos writes that "men tend to run less negative advertising, especially when running against women, perhaps indicating that male candidates are conforming to norms of 'chivalry'"(135). Creating a negative ad would have advantages for Sutton, but we are choosing instead to create a more trait-balanced advertisement while incorporating some negativity toward some of Renacci's past decisions.

Incorporating a touch of negativity also offers many options strategically. Instead of choosing a full-length negative ad, we plan to create an ad that begins by highlighting something negative in Jim Renacci's history that may have hurt a "male-owned" issue. Essentially, we plan to attack something policy related that will highlight a weakness in Renacci's political agenda and future plans. By choosing to attack something that is typically thought to be a strong point of a male candidate, we are not only making him look weak by highlighting something that should be an asset, but we are also calling into question his ability to handle things that may not come as naturally—essentially, we are questioning his capability to hold his own in the political arena when handling more social or "female-owned" issues, like education or healthcare reform.

One of our goals and part of our strategy in creating this advertisement is a focus on the campaign and not necessarily the voter (Kahn and Fridkin 1993). We will not spend too much

time on sending messages directly to the voter. Instead, by simply using the campaign to demonstrate what Sutton offers, we will provide an idea of what the voter will gain from electing her. Doing this requires direct communication with as large of a constituency as possible. Communicating to Sutton's entire constituency will necessitate a focus on both the aforementioned ways of reaching Democrats, and by incorporating a negative portion of the ad directed toward Sutton's Republican opposition. Our previously mentioned balanced advertisement strategy will help us appeal to both male and female voters. By highlighting both sets of stereotypical traits, Sutton will appear likable to both genders and thus gain a higher percentage of votes. Additionally, candidates often use campaign messages to focus voters' attention toward some issues and away from others (Schaffner 2005). In order to gain votes, Sutton must focus her campaign around issues that she has an advantage in and has worked with throughout her time in office, which could be a good thing to incorporate into our advertisement, and could also help her gain support.

Women focus their judgment of a candidate on the candidate's ability to address social issues. However, it is also important to recognize that males and females are treated differently in the press. Therefore, we must concentrate on how we want Sutton to be perceived by the public in terms of the media: as a strong independent, powerful woman. The image she presents plays a vital role in her overall campaign. Women tend to gain more positive coverage when they appear to care about their appearance, but we must strike a delicate balance because she must still appear strong and intelligent. Societal predispositions and priorities regarding appearance may make this difficult, but all of these traits are attainable in a well-balanced advertisement.

Appealing to constituents via these discussed issues serves the purpose of mobilizing them into action and into voting. There are various communication techniques that Representative Sutton can utilize to help maximize her control of voter mobilization. Getting Sutton's campaign message and theme out to voters is the most important part of rallying support. This can be achieved through a wide variety of strategies. It would be beneficial for Representative Sutton to utilize the technology and new media she has at her disposal, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, and other social networking sites. While using social networking is advantageous in gaining a high youth vote, adults that are not as familiar with new technology tend not to be as comfortable with it, and would prefer more face-to-face contact or personal means of communication. Political scientists Gerber and Green (2000) cite in their research the impact of direct, personal communication techniques:

Our findings indicate that personal canvassing is highly effective, much more so than the direct mail and telemarketing campaigns that have come to displace it. The implication is that the decline in voter turnout may be due to the changing character of American campaigns. Although the volume of mobilization activity remains considerable, its increasingly impersonal nature draws fewer people to the polls.

In order to maximize face-to-face contact with her constituents, Representative Sutton should schedule regular public appearances at a wide variety of events. These encompass things such as speeches, town halls, canvassing, and talking at local universities to bolster the youth vote even more. In addition to this, Sutton has an expanse of press options available to her that maintain a personable, face-to-face image but also reach a wider constituency. Appearing on both hard news programs and soft news programs will ensure that her message not only reaches politically informed potential voters, but also will be heard by viewers that watch entertainment television and news.

