

# Will the “War on Women” Keep Colorado Perpetually Blue?

☒ Living in Colorado, I’ve been seeing a lot of dueling campaign commercials lately between U.S. Senator Mark Udall, who is a Democrat, and his Republican challenger, U.S. Congressman Corey Gardner. The two are squaring off in November in what strategists see as a vitally important race that may just decide which party will hold the majority in the U.S. Senate.

Both sides have spelled out their strategies pretty clearly through what they’ve been broadcasting.

Gardner is primarily hitting Udall on his support for *everything Obama*, pointing out a record of voting with the president (who has lost a lot of popularity in the state) 99% of the time. More specifically, he’s been going after things like Udall’s support for Obamacare, and his opposition to the Keystone Pipeline (economic and jobs issues). Udall, on the other hand, is nailing Gardner for his endorsement of a voter-rejected amendment to the state constitution four years ago, that would have defined *personhood* as “every human being from the beginning of the biological development of that human being.” It was an anti-abortion measure.

If one were judging the wisdom of the opposing campaign blueprints based on what voters say are the most important issues to them, one would have to give Gardner the edge. After all, jobs and the economy have been the primary concerns of Americans (including Coloradans) for quite some time. Most within the state oppose Obamacare, and most support oil drilling, including fracking which has been great economically for Colorado. Udall has been skittish about his position on fracking while Gardner is a big proponent of it.

Based on recent election history, however, the cynic in me doesn't see how Udall (even in this very tight race) can lose if he simply sticks with the Democrats' proven "War on Women" rhetoric, claiming that his foe, if elected, will ban women from using contraceptives.

It's precisely the same playbook that won Democrat Michael Bennet his U.S. Senate seat back in 2010, even as the historic *Tea Party Tsunami* flipped seats throughout the rest of the country, letting the Republicans capture the House of Representatives. It was also part of the Democrats' Colorado strategy when President Obama ran for re-election in 2012, and handily won our electoral votes here.

Republicans in my state keep calling the empty rhetoric *old, tired, dishonest, and a distraction* – all of which are true in my opinion. That doesn't change the fact, however, that the method continues to be effective at compelling people to vote against their stated self-interests and priorities, simply to punish a candidate whose social view (or at least *perceived* social view) they disagree with.

For whatever reason, Colorado is particularly susceptible to this form of identity politics, as former U.S. Senate candidate Ken Buck found out four years ago.

As mentioned above, Gardner's record has provided some ammunition to the Democrats. The broadness of the personhood amendment, which Gardner later disavowed and called his support for "a well-intentioned mistake", would have indeed restricted *certain forms* of birth control. Gardner says that wasn't his intent, and has tried to make that clear by now supporting the idea of making contraceptives available over-the-counter in Colorado.

Udall and his supporters aren't letting that slide, however. Their key focus has been to point to the personhood initiative as evidence that Gardner is "too extreme" for Colorado. And

predictably, it seems to be working. The issue has built a solid advantage for Udall among women voters, and Gardner can't seem to make up any new ground in the very tight race.

All of this might change by November, of course, but I'm not counting on it. And as a conservative who recognizes the big picture problems that are going on in this country right now, the fact that elections keep being decided by eye-rolling hyperbole, like contraception fear-mongering, is nothing short of maddening.

Our country faces incredibly serious problems. We're approaching an \$18 trillion national debt with a chronically-low economic growth rate. The entitlement culture continues to expand well beyond our capacity to sustain it, while more and more Americans continue to leave the workforce. Full-time jobs are being replaced with part-time jobs nationwide. Our country's dwindling influence on the world stage is emboldening our enemies and encouraging violent unrest across the globe. The Affordable Care Act is increasing the cost of healthcare, while limiting its quality and disrupting doctor-patient relationships. Corrupt government agencies are using their power to hurt political foes, and stonewall investigations.

Yet, our leaders in the Washington majority, who are fueling and presiding over this catastrophic mess, seem to be able to maintain power in these close contests simply by accusing their opponents of misogyny.

In the case of Colorado, the best evidence being presented to bolster such a notion is Gardner's inconsequential support of what comes down to (as it applies to constituents, anyway) a mere difference of opinion. The definition of *personhood* was never going to be changed by politicians. It's the kind of decision that is left directly up to voters within a state, just as gay marriage and marijuana legalization are.

When I see voters ignore all of the big problems that are causing them pain, just to send a message to someone that they don't like what that person thinks (or supposedly thinks) about a social issue, I can't help but feel as if we've abandoned all perspective – not just here in Colorado, but across the nation.

I'm not sure what's more discouraging: The simplicity of some people's voting rationale, or the fact that Republican strategists still don't seem to recognize what I've just described. They continue to advise candidates to run logical, *big-picture*, issues-driven campaigns against their Democratic opponents instead of doing what their opponents are successfully doing to them: Establishing them as being too *dangerous* to serve in public office.

I'm not saying Republicans should abandon the big-ticket items. I'm saying that they should, in addition to what they've been doing, start evoking some emotion... And for heaven's sake, *also* stop forfeiting the "too extreme" mantra to their Democratic attackers.

For example, why aren't Republican candidates calling on their Democratic opponents to make their views clear on an issue like *late-term* (third- or late-second trimester) abortions, which a strong majority of Americans adamantly oppose? Why aren't they putting their Democratic opponents in the uncomfortable position of having to defend the practice (which is what their liberal base will expect them to do)? The ending of a life, at a point during the reproductive process when two human beings are indisputably involved, appeals to people's reflexive sense of right and wrong. That's what would make it an affective campaign issue, and it wouldn't even have to be called a "War on Babies."

Why on earth aren't Democratic candidates, who are at odds with the majority of voters on *any* specific issue, being labeled as "too extreme" by their Republican opponents'

campaigns? Forget the “out of the mainstream” phrase some Republicans like to use. That’s too polite. Republicans should be calling Democrats “too extreme” every single time they get the opportunity. They should toss the charge around just as liberally as liberals do.



Why? Well, it seems to me that if the phrase is continually thrown back and forth across party lines, instead of just by Democrats at Republicans (like has been the case thus far), its effectiveness will quickly wane. Voters will stop taking it seriously, and that would be a good thing for Republicans who have, so far, turned the other cheek and let themselves be branded with the term.

At some point, you have to fight fire with fire in order to appeal to a segment of the electorate that only looks up to see what’s going on when someone’s actually *yelling*, “fire!” I can only hope that the Republicans (in my state and others) manage to figure that out before November.