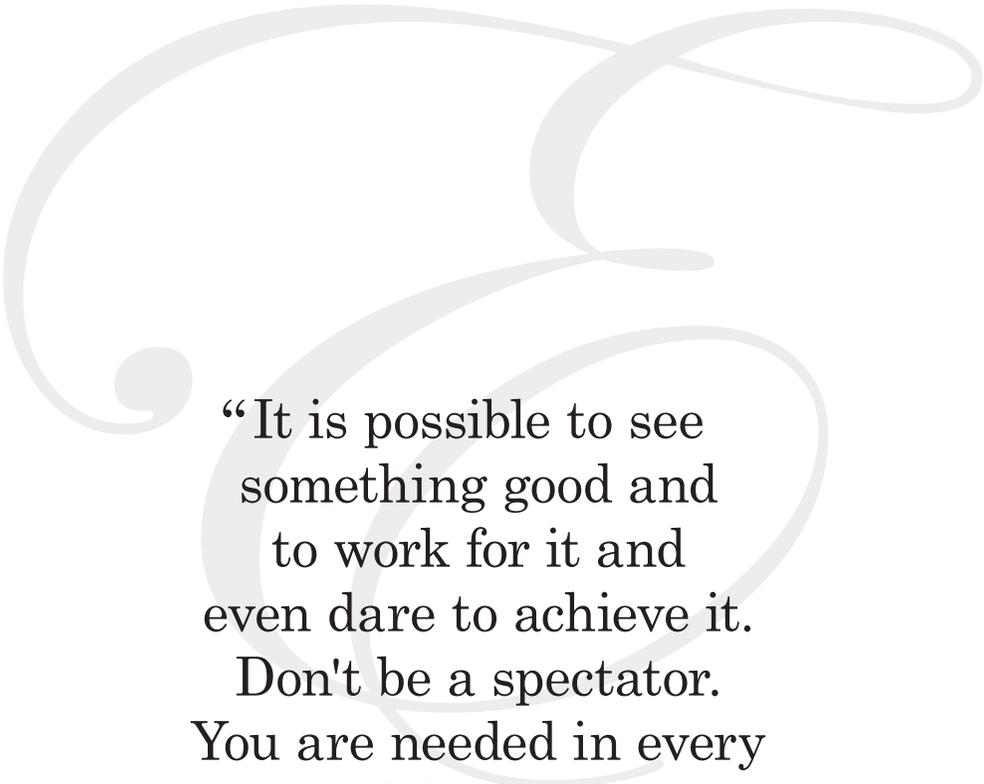


Never a Spectator

The Political Life
of Elsie Hillman



Kathy McCauley

A large, light gray decorative flourish consisting of several overlapping, flowing loops and curves, framing the central text.

“It is possible to see
something good and
to work for it and
even dare to achieve it.
Don't be a spectator.
You are needed in every
corner of the community.”

— ELSIE HILLMAN





Elsie Hillman (second woman from left) greets presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952.

Never a Spectator

The Political Life
of Elsie Hillman



By Kathy McCauley

Foreword by Terry Miller

DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE OF POLITICS



University of Pittsburgh

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

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FOREWORD

“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say, ‘It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.’ Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”—**Fred Rogers**

The Institute of Politics at the University of Pittsburgh has a long and rich history of creating opportunities to help regional leaders and the general public to see and understand our shared responsibility for improving the quality of the lives of those in our home region. We do this by offering educational programming and publications that address the pressing economic, social, and political issues that confront our region. At the Institute, we have recognized that the availability of rich archival collections of national and local dignitaries provides a unique opportunity to expand the breadth and depth of our academic offerings to students, elected and public officials, and the general public. To date, the Institute has developed case studies from the archival collections of former Pennsylvania Governor Dick Thornburgh (focusing on the state’s response to the Three Mile Island nuclear accident) and the late U.S. Senator H. John Heinz III (in which we examined market-based incentives in environmental policy). These case studies are used in colleges, universities, and policy centers throughout the United States.

In 2009, Institute leadership began a conversation with Elsie Hillman about tapping her archival collection to develop a case study on civic engagement and leadership. Unlike the earlier case studies that focused on a specific pivotal event or public policy, this case study would illustrate that despite one’s political, social, or economic means, individuals—and youth in particular—can be productive agents for positive change.

Because of that broad theme that describes how individuals can improve the community around them, several foundations generously

contributed to the funding of this project: The Buhl Foundation, Heinz Endowments, The Pittsburgh Foundation, and PNC Foundation. Their goal, like that of the Institute of Politics, is not to advance a political philosophy or any specific opinions that are represented in this book but to celebrate the character and leadership of Elsie Hillman—traits that, if emulated, can empower emerging and seasoned leaders to be effective change agents through civic engagement. This case study, then, examines the art of the “skilled social actor,” a term that describes an individual’s ability to be focused on others, move beyond differences, and seek solutions for a greater good.

Our nation now faces a number of daunting challenges that leave many wondering why Congress and the White House are unable to put partisanship aside for the greater good of the country. This polarization is the exact reason why the Institute felt that the time was right to provide a case study that focuses on civic engagement and leadership, for Hillman’s story is a unique example of how to work in cooperation for the greater good.

It was difficult to determine the focus of this case study because Hillman has done so much in so many aspects of her life. We finally settled on her role and rise in leadership in the Republican Party because it was, as she said, a primary focus of her life and family for more than 50 years.

You will read within these pages about how Hillman, through her thoughtful leadership, boundless energy, big-sky thinking, clear perceptions, and principled defenses of civil rights, rose in power within a transitioning Republican Party—a party she had enthusiastically joined in the early 1950s to campaign for Dwight D. Eisenhower, a war hero who supported equal rights and programs for the poor and elderly while empowering state and local governments. This was the party that Hillman embraced.

You will read about how, as a party moderate, she encouraged women to run for political office and supported their efforts, worked hard to increase the political participation of African Americans in

the party, and engaged and garnered the support of organized labor for candidates who shared her beliefs. Hillman was able to accomplish these goals because of her ability to understand the linkages among, across, and between groups; build and mobilize coalitions; and find consensus on issues of mutual benefit to all parties—all while encouraging a spirit of cooperation.

You will read about her knack for identifying individuals she believed would make good, balanced leaders and her tireless work to elevate them to positions of great power, leading some to dub her a kingmaker. You will read about her concerns for the moral, social, and political implications of religious beliefs; her passion for certain political issues that were not often shared by those in her party; and her sadness over having dedicated much of her life to a party that she came to believe had abandoned her.

It is a story about how—through her warmth; kindness; and passion for social, political, and economic justice—she worked to create a more fair and equitable world for all people. Her clarity of thought, vision, and commitment, and her dedication and ability to will into being that which others may not have imagined possible makes her story an important study in leadership, civic engagement, politics, and government—in any context.

That is what you will read within these pages. Here is what you will not: that at the same time that she was dedicating her life to public service in the political realm, Hillman also was giving her time, energy, leadership, and service to causes in her beloved Pittsburgh.

As she was working with leaders in the African American community to engage with the Republican Party during the 1950s and '60s, Hillman also was seeking to involve more African American people in leadership within the city's civic organizations and brokering board memberships of Whites in traditionally African American organizations just as she had joined the boards of the Anna B. Heldman Community Center (later the Hill House Association) and the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh. Because of her presence in the African American

community, she garnered support, approval, and the community's trust. She did this not by saying she cared about the community but by showing that she cared.

Throughout her life, she has sought to take on not just national and local issues that she felt passionate about but also those that were, in fact, quite controversial. This was never more apparent than during the 1970s, a decade that saw a great increase in the influence of the women's movement. Women's roles changed profoundly with the enactment of key legislation and court decisions—the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, Title IX, *Roe v. Wade*, President Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order 11246 prohibiting employment discrimination based on gender, and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment by Congress—all fueling the growing surge of feminism that swept the country and the globe.

Women witnessed the advancement of their gender in positions of political power on the world stage as they became heads of state from Israel to Argentina, and the number and diversity of women elected to public office in the United States also increased. (Hillman was elected by her peers in Pennsylvania to the position of Republican national committeewoman in 1975, a position she would hold for 21 years.) These were exciting and challenging times for women. They entered the workforce in greater numbers, asserted their rights to jobs, demanded equal pay for equal work, pushed for quality education, and for the first time in history surpassed men in college enrollment.

Like the majority of her party, Hillman had long supported the reproductive rights of women and other women's rights issues, and it saddened her deeply when the Republican Party, at its 1980 convention, abandoned support of the Equal Rights Amendment. Undaunted, she remained fiercely committed to the issue, joining and supporting organizations such as the Interfaith Alliance, which challenged bigotry, hatred, and intolerance, and the Republican Majority for Choice, which supported the party's traditional principles that it saw as consonant with a philosophy of inclusion and tolerance on social issues, including protection of reproductive rights.

Throughout the time that she was leaning into her work to support women's rights, she was taking a bold and proactive stand against intolerance and bigotry by championing critical social justice causes, often as part of nonprofit boards within her Pittsburgh community. She and her family gave generously to support these organizations as well.

But then there are the actions that she took that only a few know about. Take, for example, the story of a man who in the early 1980s was stricken with HIV/AIDS. Already beginning to become very ill, the man also was about to lose his house in the Shadyside neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Hillman sprang into action, trying to persuade a church to purchase the house but eventually purchasing it herself so that the man could continue to have a place to live. Over the next few years, this three-story building became a place for other people with HIV/AIDS to live, giving them a safe, loving environment at a time when so little support could be found.

The Shadyside home became an early, informal hospice center for HIV/AIDS patients where they and their families were treated with dignity and respect in an environment of compassionate care. Hillman met with patients and family members, dropping by with meals, a kind ear, encouraging words, and emotional support. Through her active involvement and leadership, she gave others permission to do the same. It should come as no surprise that when, in 1985, the Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force was founded, Hillman was one of its first volunteers.

Hillman began to shift her focus from national politics to addressing more of the needs of her home community once she stepped down from the Republican National Committee. She spearheaded the Save Our Summers project in 2004 with Pittsburgh City Council member Sala Udin and The Pittsburgh Foundation, raising the funds needed to keep the city's pools open; she collaborated on the Neighbor-Aid fund in 2008 with The Pittsburgh Foundation, the United Way of Allegheny County, other foundations, and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services to strengthen the region's safety net for families and individuals in hardship as a result of the economic downturn; and she instituted

the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics at Chatham University, which encourages women to get involved as political leaders. Each of these speaks to her pioneering spirit and desire to advance the quality and equity of life for the citizens of her beloved Pittsburgh region.

In some civic efforts, Hillman clearly served in a leadership capacity, as she did in her work as cochair of the K–12 Team of the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Here she worked to assist the superintendent and school board in creating a student-centered program focused on overall improved student academic achievement in math, literacy, and science; building a world-class high school performing arts program; and assisting school leadership as it went through the painful process of downsizing the district—all consistent with her belief that educating our children is the most important thing we can do for our home region.

She also cochaired (with then U.S. Steel chair and CEO David Roderick) a committee charged with addressing the city’s dire fiscal problems. Working quickly, the committee outlined a number of strategies for addressing the fiscal problems that led to budget cuts and the creation of state-appointed oversight boards. Years later, Hillman wrote an article that reflected on the lessons learned from this work, calling for Republicans and Democrats to work together to find the solution to a new set of financial issues.

Her words are paraphrased here:

- Know that change usually comes slowly.
- Recognize the importance of the city and the fact that we all are in this together.
- Acknowledge the important and good work of our city and state officials.
- Put every option on the table and avoid taking positions that you cannot back out of.
- Be reasonable and willing to compromise.

- Insist that key decision makers, especially our legislative leaders, Republicans and Democrats, are engaged in the discussions from start to finish.
- And finally, realize that if we don't learn from our past experiences, we will surely repeat past mistakes.¹

What I read in her article is a skilled social actor at work, inducing cooperation. I also see the wisdom borne of an openness to experience, the willingness and courage to become involved and to never be a spectator, especially—even—when it may not be the easiest thing to do, the popular thing to do, or the most politically appetizing thing to do but what you know in your heart is the right thing to do.

This inclination to act led her to launch and win campaigns not only for elected officials but also for equality and civil rights. It drove her to create and advance social, educational, and professional opportunities for those at the margins and to make great contributions to the arts, sciences, and humanities. Her story inspires others to be more and do more—to live with intention, courage, and hope. Through her actions, she expands our own sense of what one person can do and our ability to support it in others.

Author Marianne Williamson said, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. ... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.” This, to me, is the essence of Hillman’s nature and her generative gift to us all.

–**Terry Miller**, director, University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics

CHAPTER ONE



Introduction

This is a study of a woman raised in privilege but not defined by it. Born before World War II, Elsie Hilliard Hillman defied the conventions of her time to become a leader in the rough-and-tumble world of party politics.

For more than 40 years, Elsie Hillman devoted her working hours to the Republican Party, rising to the highest position in its volunteer ranks and ultimately becoming known as a kingmaker for her role in selecting and electing candidates, including President George H.W. Bush, U.S. Senator H. John Heinz III, and Pennsylvania Governors Dick Thornburgh and Tom Ridge. When she retired from party leadership in 1996, it would cap two decades as a leader of the party at local, state, and national levels.

The arc of Hillman's career in politics describes the skilled social actor—a term sociologists use to describe those rare individuals who can “empathetically relate to the situations of other people and, in doing so, are able to provide those people with reasons to cooperate. Their sense of efficacy comes not from some narrow conception of self-interest, but from the act of inducing cooperation and helping others attain ends.”²

What makes her political life all the more interesting is that Elsie Hillman deployed her skills within an institution that was undergoing a historical shift. She joined the Republican Party because she saw it as a means of working for what she valued most: moderation, tolerance, and civil rights. But as she worked to bring more women and African Americans into the party and to find common ground, social conservatives, including the religious right, were growing in strength, pulling the Republican Party away from the center of the political spectrum. This study looks at how Hillman used her skills to choose, promote,

and elect moderate candidates and to fight against the narrowing of the party platform. It begins by tracking her rise within the party structure from the time she began working for Dwight D. Eisenhower's campaign for president to her election to the Republican National Committee (RNC). It then summarizes the research on the skilled social actor to provide a framework for viewing her political work and provides five cases to illustrate her strategies and tactics on behalf of moderate Republican candidates. The study concludes by looking at the context within which Hillman was working for moderation: She happened to join the party at a time when the nation was in one of its least polarized periods and when the influence of religiously motivated activists upon the Republican Party was at a historic low. Hillman had joined a party that reflected what she believed. Over the decades, the party drifted away from her and other passionate moderates.

By the time she retired from party politics, Hillman was deeply frustrated. She would write to one RNC leader, "After 50 years of making the Republican party the primary focus of my life and of the family, I am deeply saddened. ... I hope that you can hear the pain in my voice as well as the hope in my heart."³

A note on citations

This text follows *Chicago Manual of Style* citation format for endnotes with the exception of quotes, direct or indirect, procured from interviews conducted specifically for this book.

A separate listing of interviews is contained after the endnotes on page 125. If a direct or indirect quote in this book is attributed to an individual without an endnote number, additional information can be found in this list of interviews.

CHAPTER TWO



A Modern Republican

The party she joined

Although she was born in a part of Pennsylvania where Democrats outnumbered Republicans three to one, there was no question that Elsie Mead Hilliard Hillman would register as a Republican. Her father, Thomas Jones Hilliard, was ardently anti-Roosevelt. Her sister already was active in party politics in Rhode Island, and Hillman had married into a Republican family.

But family affiliation was just part of what influenced her. Republicans were the party of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the war hero who stood for the principles she cared about: tolerance and equal rights. Ike was an inspiring, progressive figure for Hillman. “He was an exciting candidate for many of us because he was the first presidential candidate from either party who had appeared in many years as the people’s choice rather than one chosen in smoke-filled rooms,” Hillman said.⁴

Hillman also joined the party because it welcomed women and ensured them more than a token place in its structure. It was the Republicans whose national platform had included support of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) at each convention since 1940 and whose national committee had passed a rule guaranteeing that half of its members on every committee would be women. When Mrs. Medill McCormick wrote in the 1922 *Congressional Digest* about the number of women joining the Republican Party, she reminded readers that it was Republicans who had championed the causes important to many women by pioneering the National Child Labor Law, compulsory school attendance, and protection for widows and single mothers through “mother’s pensions” (the precursor to public assistance for families with dependent children).⁵

And then there was women’s suffrage. Republican Senator S.C. Pomeroy of Kansas introduced the first resolution for suffrage in 1868,

and 60 percent of Republicans voted for it, while 100 percent of Democrats voted against it. *The Republican Campaign Text-Book* of 1920 made the point: It was the Republicans who had welcomed women “into full participation in the affairs of government and the activities of the Republican Party.”⁶

It was not that the leaders of the Republican Party saw the role of women, civil rights, or other “social issues” uniformly. From the Civil War forward, the party contained a tension between conservatives and moderates that was only magnified after Roosevelt’s New Deal, when party members divided over whether to reject all or just some programs and had internal debates over tariffs and the value placed on reducing the national debt. As political writer Craig Shirley characterized the division, “the Party had housed two competing personalities, with conservatives battling liberals in a pretty much perpetual state of equilibrium.”⁷

The 1948 presidential primary framed the differences clearly. Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio had the support of the Republican Party’s traditional conservatives and possessed a “ferocious loyalty to his party and distrust of the eastern financial establishment, which he suspected of collaboration with the New Deal and encouragement of intervention overseas,” writes historian Nicol Rae. “Taft further feared that the New Deal’s centralization of government and intervention in economic affairs would stifle America’s exceptional ‘individualism.’”⁸ In contrast, New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey, who led the Republican Party’s moderate wing, drew his support largely from the eastern part of the country. Dewey had a practical bent, certain that Republicans would lose if they opposed all of the New Deal’s programs. He said that if Republicans tried to return to their positions of the 1920s, opposing Social Security, farm price supports, and old age benefits, “you can bury the Republican Party as the deadest pigeon in the United States.”⁹ Dewey won the Republican primary but lost narrowly to Harry S. Truman in the general election.

In 1951, when Eisenhower announced that he would run in the Republican primary, Taft already was busy lining up delegates and was poised as a front-runner by the end of the year. But his opposition to many domestic programs and his isolationist views made even his supporters wonder if Taft could be for something. Eisenhower was no fan of the New Deal, but he thought that opposing popular programs like Social Security could cause “lasting damage to the Republican cause. ... He had little regard for Democrats and liberals, but he was equally scathing about the right wing of his own party, which he believed was impractical and often reckless,” writes Lewis Gould in *Grand Old Party*.¹⁰

Eisenhower would be a “Modern Republican”—a term he meant to convey inclusiveness. (One historian wrote that Eisenhower had considered different catchphrases to indicate the values of the party he wanted to lead, including the more clear but cumbersome “party of justice for all the people.”¹¹) But his moderate policies and convincing 1952 election victory did not translate into success in the midterm congressional elections. The Republicans lost control of Congress and endured further losses in 1958. They would not control the Senate again for nearly three decades or the House of Representatives for four decades. “Had Eisenhower’s approach to the Republicans proved successful at the polls for candidates other than himself, he might have persuaded his Republican critics of the merits of his view of the electorate. Instead, during the Eisenhower years, conservatism stirred and then gained momentum,” writes Gould.¹² The period saw the advent of the conservative magazine *National Review* and the founding of the John Birch Society—which marked the growing strength of conservatism during the 1950s. “Their presence did not yet threaten Richard Nixon’s control of the 1960 presidential nomination, but the tension between Eisenhower’s brand of conservatism and the more ideological brand on the right foreshadowed the party’s struggles in the 1960s,” according to Gould.¹³

This was the context in which the young Hillman joined the Republican Party. Her own memories of the time are tied to her excitement at campaigning for Eisenhower, barely aware of the splinters within the party. When her uncle by marriage, Ernest Hillman (an Allegheny County commissioner), called her up on the telephone to say, “Elsie, I’m heading up the campaign for Senator Taft and I hear you just signed up to volunteer for Eisenhower,” she responded, “Well, isn’t that wonderful? One of us in the family is going to win!” She says today, “He never let me forget that. I mean, how innocent I was.”

Hillman would be a quick study, developing the skills of an effective social actor but never the cynicism of a political operative. In this, she remained true to her upbringing and mindful of her mentor, U.S. Senator Hugh Scott, who reinforced her inclination to see the best in people.

