THE PROFESSOR ON THE (ONLINE) CAMPAIGN TRAIL

The Professor on the (Online) Campaign Trail

Newfound Press

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First Edition.

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Newfound Press
University of Tennessee Libraries
1015 Volunteer Boulevard
Knoxville, TN 37996-1000
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DOI: https://doi.org/10.7290/V7mwdtxy

Names: Harmon, Mark D. (Mark Desmond), 1957– author. | Bedenbaugh, Robin A., editor. | Stewart, John G., 1935– dedicatee.
Title: The professor on the (online) campaign trail / Mark Harmon.
Description: Knoxville, Tennessee : Newfound Press, University of Tennessee Libraries, [2024], ©2024 | 1 online resource : illustrations (some color), color photographs | First edition. |
Summary: "Part campaign diary, part how-to guide, this book is the story of the 2022 congressional campaign of University of Tennessee, Knoxville, journalism professor Mark Harmon. Harmon attempted something no East Tennessee Democrat has done since William Montgomery Churchwell in 1855—represent the Knoxville area in Congress. Harmon had scored an upset in a 2006 bid for Knox County Commissioner and hoped to do so again against the deep-pocketed Republican incumbent, Congressman Tim Burchett. With a volunteer campaign manager and treasurer, and in-kind donations of photography and video services, Harmon relied heavily on local presence at community events in a vigorous ground game supplemented creatively with Facebook and Instagram. Grassroots in format as well as content, this open-access ebook makes ample use of images and film clips to give a street-level view of a homegrown campaign."—Provided by the publisher.
Identifier: ISBN-13: 978-1-953291-10-3 (PDF)
Subjects: LCSH: Harmon, Mark D. (Mark Desmond), 1957– | Political candidates—Tennessee, East. | University of Tennessee, Knoxville—Faculty—Political activity. | United States. Congress. House–Elections, 2022. | Political campaigns—Tennessee, East—History—21st century. | Democratic Party (Tenn.)—History—21st century. | Mass media–Political aspects–Tennessee, East. | Communication in politics—Tennessee, East. | Knox County (Tenn.)—Politics and government—21st century. | Tennessee—Politics and government—21st century.
Classification: LCC JK2318.T2 H37 2023eb (PDF)

Dedication

This book is dedicated to John Stewart, a longtime senior aide to Senator (and later Vice President) Hubert Humphrey. John was a key player and observer in the passage of the 1964 Civil Right Act, and later had the historic distinction of having his Democratic National Committee office burglarized in the Watergate break-in. John was an advocate for progressive causes, a friend to struggling candidates, and one of those moral and intellectual guiding lights we do not see enough in public life. He died during the early stages of my campaign, but I could feel his joy permeating it.

I'd also like to acknowledge and thank all the wonderful donors and volunteers, many of whom I met for the first time during this campaign. They became friends, and their help and faith buoyed this joyous effect.

I am grateful to Robin Bedenbaugh and all the great folks at Newfound Press who helped guide this material into a functional and fun e-publication.

Finally, I am forever in debt to my lovely wife Becky who reluctantly agreed to this political romp, knowing all the work and all the disappointments that would come. I share with her the joy of having done it, and the joy of being done.

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Introduction

Many books have a simple purpose—a cookbook, a tale of romance, a detective story. This book is harder to explain. In some ways it is a murder mystery: who killed American democracy? In other ways it is a classic adventure, a hero's quest for what is right and true. Parts of it read like a voyage combining travel and self-discovery, like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, or John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*, or even William Least Heat Moon's *Blue Highways*. At its heart, however, this book is a case study in one American congressional campaign during 2022. There are political lessons to be gained from such a story, especially about tactics and online campaigning.

There certainly are academic moments across this narrative. That is the great curse and glory of being a university professor. This campaign cannot be considered anything close to a traditional experiment. I was not a dispassionate observer; I was the candidate—with all the insights and biases that introduces. Further, the goal never could be a classic experiment. No static Tennessee House District Two exists as a control group for comparison regarding the experimental "methods" of my quest. The goal never was clean comparison; it was an upset win, or at least a much-improved showing.

Nevertheless, this work I believe will find value among many readers. Politically active "super citizens" may find inspiration and even an idea or two worth modifying and using. As a time capsule, this book may lead future historians to clues about the factors at play during this moment in our nation's electoral history.

The chapters in the book begin just after I filed the Federal Election Commission paperwork to run in Tennessee U.S. House District Two, but the story really begins in the summer of 1975 at Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis, Indiana. I was there for several days as part of the National Student Congress, and it served as something of a bridge from my high school speech and debate days to my four years of collegiate competition for Penn State.

My colleagues in forensic competition in the Pittsburgh area had voted me to the position. The coach at Central Catholic High School, who clearly did not like me (I competed for Keystone Oaks High School and sometimes defeated his students), instead of submitting to the national convention my suggested bill on antitrust action substituted one on taxing fat people. When I got to the National Student Congress, I mixed and mingled with my new colleagues. All of them agreed with me that "my" bill was terrible. Working with a guy who aspired to be the presiding officer, I deliberately assigned it to the wrong committee where it would die. In appreciation, I was recognized to speak several times and eventually won one of the event's speaking awards.

My lifelong interest in politics and public policy thus mingled with a hint of curiosity about serving in the real Congress. The task before me in 2022 was a steep one. No Democrat had represented the Knoxville area in Congress since William Montgomery Churchwell (lawyer, judge, and later Confederate) left in 1855. Since 1867, despite upheavals and changes and party ideological shifts, the area consistently has been represented by Republicans. I knew from the start this would be a battle and an incredible longshot, much more of an upset than my 2006 upset win to become a Knox County Commissioner. I wasn't doing it for tactical reasons or likelihood of success. It was simply an imperative. We had a terrible congressman; I knew I could be a better one. Let's ignore the odds and try.

You may wonder how I got here. No campaign begins in a vacuum. I build on the accomplishments of Renee Hoyos, the accomplished environmental

activist who ran for this seat when it became open in 2018. John J. "Jimmy" Duncan had retired; he had held the seat since 1988. Before that, his father held the seat for 23 years. After 50 years of Duncans, there was a lot of pent up political aspiration for the seat. Former state representative, state senator, and Knox County mayor Tim Burchett emerged from a crowded Republican field. Hoyos easily outpaced two other Democrats in the primary. Burchett scored 64.9 percent of the general election vote; 33.1 percent for Hoyos, the remaining scattered votes went to independents.

Renee Hoyos ran again in 2020, and raised an impressive $812,784 (compared to Burchett's $1,336,276) and she spent nearly all of it. Now running against an incumbent and in a presidential year, her percentage of the vote slipped to 31.06%.

I have known and liked Renee for years. I met her for lunch to talk about my campaign while it was still just a notion in my head. She shared some practical ideas for campaigning, and I agreed with many of them. Unlike her, however, I could not just bring myself to four hours a day of "dialing for dollars" to raise campaign cash. I knew my fundraising total would be less, but I'd also keep costs low by not hiring a campaign manager or treasurer; all would be volunteers. I succeeded in getting in-kind donations of photography and video services. I'd spend less than she did on over-the-air television, but I would aim for a substantial and creative effort using Facebook and Instagram ads—and a ground game featuring me at many community events.

Early in the campaign, I told assembled Democrats that if Renee were running, I would not be. She was kind enough to serve as the interviewer for a cable access program, *Democratic Television* in Knoxville, with me as the guest, talking about my hopes at the start of this great adventure.

Chapter 1

It Begins with a Parade, and No Hollywood Moguls in Sight

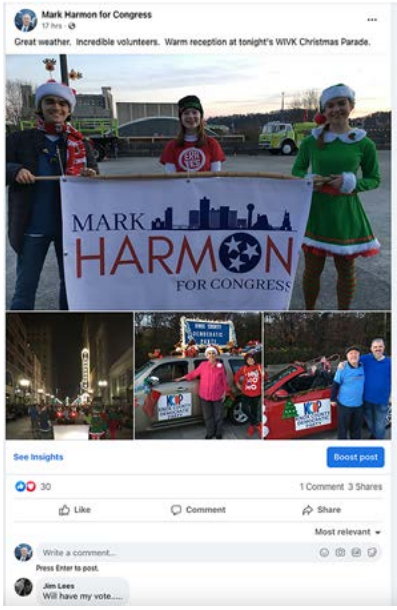
The "Mark Harmon for Congress" banner, firmly attached to a red truck rounded the turn at the end of Farragut's Independence Day Parade, July 3, 2021. That's when my election opponent came up to the vehicle, leaned toward it, and said, "Mark." I greeted him back with "Tim." Marty McLean, the truck's owner and my driver that day, pulled the vehicle into the Ingle's Supermarket parking lot to remove the banner, flags, and bunting. That's when I noticed incumbent Congressman Tim Burchett's approach to the parade apparently was to hang out at the finish line and greet some of those passing.

I also saw he was hanging out with a couple sheriff deputies and two guys with flags. One flag had the delusional and conspiratorial lie "Trump Won."

I had gotten some photos but asked Knox County Democratic Party Vice Chair Jack Vaughn to get a good shot or two. He did, sent them to me, and I made sure those got a lot of play via Facebook and Twitter. Knoxville Holler, the local offshoot of the progressive news site Tennessee Holler, also made good use of the photo.

What happened next, I can describe only as a freak out by Burchett. He sent out a fundraising blast citing his need for money because The Liberals were Coming After Him!

Naturally, I had fun with Burchett's blurt, posting an image of it on Facebook. Some readers thought I did not stress enough the most amusing part of it. Burchett wrote Hollywood moguls were behind my effort. The two-term incumbent was quite lazy in his posting—just using "cut and paste" boilerplate material from Republican fundraising text. So, I put together some fun social media messages of me with Hollywood wax figures (from Madame Tussaud) of an elegant Nicole Kidman, Whoopi Goldberg as a nun, Charlie Chaplin, and ET, the extraterrestrial, on a bicycle.


Mark Harmon for Congress
17 hrs
Great weather. Incredible volunteers. Warm reception at tonight's WIVK Christmas Parade.
MARK
HARMON
FOR CONGRESS
See Insights
Boost post
30
1 Comment 3 Shares
Like
Comment
Share
Most relevant
Write a comment...
Press Enter to post.
Jim Lees
Will have my vote.....

Chapter 2

A Day Both Frustrating and Inspiring

Some days on the campaign trail just buoy my soul. Today (Oct. 2, 2021) was one such day. Hundreds of people from East Tennessee gathered in Knoxville's Krutch Park to proclaim support for abortion rights and the *Roe v. Wade* precedent. The event was one of a coordinated set of dozens held across the country in response to a draconian Texas antiabortion law, one that empowers legal vigilantes to go after any person who dares to help a woman seeking an abortion after six-week gestation—such a restricted window that many women may not even know they are pregnant before they are precluded from exercising that right.

That Texas law, combined with lingering outrage over the January 6th insurrection, may make this a non-traditional off-presidential-year congressional election—maybe even enough of an opportunity for me to do much better than expected in my heavily Republican district.

I picked my way easily through the gathering throng, many holding handmade signs. I'd say, "I'm Mark Harmon," gesturing toward my Mark Harmon for Congress t-shirt. "I'm running against anti-choice Tim Burchett." Sometimes I'd say anti-choice and insurrectionist Tim Burchett. The response was uniformly positive. Some would say, "You've got my vote" or "Good, I'm glad you're doing this." I'd reply with a soft sell, "So, please look at my website (handing the person my campaign business card) and help as you can."

We marched from Krutch Park up Gay Street and took a left into Market Square where we thronged onto the vacant stage to chant "We won't go back!" It was a huge group, and I used my phone to get a video panning across it. As the group left the square and retraced its steps, I stepped out at the corner of Gay Street to consider next steps, specifically calling Becky to pick me up. She had dropped me off for the event as we anticipated difficulty in parking. That moment was when one dedicated supporter yelled, "This is Mark Harmon. He's running against Tim Burchett. We've got to support him."

The local newscasts gave no attention to the story. I watched with increasing frustration as WBIR did several crime stories and soft features (including a national story out of Texas about a Whataburger customer who pushed on social media for a raise for one employee), but nothing on a big, controversial, and topical local rally. WATE in its late news led with some rally video and a sound bite from an organizer about the importance of retaining choice. WVLT had sports pre-emptions of news and nothing relevant on its website.

Of course, I expected the grinning suburbanites of local TV largely to ignore my campaign, much like their well-documented inattention to almost all "down-ballot" races. That term, however, needs some tweaking. The way ballots are laid out in this area, my race will come high on the ballot—right after the gubernatorial contest at the top of the ballot. The 2022 election had no presidential race, and no U.S. Senate contest in Tennessee. Thus, my challenge to failed insurrectionist Tim Burchett will be the second decision voters in seven to nine counties will make. I'll know the exact boundaries once our state legislature completes its redistricting/gerrymander.

The next day *Knoxville News Sentinel* (or KnoxNews.com) coverage of the abortion rights protests was disappointing. Posted at 11:07 a.m. were seven photos (with caption below them, but no story) from photographer Angela Dennis.

I may get the local news outlets to do a small story or two with a launch event, prod them unsuccessfully when Burchett ducks debating me, and (I hope) leave them agape with a surprise on election night. This campaign will

Fun times at Pine Fest in White Pine, a few weeks before it was redistricted out of TN 2.

have to make its own media—and do so cleverly, repeatedly, and using the best research on what works, especially regarding social media.

That's why the retail politics keep my juices flowing. There is a reservoir of good will for my campaign, a growing frustration toward the incumbent, and opportunities to find voters and to listen to them. If my opponent is to win it, that victory will come solely from reflex and reactionary voting based on the R behind his name. His overconfidence is my opportunity.

My campaign business cards lately have been getting a good workout. I distributed a whole bunch of them two weeks ago as I wandered around Pine Fest in White Pine, Jefferson County. There, to a mixed viewpoints crowd of persons almost entirely unknown to me, the appeal was different. "I'm Mark Harmon. I'm running for Congress. Please look at my website and let me know what you think." I worked that crown for roughly three hours in the sun, using the Jefferson County Democrats tent as home base for water breaks.

I enjoyed my new contacts and friends in Jefferson County so much. They were an enthusiastic and helpful group. I went to two picnics hosted by the Jefferson County Democratic Party. By the time of the second one, we all knew what the state legislature had done. It moved nearly all of Jefferson County out of my district (except for one Strawberry Plains precinct). Instead, it gave me the even more Republican, and less organized for Democrats, Union County.

Chapter 3

Tommy Jones' Face Turns Purple, and Other Reflections on the Political Life

My political career predates the 23 years I've so far spent in Knoxville. Reportedly in 1960 my mother, who adored John F. Kennedy, slapped a JFK sticker on my three-year-old behind. In 1968, my Democratic father put a large cardboard "H" (for Hubert Horatio Humphrey) on each of his three children and posed us in front of a polling place. In 1972 I was a 15-year-old volunteer for George McGovern. I did some volunteering in 1980 for the Ted Kennedy campaign. In the mid-1980s I did some volunteer work for a Cincinnati City Council candidate, Roxanne Qualls. During the 1984 presidential election night I helped WBNS in Columbus, Ohio, gathering bottom-of-the-ballot results from outlying counties to assist the station's coverage.

