

Political Manuevering At Its Best

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Chapel Hill Herald. This commentary is an analysis of how North Carolina's lieutenant governor used a cache of money and publicity to improve his standing in the Republican party.



The Daily Reflector/Paul Glankler

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Politicians have often adopted strategies of political opportunism - seeing where the people are and running out in front - but few have done it as aggressively as Lt. Gov. Jim Gardner.

If money and headlines are good indicators, Gardner's smash-mouth political maneuvering has proven immensely successful, heightening his status as a news maker and lifting him to the top of the state's Republican party.

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A conservative Rocky Mount businessman, Gardner resurrected his political career in 1988 by defeating Democrat Tony Rand for lieutenant governor. He served in Congress in 1967-68 and ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1968 and 1972.

The record shows Gardner prepared for his battle in 1990 by raising money in 1989. This money paid for advertisements that launched much of the debate he involved himself in. The record indicates he also used his political appointments as lieutenant governor to strengthen his support and image.

The Associated Press reported in February that Gardner's two political committees raised nearly \$486,000 in 1989, more money than any other state politician.

The Committee to Elect Jim Gardner, the leftovers of the machine that helped Gardner win office in 1988, raised \$99,718 in 1989. The Jim Gardner Committee, an organization Gardner established to finance political activities and future campaigns, according to a Gardner spokesman, raised \$338,000 that year.

By contrast, Gov. Jim Martin raised just \$223,000 in 1989, and Attorney General Lacy Thornburg, a possible Democratic candidate for governor in 1992, raised only \$42,320.

The names of Gardner's financial contributors reveal that Gardner has quickly won over key patrons that helped elect Martin to two terms in office.

Among the individuals who contributed \$1,000 or more to The Jim Gardner Committee in 1989 were Frank Rouse of Emerald

Isle; Jack Laughery of Rocky Mount, a business associate of Gardner's; Tommy Pollard of Jacksonville, a member of the state board of transportation; Jim Broyhill, a member of the Martin administration; William Graham, state banking commissioner; and C.C. Cameron, former First Union executive and now state budget director, Howard Haworth, chairman of the state Board of Education, contributed \$500.

Gardner also succeeded in courting the same political action committees that gave money to Martin. In 1989, Gardner received nearly \$20,000 from 10 key PACs, including Duke Power, CP&L, Barclays American and Jefferson Pilot.

With the money in hand, Gardner sowed the seeds for success by maneuvering himself into the public spotlight.

During last summer's legislative budget debate, Gardner purchased advertisements that took issue with any additional state taxes and spending in the face of a critical budget shortfall.

Additionally, in press conferences, Gardner even took issue with his own governor on the question of a one-cent sales tax. He also opposed Gov. Martin's proposal to build a hazardous waste incinerator and dump in North Carolina.

Gardner's aggressive, populist stands appear to have affected the type of news

coverage he received in 1990. If a headline count is any indication, Gardner helped his cause, according to an analysis of coverage in the state's largest newspaper, The Charlotte Observer.

The amount of coverage Gardner received in The Observer remained fairly consistent from January through September, but the type of coverage changed in the latter months.

In fact, from January through April, Gardner was mentioned in eight items on The Observer's editorial or front pages. From May through August, however, Gardner was mentioned in 18 articles on editorial or front pages.

The increased coverage on the editorial pages demonstrates that Gardner was able to inject himself into the public debate concerning the most controversial state issues.

The additional front-page coverage tends to indicate that Gardner became a noteworthy participant in the biggest news events of the day.

Gardner combined that publicity with his political appointments as lieutenant governor to effectively lift his standing and support his financial backers.

First, Democratic legislators gave Gardner a boost by stripping him of the powers that would have tied him to day-to-day lawmaking chores. Once freed, Gardner was able to concentrate on press appearances and voter-sensitive issues.

Martin, by executive order, created a Drug Cabinet in 1989 and appointed Gardner to head the group. The panel has no power to control state policy, but it has given Gardner a means to conduct his job and campaign at the same time.

Martin also created the Western North Carolina Environmental Council and appointed Gardner to chair the group. The appointment has given Gardner the opportunity to appear often in western North Carolina, a GOP stronghold where Gardner, a barbecue man from Down East, needs to build a political base.

In January 1990, Gardner's strategy appears to have paid off. While wearing his environmental hat, he opposed a bill to restrict emissions linked to acid rain. He presented a resolution that favored Duke Power and CP&L, justifying his position by claiming that power companies should be allowed to operate at full capacity because they have been "historically low emitters."

The record makes it appear Gardner used his appointed post - the same position that made him an advocate for the environment - to lobby against the very interests he supposedly was protecting. Meanwhile, he was looking out for the utilities that had given him large contributions.

Despite a 16-year absence from public life, Gardner's star has risen steadily since taking office.

He has positioned himself as a likely GOP gubernatorial nominee in 1992 and hinted he was interested in a bid for the U.S. Senate seat now held by Terry Sanford.

Moreover, if Gardner continues to gain more control over the state GOP, his tactics could become a blueprint for other Republican candidates.

agree that there is nothing aberrant in the Milli Vanilli case, because this is what America is all about. What most disturbs them is the possibility that people will assume that the problem is gone now that Milli Vanilli has been humiliated and de-Grammied. Stuart Ewen, author of "All-Consuming Images:

They give a damn, have people lost the ability to differentiate, and do they care to differentiate any longer?" That is essentially the puzzle posed by the curious figure of Mark Kostabi, the New York painter who doesn't actually paint many of "his" paintings. He hires someone to do the painting part. He even hires

life the American way." The American way requires that they now write a book. There is already talk of a book deal. Whether they will write it themselves is not a great mystery. Joel Achenbach writes columns for The Washington Post