Rationale for Implementing Strategies

As we mentioned above, we are planning to capitalize on Sutton's gender as a main part of the ad we plan to create. Our research has consistently shown traits that the general voting public associates with a female candidate are very important to the electoral process, and ultimately in helping the constituents choose which candidate to vote for. We also plan to highlight issues that will help Sutton appear strong and unwavering in order to bring out some stereotypical male characteristics as well. Even more than highlighting a candidate's gender trait set, voters want a balanced candidate; essentially a candidate who is compassionate and in-touch as well as strong and steadfast in their beliefs. Based on our research, we have come to determine that this kind of ad—a balanced, mostly positive advertisement—will be most beneficial to Sutton's campaign.

We are also planning to incorporate some elements of a negative advertisement to our project. While the ad will not be completely negative, we will focus on a policy-related negative decision, like Renacci's attempt to file a false tax return in 2010. The tax return claimed that Renacci lost over a quarter of a million dollars, when in actuality, he made over thirteen million. He then proceeded to attempt to raise taxes on Ohio families by 23%. Because this is a policy-related issue and a major defect on Renacci's political past, it would be something we could potentially use in our ad to make him seem weak on issues that should be his political forte. By doing this, we are not only calling into question his ability to handle "male-owned" issues, but also raising serious doubt about his ethical agenda and his compassion toward the millions of families that would be impacted by a much higher tax rate, both qualities that are associated with a female candidate. A negative approach to something like the attempt at higher taxes is something that would work strongly in Sutton's favor.

The obvious goal of any political campaign is to gain as much support and earn as many votes as possible in order to take office. Sutton's aim is no different. In order to appeal to different constituencies, we will employ a wide array of strategies. We plan to capitalize on Sutton's campaign slogan which is "Betty Sutton: A Fighter for the Middle Class." As we touched on in our overview of this race, Sutton is primarily trying to appeal to the middle class, a very important element of her campaign because of the high proportion of middle class citizens living in Ohio. Thus far in her campaign, Sutton has used her party's liberal affiliation to appeal to sects of the population that she looks to specifically benefit. These include the elderly, the

veteran population, and various other groups like the LGBT. She looks to assist the elderly population with new ideas to federal programs like social security and Medicare, while helping Ohio's veterans with access to jobs and healthcare. While Sutton's campaign revolves mostly around engaging the middle class, she has also made it clear that she cares deeply about other very important parts of the American population. This will help her gain a greater basis of support and ultimately result in more votes.

Along with the middle class, a staple of Sutton's campaign centers on women's issues. She focuses on creating equity in the workplace for women. The importance of this topic is evident through its advent in the today's media (U.S. Representative Betty Sutton, 2012). Evidence shows that, in general, women are working longer hours and being paid less than men. In fact, on average, women earn just 78 cents for every dollar earned by men. On her website, Representative Sutton also claims to have been "a proud co-sponsor of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act signed into law. Lilly Ledbetter finally restored the rights of women to challenge unfair pay. A longtime champion of basic fairness and justice, Betty fought for pay equity legislation in the Ohio State Legislature and represented women subject to sex discrimination in her legal practice" (U.S. Representative Betty Sutton, 2012). We will use this information, as well as touching in on other women's issues to benefit Sutton's campaign by not only emphasizing her successful past with regard to passing legislation, but also to demonstrate her concern for social issues and women's rights.

Conclusion

This proposal summarizes our campaign communication plan in its entirety. We have outlined what we are planning to create in terms of an advertisement for Representative Sutton's campaign; an issue and trait balanced ad with a slight touch of negativity in order to provide criticism against opponent Jim Renacci and a policy-based issue. In general, we plan to highlight messages of Sutton's campaign and her campaign slogan in regard to the social and liberal issues that she has made her focus. Based on our research, we believe that this method and plan is the most effective means of creating a campaign advertisement that will reach voters and work to mobilize Sutton's constituency. It is our hope that the advertisement we create will benefit Representative Sutton and her hard-fought race thus far.

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