My political and media activity, however, really took off in 1988 when I moved to Lubbock, Texas, for a job at Texas Tech University. I'd done some radio in Cincinnati during my first teaching job at Xavier University, but the Lubbock market (150th in Nielsen rankings) was where I really learned my craft as a TV news producer.

I became the Saturdays, vacations, and emergencies producer for KAMC-TV, a small family-owned station literally in the middle of a cotton field. For two and a half years I produced newscasts, sometimes working alongside current or recent students of mine. When station management fired news director Larry Elliott (the guy who hired me), I turned around and hired him to be my teaching assistant—setting him on an academic path that suited him.

I left the station on my own terms during another change in leadership, and that opened the door for me to explore local politics. I became a precinct chair, and then county chair, for Lubbock's Democratic Party. I even did some radio talk show work, weekly political interviews.

All that is prelude to one moment of unintended political humor. The party vice chair, Tommy Jones, and I had been invited to a political "tabling event." Candidates and parties set up tables, spread out their literature, and spoke with people who wandered about to meet and greet. Civic groups in the area sometimes sponsored these events.

Tommy and I sat at the Democratic Party table. Only a handful of people stopped by to chat. That all changed when a pair of attractive blonde teenagers approached out table. They were festooned with hats, sashes, and buttons all supporting a first-time Republican county commission candidate named Gary Schwantz.

Decades earlier I learned from a Penn State speech and debate colleague, Aaron Schiller, some choice Yiddish expressions—including that schwantz or schwanz is Yiddish for penis. I don't know how Tommy, pure West Texan from the top of his head to the tip of his cowboy boots, picked up that knowledge, but clearly he did.

"Have you heard about Schwantz?" one of the bubbly teens asked me.

"Ah," I hesitated, "You know, I think I've known about Schwantz for much of my life."

The other buoyant teen asked, "So what do you think about Schwantz?"

I could sense Tommy had caught on to the double entendre and his face was turning purple from suppressed laughter.

"Well, I'm torn," I said, "sometimes I think there's enough Schwantz in politics."

That was too much for Tommy. He bolted out a nearby exterior door to explode in laughter and catch his breath. I excused myself from the confused young ladies and trailed him outside.

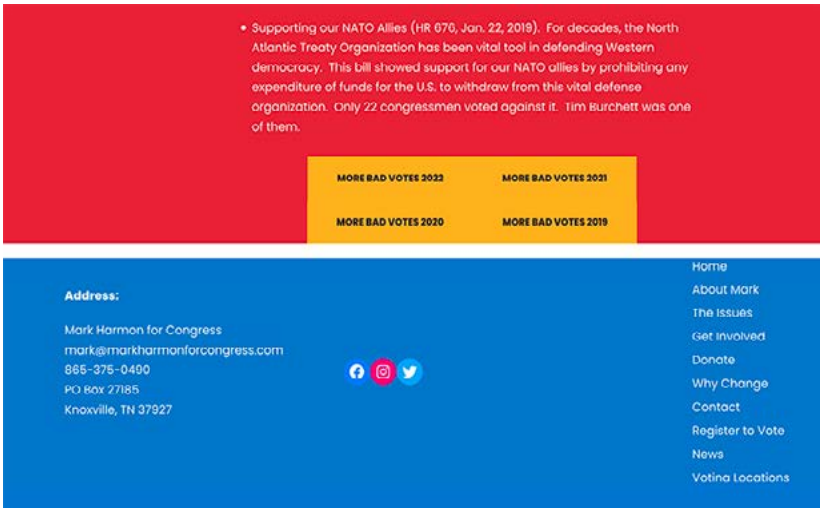
What?" I asked. "You must have noticed all the Schwantz around here."

"Stop, just stop," Tommy implored, holding his sides and bowing his head to stop convulsive laughter.

So, my 2022 campaign was not my first rodeo, literally and figuratively. My first rodeo was in Pampa, Texas, during my 1998 run for Congress in the 13th district of Texas.

That campaign yielded some incredible memories. One was campaigning in Mr. Porky's, a biker bar in Denton, Texas. The patrons were polite and supportive. I hope no photos survive from the time I disco danced in front of a high school band in a parade; I clung precariously to the side of a window-pane truck in another parade. I judged a chili contest near Wichita Falls with a bunch of drunk firemen. I also attended a park opening in Bowie, Texas, tromping around in my cowboy boots in 100-degree weather. In a bit of foreshadowing, my opponent in that contest, Republican extremist incumbent Mac Thornberry, ducked debates. At the one forum where we both appeared, he claimed a conflict, was granted his request to speak first, and left.

The 13th district of Texas in 1998 was huge, about the size of Indiana. I went through 13 oil changes, bopping about from Lubbock to Amarillo to



Wichita Falls to Denton, and lots of smaller communities on the way. Just as I left Lubbock on one trip, my car was struck hard from behind. No one was hurt I the accident. I trundled back to Lubbock, famed home of early rocker Buddy Holly, to have the car repair done at Body Holly.

I handily won a contested Democratic primary even though I was outspent five to one. I could not overcome being outspent more than 25-to-1 in the general election, and finished with 31 percent of the vote in that heavily Republican district.

Chapter 4

Early, Heady, and Nearly Academic Thoughts and Plans

This chapter will be a different from all those that precede and follow it. It largely is a contemporaneous memo from early in the campaign about various aspects of strategy and messaging. Retrospective reflections on how that changed and worked (or didn't) are added in parentheses and italicized text. References are listed in APA style, and are listed at the end of the chapter.

Magic Number and Other Numbers

The best-case scenario is that Mark Harmon for Congress and the Democratic Party, through Herculean effort at Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV), keep the Democratic tally at the same as Renee Hoyos in 2020, a total of 109,684. Tim Burchett, slovenly relying on his advantages merely repeats past practices, slumps to his 2018 total of 172,856.

That outcome is in line with the Brownstein (2021) analysis of how Democrats can defy history and gain seats in the 2022 midterm. In that analysis, Brownstein quotes Michael Podhorzer, longtime AFL-CIO political director using data from Catalist, a Democratic Party targeting firm. Those numbers are that 91 million Americans have voted Democratic in at least one of the last three elections, compared to just 82 million for Republicans. The key thus in 2022 will be identifying and getting those Democratic-leaning voters, notably a rising generation of younger voters, to the polls.

The best-case scenario as a starting point is possible. The Democratic Party "autopsy" of the 2020 election, came to two major conclusions: 1) Trump voters are reluctant to reveal truthful information to pollsters—as Trump is not on the ballot or in office in 2022 candidates like Burchett who pander to Trump voters will not gain from this polling and turnout offset; 2) Democratic candidates did well in 2020 fundraising, but spent too much on traditional TV and spent it too late in the election cycle (Kane, 2021). This

latter criticism could apply to the otherwise efficient and effective Renee Hoyos campaign.

This leaves Mark Harmon with 38.82 percent of the vote. Though that may be how it turns out, let's calculate a Better-Than-Best Scenario where various standard and creative turnout and persuasion techniques have superior results, but ones predicted by existing electoral research. Using the Best Case Scenario, the magic number for victory is 141,271 votes.

(Turnout was much less than this scenario at 207,678. The actual magic number for victory was 103,840. Mark Harmon achieved 66,637, 32.1 percent.)

Better-Than-Best Tactics

So how does Harmon acquire the extra 31,587 votes from the Best Case Scenario? The techniques, assumptions, and tallies are summarized below.

1. Switch to much more digital advertising, very early in the campaign and consistently through the election cycle. Estimated gain: unknown, but pegged at same as TV—5650 votes.

(We did this and it easily was the best part of our effort. The vote gain number is a more nuanced discussion, to be done later in this book.)

2. Targeted Direct Mail by Surnames (Asian, Black, Hispanic) or Female-Headed Households emphasizing different aspects of Burchett's awful voting record—with follow-up phone calls. Estimated 100,000 pieces total. Estimated gain of 1200.

(Limited budgets meant we did less by direct mail, and more of this tactic by web ads.)

3. General direct mail with phone follow, estimated gain of 1200.

(Direct mail initially was used for fundraising, either in checks sent to the campaign PO Box or, more frequently, electronically via an Act Blue link from the campaign website.)

4. Volunteer phone banks—100,000 calls, 2800 votes gained.

(We did a lot of calls, but nowhere near 100,000. The volunteers at our Thursday evening volunteer sessions more often worked on personalized post cards.)

5. Heavy personal door knocking, often by candidate himself, on swing and lean Republican doors across the district. Aim for

50,000 doors yielding 10,000 conversations, yielding net gain of 1800 votes.

(Knox County volunteers did a lot of targeted door knocking. Candidate did some door knocking in Maryville, but relied very heavily on meeting voters by attending events all over the district.)

6. Neighborhood parties for outreach, fundraising, and gaining volunteers. Estimated gain 60 votes.

(The campaign didn't organize any of these, but responded to many invitations to meet-the-candidate events, both partisan and non-partisan.)

7. Peer to peer text (women include environmental appeals, African American include Civil Rights, Asian American include Tim's awful vote/record, etc.). Estimated at same as relational organizing, 1320 votes.

(Not done, though Get-Out-The Vote Texts done as an in-kind contribution by Knox County Democratic Party.)

8. Targeted radio, use talk radio just to set up free news story on failure to debate, otherwise emphasize stations with a high female listenership. Estimated gain 2000 votes.

(Media buyer Nina Reineri investigated radio buys, but recommended heavy run of targeted web ads, and some TV ads, especially on local newscasts and local morning news programs.)

9. Social Media Influencer Outreach, estimated at same as relational organizing 1320 votes; and
10. Boosted Posts, estimated at same as relational organizing, 1320 votes; and
11. Digital Ads, estimated at half TV rate, 2825 votes.

(Largely done through our Digital Advertising program coordinate by Jesse Plunkett from Loran Media.)

12. "Vote Tripling" program, identifying supporters as they leave primary, hand them a card, and ask to text three others. Estimated gain 1765 votes.

(Not done. Trial run showed the 100-yard marker in many, if not most, early voting locations made this unworkable.)

13. TV and Web Ads, possibly from a Republican conservative who

supports Mark Harmon because he's smart, he's honest, he listens. Total TV gain, estimated at two percent, 5650 votes.

(We did TV ads, but opted for low-cost direct-to-camera ads with Mark Harmon speaking. These were well received.)

14. Regular YouTube videos, well promoted, internet buzz, estimated 1000 votes.

(We had a YouTube Channel, a TikTok Channel, and an Instagram Channel.)

15. Launch/Video contest/Comic Book. Potential for free media. Estimated gain: half of TV ads at 1412 votes.

(We announced a video contest. No entries. Never did the comic book.)

16. Campaign podcast and podcast appearances. Estimate 1000 votes.

(Our opponent did some podcasts. We never did, but did make available the very good WLIL, Lenoir City, interview. We contacted several state-wide political podcasters, but none chose to do an interview or story.)

17. Relational Organizing. 500 people x 20 people each, meaning 10,000 contacted, estimated yield of 1320 votes.

(Not really done. In retrospect, the purported total gain of 33,642, and a huge upset win, clearly was wild extrapolation and wishful thinking, but done in a noble cause and with remarkable perseverance.)

Messaging

(Initially, the campaign toyed around with some standard Democratic tested wording, such as that below.)

No matter where we come from or what our zip code, we work hard for our families. But today, certain politicians and their greedy lobbyists hurt everyone by handing kickbacks to their rich sponsors, defunding our schools, and threatening our seniors with cuts to Medicare and Social Security. Then they turn around and point the finger for hard times at the most vulnerable. We need to join together with people from all walks of life to fight for our future, just like we won better wages, safer workplaces, health care, and educational opportunities for all.

(As the campaign progressed, emphasis changed a bit. The back of my Mark Harmon for Congress t-shirts read "We need a better congressman." It's a simple, but elegant, appeal to what competitive debaters call "comparative advantage." I don't need to prove a perfect reason for my election; I need to point out this is a ballot choice between me and Burchett, and he has proven to be awful. In the end, our messaging was simple. I am pro-democracy and pro-choice. My opponent is not either.)

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Chapter 5

Too Many Damn Jeeps

Early December 2021 featured a series of local parades. The biggest was first. It was the WIVK Christmas Parade, a local tradition for many years and a pet project of our top-rated country music radio station. The Knox County Democratic Party, prompted by the indomitable Janice Spoone, puts forth a big effort every year to show a strong presence at parades. Shannon Webb, Linda Haney, Kathy Manning, and several others have established record of getting us ready for these local spectacles.

It was easy to get volunteers for the WIVK Parade. The weather was warm and dry. The route was reasonable. The crowds almost always are big and enthusiastic. We gathered at the parking garages near the Knoxville Coliseum and Auditorium. Linda Haney drove her PT Cruiser, festooned atop with a billboard-style sign reading Knox County Democratic Party. State Representative Gloria Johnson rode in a convertible driven by Colvin Idol. Paul Witt drove me in his red convertible. Several weeks earlier I had obtained a long bamboo stick from my sister-in-law and her wood artistry business. The stick was zip tied to my Mark Harmon for Congress banner. It fit well. College Democrats, dressed as elves, carried it just ahead of our car.

We dressed the car with lots of Christmas items—snowmen, candy canes, garland, lights, boxes made to look like decorated Christmas packages, etc. I still had time to speak to other groups. I talked amiably to the local Mini (car) fan club, telling them that my wife has a name for her beloved Mini; she calls it Baby. I also chatted with the Young-Williams Animal Center. They assured us that their van full of puppies and kittens all would be adopted within the week.

I'd never done the WIVK parade and it made quite an impression. Early on I caught a glimpse of my UT colleague, Professor Nick Geidner. He was there with his son, and I saw Nick chuckling at the sight of me in a Santa cap standing in the back of a red convertible and shouting "Merry Christmas" to the crowd.

We turned on Gay Street and found ourselves bathed in white light as far as one could see. I continued to greet the crowd and the reception largely was positive. People would yell "Merry Christmas" right back to me. By the time we got to the glowing Tennessee Theatre I could hear the parade announcer say something like, "Knox County Democratic Party reminds everyone that your vote is your voice." Little did I know that parade weekend all would be downhill from there.

The next morning, we paraded in Karns. Makaela Webb, one of the elves from the previous night, carried my banner solo. I rode with Linda Haney in her vehicle, one again properly affixed with Christmas items. I met Marquis Dotson, a teacher, coach, businessman, and our candidate from state representative in this difficult-to-win corner of the county. He was optimistic and well prepared.

Some folks were stone faced upon seeing our Knox County Democratic Party identifying magnetic signs on the sides of vehicles, and the wooden sign atop Linda's car. Overall, however, I received a solid number of "Merry Christmas" replies to my exhorting the same. There was however, a noticeable increase in one repugnant chant I heard only a few times the previous night. Almost always led by men in red MAGA hats, one sometimes could hear them bellow "Let's Go Brandon." It's a crude rejoinder that developed from a recent NASCAR incident in which, during a live postrace interview, the crowd was yelling "Fuck Joe Biden." The befuddled sportscaster, interviewing the winner, suggested they were saying "Let's Go Brandon."