Early influences

Elsie Hillman and her brothers and sister were “taught from the beginning that among our responsibilities was one to our community” and that “by working in concert with others, we might help the community rise.”¹⁴ Hillman said that her mother, Marianna Talbott Hilliard, had a beautiful spirit and gave her children the example of how to work for the broader good. Hilliard’s work included leading the local volunteers in spotting aircraft over Pittsburgh during World War II, serving on the boards of several nonprofit organizations, and heading the citywide effort to raise money to buy mobile kitchens and hospital equipment for people in England who had been bombed by the Germans. When she was a teenager, Hillman began volunteering, too. She cleaned instruments for surgeries at Eye and Ear Hospital in Pittsburgh, sold War Bonds, and knitted socks for soldiers.

Hillman’s mother also gave her children an appreciation for the importance of faith in one’s life, a faith that did not reduce the world to good versus evil. Hilliard was a Christian Scientist, believing that anyone can be redeemed and that God’s work is experienced here and now.

Like many adherents, she preferred to rely on God, not medicine, to heal physical maladies, but she still made sure her children had regular medical care. While it pained her each time she had to take them to see a doctor or give them their pills, Hilliard did so anyway. From this, Hillman learned that “sometimes we have to give up part of ourselves” for others.¹⁵

Her mother must have been tried in smaller ways, too. Hillman was a “high-spirited” student at the Ellis School who skirted the rules of 1940s Pittsburgh. “I was in terrible trouble. ... I was always in trouble,” said Hillman. “I remember riding on the back of a motorcycle with my beau at the time. He kept going around the school, and Miss Ellis came out and rang the bell. She’d stand on the corner of Ellsworth Avenue and shake this bell for everybody to go in after lunch, and here I was, riding around on this motorcycle.”

Hillman loved the friendships and fun of school but was less interested in the classwork. So that she could focus more on schoolwork, she transferred to Chatham Hall in Virginia and then to the Ethel Walker School in Connecticut, which was within a short train ride of her aunt, a “wonderful woman” who seemed to understand her independence and spirit. This aunt would call the school and tell the headmistress that her son, Albert, who was in the U.S. Marine Corps (true), was being sent overseas that following week (not true) and ask if Elsie could please come to New York for the weekend, because she really was more like his sister than his cousin. Sprung from school, Elsie Hilliard would go to New York and have a great time in the city with her friends. “About three weeks later, my crazy aunt would call up again, and she’d say, ‘Albert just got reassigned and now he’s really leaving.’ So I’d go back down to New York.”¹⁶

After she graduated, Hillman went to Westminster Choir College in Princeton, N.J., to study piano and voice. (Her grandmother, Katherine Houk Talbott, founded the college, which now is part of Rider University.) By this time, she had fallen in love with Henry Hillman, a U.S. Navy pilot stationed at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, N.Y. She had met

him when she was a teenager as he was “in the same crowd” as her older sister. When Henry Hillman learned that he was soon to be sent overseas, he called up Elsie’s parents and asked if they could get married earlier than planned. They were wed in May 1945, when Elsie was 19.

The Hillmans moved to a military base in Dallas, Texas, to wait for Henry to be deployed again; their plan was that after he shipped out, Elsie would go back to college. Those plans changed when the war ended that summer. They were able to move back to Pittsburgh, where they would raise their four children in the Squirrel Hill section of Pittsburgh (in a home with “only one piece of furniture in the whole house the four of us weren’t allowed to jump on,” according to their daughter, Audrey Hillman Fisher).¹⁷

Henry Hillman went to work for Pittsburgh Coke, one of the companies his father, John Hartwell “Hart” Hillman Jr., had rescued from default during the Depression and that would help to establish him as one of the country’s most successful businessmen. Hart Hillman invested in a network of companies that employed thousands, but he was not widely recognized in Pittsburgh because he wanted it that way. An employee of his was quoted as saying, “The first thing Hart Hillman said when I went to work for him was, ‘You know, I hire public relations people to keep me out of the press.’”¹⁸

When Henry Hillman took over the company, he also preferred to stay out of the limelight. But he had a harder time doing this than his father, both because of Elsie Hillman’s involvement in civic affairs and politics and his own interest in community and economic development in the region. Even as Hillman was multiplying the value of the company his father had built, he devoted time to serving with the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh and as president of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, where he “shifted its emphasis entirely—from rebuilding the physical city of Pittsburgh to rehabilitating the human one,” according to a 1969 *Forbes* magazine article.¹⁹ With Henry Hillman’s support, the Allegheny Conference began to invest in training and business development programs in African American

communities, including Operation Dig, founded by civil rights leader Nate Smith. Smith would become a friend of the Hillmans and a political ally of Elsie Hillman.

The influence of Hugh Scott

While Elsie Hillman's upbringing may have led her to seek ways to be part of the community outside her social circle, it was Republican U.S. Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania who showed her how to apply her natural gifts in politics. He encouraged her to take on ever-higher leadership roles in the party, was her advisor on key decisions, and guided her in developing her political skills.

Scott and Hillman had met during the Eisenhower campaign, and it was shortly after that when Scott identified Hillman as a rising star in the party, according to Martin Hamberger, who volunteered for Scott and became his chief of staff in the 1960s. It was Scott who urged Hillman to run for chair of Allegheny County's Republican Party and for mayor. (She would be elected chair of the party but decline each opportunity to run for public office.) "Elsie was such a dynamo of activity and brightness—the kind of person that you could immediately identify with as a leader," said Hamberger. "She has a great capacity for pulling together disparate threads and weaving the tapestry. And I think that's what she did politically, always recognizing that any organization is a function of the people, what they think, ideas, and how you convince them that what you're trying to do is the best way to achieve a better life for them."

Hillman could not have had a mentor whose abilities and beliefs were so closely consonant with her own. Scott was a moderate Republican who first won election to Congress in 1940 and rose quickly in the party's ranks to become the head of the Republican National Committee (RNC) and a leader on the national scene, helping to engineer the Republicans' Draft Eisenhower campaign in 1952 and serving as a political advisor to both Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. Scott won

his Senate seat in 1958 in what *The Washington Post* later called “a triumph for Pennsylvania moderates over the Republican right wing.”²⁰ In 1962, he showed his moderate stripes again by supporting William Scranton as the Republican candidate for Pennsylvania governor. In doing this, he had to defy the state party leadership, which had selected a much more conservative candidate. He also supported New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller in the 1964 Republican presidential primary and, after Rockefeller withdrew, helped to lead the effort to draft Pennsylvania Governor Scranton for president in the hope of derailing the campaign of conservative Republican U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona.

Scott’s colleagues would elect him party whip in 1969 after he had “united liberals, moderates, and a few conservatives with whom he had close personal ties,” and he would rise to Senate Republican floor leader with the support of that same coalition.²¹

Of his accomplishments during his 36 years in Congress, Scott was most proud of his sponsorship of key civil rights legislation. Scott’s positions on this issue, as well as his optimistic disposition, deeply affected Hillman’s own political perspective. Scott’s innate desire to ascribe honorable motives to people was crushed by the president he trusted. “His most bitter disappointment was that Richard Nixon had lied to him” about his involvement in Watergate, according to Hillman.

Moving from volunteer to activist

It was in 1960 that the 34-year-old Hillman decided she had to have a talk with Allegheny County Republican chair Ed Flaherty. In all of her time spent volunteering for the party, she said she had seen “no Black participation and no minorities in the campaigns at all.” She went to party headquarters in downtown Pittsburgh and said to Flaherty, “Could I see your files? I’d like to volunteer to help work on getting more minorities involved.” Those files showed that there were just a handful of Black Republicans in the county who were active in

PUBLIC SPEAKER IN THE MAKING

As outgoing as she seemed, it took years for Hillman to feel comfortable meeting face to face with people in authority or giving speeches. “I used to lie about having to sit down to make a speech because I would shake so when I stood up,” Hillman said.

She laughed when she remembered a meeting in the 1960s when she was so nervous that she hyperventilated. Hillman had traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with a venerable figure in the party, Val Washington, who had been a key advisor to Eisenhower and was the first director of minority affairs at the RNC. She wanted to learn what he was doing at the national level to expand Black participation in the party and had just found the courage to utter, “What are you doing about the Negro vote?” when she passed out. When she recovered, she found that Washington had come to her rescue. “He and I became fast friends because he had to tote me to the hospital, get the ambulance, and go to the emergency room,” said Hillman.

the party. Flaherty suggested that Hillman meet with Wendell Freeland, who shared her concern. Freeland, a Tuskegee Airman during World War II, had moved to Pittsburgh from Baltimore, Md., and was working as an attorney in the district attorney’s office (which, Freeland said, “always had one Negro” on its staff).

Freeland and Hillman arranged to meet at the Union Grill in Pittsburgh. Freeland remembers saying to her, “I’m a Negro, but I want to be as much in the 14th Ward [Squirrel Hill, a predominantly White area of the city] as I am in the 5th Ward [the Hill District, a predominantly African American area of the city] and for you to be as much in the 5th as you are in the 14th.” Hillman told him, “Of course!”

Freeland and Hillman began to work together on the Nixon presidential campaign in 1960, after Flaherty appointed them the county’s cochairs. They worked every day that year for the campaign, traveling to Republican ward committee meetings in the city’s varied neighborhoods, both Black and White, recruiting volunteers and training them to be poll watchers.

They also spent days organizing ward-by-ward TV parties throughout the Black community so that people could gather to watch the Nixon-John F. Kennedy debates. Unfortunately for Nixon, those audiences saw a man who looked nervous and less vigorous and presidential than did Kennedy; in Freeland's words, Nixon simply "screwed up."

Those TV parties may not have persuaded many Black people to vote for Nixon, but Hillman and Freeland's work in bringing baseball player Jackie Robinson to Pittsburgh made an impression on the Black community and added to the pair's growing stature within the local Republican Party. It was late in the Nixon-Lodge campaign when the two organized Robinson's visit with leaders in the city's African American neighborhoods. This succeeded in getting the attention they sought, but not without their having to steer over the racial shoals of the time. First, they had to get Robinson safely into the city. "We met Robinson at the airport on a bus, and we didn't want the bus to have only Black people," said Freeland, so Hillman and other friends of theirs recruited White people to ride on the bus with Robinson and other Black supporters of Nixon.

Freeland said that when it was time for Robinson to leave, the Pittsburgh Police officer who was supposed to drive him to the airport said he could not go beyond the city's border. So Hillman drove Robinson to the airport in her Mercury station wagon.

Building a network in the Black community

Hillman's credibility with the Black community grew after she was appointed volunteer chair of the Republican Committee of Allegheny County and chose Jessie Hewlett as the paid staff person for the organization's downtown office. Hewlett, a Black woman, had worked for W.P. "Bill" Young, a Republican leader who later became the first chair of the Negro Republican Council and secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry under Governor Scranton. "Jessie was someone Elsie could trust and who would trust her," said Freeland.

MAMMOTH RALLY

Hillman organized a rally for gubernatorial candidate William Scranton on October 24, 1962, in downtown Pittsburgh. “We had to really do something to make it different,” recalled Hillman. “So we got the Civic Arena, and Eisenhower agreed to come and Jimmy Stewart agreed to come. We brought in people from all the surrounding counties on buses. The traffic jam! I just couldn’t believe that all those people were coming to the Civic Arena. We filled it to overflowing.

“The Democrats had said, ‘They can’t find enough Republicans to fill a telephone booth.’ So we put a telephone booth on the stage of the Civic Arena. And Jimmy Stewart got in it and said ‘Hallo. I’m calling the Democrat Party from a telephone booth in the Civic Arena. I’m the only one in the booth, but there are 17,000 people in the audience.’ ”

In spite of driving snow, this was the largest crowd in the arena’s history at the time; the *Pittsburgh Courier* headline read: “17,000 Cheer Ike, GOP Nominees at Mammoth Rally.”

Hillman notes, “That’s when people started taking me seriously and we thought, ‘Maybe we could do some other things.’ ”

But Hillman’s choice angered some White people in the party, who refused to come into an office with a Black woman on staff. “There were cross raisings, nearly,” according to Freeland.

Hillman and Freeland persisted, bringing more Black people into the Republican Party and onto the leadership of Pittsburgh’s civic organizations, along with bringing more White people onto the boards of traditionally African American organizations. One of the most respected of these groups was the Anna B. Heldman Community Center, now Hill House Association. It was through her board work for the organization that Hillman met a number of young Black ministers who would join her in civic and political work for the Hill District. “They knew from my work with the Hill House that my interests lay in their communities and that I wasn’t just trying to exploit them for political purposes,” said Hillman.²²

William Scranton remembered calling upon Hillman and Freeland in 1962 to tap the Black political network they had begun to develop, “going building to building and house to house on the Hill in Pittsburgh” with them, according to Scranton. “No Republican had ever done that. And we went to the *Pittsburgh Courier* and spoke with them. In Philadelphia, the only way I got anywhere with Black people was through the churches. But this one [Pittsburgh] was a real political organization.”

Spending time in Black communities and with civil rights leaders like Reverend LeRoy Patrick, Reverend Elmer Williams, and Nate Smith led Hillman to find a deeper motivation for her work in politics. “I began to understand what it was like on the other side of the street from where I had lived,” said Hillman in a speech she gave in 1998. “I began to understand the passion and the stamina that drives leaders for civil rights. My politics had led me into a new challenge, which was to try to impact life in the inner cities for both old and young people, to try to make the whole community meet its obligations toward the continuing problems of health, education, and safety for the less privileged and the most needy.”²³

Conservatives vs. moderates at the 1964 convention

The tensions between moderates and conservatives during Eisenhower’s years continued during the 1960s. Nicol Rae, author of *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans*, writes that, during this period, supporters of Taft from the Midwest joined with conservatives from the Sun Belt, many of whom were development speculators and promoters who were not loyal to the Republican Party establishment. This left the “liberals of the Eastern seaboard an isolated minority with limited influence on the future course of the Republican Party.”²⁴

When it came time to nominate a candidate for president in 1964, this new conservative coalition favored Goldwater, who had articulated a core set of conservative beliefs in his best-selling 1960 book, *The Conscience of a Conservative*. Conservatives of that era found in his book a clear argument for their beliefs and what they thought it

meant to be a Republican. But it contained an argument for states' rights that, when coupled with Goldwater's vote against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was interpreted by some as code for support of racial segregation, even though Goldwater had argued against segregation elsewhere.

Moderates in the Republican Party were equally passionate about Rockefeller, Goldwater's major competitor during the primary race. This moderate versus conservative battle came down to the primary race in California, where Rockefeller was ahead in the polls. But his campaign was upended by a single event. "On Friday, the Field Poll in California showed Nelson 10 points ahead of Goldwater," recalled Scranton. "On Saturday morning, Nelson Rockefeller Jr. was born. And the thing exactly reversed, with the Field Poll showing Goldwater 10 points ahead of Rockefeller. Incredible. It had brought to light Nelson's divorce and his family problem." That "family problem" was Rockefeller's second marriage to a woman whose first four children were in her former husband's custody. The birth of Margaretta and Nelson Rockefeller's son reawakened public opinion against their relationship.

With just five weeks until the Republican National Convention in San Francisco, moderates quickly searched for an alternative to draft as their presidential candidate, not only because they feared that Goldwater could not win the race for president but also because he would drag down vote totals of state and local candidates. Through the urging of Senator Scott, they turned to Scranton, who had shown he could win strong support from both Democrats and Republicans in his statewide race.

Scranton agreed to run because he was disgusted by Goldwater's stance on civil rights. "When I ran for president, I did so on the issue of civil rights," said Scranton. "Barry Goldwater was a nice guy and I don't think he was a racist, but for some damn reason, he voted twice against the most important bill we've had in modern times, the Civil Rights Act."

Scranton dove into the race, visiting 25 states in 25 days. To give him the boost he needed to compete against Goldwater, moderates

hoped to persuade Eisenhower to speak at the convention on Scranton's behalf. Hillman, who attended that convention and was involved in the brief effort to draft Scranton, remembered their game plan: "Scranton was supposed to have had the endorsement of Eisenhower. This was going to happen on a given night, with Eisenhower making a speech. Once the word went out that Eisenhower had endorsed him, then everybody knew what calls they were supposed to make. It did not happen. I called up Bud Humphrey in Cleveland, whose father was George Humphrey [the secretary of the treasury under Eisenhower]. His wife was part of a network for Scranton that was out there. I learned that George Humphrey [a strong supporter of Goldwater] talked Eisenhower out of doing it."²⁵

News accounts of the time show that Goldwater's people controlled the convention, shutting out Scranton and Rockefeller supporters. Hillman said, "The Goldwater people wouldn't let us move our people into the convention hall."

For Black Republicans, the convention was a horror. Black delegates were "shoved, pushed, spat on, and cursed with a liberal sprinkling of racial epithets," wrote Taylor Branch in his book *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65*. W.P. Young, the African American labor secretary of Pennsylvania, was beset by Goldwater delegates who "harassed him to the point of setting his suit jacket on fire with a cigarette."²⁶ Jackie Robinson was at the convention, too, and wrote in his biography, "It was a terrible hour for the relatively few Black delegates who were present. Distinguished in their communities, identified with the cause of Republicanism, an extremely unpopular cause among Blacks, they had been served notice that the party they had fought for considered them just another bunch of 'niggers.'... One bigot from one of the Deep South states actually threw acid on a Black delegate's suit jacket and burned it. ... A new breed of Republicans had taken over the GOP."²⁷

Hillman recalled that a fire erupted on the floor of the convention, something Scranton described in an interview: "When the actual voting

was going on at the convention, there was a ramp on the side that people going to the dais could go up. And Mary [Scranton's wife] went up it every night. I watched her on television as she started up the ramp. And it broke into fire. I thought she was consumed."

Scranton had entered the primary at the last minute "to make everybody realize that not all Republicans were anti-Black. ... The thing that I worried about terribly was that if Goldwater were the candidate, because of his stand on the Civil Rights Act, he would win the solid Deep South. And he did. From then on, I thought, the Republican Party was going to become the White supremacy party. And it is, in the South. Let's be honest about it."

"That convention sure did mobilize people like me," said Hillman. "You were either going to stay in politics and try to change things or get out because it was just so bad."²⁸

Ascending the ladder

In 1966, Elsie Hillman decided to run for the elected position of vice chair of the Republican Committee of Allegheny County.

Hillman knew that she was ready to lead. She had served as volunteer chair, secretary of the party, and chair of the 14th Ward Republican Committee (the only woman among the 32 ward chairs at the time) and had organized one large-scale event after another. She believed that the leaders of the more conservative wing of the Republican Party in Allegheny County, including its highest-ranking elected leader, District Attorney Robert Duggan, would not support her run for vice chair. But that would not matter, because the seat was wide open after the incumbent, Nelle Dressler, had made public her decision not to run.

When the time came to get on the ballot, however, Marian Metro, an active party member who enjoyed the backing of conservatives, submitted her nominating petition for vice chair. This caught Hillman by surprise, as did the wrong time on the clock in the party office, which led her to think she had more time to file her petition than she did.

(Freeland believed that it was turned back purposely to cause her to miss the filing deadline.) Hillman quickly began organizing a write-in drive. But Allegheny County party chair George F. Pott barred write-in votes, as described in a July 1966 article in *The Gettysburg Times*, which reported that this decision “drew criticism from an unofficial candidate. Mrs. Henry L. Hillman, whose name was not on the ballot but who had announced she was a candidate for vice-chairman, said her supporters could not vote for her because write-in slots on the voting machines were sealed. She called Wednesday’s election a ‘sham.’ ”²⁹

Personalities and philosophy aside, leaders in the party found Hillman to be an enigma. She seemed to lack parochial motivations like patronage or personal gain. Hillman said, “Nobody really knew me. They didn’t know why I was there, what I wanted, even though I didn’t want anything. They didn’t understand me at all because I didn’t have to be going to an office every day. ... So there was tremendous distrust.”³⁰ Andy Gleason, who chaired the Cambria County Republican Committee and was one of the statewide power brokers in the party, met Hillman during this time. He remembered thinking, “Why in the name of heavens would somebody like that want to get mixed up in politics?”

Hillman met the party leaders’ distrust head on by becoming their “student and coworker. ... They were often better politicians than I was. They could beat me fair and square anytime I tried to take them on. If there was a problem, they knew who to call. If we needed a candidate, they could find one. If we needed to plot out a campaign, they knew how to do it.”³¹

Hillman said that by the time she ran for the top job in the Republican Committee of Allegheny County in 1967, “I’d proven that I didn’t have two heads and that I could work and that I was on their side.”³² She was elected chair with overwhelming support from party members, becoming the first woman to head a political party in a major urban area and making news locally and across the state. In a profile of her win in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Hillman said about the men and women of her party, “They are a good, good group. We’ve all worked together.

