

The Montgomery Sentinel

Travel Tales

Surfing the Blue Wave: Traveling for Political Change in the 2018 Elections

Part 1 of 3

by

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“Get the f**k out of here, you f**king Democrat! And on your way, I’ll shoot you in the back!” That is the new level of political discourse in this country, at least as heard from a diehard Republican in Washington state’s 8th Congressional District.

I was south of Seattle in September 2018, trying to “Flip the 8th”-- convert it from Republican to Democratic. I was door-belling for Dr. Kim Schrier, a pediatrician who had entered politics when the Trump administration had tried to eliminate Obamacare benefits for many of her patients and for 32000 other people in her District alone.

The MiniVAN Democratic software on my smartphone was telling me to find a particular address in a rural neighborhood near the Green River Gorge. But I couldn’t find it. Walking through the cold drizzle, I approached a house with a wide porch and six people sitting around a table. “Howdy,” I called from the street, “Do you know where the Johnson family lives?”

“Who wants to know and why?” came the aggressive reply from the 50-ish, bleary-eyed man facing me.



Dr. Kim Schrier

“Hi,” I replied, “I am Lew Toulmin, a volunteer for Dr. Kim Schrier for US Congress, and I want to give them some literature.”

“Is she a Democrat or Republican?” asked the man. “Sir, she’s a Democrat,” I said, and he began spewing forth his party platform of death threats and obscenities.

I was astonished, but what happened next surprised me even more. A younger man leapt up and stood behind Mr. Republican, and yelled, “Shut up, Dad! You’re an idiot! I support the Resist Trump movement!” He flashed two middle fingers at his father, and hollered at me, “Keep it up, pal! Keep handing out your literature! She’s got my vote!”

I thanked the son, wished Mr. R a nice day, and beat a hasty retreat. No holes appeared in my back.

Doing some research later, I found that Mr. R had committed a Class C felony under Washington state law (Section 132Q-10-215), punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. But I didn’t go back, call the police, or perform a citizen’s arrest. Somehow I didn’t think that would win many new votes.

I had gotten into this situation because I was tired of yelling at Donald Trump on the TV screen in Silver Spring every night. I did a nationwide search for the best US Congressional candidate I could find who was a woman (not enough women in Congress), in a toss-up District (didn’t want to waste my effort), and not a lawyer or an ex-prosecutor (waaaay too many of those in Congress), who would likely vote for impeachment. When I learned that Kim Schrier had an undergraduate degree in astrophysics, Phi Beta Kappa, from UC-Berkeley, I was very impressed. Not many astrophysicists in Congress these days!

Then I found out that her opponent, Dino Rossi, was a “Mini-Me” lickspittle disciple of Trump, a developer and landlord worth \$30 million, who advocated 18th century-style “homes for unwed mothers” and wanted to lower the minimum wage for youth. I immediately bought my plane ticket to Seattle.

I committed to working for the campaign for a month, as a volunteer. I rented a small car, and stayed in the basement of my cousin’s home, who lived near the 8th District. But Dr. Kim was such a terrific candidate – articulate, smart and compassionate – that I would have happily spent the money for a hotel if necessary.

The campaign’s strategy through early September was to focus on local issues (rather than Trump), especially health care, since that was Dr. Schrier’s strong suit. She also had progressive positions on the environment, transport, education and especially on pre-existing health conditions. Kim herself had developed Type 1 juvenile diabetes at age 16, so she knew a lot about such conditions.



Dino Rossi, property developer and landlord

Campaign tactics were mainly focused on the field work “ground game” – phone calling and knocking on doors to identify likely and certain Democratic voters, and undecideds, who would all be contacted again in the last month of the campaign.

The 8th District was viewed by both political parties as one of the ten most important swing districts in the country. It was gerrymandered to be perpetually Republican, but was first rated as “toss-up” by Sabato’s Crystal Ball, and then in early September was re-rated as “leaning Democratic.” Schrier’s own polls showed her leading by just one percent in late September.

As a result, the Republicans poured over \$3.8 million into the race, while Democrats, including Emily’s List and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, put in \$2.8 million.

It was amazing to see the energy and spirit in the campaign. I had not worked in a political campaign since the Nixon Administration. I had forgotten the excitement and sense of purpose. The number of volunteers was incredible. While opponent Dino Rossi was reportedly paying his entire field staff, all of the hundreds of Schrier field volunteers were exactly that.

So, did Dr. Kim Schrier win? What were voter reactions – other than the occasional death threat? For the answers, you’ll have to read my column next month!

Lew Toulmin worked for Cesar Chavez of the United Farm Workers and for AFSCME, AFL-CIO, and managed two political campaigns in Florida in the 1970s.

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Photos, captions and credits:

1. Dr. Kim Schrier, Democratic Candidate for Congress in Washington state’s 8th Congressional District in November, 2018 in her doctor’s lab coat. (Courtesy photo)
2. Dr. Kim Schrier, Democratic Candidate for Congress in Washington state’s 8th Congressional District in November, 2018. (Courtesy photo)
3. Dino Rossi, Republican Candidate for Congress in Washington state’s 8th Congressional District in November, 2018. (Courtesy photo)
4. Dino Rossi, Republican Candidate for Congress in Washington state’s 8th Congressional District, literally running for office at the Ellensburg, Washington Rodeo Parade. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
5. Dr. Kim Schrier at the Ellensburg, Washington Rodeo Parade. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)

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