In many ways it is the perfect example of what passes for humor in the extreme right-wing echo chamber—it was personal, insulting, crude, and not nearly as clever as the bellowing buffoon thinks it is. It was sad to see men leading children in the chant. We Democratic parade participants largely did not take the bait. We simply yelled "Merry Christmas" even louder. I even held my tongue when near the finish line someone screamed "Thank you for record high gas prices." Though I wanted to retort "You're welcome for record low unemployment."

That evening was Powell, even more of a right-wing bastion. The even started badly and grew worse. I got confused when I saw a bunch of vehicles in a lot and thought it was the assembly point. After a few phone calls, I learned the actual gathering spot was at the middle school a few hundred yards away. I had stumbled into the separate gathering spot for all the proud local Jeep owners. I reached Powell Middle School, but quickly was assigned by Shannon Webb to follow her husband, Isaac Sherman, to the high school where the parade was scheduled to end. One woman joined us in our three-vehicle caravan to that lot so we could car pool back in Sherman's car, returning from the closing line to the opening spot. After getting back to the middle school, we resumed vehicle decoration. The plan was to have me ride in Shannon Webb's car, but it wouldn't start. Some string of lights likely drained the battery. I quickly exited the vehicle and folded up my banner, tossing it into the disabled car. I'd ride with our reliable volunteer

Frank Schingle and his wife. Shannon joined the group of walkers toting life-size cardboard cutouts of prominent national Democrats—Joe and Jill Biden, Barack and Michelle Obama. I still had a yard sign left over from my successful campaign seven years ago to be on the Tennessee Democratic Party Executive Committee. It now read Mark Harmon (taped over pieces of paper) for Congress. I handed it to Shannon to carry.

The Powell route was fairly long and the crowd was unevenly spaced, but of decent size. The same crude chants and odd stares returned, as well as some downturned thumbs and boos. I got a bit concerned when we passed the high school, but eventually we made some turns and found ourselves in the parking lot serving some high school sport fields. I wound my way, carrying my campaign in a box, to the high school spot where I had left my car. Finally, I inched my way through heavy traffic and made it home.

The final parade that weekend was late Sunday afternoon in Gibbs. Once again, I was in the back of Paul's convertible. He made the best of the wait by watching the Bengals-49ers game on his phone. As we line up, I noticed our group was next to the hot rod group. It was noisy and smelly. One hot rod appeared to be sponsored by a local muffler shop, though it showed little evidence of any muffler. I caught a glimpse, beyond the hot rods, of my opponent in his black Karmann Ghia parade car. His stepdaughter was beside Burchett in the passenger seat. Little decoration was on the car, just two

of his yard signs poked into the window channel on either side. I thought briefly about dashing over there and suggesting two or three debates, but thought better of such an awkwardly timed confrontation. Moments later, the three lanes merged and we crept along that short parade route. The reception was better than in Powell, but that's not saying much.

Six days later our clump of Christmas parades wrapped up with one in the heavily Republican community of Halls. The weather was very cold, as Kathy Manning and I sat in the open deck of Elizabeth Rowland's red

pick-up truck. I clutched my Mark Harmon for Congress sign. As is many other parades, we had to wait for too many damn Jeeps to line up ahead of us. The dozens of Jeeps varied from well decorated to hardly anything holiday related, maybe a string of lights or a Santa cap on the driver. The parade ranged from high-speed to slow-speed sections, but in all I bellowed "Merry Christmas," and mixed in some "Ho-ho-ho." We undid the decorations at the close of the parade in a strip mall parking lot. My hands were so cold I had to warm them over the heating vents in Linda Haney's car. I had some good reaction to my parade photos on Facebook and Instagram, but overall was relieved that next scheduled parade would not be until mid-January for the Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday.

One supposes these "show the flag events" are important for long-term party building, reassuring the "blue dots in a red sea," and helping all our supporters keep the faith. I didn't see much immediate effect in my campaign. My daily online review found few new Act Blue contributions, few new volunteer forms completed; and many days would pass with no checks in my campaign post office box. The fall University of Tennessee semester, however, had come to an end—and I was able to kick the campaign into a higher gear.

Chapter 6

Thirsty Times in January

The new year began with contributions flowing, but not the water. Just a few days into 2022 a water pipe just inches into the basement of our house had corroded into a gushing leak. The water flowed into a nearby drain in one corner of the basement, so fortunately there was no water damage. KUB noticed a spike in water usage and called. Becky and I inspected the house perimeter and the inside pipes and found the leak. We quickly called our plumbers at Pipe Wrench. They responded within hours, and, of course, had to shut off the flow.

We spent an awkward long weekend without water. Becky and I became a response team, a strike force anticipating and alleviating problems. We dashed into the Fountain City Kroger. Becky took one cart for more traditional shopping. She tasked me with getting large numbers of water jugs, water bottles, paper plates and bowls. I filled a cart with these items. If anyone had asked why, I was prepared to shrug and say, "I'm thirsty."

My campaign manager, treasurer, and overall guru, Paul Witt, was a great help. I went to his house to refill some water jugs and to check on some campaign items. I timed my first campaign fundraising mailer to go out on January 6th, the first anniversary of the Capitol Insurrection. My printer/mailer, Burns Printing, was very professional in helping get this done. It worked, too. The next few weeks saw me daily taking trips to the campaign PO Box, and then to First Horizons Bank, collectively picking up and depositing contribution. Of course, I'd stop at my home computer to enter data and review the online Act Blue contributions. The account showed a steady stream of online contributions. I would spend hours writing personal thank you letters and post cards to contributors. The campaign bank account grew by thousands of dollars.

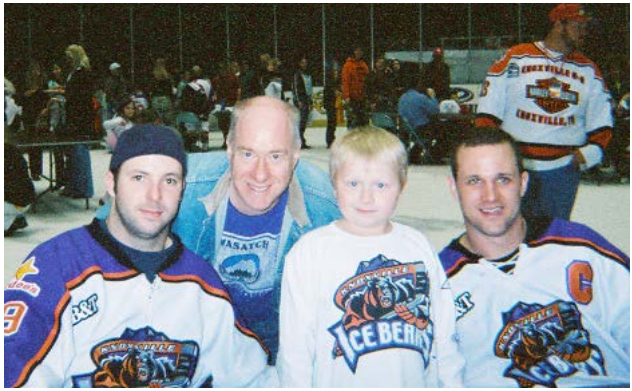
Not everything worked. I tried a nationwide post card mailing to some fellow professors who had used Act Blue to contribute to Democratic causes and candidates. It didn't even cover its costs. Lessons learned. Post cards

should be done within the district only—and used for persuasion and turnout. A post card campaign, even one targeted to those familiar with Act Blue, lacks the return envelope feature important to getting contributions.

While the return envelopes were still coming in from the larger mailing, I had a Zoom meeting with my media buyer, Nina Reineri, and her social media recommendation, Jesse Plunkett of Loran Media. I had known Nina for years. I brought her into the Jim Andrews for Sheriff race as a media buyer in 2002. She did a great job, improving upon some of the early buys I did for Jim and his oh-so-close-to-success campaign. It turns out I knew Jesse, too. He had been a student in one of the first classes I taught at the University of Tennessee in 1999.

It's amazing how a campaign can pull together strands of your life and wind them around each other, creating a rope for you to bind the component parts of your great effort. For example, the shooting of my campaign's television ads was done by Levi Lacey as an in-kind contribution. Levi now is an independent video crew member who has served in many video productions. He was in his mid-20s during my campaign, but I got to know him years ago when he was eight and we were matched in the Big Brothers program. Levi and I spent years as a match. Our favorite things to do in-

cluded movies, par-three golf, lunches, Tennessee Smokies games, and, most especially, Knoxville Ice Bear games. Once I arranged through the Ice Bears general manager that Levi was the puck dropper at the ceremonial start of the game. Even after the match officially ended, Levi and I stayed in touch and remain friends to this day.



Levi and I near the start of our adventure as Knoxville Ice Bear fans.

Chapter 7

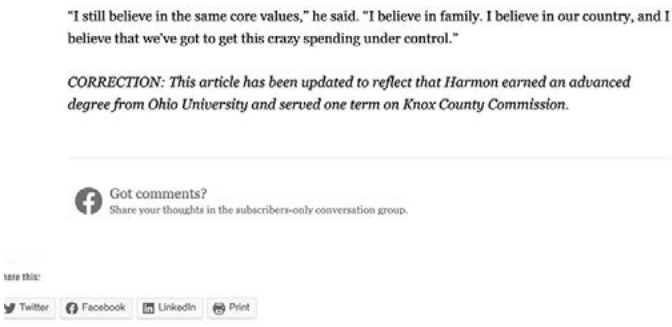
Seeing a Campaign in the Shadows of News Absence

February 2, 2022, groundhog Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow, meaning six more weeks of local media ignoring my campaign. The *Knoxville News Sentinel*, to its credit, earlier did run my guest column—tied to the January 6th anniversary—concerning tough questions to ask Tim Burchett. Further, the newspaper also ran my retort/rebuttal to a remarkably poor piece Burchett (or someone writing for him) cobbled together in anticipation of, and critical about, President Joe Biden's State of the Union message in early March.

I received early notification of Burchett's article thanks to a Google Alert I had set for mentions of my opponent's name. I promptly put together a retort, pointing out the errors, overstatements, and contradictions in Burchett's blurt. My column showed up within a couple hours of submission on the KnoxNews website. The editor said he had run it for timeliness. Damn right! The next day's hard copy of the *Knoxville News Sentinel* paired Burchett's work with mine—his was atop the editorial page, mine was below that. The page even had a letter to the editor critical of the congressman.

I sent items to local newsrooms, and called as well, trying to coax the local newscasts into stories about my challenge to Burchett to debates. I also called in response to his appearances on local political chat shows. I suggested that the more ethical course would be to interview his only declared opponent as well. None of my exhortations went anywhere. The most disappointing coverage failure happened when I caught one of Burchett's Twitter deceptions fooling a local newspaper editor. Steve Hunley, editor and publisher of the hard-right *Knoxville Focus*, wrote that the Voting Rights Bill, stagnant in the Senate thanks to the filibuster, would lower Tennessee's voting age to 16.

It wasn't true. Using fact-checking sites, I traced the lie back to Republican Minority Whip Steve Scalise and some deceptive talking points about


"I still believe in the same core values," he said. "I believe in family. I believe in our country, and I believe that we've got to get this crazy spending under control."

CORRECTION: This article has been updated to reflect that Harmon earned an advanced degree from Ohio University and served one term on Knox County Commission.

Got comments?
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the legislation. From there Burchett clearly did a lazy cut and paste job in a tweet, mindlessly repeating the points. The truth was the the bill would have allowed people as young as 16 to submit voter registration early, but those would not take effect until the person turned 18. Neither Burchett nor Hunley ever retracted or apologized for the error, and no news organization thought it was worth a story. I personally pressed Jesse Fox Mayshark of Compass, but to no avail.

It seems many news organizations have a mental peg named politics, one that mostly means elections and will not start until sometime late in the summer preceding an election. I fully expected a predictable pattern to play out. The League of Women Voters and other groups will hold forums and Timmy won't show. I'll try to make a story of it. No newsroom will care. I may get invited once to each of the local political chat shows, *Inside Tennessee* (WBIR) and *Tennessee This Week* (WATE), but the producer will cave to Burchett's insistence that the items be taped separately. When I reached the end of the year, this list of news tendencies proved to be prescient with a few tweaks and clarifications. Burchett did ignore the League of Women Voters. The League, following their policy, did not hold a forum for just one candidate, me, and thus the group effectively gave the incumbent veto power over that debate. *Tennessee This Week* never had me as a guest. To their credit, however, WBIR's *Inside Tennessee* went forward with a Zoom session to produce a program about the second congressional district race.

Click button to hear the WLIL Radio interview

Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE, Washington, DC 20554
Political Division 202-418-1440
Fax 866-418-0232

Mr. Darrell Bryan
WLIL Radio General Manager
1240 Simpson Road W.
Lenoir City, TN 37771
(865) 317-1322

MARK HARMON FOR CONGRESS

Dear FCC and Mr. Darrell Bryan,

On June 2, 2022, radio station WLIL, Lenoir City, aired over its public airwaves (730 AM and 102.7 FM; Facility ID 73211) a program called "Tellico Village Conservative Club Presents." The guest was incumbent Republican congressman Tim Burchett. I believe the host ran afoul of Sections 312 and 315 of the Communication Act of 1934 (requiring equal treatment in the selling or giving of non-news air time of candidates for elective federal office) when the host made a specific call to action.

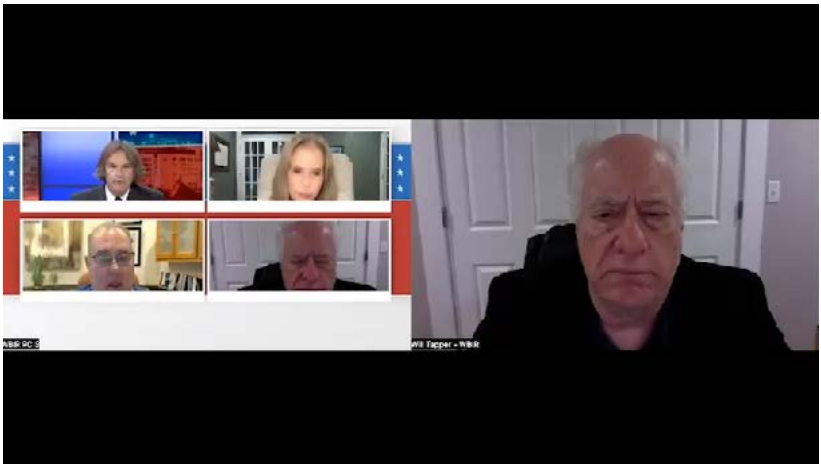
At 55:32 into the program (mp3 file available on request), the host asks, "So, if people want to help you and help your campaign, how can they do that?" Burchett replies, "Well, we've got a website, burchettforcongress.com, you know." The host interrupts to say, "I imagine there is a donate button on there." After some brief cross-talk, Burchett asks listeners not to call his Knoxville office for "campaign stuff." He says, "That's the cardinal sin. We have to be careful; I think we can refer but we can't recommend."

Burchett explains further, but the host says, "If you do want to donate to Congressman Burchett's campaign, I'm sure he'd appreciate it. He does have an opponent in the upcoming election in 2022. And we all know how important it is to send conservatives to Congress, and Congressman Burchett is one of the finest conservatives in the United States. He can be—you can donate to his campaign at Burchett, b-u-r-c-h-e-t-t, burchettforcongress.com/donate."

This appears to be a clear violation, and I believe the appropriate remedy is as follows. The program in which this apparent violation occurred was one hour. Thus, the station should be required to air in the same time slots where this program aired a one-hour program from Burchett's opponent in the November 8, 2022, election. I'm that opponent. My name is Mark Harmon and my contact information is below.