I've tried to demonstrate my good intent, too. But I couldn't do anything without their support.”³³

Women found inspiration in her victory. Mrs. Mollie Cohen wrote to her, “Maybe someday we'll have a lady in the White House.”³⁴ Mrs. H.S. Hopkins, who said she was old enough to be Hillman's mother, wrote, “The men say, ‘The women will never get on together.’ I say to you, ‘Let's prove that we can.’”³⁵ And Sylvia Vogt wrote that male committee members had said before Hillman's election as party chair, “I don't think a woman can handle it. She won't be forceful enough.” Wrote Vogt, “That's a laugh!”³⁶

Among the people who wrote Hillman notes of congratulation on this county-level win was this prescient one from John Blewer of Texas Gas Transmission, LLC: “It looks to me like we need somebody with your campaign technique to help out at the national level.”³⁷

Learning as she led

Now that she was the elected county chair, Hillman was in a position to make this an organization that women and minorities would want to join. But she learned that her job came with one benefit that she did not want: the chance to exercise political patronage.

It had been a century-old practice in Pennsylvania to reward people and groups who had worked to elect the governor with jobs and state contracts. “With the governor's seat went a multitude of state jobs—the political coin of the realm,” wrote Dick Thornburgh (who later would become governor himself) in 1974.³⁸ Some of these jobs and contracts were distributed through the county-level committees of the Democratic and Republican parties, and it was the responsibility of the chairs of the county committees to allocate them to the faithful.

Most chairs would seize upon this as the gift it was meant to be: a way of cementing their position and linking the local volunteers and contributors with the statewide network that supported the election of approved party candidates. But for Hillman, it was a necessary evil

borne of the fact that a Republican governor was in office at the time. “I had all the contracts for the state—every post hole digger and every guy who worked on the highway in the summertime, and kids and interns and school contracts, like the milk contracts for the state hospitals and institutions. All of that had to be approved by the county chair.”

She did not like it, but Hillman was practical. She would not crusade to change the system, nor would she function as a patronage czar. This was just part of the job to be delegated. Instead, she devoted her own time to building the base of the party and selecting good candidates. She knew she would need someone both to help her in putting together a strong organization and to go with her to the union halls, fraternal associations, and ethnic clubs where she intended to recruit Republicans, so at the recommendation of a colleague, she hired Ollie Thurman to be the executive director of the Republican Committee of Allegheny County. Thurman, who decided to move back to Pittsburgh from Hawaii for the job, had grown up in Pittsburgh and worked for Senator Scott in his Pittsburgh office, so he was familiar with the Republican Party operations in the county (and also came recommended by the senator). In recollecting his work for Hillman during that time, Thurman said, “She had walked into a disorganized office, which is putting it mildly. You’re talking about a party that was a joke. ... You always had one county commissioner [seat], just because by law, there had to be at least one Republican. But there were no other Republicans winning anywhere in the city. ... She took on a thankless job and made the party into a real player.”

They got to work putting together competitive campaigns for candidates for local, state, and federal offices, starting by picking a stronger, more diverse set of candidates for state legislative and city elections—even though they knew the odds were overwhelmingly against them in the City of Pittsburgh, where voter registration was three Democrats to every one Republican. Hillman also turned to a small set of confidants for help in finding good candidates. The members, who would call themselves the “007s,” included Harold Blaxter, Al Capozzi, Freeland,

Hillman, John McComb, Sheldon Parker, and Thornburgh. The 007s met monthly to “plot about where I could go next,” said Hillman.³⁹

Thurman said, “Elsie and her group really handpicked the City Council candidates, and they were light-years better than any other candidates they [the party] had ever had.” They chose a slate of “ethnic” candidates for City Council to appeal to Pittsburghers who were African American or of Irish, Jewish, Greek, or Italian descent. They worked for Raymond Shafer’s successful campaign for governor of Pennsylvania and put forward for the U.S. Congress Algia Gary (an African American who was a municipal employee) and Thornburgh. And they worked for Rockefeller’s 1968 presidential primary campaign, organizing a large rally in Pittsburgh. With less enthusiasm, Hillman worked for Nixon after Rockefeller lost in the primary.

Scott and others in the party urged Hillman to run for mayor of Pittsburgh during these years, but she decided against it—in spite of her young daughter’s encouragement for her to run so that her mother could “make Dad the chief of police.”

One example of Hillman’s growing influence was in how she helped her friend and fellow 007 Thornburgh to become the U.S. attorney for the western district of Pennsylvania. Thurman remembers that Scott called Hillman and said, “Elsie, they’ve given me 45 minutes to name a candidate, otherwise we’re going to lose it and it’s going to go to Duggan’s guy.” (Duggan wanted the position to go to an assistant district attorney.)⁴⁰ “We had already agreed that Thornburgh would be the one she wanted to nominate, so she said ‘Okay, we’ll get hold of him,’ ” said Thurman. “We called his office and they told us that Thornburgh was on the bus going home. So I jumped in the car and ran up and met the bus in Squirrel Hill, and he got off the bus and I said, ‘You’ve got to decide right now. You don’t have time to talk to your wife or anyone. Do you want to be U.S. attorney?’ And he said yes.”

Thurman said that it was through the “grunt work” of this period that Hillman earned her stripes and “got tough.” It was under Hillman’s leadership that the county committee was transformed into a true

organization focused on candidate recruitment; local organizing; and political relevance, locally and nationally.

Friend of labor

Whether it was in her nature, her upbringing, or simply the bent of this self-proclaimed “passionate moderate,” Hillman did not buy the narrative that Republicans were the party of people who cared only about powerful industrialists and lower taxes while Democrats were the party of the working people beholden to labor unions. She believed that working people and their unions in Pittsburgh would vote Republican given the right candidate.

As it turned out, she was correct. For one thing, organized labor had never wanted to be taken for granted. Jack Shea, the president of the Allegheny County Labor Council, said, “It’s not about Ds and Rs with us. We’re not a party. It’s about how you are on the issues. Just because you’ve got a D behind your name doesn’t mean that we’re going to be for you.”

Labor leaders also respected businesspeople who treated their employees fairly, and Henry Hillman, the president of the Hillman Company, was one of those who did. When union leaders looked at the Hillman Company’s real estate projects, for example, they saw jobs that were “100 percent union, and they pay all their bills,” said Jim Klingensmith, executive vice president of the Allegheny County Labor Council. The Hillmans’ good friend, H. John “Jack” Heinz II, president of the H.J. Heinz Company, also was highly regarded. The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union employees at the Heinz Company “loved the Heinzes,” Klingensmith said, and that included Jack’s son, John, who worked at the company. Klingensmith said the joke was that Jack Heinz urged his son to go into politics because the younger Heinz “was settling too many grievances in the cafeteria before they got up to human resources.”

With the help of labor, Elsie Hillman helped John Heinz to launch his political career. She and her husband were in Japan in the spring of 1971 when they learned that Republican U.S. Representative Robert Corbett had died. The Republican Committee of Allegheny County would have just weeks to nominate its candidate to run in a special election to fill Corbett's term. Pott wanted that nomination, but John Heinz had sent Hillman a telegram asking for her support, knowing that her influence with committee members was powerful. She sent Heinz back a telegram pledging her support and that same day sent 350 telegrams to Republican committee members, urging them to do the same.

Heinz secured the Republican Party's support in Allegheny County, earning the chance to run against the Democrats' choice, John E. Connelly, the owner of a fleet of riverboats. Republican Party regulars thought that seeking the support of organized labor would be a waste of time, but Hillman, who chaired Labor for Heinz, and Jim McGregor, Heinz's campaign chair, believed that individual labor unions would support Heinz if they had the chance to meet him.

Hillman's first step was to ask the Allegheny County labor council not to endorse either candidate. A request like that from a Republican Party official would have been unthinkable a few years earlier, but the Heinz name and the relationships that Hillman had forged during earlier campaigns meant that the labor council would at least consider her request. (Hillman knew and had worked with Jack Armand, the leader of the cab drivers' union in Pittsburgh, having first met him through her childhood friend, boxing great Billy Conn.)

The labor council agreed to withhold its endorsement, giving Hillman and Heinz's campaign staffers the leeway to court each of the unions separately. Hillman brought Heinz to early morning meetings with labor members at plant gates, introduced him to the carpenters' union and the steamfitters' union, and got him written endorsements from one local after another. Hillman also opened an office in the Frick Building in downtown Pittsburgh for the exclusive use of union

volunteers so that they could use its free telephones for the new technology of “phone banking.” Russ Martz, who worked for Heinz’s campaign, said that Hillman would say to each union, “We would like John Heinz’s picture on the front page of every publication you send to your membership, please. And we want these phone banks manned from 3 in the afternoon to 9 at night, every night, calling your members. I want you to take responsibility to make sure those phone lines are busy and that they’re calling members to remind them that the union is supporting John Heinz in this election. Okay?”

Early in the Heinz congressional campaign, Hillman approached Marylou Stefanko, the local head of the state’s largest teachers’ union, the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), asking if she would meet with a moderate Republican. After thinking about it for a week, Stefanko agreed to meet Heinz and was impressed enough to organize her union to work for him, getting more than 500 volunteers to use the union phone bank. Stefanko also issued a challenge to a friend of Connelly, betting that he could not get his candidate to debate Heinz (something Connelly had avoided). He took the bait, and the debate before 200 PSEA members helped to turn the tide for Heinz. “There was no question after that debate that the Western Region was going to make the recommendation to the state PACE [Political Action Committee for Education] that we wanted to endorse Heinz,” said Stefanko. At a rally held in Pittsburgh near the end of the campaign, more than 2,000 teachers, Teamsters, members of the building trades, and mine workers turned out for Heinz.⁴¹

Heinz won that election and every other race he ever entered. “Elsie was tremendously helpful in getting the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] endorsement in a tough year, and she was just as helpful with getting the endorsement from [then United Mine Workers of America President Richard] Trumka and the United Mine Workers,” said Kevin Talley, who managed Heinz’s later campaigns for the U.S. Senate. In Heinz’s last campaign, he won two-thirds of the state’s vote; few officials on

the national scene were as popular in their home states. The unlikely heart of his base was organized labor.

Pittsburgh's labor leaders introduced Hillman to their peers in the eastern part of the state, said the Labor Council's Klingensmith. "The ironworkers who were here got her an introduction with those guys in the east, and she was just so gracious. How do you not like her? And they developed a relationship and they trusted her, just like we trusted her here." But Hillman did not always wait to be introduced. When she was working for Heinz's run for U.S. Senate in 1976, she happened to be in a cab heading from the airport into Philadelphia and had an extra half hour, so she asked the cab driver to take her to see John P. Morris, the head of the Teamsters in Philadelphia. Hillman had been working with the Teamsters in Pittsburgh through Jack Armand, so she felt that asking for Morris' support was worth a shot. As she remembered it, she walked in and said to the 10 skeptical men sitting there, "Hello, I'm Elsie Hillman from Pittsburgh and I would love to see Mr. Morris. Is he here?" I didn't know him from a cake of soap but I talked to him about the campaign, and he seemed to like what I was saying." Hillman remembered that Morris and the Teamsters did decide to endorse Heinz in his campaign for U.S. Senate. Years later, Morris would present Hillman with Philadelphia Local 502's Civic Award.

Hillman's support among union members is strong to this day, and she has worked with labor leaders on more than political campaigns. She was their ally in advocating for a new airport in Pittsburgh along with other building projects that they agreed were good for Pittsburgh and good for jobs. They still approach her to work behind the scenes to resolve misunderstandings, as they did in averting a strike by janitors. Shea said that when janitorial workers threatened to stop work in the City of Pittsburgh, a union leader called Hillman to explain that something was going awry in their communications with business leaders. "Somebody wasn't getting the message to the right people. Elsie Hillman called the people that needed to be called." The issue was resolved.

Why is it that labor members felt a connection to Hillman? Shea thought it was because “she had time for regular people. She had time for people who need other people.” Klingensmith said, “She figures labor’s a big part of the community and a big part of the overall structure of the community. She’s always respected whichever way we’ve gone. She’s never tried to pressure anybody.”

The fact was that Hillman liked the labor leaders she met and they liked her, something that at least one “upper-crust Pittsburgher” could not fathom. “I never understand why she got involved in politics,” said this person in a 1969 *Forbes* article. *Forbes* did not identify this person. “Having to bother with the kind of people she gets involved with—cheap politicians, ward heelers, people like that. Even inviting them into her home.”⁴²

LeRoy Zimmerman, former attorney general of Pennsylvania, seemed to understand Hillman’s ability to connect with all sorts of people: “Life is about relationships. If there’s anyone I know in my experience in politics and government who understood the value, the need, and the loyalty of relationships, it is Elsie Hillman.”

As Hillman rose in the party, George H.W. Bush and other leaders would benefit from those relationships and her growing skills as a social actor.

State and national party leader

After Raymond Shafer was elected Pennsylvania’s governor in 1966, more than 200 Allegheny County Republicans headed to Harrisburg for his January 1967 inauguration. Hillman, who organized the trip, wanted to give the Allegheny County contingent a chance to meet other volunteers in the state, so she and David Maxwell of Philadelphia handwrote invitations on construction paper that read: “The Allegheny Armpit. Open 24 Hours. Starting Now.” When people arrived at the door to the Allegheny Armpit—an impromptu gathering in a Harrisburg hotel room—they saw Hillman dressed as a Bond Girl, with fishnet stockings, go-go boots, shimmering gold raincoat—and her signature headband.

Hillman had begun to gain attention at the state level as someone who could make politics fun even as she could organize, lead, and win campaigns. She looked for chances to have food and drink, making her homemade stuffed cabbage or “beans and weenies,” inviting other women volunteers to eat popcorn in her hotel room during state meetings, or talking usually taciturn Republican men into being part of a pantomimed circus act. She knew that injecting levity could soften some of the divisions of geography or points of view and be a salve when times were tense.

At the request of her peers in other counties, Hillman began to spend time helping them to raise money, which allowed her to extend the network of friendships she had begun to build during trips to the Republican National Conventions. While some asked her to come to their counties, she also sought out county chairs, particularly those she admired and from whom she wanted to learn, including county chairs Anne Anstine of Juniata County and Andy Gleason of Cambria County, who became her friends. Gleason said of Hillman, “I never knew anybody in all my years in politics and business that had the ‘touch’ that Elsie had. She could take somebody off the streets and talk to them the same as she could someone who was her good friend.”

One of the sources of her growing influence in the party was her family’s ability to make sizable contributions. Elsie and Henry Hillman each gave \$25,000 to the campaigns of several candidates—substantial contributions, but less than others gave in a state that has no upper limit on campaign contributions. The Hillmans could have given more, but, according to John Denny, who worked with Elsie Hillman on several elections, they never wanted to short-circuit the process that candidates must go through to build a broad base of support with a mix of donors.

More important than her personal contributions to candidates was Hillman’s willingness to help other county chairs and the Republican State Committee (now known as the Pennsylvania State Party) to bring in state- and national-level figures to raise money. She began by asking Scott, Scranton, and Shafer to help her get notables to speak

at fundraising events. She also would just pick up the telephone and call people, whether she knew them or not. “When we were working on the Eisenhower campaign,” Hillman recalled, “I called up the attorney general in New York [Louis Lefkowitz, a close ally of Rockefeller’s] and got him on the phone from our little headquarters. ... I didn’t know him at all. I just thought, ‘Why can’t you call up the attorney general of New York and find out what you want to find out?’ It just didn’t occur to me that you couldn’t do that.” Years later, after she became one of Pennsylvania’s three members on the RNC, she could more easily ask national leaders like Senators Bob Dole, Howard Baker, and John Danforth to travel to Pennsylvania to help candidates.

Over time, Hillman would build a network of friends who some might call “foot soldiers”—people she could mobilize to support the candidates or issues she cared about. Those loyalists were not only in the western part of the state; former Lieutenant Governor William Scranton III said that, in the east, the closer Hillman got to the Susquehanna River, the more powerful she was.

Because of her growing influence, the party’s 1974 candidate for governor, Drew Lewis, asked Hillman to run for lieutenant governor. Reported at the time as whispers and possibilities, a letter Hillman wrote to Lewis in February 1974 indicates that he had asked her directly. “Thank you, Drew,” Hillman wrote. “In my golden years (too fast approaching!) I will probably tell my great-grandchildren that I was asked to run for Lt. Governor in Pennsylvania.”⁴³

As she increasingly stumped statewide for candidates and served on the state party’s leadership and finance committees, Hillman encountered the “kings” of the Republican Party, the chairs of Philadelphia, Montgomery, Chester, Bucks, Delaware, and Lancaster counties. Theirs were the pivotal counties in elections for statewide and even presidential candidates, and they were unabashed in expecting that Republicans who worked hard to elect the governor or treasurer could expect to have the chance at a state job or contract or to serve on a commission. That was the arrangement in Pennsylvania, one of the

last states to eliminate unbridled patronage. The party that held the governor's office controlled thousands of state jobs and millions of dollars in state contracts. The party faithful at the state and county level would be rewarded, and, in the counties, this meant contracts and access to field-level jobs, such as highway and state hospital jobs. The county chairs controlled this local patronage and could deploy thousands of volunteers during campaigns and raise hundreds of thousands of dollars, so candidates for statewide office relied on them for their war chests and votes.

Hillman did not pretend to wield the influence these men had, as Allegheny County constituted no more than 11 percent of the commonwealth's registered Republican vote in the 1970s. But she took her seat at the table without apparent hesitation. As LeRoy Zimmerman, the state's first elected attorney general, put it, "She had the ability to sit in the room with Billy Meehan [of Philadelphia] and Andy Gleason and George Bloom [the state chair] and talk the talk. She understood how deals were made, election tickets were put together—that included considerations of geography and gender. ... She'd come into the leadership meetings and start talking about what she felt, what she believed, and why, and before you know it, we left with consensus."

"When Elsie came down here to the southeast," said Delaware County Chair Tom Judge, "she might have thought, 'Hey, these are macho men. They're not going to accept me.' But we finally did."

Elected to the RNC in turbulent times

In 1975, when the state committee elected Hillman to be one of Pennsylvania's three members on the Republican National Committee (RNC), it was an indication of the support she had earned among her peers. But she was joining the national committee during the most turbulent year in its history. Nixon had resigned in 1974, damaging Republicans in elections at every level of government and tainting the reputation of the RNC. "A mere 18 percent of the American people dared admit they were Republicans," wrote historian Catherine Rymph.⁴⁴

After Gerald Ford succeeded Nixon as president (and Nelson Rockefeller became Ford's vice president), he appointed Iowa's Mary Louise Smith as RNC chair, in part as a way to reach out to women but also because Smith was a good grassroots organizer and a trusted moderate in the party. One reporter who had followed Smith's career wrote that she spent a lot of time "worrying about ways to attract Blacks and other minorities," according to Rymph. Smith also was an active supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment, and in this she was a reflection of the average Republican woman of the time—56 percent of Republican women were in favor of the ERA.⁴⁵

Smith had to work quickly to organize the Republican convention that would take place in Kansas City, Mo., in August 1976. This one was bound to be contentious, as Ronald Reagan was challenging Ford for the nomination. In the years since Reagan's nominating speech at the 1964 convention, Reagan had become the favored leader of a new coalition of conservatives. This group included people who had been attracted to Goldwater's conservative philosophy along with the "new right"—people who melded their conservative politics with their religious views and considered themselves purists. Goldwater repudiated the connection between his conservative movement and this new coalition. In 1981, he said, "I've spent quite a number of years carrying the flag of the 'Old Conservatism.' And I can say with conviction that the religious issues of these groups have little or nothing to do with conservative or liberal politics. The uncompromising position of these groups is a divisive element that could tear apart the very spirit of our representative system, if they gain sufficient strength."⁴⁶

Even in 1976, the new right had impressive strength. Ford felt their pressure and, to gain their support, agreed to a change in his choice of running mate. Rockefeller was out and the more conservative Dole was in as his chosen candidate for vice president.

When the convention began, Reagan was 103 delegates short of the total he needed for the nomination and Ford needed 22 more, so both set out to woo uncommitted delegates. In a bold attempt to win over moderates,

STRUCTURE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

Republican Party members are linked through national, state, and local committees that recruit and support candidates and advocate for the party platform.

The Republican National Committee (RNC) is based in Washington, D.C. and has 168 members—three per state or territory (a national committeeman, a national committeewoman, and a state chair). The highest-ranking Republican at the state level (e.g., the governor) nominates the national committee members, and the state committee members vote to approve them. The RNC meets twice each year.

The Republican state committees (called State Central Committees or State Executive Committees) are composed of members approved or elected by Republican voters in their states' counties or congressional districts. In Pennsylvania, state committee members are elected every two years during the Republican primary, and the number of committee members per county is based on that county's share of the registered Republicans in the state. Each county is assured of receiving at least two members.

