

POLITICS DAILY

Colorado Dems' Ad Strategy Worked: Weak Tea Party Candidate Won Primary



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A Democratic campaign group's \$500,000 in ads targeting the perceived front runner in the Colorado governor's primary in August may have clinched the GOP nomination for a Tea Party candidate with no political experience.

Small businessman **Dan Maes** won the GOP nomination after Colorado Freedom Fund ran **television ads** in the two weeks before the Aug. 10 primary slamming former congressman Scott McInnis for plagiarizing a series of papers on water policy. McInnis ended up losing to Maes by 5,150 votes out of 390,108 cast.

Most political analysts, as well as activists from both parties, believe Democrat **John Hickenlooper** will win what is now a three-way race for governor in large part because of Maes' victory.

"As much as it pains me to give them credit, I think it had a tremendous impact in the primary," said Colorado GOP Chairman Dick Wadhams. "Voters saw that ad during the Republican Primary. They had no idea it was being financed by a bunch of leftist, wealthy individuals."



The most recently filed campaign records from Colorado Freedom Fund indicate that the **Democratic Governors Association**



Tancredo, left, Maes, Hickenlooper (Ed Andrieski, AP)

donated \$150,000, while wealthy Colorado philanthropist Pat Stryker gave \$108,000. The SEIU Small Donor Committee gave \$200,000 and the Public Education Committee, an education union, gave \$150,000. Two other groups gave \$5,000 each to the committee.

"Democrats spent more money on Maes in two weeks than he raised in his entire campaign," said Rob Witwer, co-author of "**The Blueprint**," a book about the Democrats takeover of Colorado. "They wanted Dan Maes to be the Republican nominee and they got him."

Raymond Glendening, national political director for the DGA, said there are other instances where the group made independent expenditures against Republican candidates before primaries.

"We haven't done it often, but we've done it several times," he said. "You have to look for when the best opportunity is in a given year and bring out the facts about your opponent."

In the Colorado race, it made sense, he said.

"That was the right time. The very damning evidence on Scott McInnis had just broke and we decided to let everybody know."

The group also spent money campaigning against GOP candidates before primaries in **Iowa, Wisconsin** and **Nevada**. In Wisconsin, the DGA contributed to groups against both top GOP candidates. In Iowa and Nevada, respectively, former Gov. Terry Branstad and Brian Sandoval won their races despite DGA spending. That leaves Colorado as the only state where the strategy was successful.

Wadhams said the intent of the anti-McInnis ads was clear.

"They clearly wanted to impact the outcome of our primary," he said. "The left did the same thing in Nevada when they **attacked Sue Lowden**, which greatly helped Sharron Angle in the (U.S. Senate) primary."

Seth Masket, an associate professor of political science at the University of Denver, said the DGA's \$150,000 was effective.

"If this is what helped ensure that they got Dan Maes as the nominee . . . that's a great move for them," Masket said. "This is now a race that both national parties are pulling out of at this point because it's so obvious what the outcome is going to be."

Maes and Hickenlooper face former congressman **Tom Tancredo**, who is running on the American Constitution Party ticket. Even before the primary, Maes had been fined more than \$17,000 for **campaign finance violations** and said the city of Denver's bike-share program might be part of a United Nations plot to take away personal freedoms.

Since his nomination, the **Denver Post revealed Maes** claimed on his campaign Web site to have performed undercover work for the Kansas Bureau Investigation around the time he was fired as a police officer in Liberal, Kan., in the mid-1980s. KBI officials deny that Maes worked for them. But Maes is sticking to his story, complete with a **six-minute YouTube video** in which tries to address a variety of controversies surrounding his campaign.

Colorado Republicans last month tried unsuccessfully to **force Maes out of the race**. Neither the state party nor the Republican Governors Association is providing financial support to Maes' campaign.

Numerous current and former elected **Republicans have endorsed Tancredo**.

Even GOP Senate candidate **Ken Buck backed off his support of Maes**. And a Sept. 14 Rasmussen poll shows **Maes running in third place**.

Tancredo's **first television ad** makes no mention of Hickenlooper, but instead features an 83-year-old conservative activist and former Maes supporter who accuses the candidate of asking her for \$300 in cash to pay his mortgage. Hickenlooper began running ads in August, while Maes has yet to go on TV.

"I think that John Hickenlooper is going to be elected governor," said Glendening of the DGA. "I've been extraordinarily happy with Dan Maes as a general election candidate."

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