Cordially yours,

Mark Harmon, candidate for Congress, US House TN 2
mark@markharmonforcongress.com
Phone: 865-375-0490



Host John North said Burchett had been invited but declined. I asked the producer if I could record the Zoom session and he agreed. I had some very good replies to regular panelists Republican Susan Richardson Williams and Democrat Don Bosch. Williams tried to explain away Burchett's failure to debate as just good incumbent strategy. I replied that approach was "strategy not service" and "make me an incumbent, and I'll show you how I debate." Bosch picked up on my "strategy not service" line and noted I would "kill" Burchett in a debate. My favorite moment, however, came during the first commercial break. Bosch asked North, "Where's Tim?" North relayed that Burchett wouldn't appear on same taping with me. Bosch asked if he would appear solo. "We wanted him to appear with Mark," said North. I interjected, "Thank you." I took that Zoom clip and made a 21-second item that played quite prominently across my social media.

After the campaign was over, I checked my DVR to discover that the Nexstar-owned ABC Affiliate in Knoxville, WATE, did one congressional candidate program during the campaign cycle. October 30th it had dueling zoom interviews for Congressional District 3, on the south and west edges of that station's signal area. Incumbent Republican Chuck Fleischmann was first, and fielded questions about inflation, military aid to Ukraine, federal budget cuts, and a border wall. Democratic challenger Meg Gorman followed and spoke about abortion rights, immigration as a humanitarian issue, inflation, and she raised the matter of threats to democracy. Host Don

Hudson mentioned the two incumbents on the ballot, and then the program veered into a discussion of national political issues with the program's regular three-pundit panel.

Congressional District 2 makes up the vast majority of the Knoxville TV market's signal area and population. Nevertheless, the Burchett v. Harmon race never was addressed. I called *Tennessee This Week* producer Jeff McClain and asked why. He said he'd check his notes and records. In my follow-up phone call, he declared he had spoken to station management and he "can't give you a comment for that purpose."

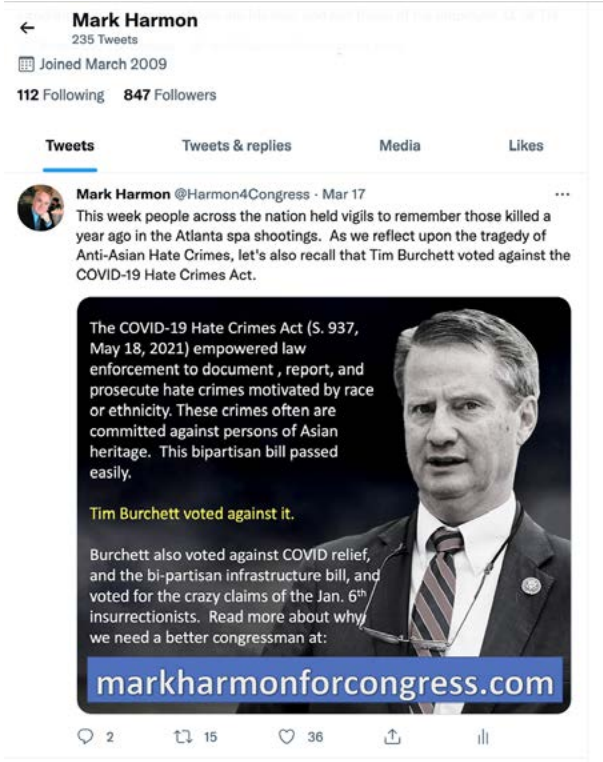
Chapter 8

Beware an Idle March

Shakespeare put the words "Beware the Ides of March" into the mouth of a soothsayer warning Julius Caesar. Mid-March this campaign saw many political intrigues, but not stabbings. The question of whether I might have an opponent in the Democratic Primary has arisen. One fellow, Jeffrey Grunau, called me and we talked about running. He lives in the west part of Knox County, and seemed to agree with me on many things. We had an interesting exchange in which he sent me a note about China playing a role in stopping Russia's war against Ukraine. I replied with a CNN opinion piece suggesting that was unlikely. He replied, "Oh, I already read through your site before I called you. I'll read your link/. I'm a fan of rationality, and not afraid to admit when I am wrong." He could be a fun addition to this campaign. In the end, he took out a petition to run as an independent, but apparently did not file it.

I then learned that a young man named Marcus Lowery filed to run as a Democrat. I discovered that he lived in the Lonsdale area, had a spotty overall and Democratic voting history (no municipal elections, plus a Republican primary in 2016). No one in the party seemed to know him. At least one of my supporters attempted to nudge him to opt instead for a Democratic run for state senate. The filing deadline was not until April 7th, so I proceeded with preparations—taking nothing for granted, but also knowing my long area-wide history of attending and assisting with Democratic Party events will help me secure the votes of the party faithful.

Much of March was spent as a web warrior. Here are two sample tweets:



Mark Harmon
237 Tweets
Back
Tweets
Tweets & replies
Media
Likes
Mark Harmon @Harmon4Congress · Mar 26
Yet another awful Tim Burchett vote. Go to my website to help us get a better congressman.
THE CROWN ACT PROHIBITS DISCRIMINATION BASED ON HAIR TEXTURE OR STYLE
Tim Burchett voted against it, and mocked the bill on Twitter
We really need a better congressman
markharmonforcongress.com
Paid for by Mark Harmon for Congress; Paul Witt, Treasurer
2
19
64

Elections Matter Because You Matter.
Congressman Tim Burchett voted to ignore election results and delay or deny the peaceful transfer of power.
He is counting on you not voting. Surprise him, and replace him.
Mark Harmon supports voting rights, abortion rights, expanded college grants, and a higher minimum wage.
Mark Harmon for Congress
Paid for by Mark Harmon for Congress
Paul Witt, treasurer.

Chapter 9

Pieces of April

Cognitive dissonance is the relevant communication term. We humans do not like holding contradictory ideas. We seek ways to resolve the discomfort. In a longshot congressional campaign cognitive dissonance abounds. As the candidate I must recognize the longshot status of this bid, yet still must muster optimism for a David v. Goliath upset—all that I can motivate myself and others for the tasks ahead.

Typically, what I told people is, "Mama Harmon didn't raise any dummies." Further, I know I'm running in a "Plus-19" Republican district, meaning most calculations are that the Republican candidate has a 19-percentage point advantage. I also remind the audience that this is a wholly unpredictable midterm with lots of insurrectionists (or insurrection-adjacent candidates) running for reelection. I also warned throughout Spring 2022 that the Supreme Court was poised to wipe out abortion rights, and allow severe restrictions on women's reproductive freedom. If any person still seems dubious about my optimism, I say that sometimes you do something not because you believe you'll win, but because you know it is the right thing to do.

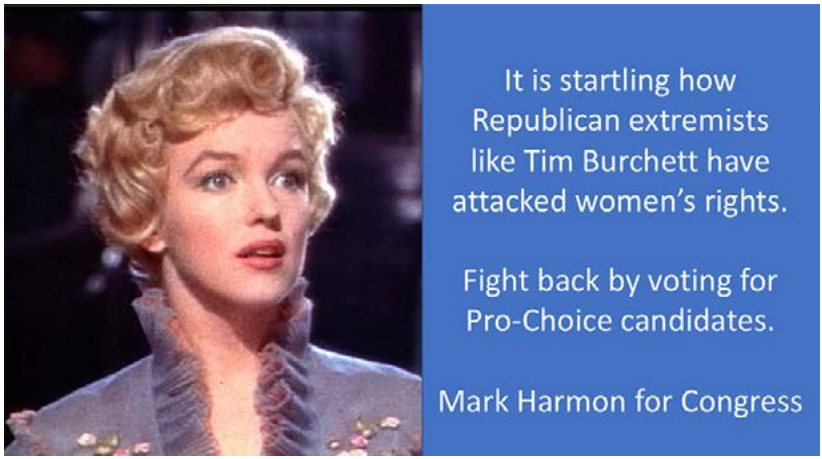
I fully expect that I'll be asked in some forum or political chat show about the long odds in this contest. My answer will be that this choice isn't about the odds of success, but about the odd and terrible voting record of my opponent.

That's the way I hope to break the awful journalistic habit of handicapping contests rather than covering them from a public policy perspective. When asked about the tired and over-used left-right, liberal-conservative spectrum, I intend to say that this election really isn't about right and left; it's about right and wrong. Burchett's votes to delay or deny the peaceful transfer of power were wrong—as were his votes against COVID relief, the bipartisan infrastructure bill, the extension of the Violence Against Women Act, the COVID Hate Crimes Act, and even against resolutions supporting our NATO allies.

The odds of winning question came up in a series of questions from a supporter in a parking lot. I tried the same series of replies I used elsewhere, but found it hard to read persuasion on her face. We both were at that location on Executive Park Drive (just off the Interstate 40 Cedar Bluff exit) for the opening of the West Knoxville Democratic Party office. The weather that day was quite unusual. As the event began, a mix of snow and rain was falling, but as it finished the sun had burst through the gloom and it was warm enough for me to pump gas into my car. Maybe the election can be as improbably as the day's weather. We take omens, and hope, where we can get it.

The most revealing of many events this month was a "Living Blue in the Village" forum at Tellico Village in Loudon County. I had my COVID-19 second booster the previous day, switching from Pfizer to Moderna for the reported benefit of doing so. Unlike past shots, I had a bit of a reaction. I awoke with a racing pulse and a generalized feeling of weakness. Becky surprised me by offering to drive me to the event. I took her up on the offer, and was so glad I did. The traffic was awful on Interstate 40. It ate up all of our planned hour of travel time, and then some.

As we neared the location, Becky and I both marveled at the mile-after-mile of upscale senior-themed mega-houses, all clustered in developments around Norris Lake. The event at the yacht club was a delight. A local candidate for county commission, Kenneth Moore, spoke first and did well. I sauntered toward the crowd, away from the lectern, and did an upbeat version of my biography/issues/strategy speech that was very well received.



Becky seemed to enjoy the event, too, including talking gardening with some of the attendees. Later she volunteered that both of us should wander around the upcoming Dogwood Arts Festival in campaign t-shirts. We did so. She concentrated on the art; I ambled up to people, chatted, and distributed my cards.

A campaign is an interplay of plans and adjustments—like a jazz musician vamping, or a quarterback calling an "audible" to change the play at the line of scrimmage, or a comedian doing an improvisation item. Originally, I had planned to have a big push of volunteers outside early voting primary sites in advance of the May 3rd county primary election. The first day of early voting I did a test run of this idea, visiting both the New Harvest Park and Downtown West early voting sites for Knox County. The turnout was light. The 100-yard marker where electioneering must end was so far from likely voter parking that it was a lousy way to reach anybody. My notion to speak to existing voters ("Please vote for me when you come back in November") had to be shelved. Now it will become more important than ever to do other gatherings like farmers' markets and festivals.

The big news of this month is that I've already won the August federal/state primary. Marcus Lowery never finished filing, so I was unopposed for the Democratic nomination. Shortly after the filing deadline passed, I created social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). These read, "The November ballot is set, Mark Harmon v. Tim Burchett. If Burchett refuses to debate, what shall we call that?" was the text over an image of a chicken.

Little did I know at the time that the USA Today Network (in other words, the former Gannett newspapers that dominate daily newspapers in Tennessee) had plans for a series of election debates/forums. The first and second district U.S. House seats, as well as the major party gubernatorial candidates, would be in a forum May 12th on the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, campus. I sent an acceptance note to the *Tennessean* (Nashville) editorial page editor David Plazas even before the formal invitations had been sent.

Chapter 10

May the Fourth Be With You

This month began with a bang, or more precisely a series of political explosions, that will reverberate throughout this election season.

The last day of April found me bopping around downtown Knoxville, introducing myself to people at Rossini-fest. It has been a big and growing event on the local calendar (COVID years excepted) for several years now—though our community has no particular links to the composer of the *Barber of Seville* and the "William Tell Overture."

Becky marvels at my ability to walk up to strangers and begin a conversation. Sometimes it is as simple as making eye contact and saying, "Hi, I'm Mark Harmon and I'm running for Congress" while I hand a person my political message card (the size of a business card). It has campaign contact information on one side, and some background and issue bullet points on the reverse.

I handed out somewhere around 300 of the cards in several hours of wandering. I got to pet some wonderful dogs and speak with their owners. Society for Creative Anachronism members in medieval costumes did hand-to-hand combat. I got the chance to speak with them during rest periods. One modern-dress contact showed the interconnectedness that can happen at events like this. I appreciated one woman wearing a Pittsburgh Steelers tank top. I proclaimed that I grew up in Pittsburgh, and I'm a Steelers fan. She and her husband responded that they had been fans for years, even though they grew up in Loudon County. I explained that Loudon was part of the district and I had been there several times. They noticed on my card that I'm a University of Tennessee professor. I said, "Yes, I'm still teaching and love it." To my great surprise, they asked if I knew Sam Swan. We took great delight in sharing stories about my great colleague who had just retired.

Rossini-fest was a delight. Perfect weather. Incredible music on several stages. Nice reception, except for one grumpy old guy who wanted to blame Democrats for inflation. I noticed in talking to him that he looked right past

my remarks about the insurrection to zero in on my reference to that bipartisan infrastructure bill. I really should have said, "So, you want the roads left to crumble." This was the second time something like this has happened. I walked away with the recognition that it showed me that most right-wingers remain very uncomfortable with the insurrection, even if they will object to that word. I'm going to push it even more—not just because it annoys them, but also because we never can forget. I hope that message will appeal to independents, moderates, and the "lean Republicans."

May 2nd is my birthday, and this year simply too many newsworthy and notable things happened on it. In passing, I should note that I turned 65 with no immediate plans to retire. I like my professor job at the University of Tennessee far too much to stop now. I'm still good at it, and likely will continue with it long after this adventure in campaigning recedes in the rearview mirror.

As my 65th birthday drew to a close, Becky and I found ourselves at a Justice Knox event in World's Fair Park Amphitheatre for the Nehemiah Action Assembly. Justice Knox is a collaborative effort of many progressive-leaning church congregations. The group picks up and researches specific local problems and public policy solutions that should be employed to alleviate the problem. Local officials then are invited to the big public meeting we attended this evening. Those officials then are confronted with both the group's findings and a series of yes/no questions asking them to commit to specific actions on two or three pressing matters.

Some people may be offended by the confrontational style of Justice Knox, but I find it refreshing and useful. The methods to get commitments may by a bit over-the-top, but appear to work—as this evening's crowd was large and enthusiastic. Across all three of this year's issues (on-demand public transit, gun violence prevention measures, and steps to reduce education disparities), Justice Knox got the requested commitments.

Moments after Becky and I returned home, a political bombshell exploded across the political landscape. The website Politico somehow had obtained a draft U.S. Supreme Court opinion Justice (term used loosely) Samuel Alito had penned. It was a screed that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*, gutting the notion of a privacy right to abortion. The question would devolve to the many misogynistic state laws, effectively wiping out a right that American women have relied upon for nearly half a century.

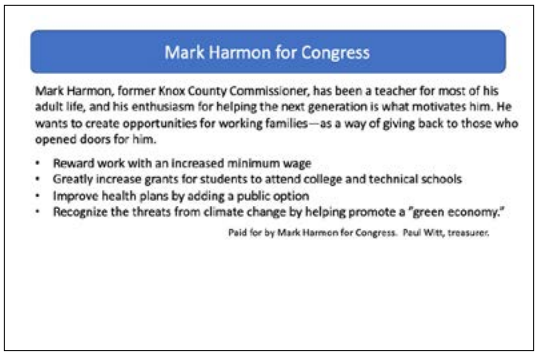
Outrage was instantaneous and loud. Rallies erupted across the country. Republicans tried to distract by talking about the court document leak, but American women and their male supporters were having none of that nonsense. The issue would remain hot, including in East Tennessee, through-

An issue explanation moment at the Justice Knox event, 2022.