At the county level, two local committee members (one male and one female) are elected from each voting precinct to their Republican county committee. These county committee members also serve on their local municipality's party committee.

At Republican national conventions, Pennsylvania's 75 delegates include its three national committee members, 62 directly elected delegates, and 10 others appointed by the state committee.

Reagan announced that U.S. Senator Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania would be his running mate. This placed the Pennsylvania delegation in a difficult position; Schweiker was the state's top-ranking Republican and was well liked, but the state's electorate had voted for Ford by an overwhelming 92 percent to Reagan's 1 percent in the spring primary.

Hillman, national committeewoman for the state and floor leader for Pennsylvania Republicans, was responsible for holding together the state's

delegation for Ford. (Lewis, national committeeman for Pennsylvania, showed particular conviction in the interest of party unity, as he and Schweiker had been friends since childhood.) William Scranton III, who was on the staff of the state committee at the time, remembered, “It was a battle for the soul and the votes of the Pennsylvania Republican delegation. Elsie was very much the strategist. She had meetings all the time: ‘How are we going to keep this person?’ On the phone with the Ford people and our delegates. Pigeonholing delegates at breakfast, at lunch. It was constant maintenance to make sure that they were there.” It took time, meetings, and organization, but it also was true that Hillman could transfer to Ford some of the goodwill she had been building in the state. Scranton continued, “A lot of the delegates were very committed, personally, to Elsie.”

While delegations like Pennsylvania’s remained loyal to Ford, who ultimately won the nomination, conservatives for Reagan were able to outflank moderates by clever maneuvering before the convention, when they gained a majority on several of the subcommittees that were reviewing the party platform. One of these subcommittees voted to recommend removing language in the party platform that supported the ERA. Although the subcommittee’s recommendation was not accepted by the crucial platform committee, the vote was close. Social conservatives did win a major victory on another plank, however. At this first convention since *Roe v. Wade*, they were able to orchestrate a change in the language on abortion. The plank was changed to read: “The Republican Party favors a continuance of the public dialogue on abortion and supports the efforts of those who seek enactment of a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children.”⁴⁷ This marked the first time in its history that the Republican Party had supported a constitutional amendment to ban abortion.

Hillman and other national committee members worked after the convention to reaffirm the party’s commitment to women’s rights. In 1979, she was able to work within the RNC’s executive committee to

develop and pass a “unity resolution” modeled on the one that she had advocated for, successfully, within the state committee in Pennsylvania. The resolution would have little impact, however, for it was passed within the largely moderate RNC, while social conservatives were building grassroots support across the country.

It was at the 1980 convention in Detroit (where Reagan won the presidential nomination) that, for the first time since 1940, the approved party platform did not explicitly endorse the Equal Rights Amendment. Instead, it substituted this wording: “We acknowledge the legitimate efforts of those who support or oppose ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.”⁴⁸ The *Ripon Forum*, a magazine on moderate Republican thinking, included this comment: “Although first to endorse the principle of an Equal Rights Amendment at a national convention, the Party has now become the first to sanction its abandonment.”⁴⁹ The most that supporters of the ERA could hope to do was keep out a plank that actually opposed the amendment.

This convention was bittersweet for Hillman, who was thrilled by the nomination of moderate and friend George H.W. Bush for vice president but alarmed by evidence of the ascendance of social conservatives in the party. A supporter of abortion rights, Hillman was within the strong majority of Republicans; 63 percent of the delegates who attended the convention said that they supported the *Roe v. Wade* decision, according to Bill Brock, who had replaced Smith as RNC chair. The same was true on the ERA, with two supporters for every one opponent.

In Hillman’s mind, a principle was at stake. “If we allowed one issue to dictate our politics,” she said 10 years later, “our system as we know it would go down the chute.”⁵⁰

Brock was not at all happy with the way that the 1980 party platform drew attention to divisions within the party. “We had very, very carefully worked to break several Republican stereotypes—by holding the convention in Detroit, for one thing. ... I was obviously distressed to see the primary debate focused on what was described as the social issues. I felt that we were risking the under-40 target group

ROOTS OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

According to Paul Weyrich, who cofounded the Heritage Foundation, other conservative organizations, and political action committees, it was not the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* that unified conservative Christians as a political force. “What galvanized the Christian community was not abortion, school prayer, or the ERA. I am living witness because I was trying to get those people interested in those issues and I utterly failed. What changed their mind was Jimmy Carter’s intervention against the Christian schools, trying to deny them tax-exempt status on the basis of so-called *de facto* segregation. ... Suddenly it dawned on them that they were not going to be left alone to teach their children as they pleased. It was at that moment that conservatives made the linkage between their opposition to government interference and the interests of the evangelical movement. That is what brought those people into the political process.” (From *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, by William Martin, p. 173).

that we had identified as our primary goal. ... I discussed at length with the Reagan people the possibility of a quieter approach to the platform. We simply lost control of the situation.”⁵¹ After the platform committee voted to abandon the ERA and added a clause favoring congressional restrictions on abortion, the RNC’s cochair, Mary Dent Crisp, walked out of the convention and went to work for third-party candidate John Anderson.

The dimensions of the new social conservative network that had formed were not well understood at the time. One party leader later said, “I don’t know of a legislator that was ever afraid of them. They really weren’t organized.” Hillman, however, was one person who had learned that the religious right was actually quite organized. A union friend of hers had shared some research on the religious right, including a map and charts that showed the overlap among the boards of several evangelical Christian organizations, political action committees, and television and radio stations. “Somebody was on the board of one group

here, on the board of this one over there, and they were all much more combined than anybody thought they were,” said Hillman.

Hillman went to talk to party leaders across the state and in Washington, D.C. Her message was consistent: The religious right is a strong and organized force that uses the “single-issue trap” of abortion to ensnare candidates who disagree with its ideology. To one group of Republican leaders she said, “There was a day not too long ago when we were all terrified of the left wing. After all, it was the left wing that marched on Washington and burned flags and perhaps toppled Lyndon Johnson’s presidency. But it was also the left wing in the peace and civil rights movement that we were all free to join. For the most part, they wanted everyone on board and kept the doors open. ... But where, I wonder, does the right wing keep its door?”⁵² Former U.S. Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania said that it was Hillman who was the first to alert the state’s Republican delegation in Congress to the growing power of the New Right. Hillman’s recollection of that meeting with the delegation was that they were unconvinced. “They thought I’d lost my mind,” she said.

Soon, however, the new right’s organizational skill and influence among voters was impossible to ignore. Jim Leach, chair of the Ripon Society, wrote that the RNC should conduct a thorough review of “the role of the New Right in American public life today and [an] assessment of the appropriateness of the party identifying in any way with New Right causes and New Right tactics.”⁵³

By the time Bush ran for president in 1988, he had to overcome a challenge from candidates supported by the religious right, including Pat Robertson. While Bush defeated them in the primary and was nominated at the convention, the social conservatives filled many of the convention’s committees and exerted influence because their supporters had run successfully to be delegates to the convention. Their show of strength in 1988 was eclipsed four years later when the Houston convention, which should have been the showcase of the party’s resolve and unity in reelecting Bush, instead displayed the party’s factions to the country.

That 1992 convention was when former Republican candidate Pat Buchanan gave a nationally televised address to the delegates that excited some and alarmed others with his mean-spirited remarks (“Hillary [Clinton] has compared marriage and the family, as institutions, to slavery and life on an Indian reservation. Well, speak for yourself, Hillary.”) and his messianic rhetoric (“There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America. And in that struggle for the soul of America, Clinton and Clinton are on the other side, and George Bush is on our side.”) This also was the convention in which the platform committee voted to change the words “mindful of our country’s rich religious pluralism” to “mindful of our country’s Judeo-Christian heritage.” And, on abortion, it was quickly clear that Hillman and the others who wanted to remove abortion from the platform were outnumbered.

Hillman and her RNC allies encountered opposition at many turns. For example, the 1992 convention organizers had changed the names of some subcommittees, which may have been done to confuse the press and members of the public who wanted to witness the deliberations. The subcommittee on “individual rights, good homes, and safe streets” was the place for discussion of the Los Angeles riots along with abortion. In the early days of the convention, the press reported that convention leaders refused to allow Barbara Mosbacher, the sister of Bush’s campaign chair, to rent a room for a press conference because it was not an official party meeting, while they had permitted the Christian Coalition of America to hold press conferences in the main hotel. Tanya Melich, an alternate delegate at the convention, wrote, “An outsider would have thought, from the way we were treated, that we were a battalion of Clinton Democrats from Arkansas, come to storm the Platform Committee, rather than a hundred-or-so pro-choice Republicans. Police officers and security seemed to outnumber Republicans.”⁵⁴

When the issue of abortion rights was brought to the platform committee, Vivian Petura from New Mexico said, “This is not a political issue.

Ladies and gentlemen, please take it out of the platform.”⁵⁵ A few other committee members joined her, asking the platform committee to include “big tent” language instead, but they failed. The only hope of bringing their recommendation to the floor of the convention was a minority report, which required the agreement of six delegations. Hillman, national committeeman Herb Barness, and Specter agreed to make Pennsylvania’s delegation one of the six. But there was not enough support to sway the other delegations, so the statement on abortion remained in the platform.

When Hillman returned to Pennsylvania from the 1992 convention, she mobilized her political network and began to be more strategic in her own contributions to campaigns to help counter the growing conservative movement in her own state. She persuaded the state committee to adopt a statement of principles that excluded any mention of abortion (something she later suggested as a model for the 1996 convention). She continued to speak publicly. “I see an intolerance that comes from the very right wing of the party, and I think that’s very dangerous. It’s not conducive to having people come together to solve problems,” she told reporters.⁵⁶ She started a political action committee called the Republican Future Fund to support the campaigns of moderate candidates. (Across the Republican Future Fund’s most active years, it contributed more than \$200,000 to campaigns and the party, drawing its money from Hillman, corporate leaders, and other Republicans.) And when candidates wrote to Hillman for contributions, she began to turn them down if she thought that they had kowtowed to the religious right. This was not always simple. When Pennsylvania State Senator Mike Fisher, who was about to mount a campaign for attorney general, asked Hillman to contribute, she wrote back late in 1995:

I admit to being on the horns of a dilemma here as you are somebody who has been a friend for a long time and we have worked together for many years. ... My problem is that I am really tired of being shoved around by “pro-lifers.”... With our state legislature, 140 strong out of 203 members in the pro-life caucus, holding the governor hostage on his education bill,

I am really not anxious to turn the attorney general's office open again to use its power to further this trend!

However, I am sending a contribution. ... If asked, I will send a contribution also to Mike [Montgomery County District Attorney Michael Marino, a potential candidate in the primary who was pro-choice] ... and will support the person who wins the party endorsement at the next meeting. ... I do not believe that we are dealing with understandable religious conviction, but instead, with zealots.⁵⁷

State committee members started to hear grumbling from social conservatives in the state about Hillman's activities. Some wrote to say that she should not be reelected as national committeewoman because of a large-scale mailing she had helped to send out that unveiled the Christian Coalition's support for candidates. Some conservatives called on the state committee to investigate her.⁵⁸

John Denny, who worked with Hillman on state and national campaigns, remembered that, in early 1996, there was a movement afoot to denounce Hillman just after the annual Lincoln Day dinner in Harrisburg, which happened to be close to the weekend when the Pittsburgh Steelers were playing the Dallas Cowboys in Super Bowl XXX. Denny said that she mailed every state committee member a Steelers' Terrible Towel ahead of the day and then "turned the entire Lincoln Day dinner into a fun Steeler party with little Steeler footballs and Steeler paraphernalia. She stood up and defused the tension by saying, 'We can be against each other on this or that, but when it comes to the Super Bowl, we're all Steeler fans.'"

Although Hillman was getting close to announcing her retirement from the RNC, she wanted to serve on the platform committee for the 1996 convention in San Diego—her first and only time on the platform committee. "I just knew what the issue was going to be," she said. For months prior to the convention, she worked to build support for removing the abortion language from the platform, and when nominee apparent Dole said in June that he would support a "declaration of

tolerance” in the platform, she urged delegates to write to him and the RNC to urge them to include this language. She also met with RNC Chair Haley Barbour and several dozen Republican members of Congress to discuss removing abortion from the platform and formally surveyed the Republican leaders in the country so that she could announce to the platform committee the leadership’s support for removing the abortion plank.⁵⁹

The San Diego convention would not generate the heat of the 1992 convention, in part because so many moderates had given up. The religious right was able to build upon its earlier successes, adding language on abortion to several planks where it had never been before. While the declaration of tolerance was debated, it did not pass.

Hillman officially retired from party leadership in 1996. At her suggestion, the state committee elected her good friend, Anne Anstine, to take her place as national committeewoman. Hillman now had the time she had wanted to spend with her grandchildren and volunteer for ventures that affected the city she cared so much about—from the Regional Renaissance Initiative, which has preserved and supported assets like the area’s libraries and museums, and the Home Rule Campaign, which changed the structure of Allegheny County’s government, to the Pittsburgh Financial Leadership Committee, which developed strategies for returning the City of Pittsburgh to firmer financial footing.

She did not completely close the chapter on politics, however. When Hillman retired from party leadership, she wrote a letter to the state committee that said, “I will miss all of the fun I have had and all the friends I have so enjoyed because the whole experience has been such a big part of my life. But I can run alongside you all, shouting and waving banners no matter where I am on the road! And I will!”⁶⁰ During her retirement, she did more than wave banners—she cochaired six more campaigns, making sure that she could help Specter, Governor Tom Ridge, and State Treasurer Barbara Hafer at least one more time.

CHAPTER THREE

The Skilled Social Actor

In 1997, sociologist Neil Fligstein published his paper, “Social Skill and the Theory of Fields,” exciting scholars in disciplines ranging from sociology and political science to game theory. Fligstein had articulated a framework for understanding how people spark change in fields ranging from government and corporations to the civil rights movement. In doing so, he helped to focus political inquiry on the artistry of key actors within institutions—and to move away from a “distanced, abstract, and only marginally applicable would-be science,” according to Philip Agre, formerly of the University of California, Los Angeles, information studies department.⁶¹

Fligstein argued that organizations are built or changed by “skilled social actors”—inspired entrepreneurs who know how to seize opportunities and lead others in a direction that they believe is good for the institution. Their strength lies in being able to “empathetically relate to the situations of other people and in doing so ... provide those people with reasons to cooperate,” wrote Fligstein. “Their own sense of efficacy comes, not from some narrow conception of self-interest, but from the act of inducing cooperation and helping others attain ends.”⁶²

How these skilled social actors induce cooperation comes down to a core set of strategies, whether they are working within a political party or a social movement. Skilled social actors:

- persuade people that they share some overriding values and frame the stories that unite them.
- broker behind the scenes to convince one group after another that a particular agenda will benefit them. This might include convincing people that what they can get is really what they wanted all along.
- seize opportunities that arise and are resourceful, using whatever is on hand to benefit the organization.

- form alliances with disparate groups, including people with few other choices or who are outside the institution. They can become the node of the network they build, “the source of information and coalition-building.”
- try to do more than it is possible to achieve. Skilled social actors know that the excitement of action can create an environment in which people feel that they are part of a movement and that people forget losses in the wake of even a few victories.

Many of the people who worked closely with Elsie Hillman over the years have indicated that she possessed all of these qualities. Martin Hamberger said, “She leads people to want to be part of that group, organization, or movement because she helps them realize their goal and to make it work on the ground.” Kevin Talley said that watching Hillman led him to realize that “it’s important to be able to work together on different issues and walk away, if not agreeing, at least not mad at each other.” Steve Dunkle, who worked for the Republican State Committee, said, “She never wanted to be center stage. It was never about Elsie. She just worked behind the curtain.” And LeRoy Zimmerman said, “You know, she wasn’t a fist pounder or a demander. She had a quiet, persuasive, but powerful manner in which to move people to consensus.”

The cases that follow provide evidence of Hillman’s political entrepreneurship, beyond what these and other individuals have said about her. The first case about George H.W. Bush’s run for president in 1980 shows Hillman’s resourcefulness and persuasive skills, which were as important in injecting energy (and some hot air) into a campaign as in getting her candidate before Pennsylvania’s labor leaders. In the case of Doris Carson Williams’ run for Pittsburgh City Council, Hillman was able to call upon the alliances she had built with people across the city of Pittsburgh and serve as the “source of coalition building.” In the study of her role in Dick Thornburgh’s rise in politics and his run for governor, Hillman can be seen as a broker behind the scenes,

reaching out to key leaders (including Jesse Jackson) on behalf of a moderate she believed would be good for the state and the country. The Barbara Hafer study shows Hillman's persuasive skill—initially in convincing Hafer that she should change political parties and later, when she needed to exhort Hafer and party leaders to press on during an ill-fated campaign. And finally, Hillman's resourcefulness and ability to create a sense of excitement and action became important at key points in Tom Ridge's campaign for governor.

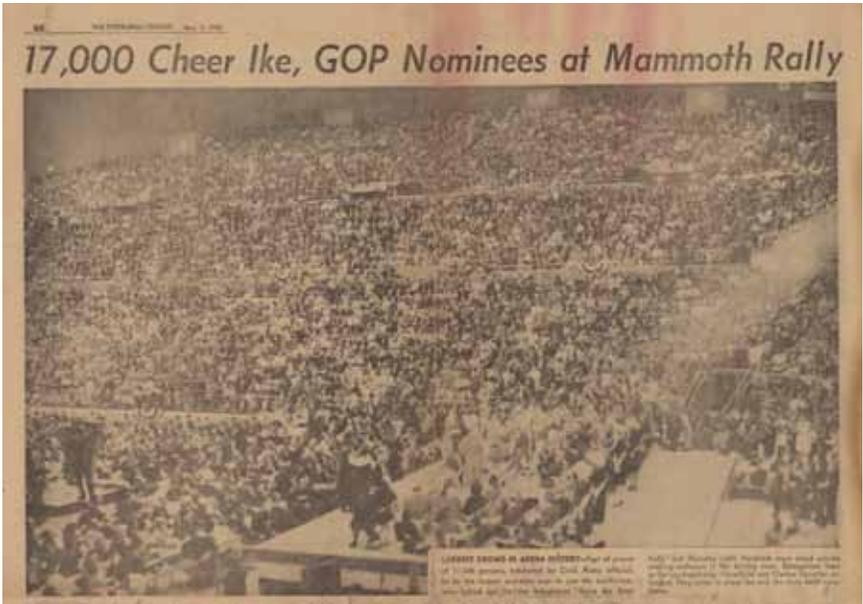
In each of the cases, Hillman seized opportunities, engaged in a bit of bricolage, and induced cooperation—all for the sake of the Republican Party.

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Hillman joined U.S. Senator Jacob Javits of New York and H.J. Heinz II in supporting the reelection campaign of her mentor, U.S. Senator Hugh Scott.

IMAGE COURTESY THE NEW PITTSBURGH COURIER. USED WITH PERMISSION.



Hillman and Wendell Freeland organized a 1962 rally for Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate William Scranton that proved that the region did, indeed, have more Republicans than could fit in a telephone booth.

FROM HILLMAN'S PERSONAL ARCHIVES

THE Allegheny Armpit
OPEN 24 Hours
STARTING NOW

Room #1 - Blue deon
BYOB

OWNED AND operated by:
MAXWELL of Philadelphia
HILLMAN of Pittsburgh

FROM HILLMAN'S PERSONAL ARCHIVES



Hillman, at center, hosting an impromptu party at a hotel room dubbed "The Allegheny Armpit," a gathering that brought together party members from around Pennsylvania at the Harrisburg inauguration of Governor Raymond Shafer in 1967.

At top is Hillman's handwritten invitation to the event.

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A Very New Political Style

—By Hungerford



Hillman's election to the post of chair of the Allegheny County Republican Party in 1967 inspired extensive media coverage, including this political cartoon, which ran in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.



Henry Hillman congratulates his wife on her 1967 election as Allegheny County Republican Committee Chair. Elsie Hillman was the first woman elected to that post in a major urban area.



As volunteer chair of the Allegheny County Republican Party, Hillman, along with Republican staff member Jessie Hewlett, accepts petitions for the upcoming election.



Hillman and then Vice President George H.W. Bush in his office during the Ronald Reagan administration



Hillman works the phones in George H.W. Bush's Pittsburgh campaign headquarters along with national campaign director Jim Wray during Pennsylvania's 1988 primary.



Barbara Hafer (center), Hillman, and State Senator James Greenwood at the PA Republicans for Choice rally in Harrisburg, 1992



Hillman bid good friend Barbara Bush farewell after a White House reception for Pennsylvania supporters in 1990.



