

Can Cynthia Lummis lose? Can Gary Trauner win?

Yes. And, yes.

Cynthia *can* lose and Gary *can* win.

By all normal political measurements, it should not end that way, but it *could*.

Discount the 2006 election in predicting how this one will end. The fact that Gary Trauner came very close to unseating Barbara Cubin two years ago has little bearing on the outcome of the '08 election. Looking back on Barbara Cubin's last three election cycles gives a better idea of what was happening. Compare the results in her elections to those for other Republicans running statewide. Only the governor's race has consistently defied the norm.

As evidenced in Mrs. Cubin's primary election against Cale Case and Bruce Asay in 2004 and against Bill Winney in 2006, her support dropped with each election. In the 2004 general election, Democrat Ted Ladd did well against her. In the 2006 primary, Bill Winney actually beat her in the state's largest county, Laramie, and the state's richest county, Teton. He also held her to almost a draw in her home county of Natrona. She finished with about 60% of the total vote by holding onto those counties that will vote for an incumbent or "insider" Republican, no matter who the opponent is. Bill Winney was not the insider - Barbara Cubin was.

Bill wounded the six-term incumbent considerably in the 2006 primary. He showed how vulnerable and unpopular she was. Gary Trauner was able to capitalize on her "win by a thousand nicks" and came shockingly close to defeating her in November. He had no primary opponent so it was impossible to measure how qualified or popular voters considered him. He was just Barbara Cubin's opponent and that was good enough for many Republican and Independent voters.

Enough was enough. That was the message - more than Gary Trauner being a strong alternative or running a good campaign. The fact that Democrats took control of Congress for the first time in 12 years didn't mean much in Wyoming, either. This is a conservative state that sends conservatives to Washington, whatever the national trend might be.

While Cynthia Lummis is no Barbara Cubin philosophically, she is also no Barbara Cubin in the eyes of weary Republican voters who had had enough of Mrs. Cubin and her performance in office during her preceding two terms.

The big differences in the 2008 election should lie in Laramie and Natrona counties. Beginning with the 1998 House election, Mrs. Cubin started to lose support in

the state's two most populous counties. She won handily over Democrat Scott Farris statewide in '04 but it was close in Laramie (14,299 to 12,990) and Natrona (10,995 to 10,073) counties.

Early in her career, she fared better. By 2000, Cubin had token opposition.

In 2002, she faced Democrat Ron Akin in the general election. She began to lose support in the two largest counties. In Laramie County, she outpolled Akin 16,013 to 13,193 but in her home county of Natrona, she won by only one vote - 11,182 to 11,181. Akin barely mounted a campaign against the four term incumbent and almost beat her in her hometown.

In the 2004 primary election, she did not get as many votes in either of the two largest counties as her two Republican opponents (Asay and Case) did combined. That might be a bit unfair but it points out her diminishing support from Republican voters in these two critical counties.

In the 2006 primary, Bill Winney beat Barbara Cubin in Laramie County (5,946 to 4,800) and came close in Natrona County (4,191 to her 4,605).

The point to the foregoing is to show how Barbara Cubin's support had declined in two counties that traditionally cast about one in six votes statewide. For other Republican statewide candidates, they voted strongly Republican.

The rest of Wyoming breaks down fairly simply: The northeast will vote Republican overwhelmingly, even if Ted Stevens were the candidate. Along the railroad tracks west of Cheyenne, those counties tend to go Democratic. Except for Teton County, all other Wyoming counties vote Republican, almost without exception and without reservation.

In the 2004 general election, Ted Ladd beat Barbara Cubin in Laramie County (20,097 to 17,969) and came very close in Natrona County (14,886 to Cubin's 15,630). A Libertarian candidate polled about 1,160 votes in each county.

In 2006, after being beaten by Winney in the primary election in Laramie County, Cubin lost in Laramie County to Gary Trauner in the general election by 6,319 votes, in Natrona County, she lost to him by 3,055 votes and in Teton County, by 3,620 votes. Trauner carried only seven of the state's twenty-three counties and two of them by 135 or fewer votes. Besides Laramie, Natrona and Teton counties, Trauner won in Albany, Carbon (by 135 votes), Fremont (by 69 votes) and Sweetwater counties.