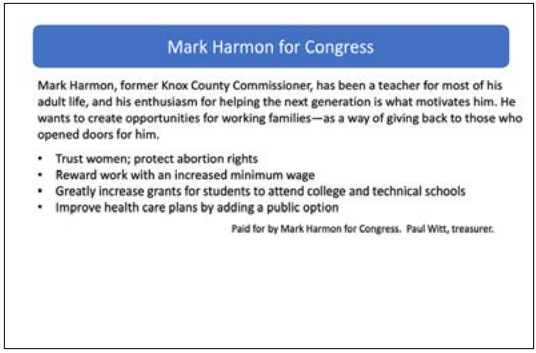
out the coming months—especially after the Supreme Court released its actual opinion (nearly identical to the draft) in June. I attended many of these rallies, some featuring long-time activists but others organized by young women—often tattooed and with colorful hair. Many seemed new to the political process, and I was pleased to see voter registration among the prompted actions.

At abortion rights rallies and at other events I find myself distributing hundreds more of my cards. This was about the time I ordered a new batch of cards, changing the bullet points to put abortion rights prominently atop the list.

The front side of my cards.



The original back side of the cards



Later version of the back side of the cards.

These cards served me very well, and were a lot more convenient than traditional political palm cards. The only downside is that they look a bit out of place when volunteers are distributing multiple candidate hand or palm cards, usually much larger, at the same time.

This month found me wandering for hours abound events like the North Hills Garden Club Plant Sale, Vestival (South Knoxville neighborhood), 'Noshville (food), and Open Streets on Sevier Avenue, once again in South Knoxville. I had done similar wandering earlier at an open street even in Lenoir City, Loudon County.

The big event in May, however, was the forum for congressional candidates (Tennessee U.S. House districts one and two) as well as major party

gubernatorial candidates—all arranged by the USA Today Network, better known as the former Gannett newspapers.

I am grateful to David Plazas of the *Tennessean* for all the effort he put into this event. That gratitude, however, is mixed with regret and annoyance for how the event/forum played out and how it was covered.

The event was in the auditorium of the University of Tennessee's Student Union on May 12th. The green room had an impressive array of food—sandwiches, chips, cookies, drinks—that could have fed the crowd of roughly one hundred people scattered across the large hall.

Head-to-head gubernatorial comparisons got frustrated by the Republican incumbent, Bill Lee. He scheduled an announcement in a different room in the student union just before the scheduled start time of the event. He likely knew that would attract the news coverage, and drive it away from the debate. Lee must have insisted on special treatment because he then wandered over to the auditorium stage to get kid-gloves treatment in a lame one-on-one interview with one reporter. The 45 minutes of softball questions clearly annoyed much of the audience. As it wrapped up, one woman called out, "That was a 45-minute commercial for his campaign." Lee then departed, leaving Democratic candidates Dr. Jason Martin and Memphis Councilman J. B. Smiley to stand at lecterns and bash Lee's policies and his outrageous absence.

University of Tennessee President Randy Boyd served as questioner for both the gubernatorial part and the final segment, congressional candidates. Democrat Cameron Parsons was there from the first district, the eastern part

of Tennessee. Of course, I was there for district two. Parson's Republican incumbent opponent, Diana Harshbarger, and my incumbent Republican opponent, Tim Burchett, did not attend. Perhaps they could cite congressional action, but I checked the congressional calendar and that was a lame excuse. Not much was happening and flights were available. They could have been there, but the cowards had no intention of doing so.

I was in good form that night, blasting Burchett and setting out a better agenda.

Only Knoxville/Tennessee Holler did much coverage of that section of the forum, but it picked out and illustrates some of the best moments. I also shared clips sporadically on my social media platforms. The *Knoxville News Sentinel* did precious little coverage of its own event. *Knoxville News Sentinel* coverage of the congressional segment was limited to this:

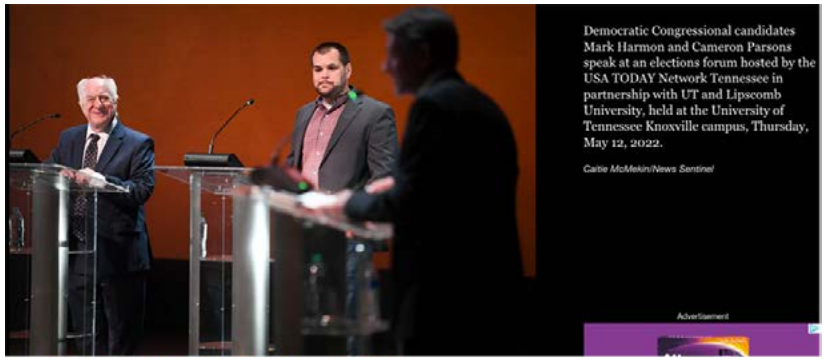
Democratic Congressional candidates Mark Harmon and Cameron Parsons speak at an elections forum hosted by the USA TODAY Network Tennessee in partnership with UT and Lipscomb University, held at the University of Tennessee Knoxville campus, Thursday, May 12, 2022. *Caitie McMekin/News Sentinel*

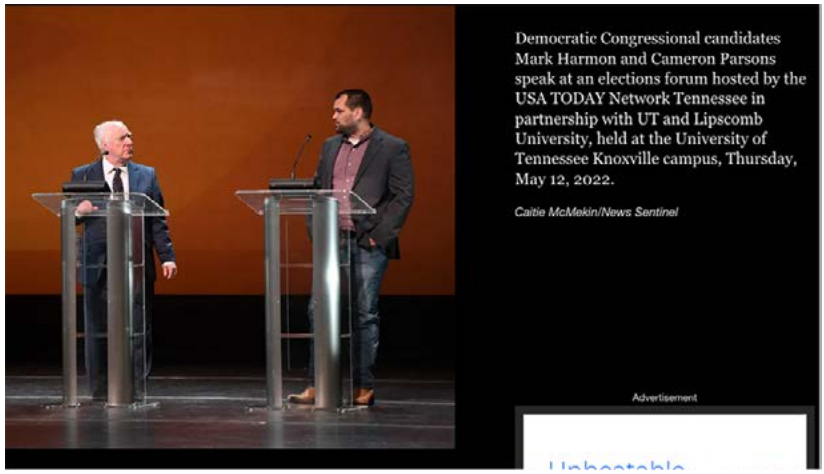
Following the gubernatorial candidates, Democratic congressional candidates Cameron Parsons, running for the 1st Congressional District, and Mark Harmon, running for the 2nd, took the stage. Republican incumbents Rep. Diana Harshbarger, R-Kingsport, and Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Knoxville, declined invitations to participate.

The next forum will be held at Libscomb University in Nashville on May 19 featuring gubernatorial candidates and congressional candidates in districts 5, 6 and 7.

Reach Melissa Brown at mabrown@tennessean.com.

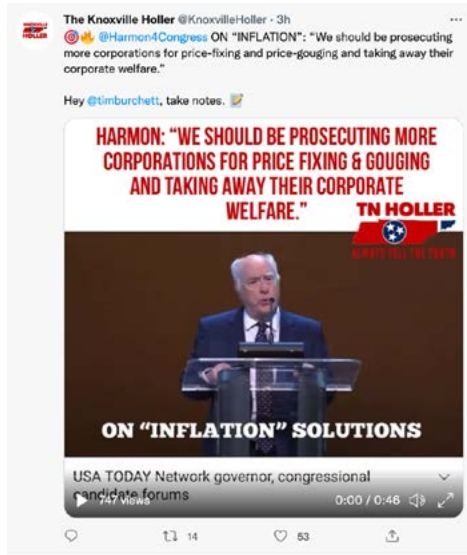
If you dig a bit deeper, you can find these photos, too.





Perhaps another factor leading to the lame, verging on non-existent, coverage of this event was the scheduling of the Golden Press Card awards at roughly the same time. This East Tennessee Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists event honors the best in local journalism. Thus, the best local reporters were downtown at a Knoxville watering hole, not around to let the public know about this moment of high political contrast.

Tennessee Holler, however, had a field day with the material.


The Knoxville Holler @KnoxvilleHoller · 3h
@Harmon4Congress ON "INFLATION": "We should be prosecuting more corporations for price-fixing and price-gouging and taking away their corporate welfare."
Hey @timburchett, take notes.
HARMON: "WE SHOULD BE PROSECUTING MORE CORPORATIONS FOR PRICE FIXING & GOUGING AND TAKING AWAY THEIR CORPORATE WELFARE."
TN HOLLER
ON "INFLATION" SOLUTIONS
USA TODAY Network governor, congressional candidate forums
0:00 / 0:46
14
53

Becky Roberts
THE CHOICE NOV. 8TH
TIM BURCHETT
JOINED LAWSUIT RESTRICTING WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.
VOTED AGAINST A BILL FUNDING PROGRAMS TO REDUCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.
VOTED AGAINST PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT
MARK HARMON
SUPPORTS REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS
WILL PUSH FOR WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS AGAINST GENDER DISCRIMINATION
SUPPORTS EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT
Mark Harmon for Congress
March 8th is International Women's Day, a good moment to remind everyone of a choice later this year.
Donna Russell and 4 others
1 Comment
Like
Comment
Share
Kim Sneed Yearman
Go Mark!!!
Write a comment...

Throughout this period, I continued to blast away at Burchett, using targeted web advertising on Facebook and Instagram. The campaign vendors, Jesse Plunkett, Brittany Speed, and perhaps others from the Loran Group, took my mockups of potential ads and improved them for use. The approach was a triangulation of these parts: a rotten Burchett vote or other action, a Votebuilder (Democratic voter database) list of persons affected by that bad vote (plus a mirror group of similar qualities), and a creative message highlighting the outrage. The metrics on these ads showed substantial effect.

Chapter 11

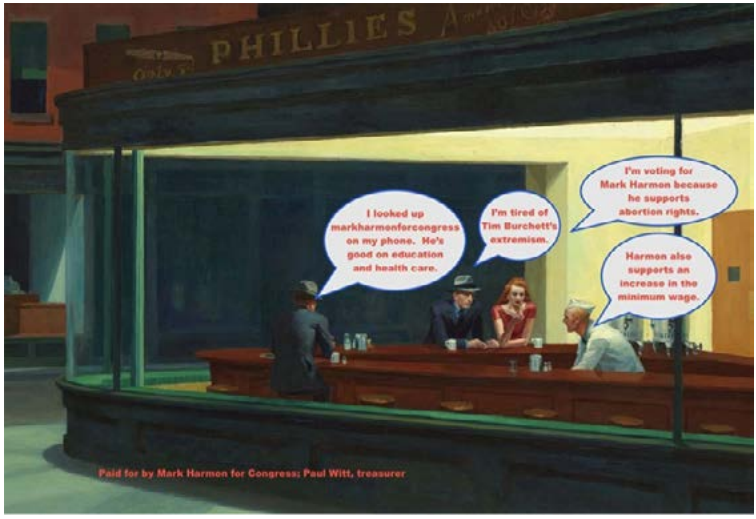
Looking into a Big Hole, and Liking It

As May ended and June dawned, Becky and I boarded a plane for a long-planned trip via the travel company Tauck. We were bound for America's Canyonlands. Becky previously had been to the Grand Canyon, but I had not. This adventure, however, was so much more than a visit to the Grand Canyon rim—as impressive and moving as that is. We gaped at row after row of hoodoos (eroded natural columns) in Brice Canyon. We walked along a stream between canyon walls in Zion National Park. We took a flight over a natural bridge, walked to a great view of Big Bend horseshoe river bend, and gently rafted with a Navajo guide to look at petroglyphs along Glen Canyon. The eight days of travel left us refreshed, a respite from my political life. We largely were among country club Republicans so we approached political conversations cautiously—though we let several of them know about our election adventure.

My opponent, meanwhile, seemed to be doing little more than the expected—carefully controlled district events almost always well distant from Knoxville, heavy fundraising from corporate and big-player donors, and a daily flow of glib tweets, often sarcastic and directed toward the Biden Administration. He has bought into the whole Roger Ailes / Fox News / Talk Radio system of poor arguments. It assumes just two sides to all issues, and two camps. In this bizarre world, any slam at any perceived flaw in the opposite camp is considered good argument and crafty reply. It is pathetic, and offensive to someone like me who has been trained in debate, argument, and logic. This flawed and foolish method has been taken up by social media trolls, and likely is the only way they know how to argue. It is the ultimate merger of Russian disinformation, MAGA lying, and angry blurts, often infused with racism and misogyny.

Web ads and creative web posts have become one of my favorite forms of campaigning, right up there with direct conversations with voters.

Here are three of my favorites:


PHILLIES
I looked up markharmonforcongress on my phone. He's good on education and health care.
I'm tired of Tim Burchett's extremism.
I'm voting for Mark Harmon because he supports abortion rights.
Harmon also supports an increase in the minimum wage.
Paid for by Mark Harmon for Congress; Paul Witt, treasurer

Mark Harmon for Congress
1d
Now that we have established that Tim Burchett went to the swamp and became just another swamp creature, the question is--which one?
Ethics Scofflaw
Corporate Suck Up
Nightmare Misogynist
Debate Skipper
Trumpian Deceit
Insurrection Adjunct
Plutocracy Apologist
Forked Tongue Liar
Denial Crocodile
Boost this post to reach up to 467 more people if you spend $14.
Boost post
Brian Carniello, Corinne Rovetti and 32 others
7 Comments 7 Shares

MARK
HARMON
FOR CONGRESS
Paid for by Mark Harmon for Congress. Paul Witt, Treasurer.

Chapter 12

Bowling for Dollars

Early in June, I learned from a reliable source that Burchett was planning a high-dollar, big-donor even at the sprawling home of a local millionaire, Pete DeBusk. The home is the largest private residence in Knox County, checking in at 40,000 square feed. The event was set for June 30th, classic timing to get great numbers for the second quarter financial report.

I decided to "counter program" with a fun event for my friends, fans, and supporters in the party room of a local bowling alley. Naturally, I put out a press release about the ironic contrast. I thought it would be an irresistible story, but local news uniformly resisted—none covered it, and one almost could sense the collective shrug in local newsrooms.

Two rescheduled events played out well in June. Knox County Democratic Party's biggest event, Truman Day, rescheduled from almost a year earlier, took place at Knoxville's Hilton. My table included my campaign treasurer Paul Witt, my wife Becky, Carol and Brian McDaniel (Brian volunteered photographic work for the campaign), parade driver Marty McLean and his wife Fran. The guest speaker, former U.S. Senator from Alabama Doug Jones, did a very good job. I had a chance to speak with him before his evening presentation. The opportunity came in a reception held at the home of local lawyer Terry Adams—or, more precisely, the four-car garage of Adams, cars removed and the room spiffed up for a gathering.