Left to right, U.S. Representative Bill Clinger, Delaware County GOP Chair Tom Judge, Anne Anstine Hillman, and then Vice President George H.W. Bush on Air Force Two in the late 1980s



Hillman and Pittsburgh Mayor Sophie Masloff (one of many friends of Hillman's who were Democratic Party leaders) don their babushkas before a visit to the city by then First Lady Barbara Bush.

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Although she fought against the party's adopted platform that year, Hillman, pictured here holding a flag at the Republican National Convention in San Diego, continued to back the 1996 Republican ticket of presidential candidate Bob Dole and vice presidential candidate Jack Kemp.

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Hillman and Allegheny County Executive Jim Roddey converse during the 2000 Republican National Convention in Philadelphia.



At Hillman's 1996 retirement breakfast in Pittsburgh, Governor Tom Ridge and President George H.W. Bush join Hillman on stage to thank her.



Elsie Hillman, who George H.W. Bush later called his “secret weapon in Pennsylvania,” joins the candidate for his campaign across the state in the 1980 Republican primary.

CHAPTER FOUR



Cases in Point

George H. W. Bush

Pittsburghers love the reaction visitors have as they drive out of the Fort Pitt tunnel and catch their first glimpse of the downtown skyline—a striking picture of office buildings straight ahead, the rivers below, and Point State Park’s fountain to their left.

Then California Governor Ronald Reagan likely had a different reaction when his motorcade drove into Pittsburgh during the 1980 primary season. Although he already had won the largest share of delegates in state primaries, his campaign staffers were unnerved by the slide in his support in Pennsylvania at the hands of his strongest rival, former United Nations Ambassador George H.W. Bush. Sensing the need to bolster Reagan’s standing, they had changed his schedule so that Reagan could speak in Pittsburgh.

Elsie Hillman intended to show Reagan and the media that Pennsylvania was Bush territory. Knowing that Reagan would be coming into the area, she and Ron Kaufman, a Massachusetts native and field representative for the national Bush for President campaign, came up with an idea.

“It was Friday night at midnight,” recalled Kaufman, “and we said, ‘How about if we get a hot air balloon, anchor it at Point State Park, and put a big sign on it?’” He and Hillman got to work, calling their network of friends and volunteers to locate the balloon and drive it into the city of Pittsburgh from 80 miles away, calling the state park commissioner to get a permit, and having a huge sign flown in from Iowa. “Sure enough, at 5 in the morning on the Monday that Reagan was going to drive in, up went the balloon.”

As Reagan and his team emerged from the tunnel, they would have seen that beautiful Pittsburgh skyline—and a stories-high hot air balloon with a sign reading “George Bush for President.”

Hillman had begun promoting Bush as a potential candidate as early as 1978, and she became his campaign cochair in Pennsylvania and a member of his national steering committee. For Bush’s introduction to Pennsylvania, Hillman organized a breakfast in Pittsburgh, pricing the event at cost and with a nod to the election year (\$19.80). It turned out to be Bush’s largest event of the primary season, with 1,100 people eating bacon and eggs at the William Penn Hotel in downtown Pittsburgh.⁶³ Kaufman said that the breakfast was what former Republican National Committee Chair Lee Atwater called an “invisible primary,” an event that signals to people that a candidate has a groundswell of support. “That says, ‘Wow, this guy has something going for him if he can get 1,000 people.’”

Such demonstrations of support were crucial to the Bush campaign, which intended to show that his momentum was building and that, while Reagan might have support of the party apparatus, it was Bush who could win the popular vote. Because Drew Lewis and other state party leaders had gathered verbal commitments for Reagan from at least 50 of the state’s delegates, going after the popular vote was, in part, a default strategy. But Hillman believed that Bush would win the popular vote because most Pennsylvania Republicans were moderates. This was a state that had chosen senators like John Heinz and governors like Dick Thornburgh; they would find Reagan too conservative.

Hillman began by approaching Republican state legislators in the western part of the state who were influential with voters in their districts and then worked to build a grassroots movement for Bush. “I knew a lot of the leaders and residents of the state,” she said. “We just went district by district, setting up volunteers who would organize the vote. I had only one paid staff person, Mark Holman, and he worked state-wide. But we had names of people in all the congressional districts who’d been down into the local committee districts.” Holman said that

they put together “a phenomenal grassroots campaign” that was very well organized. It also helped that Hillman was “absolutely determined to call in every chit, to do everything she could, to get Bush elected.”

But while Hillman, Holman, and others in the campaign were busy generating support for Bush across Pennsylvania, the candidate was considering withdrawing from the race. Bush had started out strong in Iowa that January, winning the caucuses and rolling into New Hampshire as the man to beat. But he lost New Hampshire after Reagan outmaneuvered him just before a debate in Nashua, and his losses mounted in one high-delegate state after another. By April, Reagan was nearly halfway to the total number of delegates that he needed to secure the nomination.

Hillman and others urged Bush to stay in the race. Bush later told Hillman that, without her support, he would not have pressed on in 1980. The national political director for his campaign, David Keene, said that Bush decided to remain in the Pennsylvania primary to show Republicans that he was their best future candidate. “We weren’t playing for the vice presidency, but we were certainly playing to an extent to make a point and playing for George Bush’s future.”⁶⁴

For Reagan’s part, he hoped to score a victory in Pennsylvania without having to spend much more money before the general election. The growing number of Bush supporters in the state would frustrate his plans.

Activating Hillman’s network

Kaufman was working for the Bush campaign in New England when campaign manager James Baker summoned him to Philadelphia just weeks before the Pennsylvania primary. “We were behind by 15 points, 20 points. Baker goes around the room and gives everybody an assignment except me. I said, ‘Well, I’m here.’ And he says, ‘Yeah, here’s your job. You’re going to go over the hill and go to Pittsburgh. There’s this crazy lady there and your job is to keep her out of my hair.’

“So I get in my car,” said Kaufman, “and I drive over the mountains and go to Elsie’s office. I said, ‘Hi, I’m from the national campaign, here

to help.' She looked at me and said, 'Yeah. Come with me.' We go downstairs and the doorman knows her. That's pretty cool. We get into a cab and the cabbie knows her. That's pretty cool. We go over to the Hilton Hotel, had some lunch, and the doorman there knows her. That's pretty interesting. We go and meet some guy named Tony O'Reilly [CEO of the H.J. Heinz Company]. She knew everybody."

The fact that Hillman was speaking with every person and group she knew, from ethnic organizations in their clubs to unions in their meeting halls, was proving to be helpful to Bush. But the campaign staff balked at some of her ideas. One of these came to her as she realized that the convention of the state AFL-CIO would be in Pittsburgh just before the primary. Kaufman remembered her saying, "Let's get the state convention of the AFL-CIO to invite George to speak." He told her, "I don't think that's a good idea. And why would they invite us?"

She urged him to call Baker anyway. "So I call up Jim Baker and say, 'Jim, what do you think about having Mr. Bush speak to the state convention of the AFL-CIO?' He said, 'What, are you nuts? That's a terrible idea.' I say, 'Okay, good. Right, sir.' I tell this to Elsie and she says, 'No, we're going to do it. Come with me.' So we end up going to some hotel room where the convention is, and we go and meet this priest from New Jersey. And he's in charge of the program. And I'll never figure out how some priest from New Jersey who is in charge of the program was a pal of Elsie's, but this is Elsie.

"We get the official invite and I send it to Baker. I'm just a punk kid, I don't know what I'm doing, and I'm talking with Baker, who's God. He said, 'What did I tell you?'... So, I go to Elsie and say that he said no. She said, 'Listen, you and I are getting on that phone together.' Elsie dials the number and puts it on speakerphone, and Jim Baker answers it. I say, 'Hi, Mr. Baker. We want to relitigate this whole thing. It's really important. We think his message is going great and that he's saying the right things. And these guys are going to respect him.' Baker said to me, 'Okay, here's the deal: We'll do it. But if it doesn't work, you're fired.'"

To get an idea of what Bush was in for, Kaufman snuck into the convention to hear Walter Mondale's speech. "They boo Mondale, so I think, 'This is interesting. They're booing Mondale, who's kind of a labor guy, and the vice president of the United States, and a Democrat. What are they going to do to Bush?' So I started to get my résumé going. And then Bush came in, and he gave an awesome speech and knocked them dead, with cheering crowds."

The *Post-Gazette* account of Bush's speech said, "Republican George Bush, who found it difficult to smile in a crowd a year ago, has come full circle to a broad humor that yesterday won the applause, if not the votes of delegates to the annual AFL-CIO convention here."⁶⁵ Hillman had helped to send a message to Republicans across the country: George Bush could appeal to people outside the traditional party base and he could win in a general election.

While Kaufman and Hillman were planning the event with organized labor, Holman and Kevin Talley (who later would run Heinz's campaigns and serve as his chief of staff) were working on another first for Bush: his "people's press conference," which was held at the Lithuanian Club in the South Side neighborhood of Pittsburgh. In an hour-long open session with citizens and the press, Bush answered questions with confidence and knowledge. The campaign had purchased airtime on all three of the region's networks, so thousands of viewers in the region saw the broadcast.

After these events and the additional media coverage they generated, Bush's numbers in Pennsylvania started to move. *The New York Times* reported that, just prior to the Pennsylvania primary, "all polls and most political experts were giving Mr. Reagan a wide lead in the Pennsylvania race. But they began to find that the Bush campaign has made inroads in the last 10 days, enough to bring [Reagan] back to the state."⁶⁶

Hillman called upon her network for one last event: an outdoor rally for Bush in downtown Pittsburgh on the day before the primary. Talley remembers being concerned that this could reflect badly on Bush if too few volunteers turned out for the rally. But Hillman had called

the leaders she knew in neighborhoods, churches, and unions and her taxicab-driving friends. They came out to cheer for Bush.

“We ended up winning Pennsylvania by eight points,” said Kaufman. “And we won Western Pennsylvania, which was a shock to everybody. And I kept my job.”

Bush went on to surprising wins in the key states of Texas and Michigan. But by mid-May, Reagan had the delegates he needed to win the nomination at the Republican convention in Detroit that July. The remaining drama within the party was over Reagan’s choice for vice president.

After days of discussions with Gerald Ford (Reagan’s first choice for vice president), Reagan called Bush late in the night of July 16 to ask him to be his running mate. Just after midnight, Reagan walked into Joe Louis Arena in Detroit to announce his choice to the delegates still gathered there. The *Pittsburgh Press* reporter who was present among the state’s delegates wrote, “Pennsylvania’s ‘Push for Bush’ drive finally succeeded late last night after it seemed that the Bush bubble had burst.” He quoted Hillman as saying, “I’ve never had so many ups and downs.”⁶⁷

Why did Reagan choose Bush? Reagan’s campaign research had shown that “with George Bush, we had a moderate who could, in fact, attract a constituency in the suburbs North and South,” according to Richard Wirthlin, deputy director of strategy and planning for the Reagan-Bush Committee.⁶⁸ Reagan also knew he needed to broaden his appeal among the wider base if he was going to succeed in the general election, and Bush had proved he could appeal to unions and ethnic groups through his win in blue-collar states like Pennsylvania and Michigan. Kaufman believed it was not just the wins. “It was the way we won ... the fact that Bush put together this kind of organization in a state like Pennsylvania, where he didn’t have any real ties; the fact that he picked up disaffected Democrats; and the types of people he attracted.”

Many of those same people would be ready to work for Bush when he ran for president again in 1988.

Key dates in the Republican Primary, 1980

January 21	Iowa (caucuses)
February 26	New Hampshire
March 4	Massachusetts and Vermont
March 8	South Carolina
March 11	Alabama, Florida, and Georgia
March 18	Illinois
March 25	Connecticut and New York
April 1	Kansas and Wisconsin
April 22	Pennsylvania
May 3	Texas
May 6	Washington, D.C.; Indiana; North Carolina; and Tennessee
May 20	Michigan and Oregon
May 24	Arizona and Delaware
May 26	Bush withdraws from the race
June 3	Super Tuesday

(From *The Campaign for President: 1980 in Retrospect*,
Jonathan Moore, ed.)⁶⁹

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Elsie Hillman led Doris Carson Williams' "kitchen cabinet" during her Pittsburgh City Council campaign and continued to back Carson Williams' rise within the Republican State Committee.

Doris Carson Williams

Doris Carson Williams had just finished college in Connecticut and was the host of a radio program there when a friend stopped by on a voter registration drive. Remembering that her great-grandparents had been Republicans and not thinking it mattered much in the 1970s, Carson Williams registered as a Republican that day. “I didn’t know it was a big deal until I came home to Pittsburgh and announced it at the dinner table to my grandfather, who I thought was going to have a stroke,” she said. In spite of pressure from her family, she did not change her registration. “You know I’m left-handed and I am a Republican.”

Carson Williams moved back to Pittsburgh to work as a marketing representative and decided to get involved in the Republican Party because she wanted to see more African Americans in office. She also felt that “you can work your way to the top faster in the Republican Party than you can in the Democratic Party. The Republican Party has less of a hierarchical structure.”⁷⁰ She had a friend who introduced her to Wendell Freeland, and they began working on forming the Young Black Republican Council. “We wanted to increase the number of registered Black Republicans, we wanted to provide a vehicle for young Black Republicans to run for office, and we wanted to support the Peirce campaign.” (Robert Peirce was elected Allegheny County commissioner in 1975.) While she worked on the council and Peirce’s campaign, she and her mother and her mothers’ friends also recruited what they called “foot soldiers” for the party from among their friends and neighbors.

The Republican Party may have been less hierarchical, but it was not uniformly welcoming of the efforts of this African American woman. “At first, party members totally ignored us with their ignorant attitudes,” she said in a newspaper article in the late 1970s. “But we were persistent. We went all out for Peirce—door to door ... And we won.” Carson Williams said in that same article, “White Republicans are beginning to realize that in order to win you have to seek Black support. Black voters do not make up the majority, but they provide enough votes as a bloc to make the difference.”⁷¹

Carson Williams' own opportunity to run came early in 1977, when a Pittsburgh City Council member had to resign for health reasons. Democrats and Republicans had just 90 days to choose candidates and run citywide campaigns, and Freeland, Carson Williams' friend Billy Webb, and others who knew Carson Williams urged her to run. Not realizing that it was almost a certainty that a Republican would not be elected to council in the City of Pittsburgh, she agreed to run.

First, though, she had to get the party's endorsement, which meant going to a special meeting of officials at Elsie Hillman's home in Pittsburgh. "We went to Elsie's house, and she had all this food prepared. She was very friendly, very unassuming. I didn't know that she was Mrs. Elsie Hillman, the national committeewoman. She was a normal person and didn't act like what I thought this person would." After hearing Carson Williams and the other potential candidate, the party leaders decided to endorse Carson Williams, and she and Hillman got to work on the campaign.

"The next day, Elsie said, 'We have to set up the campaign hierarchy. John Heinz will be your campaign chairman and Dick Schweiker will be your honorary campaign chairman.' She put together a committee of 10 people. I immediately ran to the library to do some research. I couldn't say, 'Well, I just moved back to Pittsburgh so I don't really know or remember all of these people.'"

In thinking back on that period of time, Carson Williams realized that Hillman had stepped forward to help her on the heels of two other major campaigns. Throughout 1976, Hillman had worked on Gerald Ford's presidential campaign, including serving as floor leader at the Republican National Convention, and she had chaired the Labor for Heinz Committee during John Heinz's run for the U.S. Senate. Carson Williams said that Hillman treated her as if she were a candidate for major office. "She acted like I was running to move into the White House."

Heinz, Freeland, and Hillman introduced her to voters and donors, contacted the media for interviews, and put together dinners with potential donors. Hillman persuaded people like philanthropist

Helen Frick to make contributions to the campaign, and Elsie and Henry Hillman and Heinz each gave significant sums to the campaign as well. Watching Elsie Hillman bring one supporter after another to help her, Carson Williams was impressed by Hillman's optimism, her sense that "there was always something else that you could do," and her respect for people. "It was always about the pleases and thank-yous and dignity and respect," said Carson Williams.

The campaign team would meet in Freeland's office in the Plaza Building to stuff envelopes and strategize. "She had endless energy," said Carson Williams. "Elsie would have an idea of how to get in front of labor, for example. 'Doris, you have to meet so-and-so.' Or that I needed a 'kitchen cabinet' of people who could give me an idea of what John Q. Public wanted to know and what the street committee was talking about." Whenever Carson Williams was not in Freeland's office or at work, she was in Pittsburgh's neighborhoods. "I ran citywide and visited every neighborhood, almost every nook and cranny. I visited places I didn't even know existed in the city. And I grew up here."

As most people expected, however, Carson Williams lost the election. But she had come closer to winning a citywide race than any other Republican in 50 years, losing by just 2,400 votes. "The newspapers talked about that for so long, you'd have thought I'd won," she said. But for the candidate, reality set in the next day. "It's like poof, the excitement all ends. I felt like my bubble had burst. ... But I could only be but so disappointed because Elsie told me, 'You have done yourself such a great honor and the African American community. And African American women, as well.' She was sharing a dignity and respect story with me," said Carson Williams.

In the years to come, Carson Williams would rise in the ranks of the Republican Party, beginning with her selection as an officer of the Republican Committee of Allegheny County and her election as Republican state committeewoman. When Hillman urged her to run for one of the leadership positions of the Republican State Committee, Carson Williams hesitated, because she thought committee members outside

of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County did not know her. Hillman told her, “Well, you’re going to write them a letter and then you’re going to call them.” So every day after she finished work, Carson Williams would go to the Hillmans’ house to make telephone calls. “I would ring the doorbell and Elsie would come to the door, big smile, dressed in her blue jeans. She’d say, ‘Come in, dear!’ and we’d go upstairs to her office. She’d say, ‘You want coffee or tea or something to eat?’ She had the telephone lists, and I would call the state committee members.” By the time of the election by state committee members that year, “everybody knew who I was,” said Carson Williams. She won big, going on to serve as the deputy committee chair for the Republican State Committee.

Carson Williams and Hillman would work together for more than 25 years at both state and national levels, bringing together Republican National Committee members and the officers of the National Black Republican Council; working for the campaigns of Dick Thornburgh, George H.W. Bush, and William Scranton III; and persuading the party to support African American candidates for city and county offices.

Working with Hillman over the years was “a classic, textbook case on why to be involved and the value of relationships,” said Carson Williams. “If you were in, she was in, and vice versa; we never said no. You knew you would be in good company. For us at that time, we got to see the benefit of our involvement right away. It wasn’t like you had to wait 15 years.”

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Elsie Hillman supported Dick Thornburgh from the start of his political career. They are pictured here at the 1986 Lincoln Day dinner.

Dick Thornburgh

When the Republican Party nominated Barry Goldwater for president in 1964, attorney Dick Thornburgh was frustrated and angry. After Goldwater then lost in the general election, Thornburgh decided to write a letter to the editor saying that the moderates in the party had allowed it to be infused by “a brand of fanatic political extremism which rallied nearly every right-wing fringe group in the nation.” He wrote, “We must, beginning today, start the job of rebuilding our party.”⁷²

Elsie Hillman read the letter in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and called Thornburgh. Would he like to come talk with her about what to do? Thornburgh later joined her and a small group of people who occasionally met after work at lawyer Al Capozzi’s offices to strategize about how to strengthen the local Republican Party and to choose moderate candidates for office.

Hillman called Thornburgh again in February 1965 to ask him to meet with several of the Allegheny County Republican Party’s leaders, including George Pott, the Allegheny County chair. They wanted to talk with Thornburgh about the idea of his running for mayor of the City of Pittsburgh. Thornburgh said, “I gulped a little bit and said, ‘Well ...’” Elsie said, “You told me you were interested in politics!” Thornburgh prepared for that meeting by telephoning the man who was running John Lindsay’s campaign for mayor of New York City. He advised Thornburgh to make three demands.

When he got to the meeting with Pott and the ward chairs, Thornburgh presented those three requests. He laughed as he remembered what happened: “It was like a series of trip-hammer blows to these guys. First I tell them I’m going to run the campaign—what the hell did I know about running a campaign? Then, that I’m going to control all the patronage once I’m in city hall—right, that was their lifeblood, they would get these jobs from Bill Scranton in Harrisburg. And third, that I needed a war chest of half a million dollars. The notion of raising a half million bucks for some untried kid—for anybody—was so unthinkable to them.”

Thornburgh and the leadership did not come to an agreement that day, and his three optimistic conditions saved him from what likely would have been a losing run for office. No Republican had won a mayoral race in the City of Pittsburgh since the 1930s and the candidate the Republicans ultimately ran in the 1965 race was defeated soundly.