Three counties made the race close.

So, how can Cynthia lose and how can Gary win?

Cynthia can lose if she continues to conduct the campaign she has started. Through the primary, she could count on her name recognition and former statewide races as state treasurer, as well as the strings pulled within the Republican Party, to get enough Republican voters to fill in the oval next to her name to finish first. Mark Gordon, who spent as much as a million dollars of his own money, went on the attack in the final two weeks and, in addition to his being a Democrat, Wyoming voters recoiled. He had come across as a nice guy and he morphed into a politician who would launch a personal attack against a rodeo queen.

Five weeks after the primary victory, Lummis has not gotten on message. The staff that got her through the primary was thrown overboard in favor of a guy with limited name recognition but absolutely no political experience - either as a candidate or with a campaign. She is losing her advantage over Gary Trauner by the minute. He has been running low-key TV ads for weeks - she did not respond.

Also, her public utterances have caused her self-inflicted wounds. No two words, with the possible exception of "gun control," elicit such repulsion in Wyoming as "income tax." Her statement that she thinks everyone should pay income tax leaves people wondering if she means state or federal income tax. Obviously, payment of federal income tax will not benefit the state of Wyoming so voters might think she is suggesting the unthinkable - a state income tax. Then she hired a paid gun of Barbara Cubin's, only to see that new spokeswoman implode within a few days. Calling an opponent's campaign and using a fake name is unacceptable.

Her new "campaign manager" with zero experience squandered the opportunity to appear a leader and in control. Instead of throwing that gal over the side for her indiscretion, he waffled until she stepped down of her own volition.

Cynthia Lummis has won two statewide general elections but has never had a contest. Once unopposed and once effectively unopposed, she is floundering in this real contest against Gary Trauner.

Whatever else happens on the national scene, Wyoming will go for John McCain by probably 65% - 35% or thereabouts. All Lummis has to do to win is to hold onto most of that advantage. Registered Republicans outnumber registered Democrats about 2.5:1 so the advantage is hers.

To this date, she has done nothing to hold serve.

If Gary Trauner ends up being the next U.S. Representative from Wyoming, it will be because Cynthia Lummis *lost* the election, not because he *won* it.

Either way, Democrats would have their first Representative from Wyoming in thirty years - since Teno Roncalio. And, either way, Gary goes to Washington and Cyndy stays on the ranch.

How can Gary win? Only by Cynthia losing. Only by her blowing her opportunity to claim this seat that has remained in Republican - even an unpopular Republican - hands for the last 15 elections.

Gary should not expect to dominate Cynthia Lummis as he did Barbara Cubin in Laramie and Natrona counties. Especially Laramie County. Cynthia was born here and has a popular name - in comparison to Barbara Cubin being so disliked here - and should be able to prevail in her home county over any Democrat.

Trauner's margin in the three counties he won big in the 2006 election will disappear. He will win in Teton County and may even win by as many votes as he did against Cubin. He will *not* defeat Lummis by 3,000 votes in Natrona County. And, she will beat him in the counties so strongly Republican. She may be able to improve on the 2:1 and 3:1 ratios Cubin beat Trauner by in 2006.

If, instead of Trauner *winning* Laramie County by 6,319 votes as he did in '06, he loses by a couple thousand, that is an 8,000+ vote turnaround. Where else can Trauner make up that difference?

Again, Gary can only win if Cynthia continues to work hard at losing.

Trauner will also be at a disadvantage with high voter turnout. Voters in a presidential election in Wyoming come out to vote Republican. When that happens, voters just go down the ballot, filling out ovals beside Republican candidates, and Cynthia has that advantage. If he tries to bring in any national Democrat to help, that is likely to hurt him, not help him.

One thing could help him reduce his margin of defeat. That would be Dave Freudenthal actually trying to help Gary get elected. That is unlikely to happen. First, Dave doesn't like to get involved in other Democrats' races - preferring to keep his relationship with Republicans as favorable as possible as he needs them to win statewide elections himself.

Gary Trauner is a good candidate. Probably as strong as Democrats can recruit in Wyoming. There is no farm system. And Gary's time in state is not a detriment or handicap. He's been here long enough to serve. His problem is that he is a Democrat in a Republican state.



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