The next day I attended an attorneys' breakfast as Gettysvue Country Club, but had to scoot out of there to make a downtown Knoxville rally at Krutch Park. Weekends are beginning to jam up like that. I dash from event to event, often wearing my Mark Harmon for Congress t-shirt.

Incidentally, at one of the abortion rights rallies two supporters separately pulled me aside to tell me I dressed too casually. One was so blunt as to say, "You dress like a slob." I said I'd work to improve things, but was taken aback. Am I not to wear the campaign t-shirt that helps me introduce myself? I was wearing some gray dress shorts that went to my knee—an item my wife

helped me pick out at Kohl's. Should I wear long dress pants during sweltering 90-degree days? Part of me wanted to say, "My shoes are size 8; walk a mile in them before being so critical." I held back. Temper gets one nowhere. Sometimes, however, I feel as if I'm a caveman who just invented the wheel, and there is some well-meaning critic off to the side saying, "No, no, no. It's the wrong color."

The other rescheduled event that month was a combined Martin Luther King Jr. (moved from a bitterly cold and snowy January day) and Juneteenth parade. Paul Witt drove me in his cool red convertible. Paul joked this was one of those parades that had more people in it than watching it. The Austin East High School cheerleaders did a remarkable routine at the closing location. I recorded it and showed it on Facebook. I've mostly shared personal events on my personal page, but on rare occasions I will cross-post something from my campaign Facebook page to my personal one. I'm not quite as active on Instagram and Twitter, but have been picking up the pace.

If you ask the average person on the street or even a seasoned super citizen about the largest and most effective U.S. lobbying organization, that person likely is to say the NRA. The National Rifle Association certainly is large and important, but it pales in comparison to the Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber is such a pervasive presence in communities of any size that it is taken for granted—a normal piece of the background of community life. It also presents itself positively, a group of local business people organized for civic and charitable good. In truth, it very different at the national level—lobbying for extreme legislation that would restrict labor rights and reduced environmental protections. The policies reach down to the local level, and the local owners of small shops become the false front of nefarious and excessive corporate influence over public policies and our lives.

In East Tennessee, we have "Chamber Partnerships," the entity and organizing principle behind a development-at-all-costs philosophy. Often local government will cooperate with them on various projects, almost inevitably sold on the promise of jobs.

I clashed with the local Chamber during my time as a county commissioner over a proposed business park in the eastern end of Knox County. Midway Business Park was a dumb idea from the start. It involved tearing up rural greenery because the land was near Interstate 40. The land was ill-suited for such a use because of high sinkhole potential. Further, it wasn't needed. We already had several half-empty business parks—and changed one failed one to a recreational park.

A highly organized and motivated citizen's group fought back against Midway and won some court victories, but eventually the Chamber got what it wanted. I even created a song/skit for Front Page Follies (a gridiron show raising money for journalism scholarships). The song was "Whatever Chamber Wants, Chamber Gets," based on "Whatever Lola Wants" from the musical *Damn Yankees*. A fellow UT instructor played the temptress while I, in borrowed overalls, played a startled local farmer.

Tim Burchett, during his time as Knox County mayor, was part of an unspoken deal to get Midway for the Chamber. It involved assurances to an East Knox County Commissioner that he would get his desired new middle school (overlooking the fact that school likely would resegregate the area and violate a consent decree or court order).

All of which is a long way of introducing the face that I was invited to attend the Blount County Chamber Partnership's "Partners in Politics." It may have been more of my opponent's crowd, but I was there and had a good time. It was in a delightful facility called Smithfield Pavilion, near Maryville. I could see it likely works well as a wedding venue. It has a meandering brook, a food service area, several picturesque spots, and plenty of room under the large pavilion for table and chairs. I mixed easily with the crowd, distributing cards as usual, and listening to the three-piece family band playing hits from the 1950s and 1960s. I even partnered from a local Republican for an egg toss. We made it through several rounds at increasing distances before the egg broke.

There were several Democrats in the crowd, but I regret that many of these near-automatic Republicans do not realize they have much more in common with me than with the extremists now controlling the GOP. Small businesses often are the victims of corporate predation. It will take a lot of effort, however, to pry them loose from their predispositions.

Another June news story deserves mention. Here is how it played out.

Chapter 13

July: Heat, Parades, Fireworks, and Yard Signs

This senior softball season, as last, I was a member of the Cardinals squad. We donned our red t-shirts and took to the fields of Caswell Park. In summer that meant hot mornings grew even hotter. Becky helped me prepare a small, insulated bag—cool pack, damp washcloth, and a bottle or two of water. I recall one particular game when I was as hot as the weather—belting a single, double, and home run.

By the way, baseball caps are a forgiving and time-defying invention. In our caps, bald spots are covered and our enthusiastic faces belie and defy our advancing years. League legend is that we don't keep score, but mentally many do but quickly forget shortly after the teams line up to congratulate each other for a good game. The league picnic presented a good opportunity for me to distribute some of the newly printed yard signs.

With design help from a professional campaign consultant and former student of mine, Eva Posner, yard signs moved from computer screen to objects in my trunk. I originally thought of ordering 2000, but campaign manager, treasurer, and level-headed political guru Paul Witt talked me down to 1000. Even at that number, I took two trips to Parrott Printing to jam them into my Honda Accord so I could begin the distribution process.

A hundred went to the downtown Knoxville headquarters; I left 150 at the Cedar Bluff Democratic Headquarters. Friend and Blount County Commission candidate Phil Young was kind enough to pick up a packet of 50 signs and posts from my porch for delivery to his area. Becky and I planted some yard signs in our neighborhood, but a good chunk of the remainder were stacked temporarily in our basement. I also ordered from Borderland Tees a new wave of t-shirts for volunteers. I worked with Burns Mailing and Printing to send out a fundraising letter to likely district supporters (Democratic National Committee scores of 90+). The fundraising letter was timed

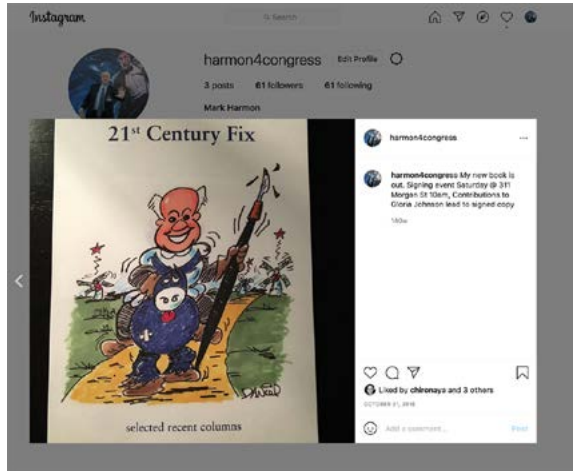
to hit midway through my forthcoming Prague trip. I had some trepidation it would work. Effectiveness is a fluid concept, but clearly the mailing needed to bring in volunteers and donations, at a minimum paying for itself. It did, and then some.

Just before the Prague trip, there were two unusual and interconnected events. Paul Witt and Marty McLean both were unavailable for the Farragut Independence Day Parade. So, Becky became my driver. I plopped my magnetic signs on the sides of her Mini Cooper and stood up through the sun roof. There I waved a flag and greeted the crowd, estimated at 3000 to 6000 people. I proclaimed "Happy Independence Day" and "Happy Fourth" and "Have a Great Fourth." The crowd was polite, if a bit confused. I heard some expressions of support. There was one heckler at the very start of the route. He was yelling something about socialism; I ignored him.

Another, perhaps more consequential, moment happened at the start of that parade. I had just stood up and popped through the roof when my phone rang. It was Darrell Bryan, the general manager of WLIL Radio in Lenoir City. He was responding to a note I had sent regarding fairness (and the provisions of Sections 312 and 315 of the Communications Act of 1934) and a recent interview on his station.

A source had alerted me to the matter. Tim Burchett had made an appearance on the station's airwaves courtesy of a program from the Tellico Village Conservative Club. Burchett was cautious about overt appeals, but the host fawned all over the incumbent Republican congressman, and made

specific appeals and instructions about how to donate to Burchett's campaign. I thought a direct appeal like that ran afoul of the equal treatment provisions of broadcast law. Bryan was an old hand at radio and a fair guy; we arranged that he would interview me in a special edition of that program that Thursday. It turned out to be a thoughtful and comprehensive interview that I kept as an mp3 file. It reflected well on me and our campaign.



Chapter 14

Czech It Out

You never can step in the same stream twice, or so the saying goes. Thus, my trip to Prague in July was by no means a replication of the class I taught there in 2019. COVID wiped out two years. In each one we recruited and had interested students, but nothing became of it because of the pandemic. The health crisis appears to have stabilized, but that could be an illusion fostered by a lull. Regardless, I once again find myself living for a fortnight in the Marriott Prague City in the lovely Flora section of Prague.

This course variation had but five University of Tennessee students, three from other universities, and two Czech student translators from Charles University. The group worked well together, learned enthusiastically, and produced some good student reporting.

Some of my free, personal time drifted back to campaign mode. I made and posted more web ads slamming Burchett, including a clever one shot in front of the Museum of Communism and highlighting Burchett's votes against Ukraine aid and against supporting our NATO allies. A lower-third graphic gave my website address under the banner "Support Western Democracy."

I also created a "Time's Up Tim" video message, one featuring the ringing of Prague's astronomical clock. Other lower-third titles highlighted Burchett's worst votes. I posted other items on Facebook and Twitter—noting more awful votes. One was against investigating neo-Nazis in the military and law enforcement. Another was against protecting women who seek abortion via interstate travel.

The most unusual Prague advance in the campaign came when a local journalist, Jana Ciglerova, learned about my quixotic campaign. She decided to do a profile of a typical lopsided U.S. congressional race, and thus brought to the readers of the nation's largest daily newspaper a case study of my campaign. We sat at a local coffee shop and she recorded our wide-ranging interview that lasted for slightly more than an hour. It was a delightful conversation

that, when it concluded, I was certain would yield a good news story. I joked in a phone call with Paul Witt that when this story appeared online and in print I then would have more coverage of my campaign in Prague than in Knoxville.

DENÍK N

ne war in Ukraine Czechia World Economy Comments Culture

July 15, 2022 1:30 p.m. American elections Interviews

I am running for Congress, although I probably don't have a chance against the Republicans, says the American professor

JANA CIGLEROVÁ + Subscribe by email

College educator Mark Harmon is a lifelong Democrat running for Congress. During the campaign, he came to Prague with journalism students from the American Knoxville. Photo: Jana Ciglerová, Deník N

Journalism professor Mark Harmon knows exactly which doors he'll be knocking on in Tennessee's second congressional district to meet moderate Republicans. Their votes are most valuable to him and can help him get into Congress. He revealed the behind-the-scenes of the political campaign in the American elections in an interview with Deník N during his visit to Prague.

What we ask in the interview:

- What chance does a Democrat have to win in a traditionally Republican district?
- What role does the repeal of the constitutional right to abortion play in the election?
- Where do the candidates get their money and who gave Mark Harmon the most?
- How much will it cost to win the election of a senator, deputy or governor?
- Why is political TV advertising passé?

You're a Democrat, you've worked as a college professor all your life, and now, on your 65-year-old knees, you've decided to run for Congress. Will you be angry that I am not too optimistic about your chances?

Prague, as it turned out, was a needed and well-timed break from the hectic world of campaigning. I did some relaxing on the outdoor patio of the hotel as I drank Czech beer and reflected on the most recent weeks of campaign effort. I did a lot more on a train ride from Prague to the delightful Moravian town of Olomuc where I played tourist.

Paul had managed to finish a required Federal Election Commission report. I missed a couple of campaign events, and would have to catch up on yard sign requests, but this respite helped prepare me for the hectic weeks ahead.

Chapter 15

Dog Days of August

Perhaps this is a good moment to mention some local political reporters, gadflies, and other observers. Brian Hornback is right-wing blogger who can be counted on to dish dirt on the latest squabbles within Knox County Republican circles, and quickly takes sides regarding them. This campaign cycle he was fair to me, and, in fact, was the first local writer to figure out I was running.

I also got a few mentions in columns within Knox News by Victor Ashe, former long-time Knoxville Mayor and former U.S. Ambassador to Poland among his many titles. He has been a guest several times in my classes for thoughtful discussions. I believe Ashe is among the many traditionalist, country-club Republicans ill at ease with the Trumpian extremists, but not certain where their next political home will be. Also writing in Knox News was a veteran and accomplished journalist, Georgiana Vines.

Knoxviews, which describes itself as progressive citizen media for East Tennessee, has been an important voice locally for many years, thanks to its owner/operator Randy Neal. Randy has become a friend. Eleven times during the campaign I posted articles on this blog under my name and account, frequently highlighting the worst of Burchett's official behavior.

Two accomplished local journalists, Jesse Fox Mayshark and Scott Barker, created and operate Compass, a must-read for its local public affairs reporting—something largely abandoned by the daily legacy newspaper, *Knoxville News Sentinel*. Barker used to be the editorial page editor at KNS and hired me to write there. I did so for several years and even picked up some local, regional and national awards for column writing. The corporate managers at KNS dropped four local columnists, including me, and I went on to write for several other local and state outlets.

Hubert Smith for years has been a media and political presence in the community. He recently has been a decidedly non-political monthly luncheon that, nevertheless, is attended by some decidedly political people. I accepted an invitation to his Motley Crew Luncheon, held early in August at

the Crowne Plaza in downtown Knoxville. The well-attended event featured many current and former local political leaders, as well as those active in charitable institutions. Political speeches (in fact, speeches of any kind) are not permitted, just food, fellowship, and self-introductions.

I noticed at one table the former and long-time congressman from Tennessee's second district, John J. Duncan, Jr., and his sister State Senator Becky Duncan Massey. Jimmy Duncan was in Congress from 1988 to early 2019. He effectively inherited the seat from his father. He may have passed the seat to his son, except for that son pleading guilty to approving bonuses for himself and six others for completing training programs that they hadn't completed. John Duncan III resigned as County Trustee. Thus, when the father retired the dynasty was over. That opened the door for Burchett to emerge from a crowded Republican field to grab the seat.

Jimmy Duncan and I have a curious history. Many years ago, we had a very polite and detailed conversation that took up nearly an entire period of an Ice Bears game. Much later, I would take him to task for errors and fallacies in his constituent newsletter. One dispute even landed both of us in Politifact, the fact checking site. Duncan had claimed, "Fewer than 10 percent of those in the House are what anyone would classify as wealthy." I used financial disclosure statements to show that claim was demonstrably untrue. Politifact agreed, and rated Duncan's claim false.

I sat at a table with a number of local charitable workers and leaders, and enjoyed a nice meal with them. When it came time for introductions, I said something like, "Mark Harmon, UT journalism professor, former county

commissioner, and I'm running for Congress against failed insurrectionist Tim Burchett." I could hear some harrumphing from the Duncan table. Too bad, truth must prevail.

Of course, late August also meant the start of classes at the University of Tennessee. I spent time preparing for the graduate-level communication theory classes I'd been assigned. I also took advantage of a visit by the leader of our Czech provider organization, Transitions, to go to many classes with him. Jeremy Druker, two past students, and I promoted next summer's Going on Assignment in Prague course. I even took Jeremy, my colleague Mike Martinez, and a visiting Czech Fulbright recipient, Tomas Karlik, to a Tennessee Smokies game. It was a welcome break from the campaign.