Thornburgh continued to meet with Hillman, Capozzi, and the other members of the group that called itself the 007s, becoming a valued member because he had a coherent vision for what the party could be. He and John Heinz III worked on putting that vision into words and developed the idea of forming the Pittsburgh Republican Forum to attract younger people to the party and give them an entry point as volunteers and potential candidates for office.

At the urging of his fellow moderates, Thornburgh agreed to run for U.S. Congress in 1966. This time, he understood that he would be a “sacrificial lamb,” because he would be running against the popular incumbent, William Moorhead; no one expected him to do better than the usual one Republican vote for every three Democratic votes. Even Thornburgh’s announcement that he was a candidate barely made the newspapers. But he was, by his own description, able to “become a large-sized pain to Bill Moorhead” by disclosing his own family’s finances and calling for Moorhead to do the same. This was before financial disclosure laws, so Moorhead, who was a wealthy man elected in a working-class district, avoided the question and never did reveal his income or assets. In striking this slight blow, Thornburgh began to establish an image as a candidate of integrity.

Hillman rolled up her sleeves to work for Thornburgh during that congressional campaign. “She worked at our headquarters, she put me in touch with people, she helped raise money,” said Thornburgh. In spite of the excitement he generated among Republican volunteers, however, Thornburgh lost the race. But he had done much better than anyone had expected, narrowing the usual rate of defeat to two to one. People in the Republican Party began to think of him as a serious candidate.

Thornburgh volunteered for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and served on the board of Neighborhood Legal Services, providing pro bono legal assistance. When Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April 1968, one of Thornburgh's colleagues in the ACLU who was a Democrat called to ask him for help. Some protesters had been arrested in the Hill District of Pittsburgh and were being held at the jail. Could he join in the defense of these men? It would help to have attorneys who were Republicans in among the Democrats working to free them. Thornburgh agreed to help.

His defense of the protesters was in character for Thornburgh, who earlier had come to the aid of Nate Smith when he was arrested during a demonstration about minority hiring. Smith said of Thornburgh's actions to free him from jail, "He worked for four days. He walked me out of there with flying colors."⁷³ Smith never forgot Thornburgh's support and returned the favor 10 years later by supporting Thornburgh when he ran for statewide office.

Later in 1968, H.J. Heinz II, chair and CEO of the H.J. Heinz Company, asked Thornburgh to help with New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller's presidential primary election run, and Thornburgh became the Western Pennsylvania chair for the Rockefeller campaign. To the disappointment of moderates, Richard Nixon won the nomination at the Republican convention in Miami Beach that year.

Given Thornburgh's role in the Rockefeller campaign, Nixon must have had to swallow hard when he named Thornburgh the U.S. attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania soon after he was elected. Thornburgh was not the choice of Nixon's supporters in Allegheny County; Robert Duggan had backed the appointment of one of his assistant district attorneys to the office.⁷⁴ But Hillman had pushed Thornburgh's name with Senator Hugh Scott, and Nixon needed Scott's support as minority leader, so Thornburgh got the position.

Thornburgh quickly earned a reputation for fighting corruption and organized crime. Using the Organized Crime Control Act that was signed just prior to his appointment, he investigated the network of people who

had long been involved in illegal gambling and payoffs to detectives and others in law enforcement. His investigation led to the conclusion that officers were protecting the mob network's leaders from prosecution by tipping them off about raids and looking the other way as they committed crimes that generated millions of dollars each year. Thornburgh's office, with the FBI and the Internal Revenue Service, believed that the system of payoffs extended to the office of Duggan, the Allegheny County district attorney. Thornburgh brought these accusations before a federal grand jury and on March 4, 1974, they "returned an eight-count indictment against Duggan." That same day, Duggan took his own life.⁷⁵

Thornburgh's tenure as U.S. attorney, filled with successful prosecutions in Western Pennsylvania and the conviction of more than 40 government officials, proved that he would work in the public interest, which placed him in stark contrast to the corruption being reported at the time. "Corruption penetrated all levels of government in Pennsylvania," historians Philip Klein and Ari Hoogenboom wrote. They reported that *The Philadelphia Bulletin* calculated that "238 Pennsylvania public officials from 1970 to 1978 were convicted of, admitted to, or pleaded 'no contest' to charges of corruption. ... As a result, by 1978 many voters equated the Pennsylvania Democratic Party with corruption and, despite its 900,000 edge over Republicans in registered voters, it was in trouble."⁷⁶ Republicans stood a good chance of winning the next race for governor, and Thornburgh had an outside shot at securing his party's nomination.

Gubernatorial primary

A number of Republicans jumped into the gubernatorial primary election in 1978. When Thornburgh entered, he was the only one from the western part of Pennsylvania. He had the Republican Committee of Allegheny County's endorsement, which was due in large part to Hillman's support.

Thornburgh first had to face three challengers put forward by more conservative party members in the county. Knowing this, Hillman had gathered committee votes for Thornburgh and pulled out all the stops.

The night of the endorsement, “the other three candidates were on the dais, waiting to give their pitches to the voters,” remembered Jim Seif, who worked on Thornburgh’s campaign. “The next thing you know, the brass band that Elsie had hired strikes up—no one knew there was going to be a band at this thing—and Dick and Elsie walk in, arm in arm. And all of Elsie’s supporters in the crowd, the committee people she had known and recruited, they went nuts.” Thornburgh won the endorsement that night.

In his campaign, Thornburgh became known for being willing to go just about anywhere, speaking to hundreds or handfuls. Murray Dickman, who also was a key staffer in the campaign, said that Hillman was crucial in that primary race. “She allowed us to establish credibility, which, essentially, we rode on,” said Dickman. “Everywhere we went in the primary was because of somebody Elsie knew.” Hillman said that Andy Gleason, chair of the Cambria County Republican Committee, opened doors, campaigning with her all across the state on behalf of Thornburgh.

Thornburgh’s primary run was strong on enthusiasm but short on money. When it became clear that the campaign could not continue without more funding, Hillman went to H.J. Heinz II to ask his family to join the Hillmans in making the sizable contributions that kept Thornburgh in the primary. Of the \$1 million Thornburgh spent in the primary, one-fifth came from the Heinz family.⁷⁷

Hillman also introduced Thornburgh’s team to the labor unions in the southwestern part of the state, bringing Thornburgh to meet union leaders and hosting parties in her home. “You never were quite sure who was going to show up,” said Dickman. It could be a union leader; or the president; “or, most likely, both. You just were never quite sure.”

Her connections could be a mixed blessing for Thornburgh, however. He wanted union support, but Thornburgh’s team knew that, if he won, there could be an “ask.” “It never was anything blatant, but you knew. Dick Thornburgh being Dick Thornburgh, you couldn’t do those ‘debts,’” said one of his advisors.

Thornburgh was determined to steer a different course on state jobs and other patronage. He would still link some jobs to election support, but nothing like the system that county chairs and union leaders had come to expect. It was in the public interest to hire employees on merit, and he wanted to distinguish himself from the tainted system that was then so much in the news. Thornburgh also was determined to cut the total number of state jobs to save money, so it would be inevitable that a Thornburgh administration would have fewer jobs for the party faithful.

But this was not something that was apparent to the unions or county chairs who Hillman was courting on Thornburgh's behalf in 1978.

General election

During an expensive primary, Thornburgh beat the candidates from the eastern part of the state and began to campaign against the Democrats' candidate, former Pittsburgh mayor Pete Flaherty.

In many ways, Flaherty appeared to be the ideal nominee. He had nurtured a reputation as an independent actor, calling himself "nobody's boy," and had worked as a deputy attorney general in President Jimmy Carter's justice department. In theory, he could be the antidote to the reputation of corruption that the Democrats had developed. His running mate shared the same name as the state's popular auditor general (and future governor) Robert Casey. And Flaherty had a broad smile and a shock of brown hair that reminded some of John F. Kennedy. One of Thornburgh's campaign staffers said that, after seeing Flaherty dancing with an old woman in his first TV ad, he told his boss, "I almost wanted to vote for him, it was so good."

Flaherty started the race more than 30 points ahead of Thornburgh. But Thornburgh followed a carefully drawn plan to close the gap during the summer and fall, using his own list of advantages. These included a smart, loyal campaign team; a set of political friends he had met through his participation as an elected delegate at the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention a decade earlier; and his running mate,

the Republican candidate for lieutenant governor, William Scranton III (Governor William Scranton's son), who provided a cross-state balance and was far better known and more experienced than "the wrong Bob Casey," as Thornburgh's campaign staff called Flaherty's running mate. Thornburgh also had a consistent three-point platform: fighting corruption, creating jobs, and responsible state spending.

Because Thornburgh was stronger in Southwestern Pennsylvania than in the eastern part of the state, his team decided to run a strategy that focused on Philadelphia and the southeastern suburbs, relying in part on Montgomery County Republican Committee Chair Robert Asher; Billy Meehan; and the other "kings" of eastern Pennsylvania Republican Party politics, who could activate their networks of volunteers. They did deliver for Thornburgh, in spite of some lingering regrets about the defeat of the candidates they had put forward in the primary from their own counties. The party leaders accepted Thornburgh's nomination, "but not happily," according to one party official.

Winning in Pennsylvania that year, when Democrats had 900,000 more registrants than Republicans, would require Thornburgh to sway a substantial number of Democrats, including voters from two traditionally Democratic groups: labor unions and African American voters. Thornburgh has said that Hillman was "responsible for the fact that we got such heavy support from labor," and Marylou Stefanko of the Pennsylvania State Education Association remembered that Hillman's connections in the Pittsburgh area helped to open the door to her counterparts in the east. "You know Dick Thornburgh had little identity in the eastern part of the state. I brought Dick Thornburgh to the PACE [Political Action Committee for Education] board, and they were asking, 'He's the Western District what?' Hillman's support helped influence the board to endorse Thornburgh for governor." Thornburgh ultimately would win 50 percent of labor votes in the state at a time when the share of labor households was significantly higher than it is today.

Hillman also had a direct impact on raising Thornburgh's profile in the African American community, including in Philadelphia. She asked

Smith (who by that point was an important labor activist) if he could persuade civil rights leader and Democrat Jesse Jackson to endorse Thornburgh in a radio spot. Because of Smith's friendship with Hillman and his gratitude to Thornburgh for defending him in 1968, Smith traveled to see Jackson on November 3, 1978, to ask him to make the recording. Jackson did, and Smith had the tape of the endorsement sent on to Philadelphia. Dickman, who was leading the campaign's effort in Philadelphia, remembers when the brown envelope arrived in his office with a tape inside. "We played it and sure enough, there's Jesse Jackson saying, 'I'm for Richard Thornburgh' "78 The Thornburgh campaign played that endorsement on radio stations in the Philadelphia area, and Hillman said that Jackson also told ministers in African American churches that they should support Thornburgh. "Elsie delivered it to us and that dramatically changed the campaign. ... We carried the Black vote for Philadelphia," said Dickman.

Back in Pittsburgh, African American leaders were organizing meetings for Thornburgh throughout the city. In her postcampaign analysis of what African American leaders had done for Thornburgh's campaign, Hillman wrote that this included raising funds to hire a coordinator (who worked out of Hillman's office downtown); developing flyers and posters that they distributed to 40,000 people in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Erie, Scranton, and Harrisburg; paying for advertising; and engaging ministers and congregants in Black churches. She also noted that a leading Democrat who had "made contacts with Black leaders statewide, [and] church leaders in Pennsylvania ... spoke out in the Democratic primary against Pete Flaherty, put his name and reputation [behind Thornburgh] in the general election" and that "the key in this necessary election effort towards the Black vote was to convert anti-Flaherty sentiment into pro-Thornburgh activity. The Black Republican leadership in Allegheny County is credited by leading Black and White Dems in Western Pennsylvania. The next step is to be credible with the Black leadership for the long-term benefit."⁷⁹

Hillman also sent Thornburgh the list of African American leaders who had worked on his campaign. It had more than 200 people on it, including civil rights leaders Harvey Adams, Byrd R. Brown, and LeRoy Patrick. In both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, Thornburgh received the endorsement of the major African American newspapers.

On election day, Thornburgh won 58 percent of the Black vote, statewide—the margin in his 200,000-vote victory over Flaherty.

Changing the quid pro quo

Many people who had worked hard for Thornburgh expected to be rewarded after he was elected. That was how it worked in Pennsylvania, whether the governor was a Democrat or a Republican.

But after the election, Thornburgh and his aides were delivering a consistent message: There would be very few patronage jobs. At a dinner to raise money to pay down campaign debt and build a small war chest, Thornburgh told 2,200 supporters, “The patronage plunder of the past will not recur.” (In his memoir, he wrote that a “shudder went through the crowd” after he said this.) At a Republican state committee meeting a few months later, he told party leaders that, of 102,000 state jobs, all but 4,000 were covered by the State Civil Service Commission, unions, or both. And of those 4,000 jobs, only 800 could be classified as “policy making,” and the “U.S. Supreme Court [the 1976 decision *Elrod v. Burns*] has flatly prohibited the firing of employees in nonpolicy positions because of party affiliations.”⁸⁰ One of the committee members at the meeting, Bill McMillen, got a standing ovation when he asked, “What’s wrong with patronage? It’s not as bad as Civil Service, where you can’t lay a finger on the bad ones.”⁸¹

With just 800 jobs to distribute, Thornburgh was bound to disappoint the party leaders who had waited for eight years to get back into power and who remembered the 50,000 jobs available to Republicans under Governor Scranton. Mike Meehan, who is general counsel for the Republican City Committee in Philadelphia, said, “We idolized Scranton. He put people to work.”

Meehan's father, Billy, who was the leader of the Republican Party in Philadelphia when Thornburgh was in office, said of the new governor, "All the jobs I have you could put in a telephone booth."⁸² It wasn't only about jobs for some political leaders. It was the millions of dollars in state contracts for legal and financial work, for construction, and for those "milk contracts" that Hillman had reluctantly managed when she was county chair.

To some extent, this disappointment transferred to Hillman. She was the early advocate for Thornburgh with a reluctant Republican state committee and, as the national committeewoman for the state, this would have been her big win. She got the brunt of the anger from party leaders through the telephone calls and letters that came when they learned that Thornburgh was ending patronage.

Traditional party members were not the only ones disappointed during the months following Thornburgh's victory. African American volunteers in the campaign felt slighted by both Thornburgh and the party. Doris Carson Williams was listed in *The Pittsburgh Press* in 1980 as "one of a number of prominent Republican Blacks who have protested ... against Thornburgh's failure to hire Blacks from this part of the state." An African American union organizer, Kermit White, spoke out at a meeting in 1980, saying, "Thornburgh has provided no jobs for Blacks, even though we worked our fool heads off for him."⁸³ Hillman later said, "The Republican state committee just didn't want to make them a part of the system."

Thornburgh said something similar. "We got 58 percent of the Black vote, but there was no way we could convert that into what it could have been by the time I got to Harrisburg. I mean, those folks wanted to be recognized and rewarded, and I was perfectly willing to do it," but the party would not have it. "So it was a squandered opportunity."

The irony was this: Hillman had invested her skills and resources in a man who had promised to clean up state government but who would reduce the power of the party structure she respected. By disrupting the tried-and-true way of rewarding volunteers and donors, fewer people

came to fundraisers and fewer invested time in the hard work of getting out the message and turning out the vote. Meehan said, “At one point after Scranton was governor, we used to have dinners where we had 5,000 people. In 1964, we got \$100 a ticket and we sold 5,000. So we were raising \$1 million a year in 1964 dollars.”

When Thornburgh ran for reelection in 1982, he would win by only 100,000 votes out of 3.6 million in the state. While he faced the problem of a terrible national economy and the usual problems of an incumbent, he also faced the consequences of his decision to decouple politics from governance.



**GOVERNOR.
BARBARA
HAFER**

A flyer from Barbara Hafer's 1990 gubernatorial campaign

Barbara Hafer

The town of Elizabeth, Pa., is in the Mon Valley, which was the heart of the steel industry in Western Pennsylvania. When the mills began to shut down, Elizabeth, like dozens of other towns with no industry to replace steel, began to look very different. People left for work in Texas and Virginia, emptying the schools and leaving behind a less affluent population.

Barbara Hafer, a public health nurse from Elizabeth, saw firsthand the toll that unemployment was taking on the Mon Valley. Because of her job and her outgoing nature, she became trusted as the person to call with questions about where to find help. “People were lined up on my doorstep when I got home. They were desperate. I was kind of seen as a local resource. Every kid who was thrown out of their house would show up. I could pick up the phone and call and get somebody to a shelter.”

When a state commission began to make grants to regions for new rape crisis centers, Hafer, with a small group of others in Allegheny County, put together a successful application for a victims’ rights organization called the Rape Crisis Center. That group included Ellen Kight and Marge McGregor (married at the time to the attorney Jim McGregor, who chaired John Heinz’s first campaign for Congress); it was through their connections with the bipartisan National Women’s Political Caucus that Hafer first met Elsie Hillman.

At that point, Hafer was active in the Democratic Party, but she was becoming frustrated by what she saw as a “caste system.” She had ambitions of running for office but felt that she was stuck in a male-dominated party that gave only lip service to female candidates and African Americans of either gender. “There was really no place for a young woman who was a feminist activist.”

Hafer recalls the evening when the Women’s Political Caucus was having its meeting at Hillman’s home in Pittsburgh. “I couldn’t find the house; I didn’t even know where I was going. I was a Democrat

committee person in Elizabeth Borough and I was a worker bee. So I get there and everybody was drinking wine and somebody was playing the piano, and all these women were all dressed up and they were eating little canapés. I decided I was going to help in the kitchen. And there was this woman in the kitchen, and I said, 'I'm Barbara,' and she said, 'I'm Elsie,' and I said, 'Everybody's out there, why aren't there any workers in here?' and she said, 'I don't know, dearie. I think it's you and me.' So we're chopping cheese and sipping wine and I'm taking platters out and then she'd take platters out and we worked all evening. She said good night and I said good night. And I said, 'Elsie, you're a hell of a worker,' and she said, 'You are, too.' She didn't say who she was, and I wouldn't have known who she was even if she had told me."

As Hillman continued to see Hafer at these meetings, she started to talk to her about becoming a Republican, explaining that her party wanted to support women running for office and that Hafer would be a good candidate. After these discussions, Hafer not only changed her registration to Republican, she became the chair of the party for Elizabeth Borough (which had not had an active committee). She turned to Hillman for advice about what to do next. "Elsie knew you needed bodies. You needed grass roots; you needed a structure. So that's what we did. We converted all of our friends, made them committee people. We ran a full-slated ticket ... the tax collector, the mayor, the council. So we started to build a base."

In 1983, Hafer decided she was ready to run for one of the three seats for Allegheny County commissioner. She and Ted Jacob, who owned an engineering firm and had run for Congress, received the endorsement of the party's executive committee—instead of the one Republican incumbent, William Hunt. Hafer traveled the county to campaign against Hunt in the primary, casting him as "Dr. No" because of his vote against a monorail transportation project that had been popular in the Mon Valley for its potential for creating manufacturing jobs. She also raised questions about the costs of a county commissioners-backed plan for a new county jail.⁸⁴ The political ads upset Hunt and

another incumbent, Democrat Tom Foerster, the chair of the county commissioners (who would become a dear friend of Hillman's). They wanted Hafer to back off and asked Hillman to talk with her.

Hillman called a meeting at her home with Hafer and a man representing the county commissioners. Hafer explained her position on the jail costs and said, "I think it's a legitimate issue, and I think the people should know how much it costs." Hillman surprised her by turning to the commissioners' liaison to say that Hafer was right. "Elsie Hillman played it straight and she had the interest of the people," said Hafer. "She never put any pressure on me to do anything."

The press generated by her attacks on Hunt helped Hafer and Jacob to defeat Hunt in the primary. Hafer and Jacob would work (loosely) as a team, trying to win two of the three county commissioner spots, but no one expected this to happen. For many years, the race had ended with two Democrats and one Republican as county commissioners. Hafer became that one Republican—and the first woman elected to the Allegheny County Board of Commissioners. (The two Democrats elected as county commissioners in that race were Foerster and Pete Flaherty, the former mayor and gubernatorial candidate.) Hafer would prove to be a popular county commissioner, winning reelection in 1987.

In 1988, the Republican state committee leaders were looking for a candidate to run for state treasurer against Catherine Baker Knoll, a Democrat from Allegheny County. They approached Hafer, who turned them down. She liked Knoll. She also had her eyes on the auditor general's office.

Running for auditor general was an unusual choice. It was tough enough to raise money for a statewide race, but for candidates for auditor general, it was especially difficult. "Nobody cared about the auditor general," said Hafer. "It's an office that has no constituency, even though it's a very important office in many, many ways. ... Nobody is going to make any money. There are no deals, there is nothing." It also seemed foolish because she would be taking on the incumbent, Don Bailey, a Democrat and Vietnam veteran.

Hafer entered the race without being sure how she would raise the \$500,000 she needed to run the campaign. She went to Hillman, who agreed to contribute, and Hillman also agreed to cosign a loan or \$200,000. A prominent Republican cosigned another loan for the same amount.

The contest between Hafer and Bailey was “one of the nastiest battles for auditor general in memory,” according to John J. Kennedy in his book, *Pennsylvania Elections: Statewide Contests from 1950–2004*, with each candidate leveling accusations of unethical behavior against the other. In the end, Hafer benefited from two factors: a third-party candidate in the race who leached a significant share of Bailey’s votes in Philadelphia and her popularity in Allegheny County, where she was “well known and popular enough among Democrats to pry away some of their votes.”⁸⁵ She had her second victory over an incumbent.

Hafer had been in office less than a year when party leaders asked her if she would run for governor against Democrat Robert Casey Sr. It was clear to most that no Republican in the state could beat Casey. He would be running for his second term and had, according to Hafer, “finally made all the deals and got the coalitions together.” While Hafer had just begun to understand state-level politics, she already knew that she would be the “placeholder” for U.S. Senator John Heinz or U.S. Representative Tom Ridge, both of whom were being talked about as gubernatorial candidates for the race four years hence. Hafer had aspirations to be governor, but she knew that the timing was wrong for her.

But there were reasons for saying yes. She had ended the race for auditor general \$400,000 in debt. Here would be her chance to raise the money to pay off what she still owed. The party would find her a skilled finance chair (Heinz), it offered her campaign staff support, and Hillman would help her to put together a leadership group. Hafer agreed to run.

What Hafer and her supporters did not realize was that her campaign would unintentionally help to organize a nascent movement of activists

in the state, people determined to undermine the moderate approach that Hillman had championed since she joined the Republican Party.

Race for governor

The 1990 race started just months after Casey had signed a comprehensive set of laws restricting abortions in the state. The sharp contrast between Casey's prolife position and Hafer's prochoice views on abortion rights would cause many to cast Hafer as a "single-issue candidate," even as she tried to highlight a broader swath of issues.

An unexpected battle during the Republican primary did not help matters. Peg Luksik, who ran a home for single mothers in Johnstown, Pa., entered as the "antiabortion candidate." Few in the party took her seriously, as Luksik had not been active in party politics prior to this election and abortion had not been a pivotal issue in elections before this point. But Luksik had a statewide network of prolife supporters, and she proved to be remarkably successful as an organizer.

At a time when Hafer desperately needed to save her money for the general election, Luksik's growing strength forced Hafer to spend \$400,000 in the primary. Hafer was able to defeat her, but Luksik still succeeded in getting 46 percent of the vote.⁸⁶ She also made the election that year about abortion.

Hafer might have been able to shift the focus to other issues but for some large obstacles. She did not have the network of supporters with the financial incentives (state jobs and contracts) to work for her. She did not have the support of most people in the party apparatus, so she and her running mate, State Representative Harold Mowery Jr., often found themselves campaigning alone. And Luksik continued to hound her after the primary, gathering the supporters she had attracted to her campaign and teaching them how to "disseminate political know-how" to oppose Hafer from within her own party and to organize protests at many of the places where Hafer spoke.⁸⁷

The fact that Casey started 47 points ahead in the polls only made the situation more dire and her candidacy less attractive to donors.

Hafer raised very little money for the general election to fill the hole dug during the primary. Without more contributions, she had no hope of getting her message out through radio and television advertising.

Those who had supported her candidacy were getting nervous about what a large defeat would mean down ticket. They feared that Republicans would not turn out at all, jeopardizing the races of candidates in districts with tight elections. Hillman convened a group of party leaders to advise Hafer. Hillman started the meeting off this way: “Barbara is our figurehead, our symbol, and we must all be part of holding her up into the best light so that others can and will follow. ... Each of us must put our individual concerns and feelings aside and must lean on and trust each other, keeping in mind that each of us does have a stake in the outcome of the campaign. ... The party leadership must show active and strong support for the candidate.”⁸⁸

By that point, there already had been what Hillman termed “pretty rough political bumps,” including a remark that Hafer had made about Casey (she called him a “rednecked Irishman from Scranton,” which she has since said was an inexcusable thing to have done); her accusation that, in spite of prison riots, Casey had not fired the prison commissioner because the man was African American; and her ban on employees in her office taking part in political activities, which prompted the headline, “Hafer’s Rules Prohibit All but Herself from Seeking Office.”⁸⁹

Hillman advised Hafer, “This does not mean disaster. It means paying very close attention to detail and perception. ... There are no decisions that you make, Barbara, that are not political.”⁹⁰

Hafer worked hard that summer and fall, pressing the governor on his most vulnerable issue: the state budget. Wherever she spoke, she told voters that the state had a \$1 billion deficit, not the surplus that Casey was claiming. (She later was proved to be correct. After the election, Casey raised taxes by a record amount to close the deficit.) “Hafer spent the summer campaigning hard as Casey handed out state funding checks and went to highway dedications,” wrote Harry Kloman in *Pittsburgh Magazine*.⁹¹ Although Kloman indicated that

Hafer crossed the state, speaking to “policemen, nursing homes, abortion rights supporters, realtors, and other groups,” she could not ignore the fact that she had no chance of catching up to Casey.

In July, she told Hillman and Anne Anstine that she was going to pull out of the race. Hillman would not hear of it. “Next thing I know,” said Hafer, “there’s Elsie driving up to Kiski [the Kiski School, where Hafer and her husband, Jack Pidgeon, the head of the school, then lived]. She said, ‘Dearie, you cannot quit.’ She really laid a guilt trip on me! She said, ‘You’re the first woman to run.’ I said, ‘Elsie, we have no money. Nobody except Arlen [Specter] will even campaign with me.’” It was about more than being broke. Hafer was demoralized by the treatment she was receiving in town after town. “They were out there with fetuses in glass jars, throwing blood on me and picketing. ... These weren’t Democrats. These were Republicans! So it was horrible. Just horrible. So Jack said, ‘Elsie, you’ve got to do something.’ She said, ‘I will. You stay in the race.’ And she gathered everybody up and they all lined up at the capitol and they all said, ‘We’re with Hafer.’” Hillman continued to support Hafer, organizing press conferences and raising more money for her campaign through events she held in her home.

But Casey had a wide lead in contributions, too. When campaign finance reports were released in September 1990, his campaign fund was 20 times larger than Hafer’s. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reported, “While Casey has announced plans to spend up to \$4 million on television advertising this fall, Hafer has struggled to attract contributions.”⁹²

Many in the party continued to work for Hafer until Election Day, including veteran Philadelphia County Republican Party leader Billy Meehan, who held a rally for her at a union hall in Philadelphia, and Centre County and Chester County Republicans, who organized fundraising dinners for her in State College and Valley Forge.⁹³ Some supporters paid a price for their work for Hafer. Delaware County Republican Committee Chair Tom Judge, who said he has always been “Republican first” and was determined not to be a single-issue man, found that his work for Hafer triggered personal attacks.

“The prolife people went down to the archdiocese. They wanted to excommunicate me because I endorsed Barbara Hafer.”

On November 6, 1990, Hafer lost to Casey by 36 points. She thought her career in politics was over. But Hillman helped her to regroup, raise money, and prepare for the next campaign. Hafer went on to win reelection for auditor general and was twice elected state treasurer.

Throughout her time in office, Hafer never changed her mind on the question of abortion rights. She did realize something else, however: “I was essentially in the wrong party.” In 2003, Hafer once again became a Democrat.

AP PHOTO/ERIE TIMES-NEWS, RICH FORSGREN



Elsie Hillman and gubernatorial candidate Tom Ridge make one last sweep through Allegheny County on primary election day, 1994.

Tom Ridge

One of the people at Elsie Hillman's 1979 bacon-and-egg breakfast for George H.W. Bush was Tom Ridge, a young attorney from Erie, Pa.⁹⁴ Ridge said he was impressed by Bush, who struck him as "an able, dignified, and quality guy" with the experience needed to be president. Ridge returned home ready to volunteer for Bush but not suspecting that Hillman would soon ask him to lead the effort to elect Bush in the northwestern corner of the state, for while Hillman was busy introducing Bush to Pennsylvanians through large-scale events, she also was establishing the structure to recruit, energize, and deploy thousands of volunteers in 28 counties in Pennsylvania.

In this, she had the help of Bush's field representative, Ron Kaufman, and 21-year old Mark Holman, who was her only paid employee on the Bush campaign. Near the end of the year, Hillman still needed a coordinator for critical Erie County (Erie was then the third largest city in the state), so she called Erie County's Republican chair, Roger Richards. Richards recommended Ridge, saying he would "do a hell of a job," so Hillman called Ridge, who agreed to be Bush's Erie County coordinator.

Holman, who worked closely with Ridge on the Bush primary campaign, remembers that the campaign Ridge organized for Bush was inclusive of income, race, and position. "We had a very aggressive, grassroots effort. ... It was very coalition oriented, with labor, African Americans, any and all Republicans." The coalitions Ridge built were able to turn out the vote for Bush during the April 1980 primary; his defeat of Ronald Reagan in Erie County contributed significantly to Bush's statewide win.

Despite Bush's Pennsylvania primary win, Reagan was ahead in the national delegate count, and by mid-May, he had secured all of the delegates he needed to win the Republican nomination. But the strength of Bush's showing in Pennsylvania and his impressive organization would factor into Reagan's decision to choose Bush as his running mate. The Reagan-Bush campaign hired many in the original

Bush apparatus, including Kaufman and Holman, and they were able to reengage Bush volunteers like Ridge for the general election.

That November, Reagan and Bush won the election, carrying Pennsylvania and the largely Democratic Erie County. One month later, when the 27 members of Pennsylvania's Electoral College gathered in Harrisburg to vote, Ridge was one of the few original Bush supporters in a room of Reagan devotees because Hillman had advocated with state party leaders that he be accorded this honor. It was one of many of her expressions of confidence to come.

Running for Congress

Throughout most of 1980, Ridge worked at the downtown Erie law firm he had joined after graduating from law school. It was there that he met several people who would become lifelong friends and supporters, including Michael Vescecco, an attorney with an office in a firm down the hall. Ridge liked and respected Vescecco and so supported him when he decided to run for Erie County district attorney in 1980. Ridge's support for his friend might have been seen as remarkable outside the county: Vescecco was a Democrat, and Ridge was fast becoming one of the more high-profile Republicans in the area. But crossing party lines, either formally or behind-the-scenes, was not unheard of in Erie. Ridge himself later would benefit from the support of a Democratic mayor and state senator when he ran for office. And Ridge's upbringing seems to have taught him to hear both sides. His father was a loyal Democrat, his mother a GOP committeewoman, and every evening the family debated. According to his mother, Laura Ridge, the dinner table discussion could be about "Politics. Religion. Browns. Steelers. It could have been anything."⁹⁵

When Vescecco won the election for district attorney, he asked Ridge to join his staff as a prosecutor. Ridge took his first job in government, one of three Republicans on Vescecco's staff.⁹⁶

It was around this time that Ridge began thinking about running for Congress and called Kaufman, who was working at the Republican

National Committee, to ask for his advice. Kaufman suggested that Ridge call Holman in Pittsburgh to see if he would be willing to come to Erie to run the campaign. Holman agreed, and in Hillman's files from that time is this record of a call Holman placed to her office: "Mark Holman called and Tom Ridge from Erie is interested in running for Congress, but not against Clinger [popular incumbent Representative Bill Clinger, a moderate Republican], so depends on redistricting. He is going to see Bill McInturff [who was working for the National Republican Congressional Committee]. Robbie Robinson will also be running. Mark favors Ridge as [he] thinks [Ridge is] young, bright, reasonable and stays free of party contention in Erie area. Wondered if you would considering [sic] putting word in for him to McInturff."⁹⁷ Hillman made the call to McInturff, setting the stage for Ridge's first run.

Ridge did not have to face an incumbent because the City of Erie was moved to a different congressional district and the Republican who held the office decided not to run for reelection. Still, when Ridge declared his candidacy, he entered a competitive primary field, so Ridge and Holman activated the network of volunteers that they had built during the Bush primary and recruited other family and friends as "Ridge Runners" to knock on doors, drop off pamphlets, and make telephone calls for the candidate. Ridge and his wife, Michele, took out a second mortgage on their house to seed the campaign, and the popular Senator John Heinz, who was seeking reelection that year, came to the district several times to speak for Ridge. Hillman persuaded Gerald Ford to provide Ridge with his endorsement, and Kaufman, now political director for the office of Vice President Bush, traveled to Erie to speak at fundraising events and on televised interviews.

Ridge won the Republican primary and faced Democratic State Senator Anthony Andrezeski in a tough year for Republicans. Ronald Reagan's popularity had fallen and it was clear that his party would lose big in the midterm elections. No one held much hope that Ridge, a relative unknown, would be able to hold onto the seat in a district in

which Democrats outnumbered Republicans by more than 15 percentage points. But Ridge enjoyed some significant advantages. People in the area knew his father, who was a salesman for Armour Meat, and they knew Ridge as a hometown kid who excelled in school and sports and had gone to Harvard University, then law school, finishing his degree only after being drafted and serving as an infantry sergeant in Vietnam. (Ridge was awarded the Bronze Star for valor.) Ridge also had generous campaign contributions from Heinz and the Hillmans. With Hillman's help, the RNC had arranged to match each dollar that Ridge raised, and he succeeded in drawing the RNC's maximum of \$50,000 for his campaign.

Ridge also had some help from a few Democrats behind the scenes. Erie Mayor Louis Tullio, no fan of Andrezeski, backed Ridge, and his support is thought to have yielded thousands of votes for Ridge. Similarly, popular State Representative David DiCarlo supported Ridge because he saw in Ridge the makings of a statesman. DiCarlo "quietly let many people in his vast political network know that he and his wife were backing Ridge," according to an *Erie Times-News* series. And Ridge's friend, Democrat Gary Horton, went with Ridge to African American churches, where, according to Horton, "some people had never seen a Republican before. They genuinely appreciate someone coming to them and reaching out to them."⁹⁸ Holman said, "One of the things that Elsie taught me and Governor Ridge—although it fit our nature—was that everyone mattered. We tried to appeal to all groups. That is the kind of constituency politics that Elsie had, and Heinz had, and Governor Ridge had."

Ridge was elected to Congress in November 1982 by 729 votes, becoming a standout in his party in a year in which 26 incumbent Republicans lost their seats.

Once in Congress, Ridge showed that his vote could be quite independent of his party's leadership. When Reagan called Ridge to the Oval Office to ask for his support of a bill to appropriate funding for MX missiles, Ridge listened to what the president had to say and then explained why he saw things differently. He voted against the bill

and with the Democrats, which helped to kill the missile program. In a *National Review* article that looked back at Ridge's voting record, John J. Miller wrote, "At a time when Reagan was peeling off Democrats on Cold War issues, Ridge consistently played the dove. He voted to support the nuclear freeze, abolish the MX missile, deny funding to the Nicaraguan contra rebels, and adopt [Democrat] Pat Schroeder's plan to bar nuclear tests above one kiloton. On funding for the Strategic Defense Initiative, Ridge wasn't just a 'no' vote, but a leader in the enemy camp."⁹⁹ His votes were not simply a reflection of his largely Democratic base; although Ridge voted for a minimum wage plan, he also voted for a ban on assault weapons, knowing that this would incur the anger of many of his pro-gun constituents and the National Rifle Association, which sent 300,000 anti-Ridge postcards to Pennsylvania voters.¹⁰⁰

Ridge's standing with the electorate in his district only improved. He won each of his five congressional reelection races by wide margins.

Race for governor

In 1990, when Republicans selected Barbara Hafer to be their candidate for governor, she knew that she was not the party's first choice. Many had been looking to Ridge to run, Hillman first among them. Believing that they had signals from him that he would enter the race, they arranged for the state committee meeting to be held in Erie that year. But just prior to the meeting, Ridge held a press conference to say just the opposite. According to Holman, Ridge had been close to announcing his candidacy until he talked with business leaders and realized that they were satisfied with Democratic Governor Robert Casey—something that Hafer soon found to be true.

The day after Hafer lost the election to Casey, Ridge began to plan for his 1994 run for governor.

Ridge was popular and well known in Erie, but he was recognized by fewer than 10 percent of Pennsylvania voters. A key part of his initial strategy in becoming known and trusted was to court party leaders and

local elected officials. Well before declaring his candidacy, he established the Fund for Pennsylvania Leadership, a political action committee to support candidates in state and local elections. The fund targeted races in which “Ridge’s cash would make a key difference in the outcome of an election, tilting it to the Republican and creating a future ally in the process.”¹⁰¹ Ridge also turned to Hillman for help in meeting committee members. “I didn’t know a lot of people on the other side of the state, but she did,” said Ridge. And he continued his courtship of Republican “royalty” in the state, including Bob Asher; Billy Meehan; John McNichol (a Delaware County GOP power broker); Herb Barness, the Bucks County real estate developer and Republican national committeeman; and Marilyn Ware Lewis, chair of the PA American Water company, who became one of his campaign cochairs.

At least a few people tried to derail Ridge’s aspirations by urging him to run for U.S. Senate instead. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that “Some top Republicans, including those close to state Attorney General Ernie Preate—who also wants to be governor—have been trying to steer Ridge away from the governor’s race to give Preate a wider berth and avoid a GOP bloodbath.”¹⁰² But Ridge had his sights set on the governor’s office and announced his candidacy in February 1993—21 months ahead of the general election.

A Philadelphia reporter called Ridge “the guy nobody’s heard of from the city nobody’s ever seen,”¹⁰³ and it is true that he started far behind the better-known candidates—Preate; State Senator Mike Fisher of Allegheny County; Samuel Katz, a Philadelphia businessman; and State Senator Earl Baker of Chester County.

Sensing Ridge’s uphill battle and eager to signal her full support, Hillman hosted one of her now-signature breakfasts for Ridge, following the model of the breakfast she had given for Bush more than a decade earlier. With Pittsburgh attorney (now Pennsylvania Governor) Tom Corbett, the chair of Allegheny County’s Ridge for Governor campaign, Hillman organized the Meet Tom Ridge breakfast. With a host committee, they handwrote notes on hundreds of invitations and made calls to

coordinate the event with committee members across Western Pennsylvania. On December 7, 1993, buses filled with supporters arrived at Pittsburgh's William Penn Hotel—1,300 people in all, each paying \$19.94 for the breakfast. The event was a public relations success, gaining media attention, but most importantly, from Ridge's perspective, it signaled the embrace of Hillman.

Asher and Meehan organized similar events in the eastern part of the state, and by the end of January 1994, Ridge had lined up the endorsements of the all-important Republican committees in Bucks, Delaware, and Philadelphia counties.

Ridge also had assembled a strong group of financial supporters. Contributions from Ware Lewis; her mother, Marion Ware; Barness; and Asher totaled hundreds of thousands of dollars. Ridge's friends in Erie were contributing heavily, too, and the Hillmans gave more than \$150,000 over the course of the campaign. By the time the first quarterly reports were due to be filed with the state, Ridge had raised \$2 million. Ware Lewis said, "The cash made him a contender. Even Democrats were startled by how much and were asking me, 'Who is this guy from Erie?'"¹⁰⁴

The Republican Party in Pennsylvania desperately needed a real contender. It had been eight years since a Republican (Dick Thornburgh) had been governor; after Heinz's death in 1991, they had lost the senator's seat during the special election; and Bill Clinton had beaten Bush in Pennsylvania in 1992. Many in the party leadership, including the state Republican committee chair, Anne Anstine, thought that the party needed to get behind an appealing candidate to show that it could pull off a win. Chris Bravacos, who had served as executive director of the Republican state committee (RSC), said, "Anne and Elsie were convinced, going back to the early '90s, that the party had to endorse for governor. ... Right after '92 was over, which was a disaster, we were hell-bent on proving that the party could do something again."

Seeing the growing strength of Ridge, the other candidates lobbied state committee members to hold an open primary and not to endorse

a candidate. Of course, Ridge worked to do just the opposite. He hired Stephen Dunkle (who had been executive director of the RSC) to manage his endorsement campaign, because Dunkle knew the committee's rules well and was an excellent strategist. Hillman was one of many Ridge supporters who doggedly called dozens of committee members across the state, urging them to endorse Ridge at their upcoming meeting and maintaining a running tally of how they intended to vote. Ridge's supporters worked to persuade committee members that they should vote yes on the first question (whether or not to endorse at all) and Ridge on the second question (who to endorse). From these daily calls, the campaign knew that most of Ridge's support was from party members in the western and southeastern parts of the state.