Chapter 16

Non-Sequitur Theatre

The yearly salary of a U. S. Congressman is $174,000, and you might think from Tim Burchett's multiple daily tweets that he views the job mostly to be a Twitter critic of Congress. The Burchett daily stream of unconsciousness on most days is a mix of right-wing talking points, good-old-boy posturing, and gut reactions that barely rise above the level of grunts. "He's a dude," Burchett would blurt in response to some story he found involving male-to-female transsexuals.

"Hang him," Burchett would respond to reports of crimes. He'd often pick out some bit of right-wing commentary to blast the Biden Administration. At one point I wrote, "You are not running against Joe Biden. You are running against me." Then I repeated my call for debates. He never replied. In fact, our actual online interactions were rare. One supporter of mine used a serious accident involving Burchett's daughter to get to a point about Burchett's lousy record on health care. I passed along and echoed a call from Knoxviews' Randy Neal that families should be out of bounds. Burchett wrote, "Thanks, Mark." The only interaction was after the election when Burchett thanked his supporters, and, surprisingly, me, giving my hashtag. I'll take it as a sincere and good gesture, even though it meant I'd be copied on all his congratulatory replies from his supporters.

I'm less prolific on social media, though during the most active days of the campaign I tried to get out a Facebook post, a tweet, and an Instagram post daily. I kept a laptop bedside so during fitful breaks in sleep I could craft posts (often using images from art and pop culture) driving home a campaign message. I'd also post photos and even a few videos. My favorites were the Insurrectionists video I captioned and a Bollywood movie trailer in support of my campaign.

If one were to put my tweets next to those of my opponent, it would read like non-sequitur theatre. I'd write about important bills and Burchett's vote on them. He would write about UFOs and Sasquatch. He'd engage in petty

give and take with critics. I would post a Labor Day message, complete with Joan Baez singing "Joe Hill."

My favorite pseudo-interaction was when Tim Burchett couldn't come up with an original excuse for not debating me. He said my first vote would be to reelect Nancy Pelosi—a Republican National Committee nonsense point dating back to at least 2013. I did not know then who would be running for speaker in 2023, but I said my first choice would be Katie Porter. (Best wishes to Hakeem Jeffries who stepped up to lead the House Democrats in 2023; and many thanks to Nancy Pelosi for her historic and effective leadership, including stellar work as Speaker.)

Perhaps some insight can be gained from examining my most popular tweets during the campaign period. A large set of my social media posts may be found in the multimedia extensions of this book, but this chart gives a sense of what ones did best in reverberating around the internet. One notices right away that, at least regarding Twitter, visual elements were not a key element. Two of the top seven had no image or video. The calls to debate and efforts to correct demonstrably untrue statements made a significant number of impressions. The high impression tally largely centered around tweets and events during the hectic last three months of the campaign.

Most Popular Tweets (5000 or more impressions)

Description	Impressions (date)
I call on Tim Burchett to remove a factual error in his constituent newsletter. He wrote the Inflation Reduction Act will "increase the United States' deficit by $146 billion." CBO calculates the legislation will yield a net decrease in the deficit by $102 billion over 2022–2031 (no image or video).	12,303 (Sept. 2)
In response to an FBI raid regarding a serious misuse of government documents, Tim Burchett tweets "This just in, no pedophiles who were associated with Epstein have been arrested yet Mar-a-lago was raided?" Let's help Tim with his memory problem. Trump with Epstein photo.	9,979 (Aug. 9)
The Starting Point of a Blue Wave, Stylized Alphonse Mucha poster of a woman. Added captions "Honor Women by Respecting Their Rights. Vote for Pro-Choice Candidates."	9,192 (Oct. 9)
The Aug. 4 primary made it official. The election this November pits me against failed insurrectionist Tim Burchett. Let me renew my call for televised debates this September or October. What say you, Tim? Chicken image.	6,961 (Aug. 6)
Thanks to all 66,637 people who wanted me to be their congressman (no image or video).	6,364 (Nov. 9)
Inside Tennessee, Burchett ducks debating me; 21 sec. clip.	5,510 (Oct. 3)
The choice made clear. Mar-a-Lago Classified documents on a carpet.	5,280 (Sept. 3)

Video played a much more prominent role in Instagram posts. None of the still images put on Instagram made the top list. Except for one downloaded GIF in which a cartoon uterus transforms into judicial scales, all the top items were video I shot and edited. The most seen and loved, by far, was dramatic footage of abortion rights protesters in Knoxville's Krutch Park

singing "I am sovereign in my body. I am sovereign in my soul. We will not. We will not. We will not be controlled."

Most Popular Campaign Instagram Posts (50+ Loves)
"Abortion Rights Rally in Krutch Park," 1,691
"Remember This on Election Day" uterus transforms into judicial scales GIF, 114
"Pander Bear" bought clip of person in panda suit taking joy in cash, 102
"Ukraine Fundraiser" quick video clip of musicians, 90
"Trust Women," remains of burnt Planned Parenthood (Profile version), 82
"Comparison" online relay of one of my TV ads, 76
"Abortion Rights" video combining protest footage and my appearance at a forum, 64
"Revealing Moment" from my Inside Tennessee appearance (Tim ducks me), 53
"Denny's and Ethics" (Profile version), 53
"Abortion Rights Rally in Market Square," a pan across the chanting crowd, 52

Chapter 17

September 14, 2022, a Very Good Day

This day, and part of the night before, left me with a deep sense of satisfaction that key elements of the campaign are coming together. Events turned noticeably in my favor. Anxieties about past sluggish action faded away. I even let myself contemplate the incredibly remote possibility of pulling off an astounding upset.

The evening of the 13th I fulfilled a pledge made weeks earlier to attend a Women's Reproductive Freedom event organized by the newly revitalized Loudon County Democratic Women. I gave a good, but brief, presentation, less than four minutes, on abortion rights. The key action, however, was that I had a local Democrat record my presentation on my iPhone.

That crucial idea, and fortuitous act, grew out of a Zoom chat I had just a few hours earlier with my web ads guru, Jesse Plunkett of the Loran Group. Jesse suggested, and I agreed, that we need to narrow our array of web ads to the four to six proven to be the most effective. Further, we should move away from clicks to the website and financial contributions as key goals. We agreed to shift to multiple times connecting with targeted voter groups.

We also would bid on, and probably acquire cheaply, some ads associated with "search," specifically Google searches for Mark Harmon or Tim Burchett. Jesse and I concurred we needed to make a strong push with pro-choice women with only middling or higher Democratic leanings. He hinted at how a good video regarding that would be helpful, and I promised to deliver both some video and a quality list downloaded from Votebuilder.

The forum was well attended and had other benefits. State Representative candidate Dr. Jan Hahn gave a moving account of his text and phone exchanges with his daughter. Both are obstetric gynecologists. The exchanges concerned a problem pregnancy with one of his daughter's patients, and how to proceed in the legal thicket of Tennessee's antiabortion laws. You could feel the pain of all involved, as Hahn, the son of an ob/gyn and the father of

another, explained the dangers posed by our legislature's interference in this intensely private medical matter.

Corinne Rovetti, formerly with the now-shuttered Knoxville Center for Reproductive Health, and Tory Mills, a former Planned Parenthood staffer, at the same event offered compelling and specific stories about how the U.S. Supreme Court and our state legislators have gone to extreme lengths to deny abortion rights. Tennessee's GOP supermajority made no exceptions in their ban for rape, incest, or the life/health of the pregnant woman. Some of those legislators lie, and claim an "affirmative defense" is sufficient. I don't believe our ob/gyn doctors are comforted by a process that first charges them with a crime, and then outlines a potential defense that may or may not work within the contours of our state's draconian laws.

The event also taught me about Mountain Access Brigade, a fund and a group offering financial assistance for abortion, transit, referrals, emotional support, and emergency contraception. This effort helps Tennessee women seeking abortion health care in other states. Becky and I made a contribution.

Our "Mark Harmon for Congress" campaign is right, both morally and in terms of political strategy, to stress abortion rights as an issue. The moral case is so strong I'd press it even it was not politically advantageous. I also think we are right to use web advertising as a way to target voters, mostly via Instagram and Facebook. Of course, I also post daily on my Mark Harmon

for Congress Facebook page, my Harmon4Congress Instagram, and Harmon 4Congress tweets.

Twitter is the preferred medium of my opponent, but he does not engage me or my public policy concerns. He often just proffers silly observations or reuses stale Republican talking points about President Joe Biden or other Democrats. It's all part of a broader pattern of not learning, or caring to learn, how to argue properly. The methods used by Burchett and so many others is a shallow and cynical technique practiced on talk radio and Fox News. In this world almost all things are political, and there are but two sides. You don't have to respond directly to an opposing claim. All you need do is pass along some slur about someone perceived to be on the other side. Direct and meaningful clash of ideas, supporting evidence, debunking of logical fallacies, factual accuracy, and critical thinking all suffer in this shallow and pathetic space.

Several people at the abortion rights forum reported seeing my web ads or social media posts, or both. The next day I was able to edit video from my brief presentation on reproductive freedom to the end of a previous video I had produced—a moving series of stills from an abortion rights rally in Knoxville's Krutch Park all paired with the protesters singing, as noted earlier, for their reproductive freedom.

Chapter 18

Mid-September to Late October

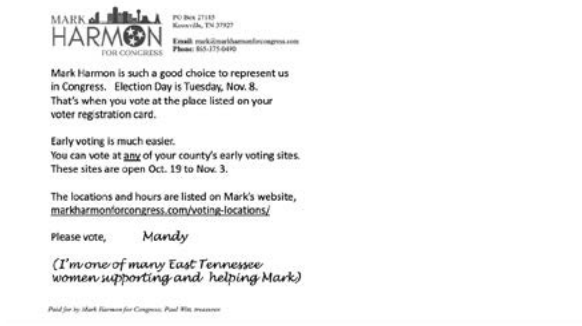
These days flew by in a whirlwind of activity and a rollercoaster of emotions. I set up a regular volunteer night every Thursday at the West Knox County Democratic headquarters. Typically, the volunteers would work on personalized post cards, and even would take home additional cards and address stickers to complete. Some of my volunteers in Loudon and Blount counties did similar work.

The typical Thursday evening turnout ranged from six to twelve people. Their enthusiasm buoyed me through some rough moments as analysis sites like Nate Silver's fivethrityeight.com would estimate my share of the vote at somewhere in the 29 to 31 percent range. These must be extrapolations from national trends. I tell Paul Witt, my friend, treasurer, and campaign manager, that I'll get 38 percent of the vote. He thinks more like 33.

One has to accept with delegation to volunteers that mistakes will be made. Two cards came back with no address labels. One came back to the campaign PO Box with neither stamp nor label. One volunteer wrote "pro life choice" candidate instead of the clearer pro-choice. I can't quibble or complain too much. Volunteers through this period increasingly helped with so many voter contact activities.

I had Burns Mailing and Printing make pro-choice cards, some with a preproduced message from "Mandy" (based on super-volunteer Amanda King from Blount County) and others blank for a personal note. We also had comparison cards. Both were oversized and required regular first-class mail postage (not post card rate). The closer we got to Election Day, the more we switched from cards to phone calls. Mostly these were Get Out The Vote calls to persons with a fairly solid likelihood of voting for Democrats but a spotty record of voting in off-year elections.

The mail in mid-October also was filled with some disgusting post cards, courtesy of the Tennessee Republican Party. The other University of Tennessee professor on the ballot in November was Greg Kaplan, a professor of



MARK HARMON FOR CONGRESS

Mark Harmon is such a good choice to represent us in Congress. Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 8. That's when you vote at the place listed on your voter registration card.

Early voting is much easier. You can vote at any of your county's early voting sites. These sites are open Oct. 19 to Nov. 3.

The locations and hours are listed on Mark's website, markharmonforcongress.com/voting-locations/

Please vote, *Mandy*

(I'm one of many East Tennessee women supporting and helping Mark)

Spanish and Distinguished Professor in the Humanities (I once coauthored a research paper with his wife who also is a UT Spanish professor). Greg and the local Democrats were making great strides toward flipping House District 18, and the statewide GOP was working hard to prop up extremist candidate Elaine Davis.

The Tennessee Republican Party flooded district mailboxes with an oversized card that called Greg Kaplan a "radical liberal" (standard fare for the Tennessee GOP; when you stand that far to the right, everything looks left). The card took an unflattering photo of Greg and then altered his features to make his nose seem larger. Kaplan is Jewish. The Knoxville Jewish Alliance, just days before the election, declared "The distortion of Jewish features in media and print has been used as negative propaganda throughout history." The KJA continued, "The use of caricatures in his manner is wildly dangerous and we call it out as antisemitism." The retiring Republican incumbent in the 18th District, Eddie Mannis, echoed the criticism, but the Tennessee GOP had little to say, and Davis said she had nothing to do with the mailers and had no prior knowledge of the content.

The Tennessee Republican Party also tried to prop up their extremist candidate David Poczobut, running under the alias David Pozy. One such card misrepresented Democratic incumbent Gloria Johnson's position on several issues by miscasting her vote against a GOP supermajority budget bill. No matter, Gloria had her usual superb campaign operation in her newly drawn district, and she won handily with 57.9 percent of the vote. Greg Kaplan, however, lost, getting 44.21 percent of the vote.

Ever since the U.S. Supreme Court muddled speech with money in the 2010 Citizen's United case, it has been easy and legal for nearly unlimited money to flow to targeted campaigns from third-party groups. Even political PACs such associated with political parties have only loose rules. Campaigns cannot coordinate with such efforts. For example, I only learned after the fact that the group Indivisible was spending money on anti-Burchett ads in

my contest. People would tell me about seeing those ads in various places, sometimes thinking I had some role. I'd correct them gently. The good news is that, unlike some of the Tennessee Republican Party items I discovered in other campaigns, all the anti-Burchett material I found on Indivisible's ByeByeBurchett website was well sourced.

Endorsements were a more significant campaign element twenty or thirty years ago. Fewer newspapers lately are doing them—and even when they did endorse, their overall influence was very slight. Organizations, of course, can exert some influence through communication with their membership, and even mobilization of resources.

Political parties, of course, pick their battlegrounds based on likelihood of success. Thus, my campaign got little more than good wishes and some free online seminars from the Democratic National Committee. The Tennessee Democratic Party, for which I had just served eight years on its executive committee, provided to me and all candidates a voter database at a reasonable price, plus some zoom gatherings and one or two in-district events I could attend. Knox County Democratic Party was very helpful with texts, including my material in block walks, and other assistance. County parties in Blount, Loudon, and Claiborne counties also were helpful.

I was pleased to get so many endorsements in my quixotic crusade for better public policy. I was endorsed by both the United Auto Workers and the Tennessee AFL-CIO based on my support for working families. Alliance

for Retired Americans endorsed me based on my support for Social Security and Medicare, and presumably on the threat posed by Republicans to those vital programs. My most treasured endorsement, however, was from the Reverend Harold Middlebrook, a national civil rights icon who worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and settled in Knoxville as a pastor. I got to know "The Rev" while working on a documentary about his life. That COVID-delayed documentary and this book came together in the same month.

One other October event stands out for its ambition, organization, and one or two moments of strangeness. Pellissippi State Community College invited all on-ballot federal and state candidates in the area to a rolling meet-and-greet, one taking the candidates to three of the college's five campuses for opportunities to interact with students and staff. Overall, it was delightful and reasonably well attended. I had great conversations with young people at all three locations, including some who interviewed me as part of a class assignment to speak with candidates. Candidate turnout was quite a mix. Two Republicans in the state legislature were there, Dave Wright and Justin Lafferty. I had pleasant small talk with each. Dave and I served together on Knox County Commission. Lafferty, his daughter, and I chatted amiably about soccer and European travel, avoiding the broad political differences between us like wary relatives around the Thanksgiving table.

Our Democratic superstar in the state legislature was there, as was Wright's Democratic opponent Zeke Streetman. We also had two independent candidates for Tennessee governor, one of whom was a fellow named Basil Marceaux. He had been griping to anyone who would listen about his accommodations at the Econo-Lodge. Some candidates took their own cars to the various campuses, but Johnson, Streetman, Marceaux and I opted for the Pellissippi-provided van and driver.

The rides gave Marceaux an opportunity to spout conspiracy theories from the deepest online recesses. Streetman and I, in the back of the van, shared disbelieving and bemused glances. Gloria, sat in the passenger seat next to the driver, and asked questions of Marceaux in the seat behind the driver, skillfully trying to draw the independent gubernatorial candidate out without ever being disrespectful. At one point, Marceaux was blasting the United Nations for some secret proviso in its 1962 founding. I suggested he check his sources because the U. N. was founded in 1945. It was a deep dive into a weird world, and I was glad at closing to get back to my car and to drive to the UT campus.

Chapter 19

A Gonzo-Like Rush to Election Day

I'm tempted for these closing days to write in the style of famed Gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson. He'd reportedly awake from drug-fueled adventures with vague memories about bizarre occurrences, perhaps consulting his 300-pound Samoan attorney (actually a 250-pound Chicano lawyer) on what the hell happened. Though I appreciate the method, that's not really my style—even if these closing moments of the campaign do look in retrospect like one rollicking blur of action, anarchy, and courage mixed with a tad of self-delusion.

The closing weeks of this campaign found me frenetically moving about to meet voters at events all over the district, yet somehow still managing to meet all my classes and fulfill all my University of Tennessee teaching, research, and service duties.

These interactions are part of the joy of campaigning. If you don't enjoy them, you are not campaigning properly. Yes, I did my share of Democratic Party and Abortion Rights events, speaking mostly to likely supporters (and meeting some great dogs and their owners at a Crafty Bastard Brewery abortion rights event). I also went to a Save the Trees event in a downtown Knoxville pocket park, the Kuumba celebration of African American heritage, Blount County Pride, Claiborrne County's Fair, a celebration of the Knoxville World's Fair 40th anniversary, the HoLa festival, a rally for early voting, and a fundraiser in support of Ukraine.

Food plays a big part of campaigning. I campaigned at Farmers' Markets in both Union County and downtown Knoxville. I dropped in to say hello at Loudon Liberals for Sanity dinner. I ate very well at India Fest, Asia Fest, Knox Food Fest, the Cumberland Estates Chili Fest, and Alcoa's Fall Fest at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center, and in the closing hours of the campaign at Greek Fest.

I had a great lunch at Greek Fest, and brought home lots of dinner items to Becky.

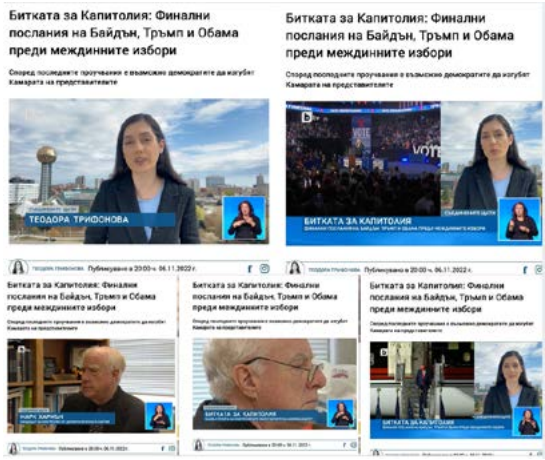
This tweet, Instagram item, and Facebook post captures one of my favorite moments of the campaign. The reception during the Pride Parade on Gay Street in Knoxville left me joyous and overwhelmed.

The folks at Act Blue had given me a wooden block countdown calendar to keep track of the days until the election. That calendar was in single

digits when I went to a delightful event, one in which people were surprised and delighted to see me. I dropped in for several hours on the Appalachian Mountain Bike Club festival, held in the Baker Creek preserve of Knoxville's Urban Wilderness. It was a delight to see parents and their young children, all properly helmeted, challenging themselves on mountain bike obstacles and trails. I mingled with hundreds of people. Some were from out of state, but many were local and several said they had already voted for me. The early voting period had just closed. This young, progressive, nature-oriented crowd almost universally was in my corner. It buoyed my spirits.

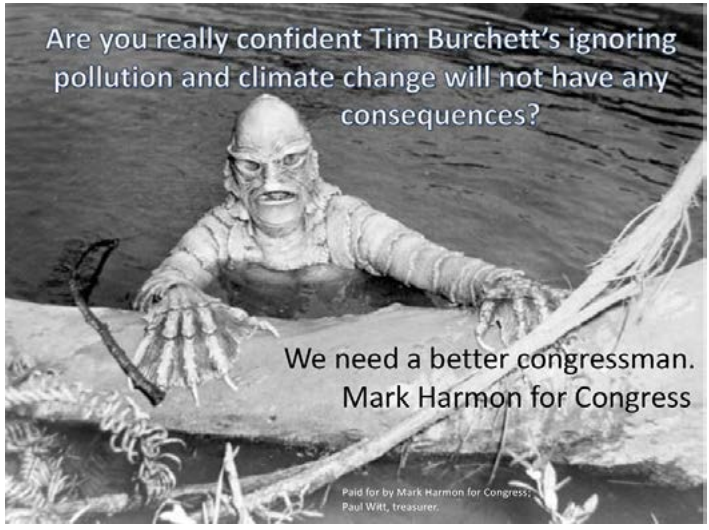
A week earlier my spirits faced a more daunting challenge, the Grainger County Fall Festival. Folks were polite enough, but I knew this would be a very tough county for me. The big draw at this festival was the beauty pageants with young female contestants ranging from toddlers to teens. Becky was aghast when I relayed news of this anachronistic and misogynistic relic still alive and well in East Tennessee.

Several national and international news organizations were in e-mail contact these days, but not for significant stories. Most just wanted a photo of me to use in graphics for their postelection results pages. I supplied them a nice head shot I'd used throughout the campaign for everything from news to candidate questionnaires. It was from a photo crafted by my volunteer campaign photographer, Brian McDaniel. One campaign news story did emerge from one of my Ph.D. students, Teodora Trifanova. She had worked for Bulgarian TV, and still submitted stories to them. She and another graduate



student decided my campaign would be a nice and convenient segment for an election preview. So, they showed up in my office, interviewed me, asked for and got some campaign still shots, and included the material. She was kind enough to provide a link to the finished work.

After the link, I shared this compilation of screen grabs, noting that I now had gotten more coverage on Bulgarian TV than on two Knoxville television stations.



Chapter 20

No Cinematic Ending

Take a flight of fancy with me. The results come pouring in and they run in my favor. The local media are perplexed and startled. Burchett's eyes get as round as saucers as he sees his near-guaranteed seat slipping away. The final tally has me in the lead. I speak to a raucous and crowded ballroom, saying "Look what you have done." A joyous song from Queen, "Don't Stop Me Now," blares from speakers. Hugs and laughter abound. The song switches to Shania Twain's "You're Still the One" as I slow dance with Becky and fight back tears of joy. Oh, what should have been.

If life were just or fair, or even cinematic, this campaign would have ended differently from how it actually played out. Bitter reality dictated there would be no Capraesque finale. Mr. Harmon would not go to Washington. All the John Does of this district did not get a better State of the Union. American Madness prevailed in the overwhelming reelection of the insurrection-adjacent extremist Tim Burchett. My Wonderful Life would go on as a teacher, not a

federal legislator. So, here is how It Happened One Night—Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2022, at Holly's Gourmet Market in the Bearden area of Knoxville.

I flitted from table to table, too nervous to stay in one conversation or one spot too long. Groups had informally gathered in separate spots. One table held parade devotees Linda Haney, Shannon Webb, and Janice Spoone. Another was where you could find County Commissioner Courtney Durrett and my treasurer/manager/guru Paul Witt. At another end of the café various campaigners sat with open laptops checking the latest local returns and taking phone calls from poll watchers with precinct tallies.

I'd get optimistic reports like "You won Sequoyah" or "You carried Dogwood." The larger picture, however, was more downbeat. The final tally was Tim Burchett, 141,041 votes or 67.91 percent; Mark Harmon, 66,637 votes or 32.09 percent. There were some silver linings. I did one percentage point better than by Democratic predecessor, Renee Hoyos, did in 2020. The Harmon percentage was 2.8 percentage points better than Nate Silver's projection at fivethirtyeight.com. I also carried the City of Knoxville precincts by more than five thousand votes. The tally was 22,959 Harmon (56.14%) versus 17,939 (43.86%) for Burchett. I carried 33 of those precincts to just 16 for the incumbent. Mine also was a very efficient campaign, spending roughly $1.20 per vote compared to seven or eight dollars per vote for Burchett.

This group of candidates and campaigners prodded the Knox County Democratic Party to greater heights in 2022. I was proud to be in their number.

It all ended with an anticlimactic text I sent this to Compass reporter/owner Jesse Fox Mayshark. I wrote, "This campaign ends with an awful sym-

metry. It began with Tim Burchett denying the results of an election. It ends with me accepting the results of an election. I congratulate the incumbent on securing another term." No concession speech needed. No other news media interested in chatting. I joked with the WVLT reporter about his assignment editor being surprised we Democrats were celebrating at Holly's Gourmet Market. I introduced myself to the WATE reporter, and said "Your station almost covered my campaign."

The next few days brought more detailed election results.

County by County Tallies, TN2, General Election 2022

County	Burchett	%	Harmon	%
Blount	30,042	76.03	9,472	23.97
Campbell	3,321	83.6	653	16.4
Claiborne	5,695	85.36	977	14.64
Grainger	4,705	87.44	676	12.56
Jefferson (1 pct.)	459	79.41	118	20.42
Knox	77,873	60.84	0,123	39.16
Loudon	15,543	79.26	4,037	20.59
Union	3,449	84.78	617	15.17
Districtwide	**141,041**	**67.91**	**66,637**	**32.09**

As expected I did well in the city, less well in the outlying areas of Knox County, and not well at all in the outlying counties whose "rote Republican voting" is persistent and difficult to dislodge. The statewide candidate comparisons were interesting. Our effort did relatively well.

Congressional Democrats in Tennessee, 2022 General Election

District	Candidate	Total Votes	Percentage	# Candidates
1	Cameron Parsons	37,032	19.71	4
2	**Mark Harmon**	**66,637**	**32.09**	**2**
3	Meg Gorman	60,230	30.27	4
4	Wayne Steele	44,628	25.74	5
5	Heidi Campbell	93,375	42.29	5
6	Randal Cooper	65,598	33.66	2
7	Odessa Kelly	68,897	38.13	3
8	Lynette P. Williams	51,083	24.30	4
9	Steve Cohen	93,755	70.04	5

On close inspection, my county and precinct vote tallies generally ran ahead of the top of the ticket, our Democratic gubernatorial candidate Dr. Jason Martin. The tally for me also often ran ahead of other Democrats in local races.

Epilogue

Here's an easy way to think about the 2022 U.S. election. It was a 5-G election, but that's not a reference to the speed and capacity of wireless connections. Instead, the five G's were: guilt, grievance, greed, gullibility, and gerrymandering.

Guilt for the January 6, 2021, insurrection hung like an albatross on the shoulders of several GOP candidates. Republicans like Tim Burchett voted to give insurrectionists the truth-denying, democracy-destroying vote those Capitol Hill rioters wanted. Burchett tried various strategies of ignoring, dismissing, and downplaying his vote, and local news organizations largely let him get away with it. Freed from that accountability, Burchett and other Republicans pursued Donald Trump's mantra of grievance in an effort to keep happy Trump's cult-like devotees.

Greed has been at the heart of Republican strategy since Ronald Reagan embraced trickle-down, supply-side fantasy as public policy. Greed remains

there today. The 2022 election found Republicans trying to blame on President Joe Biden the post-pandemic global wave of inflation. Their solution? Tax cuts for rich people and corporations, the same policy that at least thrice has failed. Burchett is a skilled practitioner of this con game: spread generalized whining about federal spending and debt, then make that debt worse with tax gifts to your big contributors, and make plans to cut "entitlements," which constituents think is welfare to the unworthy but which actually is their hard-earned Social Security and Medicare.

Gullibility in falling for this message once again, plus xenophobia about immigrants and beating up on transsexual kids, was the Republican message. It didn't work. Usually in a midterm the president's party loses a substantial number of congressional seats. That really didn't happen. Democrats gained a net one Senate seat. For the first time since 1934, the party in the White House did not lose control of a single state legislative chamber, and flipped at least three to their favor. The U.S. House did go from a razor-thin Democratic majority to a razor-thin Republican majority, but that was due almost entirely to gerrymandering district boundaries.

Take Tennessee as an example. The Republicans in our state legislature supermajority split metropolitan Nashville, a Democratic area, among three outlying districts as a way to grab one more seat. That inevitably led to eight Republican seats, and only the Memphis area represented by a Democrat.

Political pundits doubted the Democratic strategy of stressing two issues, abortion rights and democracy. Those pundits were wrong. Women

and young people expressed their outrage at the extreme Supreme Court decision. Many voters also were concerned with insurrection. Election results deniers got thumped in many states. GOP-led efforts made voting more difficult, but voters put up with the inconvenience to vote out some of the worst candidates.

Those national currents were only a trickle by the time they got to the Second U.S. House District of Tennessee. Nevertheless, I feel some pride in advancing those causes and fighting the good fight. Putting together my time in Texas and my much longer time in Tennessee, my name has been on a public ballot ten times, and I've won eight of them. I'm comfortable now stepping into the background of helping campaigns, and not being the candidate. I return to the classroom with a lot of political communication experience, and I likely will get back into writing newspaper columns.

As for Tim Burchett, he remains a Twitter blurter, pushing the same stale themes. There definitely is too much schwantz in Congress.

About the Author

Mark Harmon is a professor of journalism and media at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He has authored five previous books, dozens of academic research articles, and scores of research presentations. He served from 2006 to 2010 as an elected Knox County Commissioner, and wrote the book *Crashing the Commission* about that experience.

Harmon has been a TV news producer, a radio reporter and interview host, and news columnist. He has won two national awards for his teaching and three national awards for his newspaper column writing. He is most proud, however, of his Dishonorable Mention in the Bulwer-Lytton contest for deliberately bad writing. Mark lives in Knoxville with his wife Becky who made his campaign possible and bearable. He is grateful to all those who helped with this noble fight.