This made the snowstorm on the February morning of the committee vote a big problem for Ridge. The storm had dumped more than 9 inches, leaving state committee members at the farthest reaches of the state leery of driving the 200 miles from Pittsburgh or Erie to Harrisburg. Hillman quickly responded to make sure committee members could get there safely. She organized car pools of all-wheel-drive vehicles, rented buses to pick up committee members, and ordered box lunches for their long drives. Most of Ridge's supporters made it to Harrisburg that day.

When Anstine called for a vote on the first question, the majority of the committee members voted in favor of endorsing a gubernatorial candidate. On the second vote—the question of who to endorse—Ridge won.

After the vote, spurned candidate Katz said that the party machine “couldn't deliver pizza,” but that proved not to be true.¹⁰⁵ The RSC turned out the volunteers and raised the money that quickly bolstered Ridge's campaign, and Ridge was able to move his campaign staff in Harrisburg into RSC headquarters and coordinate the election effort with the committee's leaders and staff. The strength of the Ridge campaign convinced Baker to drop out of the race.

Ridge won the primary election, beating Preate by six percentage points and the other contenders by greater margins. He turned next

to face incumbent Lieutenant Governor Mark Singel, the Democrats' choice from among their own crowded field in the primary. Singel, who had served as governor for several months while Casey was recovering from transplant surgery, campaigned as the experienced candidate. Both Ridge and Singel were challenged by Independent Peg Luksik, the woman who nearly defeated Barbara Hafer in the Republican primary four years earlier and who still enjoyed conservative backing in central and Western Pennsylvania.

Ridge started out well behind in the name recognition enjoyed by both Singel and Luksik. But the network of Republican committee members and elected officials across the state continued to work for Ridge. And the campaign, while not flawless, continued to attract millions of dollars in contributions that allowed Ridge to air television ads early on. He began to narrow the gap with Singel.

When Hillman saw issues with the campaign, she let Holman and Ridge know it. One of these times was in August 1994, after a set of embarrassing Ridge campaign press maneuvers reflected badly on him. Hillman called a meeting with Ridge, Anstine, and Holman to help to steer the campaign back on course. Later in the campaign, she contacted Ridge to sound an alarm after he had met with representatives of conservative organizations and State Representative Joseph Pitts of Chester County in an effort to understand their point of view and, perhaps, win over Luksik supporters. Hillman got a copy of the letter that Ridge sent to Pitts following the meeting in which he wrote that he wished to work with conservative groups to find "issues of mutual concern and commitment," including reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies, promoting adoption, and keeping in place the state's 24-hour waiting period prior to an abortion.¹⁰⁶ Hillman felt the meeting and the letter would align Ridge too closely with the party's right wing; she wrote to him that she had heard that his letter was "proudly branched" by the state director of the Pennsylvania Christian Coalition at a meeting with conservatives where the director claimed that it was the religious conservatives who had engineered the Ridge-Pitt meeting.

The campaign had already begun to gain traction when, that fall, terrible news hit. A man whose life sentence had been commuted by the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons and been released from prison was charged with committing a violent crime. One of the three members on the Board of Pardons who had recommended to Governor Casey that the man be released was Singel. Singel expressed his sorrow and regret for his part in the decision, but from that point forward, the electorate's support for him began to drop.

That November, Singel won just 40 percent of the vote. Luksik's share was a surprising 13 percent. Ridge was elected governor of Pennsylvania.

Hillman had intended to retire in 1993, but remained a Republican national committeewoman because she wanted to help elect Ridge governor. After she did step down as committeewoman, she came out of retirement to support Texas Governor George W. Bush's campaign because many expected that he might choose Ridge as his running mate; Ridge and Bush were friends and Ridge clearly could be an asset during the election, having won his second term as governor by a 780,000-vote margin, with a large share of crossover votes. Ridge had even brokered a Pittsburgh "summit" between John McCain and Bush that led to McCain's endorsement of Bush in May of 2000. But the very qualities that had inspired Hillman to support Ridge 20 years earlier would scuttle his chances of being Bush's running mate. William Kristol, editor of *The Weekly Standard*, said, "I think Bush would like to pick Ridge, but I think they're worried about a pro-life revolt and giving [the issue] to Pat Buchanan."¹⁰⁷ Francis Clines wrote in *The New York Times* that social and religious conservatives "have issued stern warnings to Mr. Bush of dire consequences in November if he picks someone like Mr. Ridge."¹⁰⁸ It appeared to one *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* columnist that "Nobody seems to like Tom Ridge but the voters."¹⁰⁹

Hillman was nonetheless gratified to see Ridge's continued public service. After the September 11 tragedy, Bush named Ridge homeland security advisor and, when the U.S. Department of Homeland Security was formed, Ridge became its founding secretary.

CHAPTER FIVE

Left by the Party

A few years after her retirement from leadership in the Republican Party, Elsie Hillman wrote to a Republican National Committee official:

I have tried, through the years, to work from the inside, in an effort to both broaden our base and to present a compassionate and socially sensitive face on the Republican Party. A compassionate conservative I have tried to be, and I was encouraged when the President [George W. Bush] took this position. Unfortunately, I no longer believe that the Republican Party knows how to do that and I am not proud of the face that the Republican Party is now showing to the nation and the world. We, like Jeffords [Republican Senator James Jeffords of Vermont, who became an Independent], felt that the right wing of the Party has become so pivotal in all the national debates that there are no ears left to listen to us.¹¹⁰

Hillman's sadness and disappointment in her party had deepened in the years before she retired. For four decades, she had heralded the values of moderation and inclusion and worked hard for party unity, but she increasingly felt that the party she had known was slipping away. Her warnings to party leaders had been for naught, and some of the leaders had accommodated what she saw as intolerance from the right wing. Instead of inviting in a broader base, she feared that the party was now cementing in place a set of ideas that had more to do with personal morality than governance.

Moderates fell away from the party, and women left to vote for Independents and Democrats. A few moderate friends, like Jeffords and Hillman's friend, Senator Arlen Specter, changed their party affiliation altogether.

Pennsylvania's Andy Gleason, Republican county chair in Cambria County since the 1950s, remarked on the changes he had witnessed:

“The party today is not the party I knew. You had the Bill Scrantons. You had the Elsie Hillmans. ... I’ve always considered myself a moderate. We were trying to keep it a party for the people first.”

Shifting tides

Hillman never left the Republican Party. It left her and her fellow moderates, returning to an evangelical religious base while reverting to the polarization of an earlier period in history.¹¹¹

While she could not have realized it, Hillman had become a Republican during a period when evangelical religious beliefs and party affiliation were relatively separate. Harvard University economists Edward Glaeser and Bryce Ward have studied the connection between the two and found that the period from 1932 to 1976 was unusual for the relatively minor role of religion in party politics—compared with the much greater entwinement of the two in the times before and after.

Glaeser and Ward came to this conclusion after collecting the county-level returns for presidential elections between 1864 and 2000 and the religious censuses during that period for Christian religions. They then ran a regression to see if there was a relationship between people’s religious affiliation and Republicanism. Their statistical analysis indicates that there was a strong correlation between being a mainline (not evangelical) Protestant and voting Republican until the middle of the 20th century. Until then, evangelical Protestants were mostly Democrats. That changed in the 1960s, when a large number of southern evangelical Christians switched their affiliation to the Republican Party.¹¹²

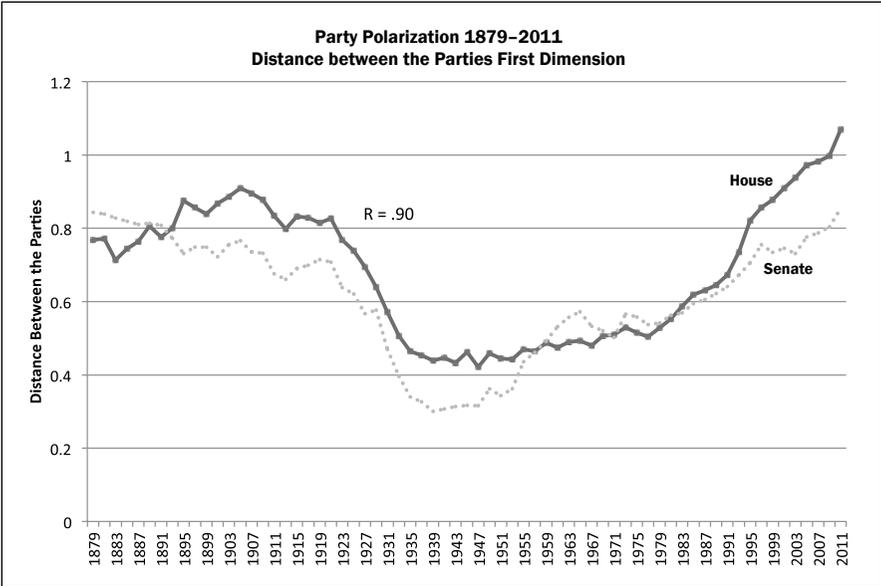
Glaeser and Ward wrote in 2005, “Thirty years ago, income was a better predictor of party than religious attendance. Today, religion rather than earnings predicts Republicanism. The rise of religious politics is not without precedent. Prior to 1930, the correlation between religion and party affiliation across states seems to have been at least as strong as it is today.”¹¹³

People like Hillman, who joined the party during the Dwight D. Eisenhower years, would have entered politics at a time when religious identity was not enmeshed with party identity. It also happened to be a window of time during which cooperation between Republicans and Democrats was high.

The window would soon start to close. In their analysis of polarization in the United States, Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal found that the distance between Democrats and Republicans was very high in the period before 1920; moved to a period of greater agreement during the 1930s to the 1970s; but then climbed again in the 1980s, with polarization continuing to rise into 2010. The researchers' method involved first identifying the factors that best explained differences in voting patterns in Congress from 1789 forward, which required them to classify more than 100,000 House and Senate roll call votes and place each congressional member "on a minus/plus scale across n dimensions." It took just two dimensions—economics and regional divisions—to get a good fit for these 100,000 votes. With this method, they were able to look at changes in voting patterns and measure the distance between Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. House and Senate.¹¹⁴

The chart on page 112, which is from an updated version of the chart published in the book *Polarized America*, shows the changes in polarization between Democrats and Republicans on votes over the course of more than a century. As the degree of polarization between the parties increases, the line on the graph climbs closer to 1.0. The lowest degree of polarization was in the period from 1935 to 1952. ("R" indicates Reconstruction.)

What happened in the second half of the 20th century to widen the divergence between Republicans and Democrats and reignite the marriage of party and religion? Certainly the messages sent by Barry M. Goldwater and Richard Nixon to Southerners brought more evangelicals into the party, and, later, the IRS actions under Jimmy Carter galvanized the religious right, who could enter the Republican Party's open door and build a coalition with more traditional conservatives.



Source: Party Polarization 1879–2010. Updated January 2011.
voteview.com/polarizedamerica.asp

It also is true that changes in federal election laws reduced the influence of larger donors and tipped the balance toward those groups (like evangelicals) that could raise small amounts of money from many people. Those laws led to the proliferation of political action committees, including many that were ideologically based, and their contributions and technical help gave candidates much greater independence from the state parties, which cared less about ideology than they did about winning.

Democrats and Republicans alike would find that candidates' growing independence from the party apparatus would allow them to style themselves as purists and make them willing to appeal to the wings of each party, where there was passion and energy and money. Once elected, their voting records increasingly aligned with the extremes, not the center.

James Thompson of the RAND Corporation said that it is really the electorate that has shifted and that candidates are simply catching up with them. "Over time, communities and regions of the country have become more homogeneous—politically, ideologically, demographically,

and in terms of ‘way of life,’” wrote Thompson. A significant factor in this is the degree of migration within the country and the fact that people are choosing to live in places “with people like them. ... The principal reason for the growth of congressional polarization over the past 35 years appears to be that—over time—the constituencies in congressional districts and in states have been changing their political outlooks to become more strongly conservative or liberal. ... The biggest victims of this process have been the moderates, who have largely disappeared on both sides of the aisle.”¹¹⁵

In essence, we have gerrymandered ourselves.

Uncharted territory

If it is true that voters are choosing to live in towns where people think and act like them, it is all the more important to look to the example of someone who chose the unfamiliar over the comfortable to enrich her community and her own life.

Hillman’s life in politics challenges us to look for those chances to engage others, to find ways of “inducing cooperation,” and to use our creativity to spark change. Indeed, as Hillman herself has said, politics can be a bridge among us:

Each of us comes from a narrow background. It is defined by our families, our neighborhoods, our schools, our social life, and our work. It is possible for us to live here and know little about our community except how to make the rounds from one familiar place and face to another. What lies between usually remains uncharted territory. Politics eliminates that unfamiliarity. Politics is a total community engagement.¹¹⁶

—**Elsie Hillman**, 1984

TIMELINE

Year	Political and Community/Personal Activities
1941	Begins volunteering at age 16 at the Eye and Ear Hospital, calculating ether dosages for patients
1945	Marries Henry Hillman
1952	Volunteers as one of “Ike’s Girls” during the Dwight D. Eisenhower presidential campaign Joins the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Board of Directors
1954	Begins volunteering at WQED
1956	Elected Republican committee member from the 14th Ward, City of Pittsburgh
1960	Appointed volunteer chair, Republican Committee of Allegheny County (RCAC)
1962	Elected secretary, RCAC Organizes outreach to African American voters as a volunteer for William Scranton’s campaign for Pennsylvania governor
1964	Elected GOP chair, 14th Ward (retired in 1974) Elected alternate delegate to the Republican National Convention in San Francisco
1965	Serves on a leadership committee to form the Hill House Association from the merger of the Anna B. Heldman Community Center and Soho Settlement House Joins the Allegheny County Anti-Poverty Advisory Council
1966	Plays integral role in Dick Thornburgh for Congress campaign Becomes a lifetime board member of the Ellis School
1967	Elected chair, RCAC Joins board of Mount Mercy College (now Carlow University)

- 1968** Elected delegate to the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach
- 1970** Retires as chair, RCAC
- 1971** Chairs Labor for Heinz during H. John Heinz III's campaign for Congress
Receives *The New Pittsburgh Courier's* Top Hat Award
- 1972** Elected delegate to the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach
- 1973** Elected to the vestry, Calvary Episcopal Church (served until 1977)
- 1974** Becomes member, Pennsylvania Republican Leadership Committee (serves until 1996)
Elected vice president of the Hill House Association
Elected vice president of the Pittsburgh Symphony Society
Receives Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania award
- 1975** Elected Pennsylvania committeewoman to the Republican National Committee (RNC) and appointed to the Rules Committee
Joins Shadyside Hospital Foundation Board of Directors
- 1976** Elected delegate and selected as floor leader (for President Gerald Ford) at the Republican National Convention in Kansas City, Mo.;
cochairs Ford's Pennsylvania campaign
Chairs Labor for Heinz during his U.S. Senate campaign
- 1977** Chairs "kitchen cabinet" for Doris Carson Williams' run for Pittsburgh City Council
- 1978** Elected to the Executive Committee of RNC (serves until 1996)
Cochairs the primary campaign for Dick Thornburgh for Pennsylvania governor
- 1979** Chairs George H.W. Bush presidential campaign in Pennsylvania and serves on his national campaign steering committee
- 1980** Elected delegate to the Republican National Convention in Detroit
- 1982** Serves on the state steering committee, Heinz for Senate
Provides support for Tom Ridge's run for Congress

- 1983** Chairs “kitchen cabinet” for Barbara Hafer in her run for Allegheny County commissioner
- 1984** Serves as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Dallas and as Pennsylvania’s Reagan-Bush reelection cochair
Begins serving on RNC’s Executive Council (serves until 1996)
- 1985** Elected vice chair, University of Pittsburgh’s newly established Cancer Institute
- 1986** Serves as state chair of Arlen Specter’s U.S. Senate campaign
Volunteers for the Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force
- 1987** Serves as general chair, Pennsylvania, George Bush for President Committee
- 1988** Elected delegate to the Republican National Convention in New Orleans and cochair of Pennsylvania delegation
Supports Hafer in her run for Pennsylvania auditor general
Chairs the Art for AIDS benefit, Persad Center
- 1989** Elected chair, Pennsylvania Electoral College
- 1990** Cochairs Hafer’s campaign for Pennsylvania governor
- 1992** Elected delegate to the Republican National Convention in Houston
Serves as general chair, Bush-Quayle ‘92
- 1993** Helps to lead the support for the passage of the Allegheny Regional Asset District legislation (Act 77 of 1993)
- 1994** Cochairs statewide steering committee of Ridge for Governor
Helps to form the Interfaith Alliance of Southwestern Pennsylvania
- 1996** Elected delegate to the Republican National Convention in San Diego and member of the Platform Committee
Retires as the longest-serving Pennsylvania Republican national committeewoman
Elsie Awards established at WQED Multimedia
- 1997** Cochairs the Regional Renaissance Initiative referendum campaign

- 1998** Cochairs Ridge's reelection campaign for governor
 Helps to launch the National Republican Leadership Council
 Cochairs Allegheny 2000 Home Rule referendum campaign
 Cochairs Jim Roddey's campaign for Allegheny County executive
- 2000** Elected delegate at large for Republican National Convention in Philadelphia
 Joins the National Board of Republican Majority for Choice
 Joins the Riverlife Task Force
 Helps to create the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics at Chatham University
- 2003** Cochairs Pittsburgh Financial Leadership Committee with David Roderick
- 2004** Cochairs Save Our Summers campaign to raise \$1 million to reopen public swimming pools and recreation centers
- 2005** Helps to lead the row office reform referendum campaign in Allegheny County
- 2006** Cochairs William Scranton III's primary campaign for Pennsylvania governor
 Founds Run Baby Run, a bipartisan political action committee supporting women candidates for the state legislature
 Establishes and chairs the board of the Elsie H. Hillman Foundation
- 2007** Joins the steering committee of Youth Futures
- 2008** Helps to launch the Neighbor-Aid campaign to respond to health and human services needs
 Receives the Leading Light Award from the International Women's Forum
 Serves as honorary cochair of Pittsburgh 250
- 2009** Receives the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh's inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award
- 2011** Receives The Forbes Funds' Shapira Medal for Exemplary Leadership

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111. Elsie Hillman, letter to Jack Oliver, June 25, 2001; Edward L. Glaeser and Bryce A. Ward, "Myths and Realities of American Political Geography" (working paper, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2005); James A. Thomson, *A House Divided: Polarization and Its Effect on RAND* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010); and Party Polarization 1879-2010. Updated January 2011, voteview.com/polarizedamerica.asp.
112. Edward L. Glaeser and Bryce A. Ward, "Myths and Realities of American Political Geography" (working paper, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2005).
113. Edward L. Glaeser and Bryce A. Ward, "Myths and Realities of American Political Geography" (working paper, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2005).
114. Nolan M. McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).
115. James A. Thomson, *A House Divided: Polarization and Its Effect on RAND* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010).
116. Elsie Hillman, "Ellis Commencement Address" (speech, Ellis School, Pittsburgh, PA, June 8, 1984).

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

**Unless otherwise noted, all interviews were conducted by Kathy McCauley and John Denny. Certain interviews also included Morton Coleman, Terry Miller, and D. Tyler Gourley.*

Asher, Robert (with other Pennsylvania Republican Party leaders)
June 2, 2010

Bowman, Lynda (with other former Republican State Committee staff)
June 2, 2010

Bravacos, Chris (with other Pennsylvania Republican Party leaders)
June 2, 2010

Carson Williams, Doris
June 15, 2010

Denny, John
June 2, 2010

Dickman, Murray (with Jim Seif)
May 11, 2010

Dunkle, Stephen (with other former Republican State Committee
staff members)
June 2, 2010

Flickinger, Sheila (with other former Republican State Committee
staff members)
June 2, 2010

Freeland, Wendell
April 6, 2010; and April 15, 2010

Gleason, Andy
June 3, 2010

Hafer, Barbara
May 17, 2010; June 3, 2010; and June 6, 2010

Hamberger, Martin (with Janet Horgen)
May 24, 2010

Hillman, Elsie
May 10, 2010; and June 24, 2010

Holman, Mark
May 24, 2010

Horgen, Janet (with Martin Hamberger)
May 24, 2010

Judge Sr., Thomas (with other Pennsylvania Republican Party leaders)
June 2, 2010

Kaufman, Ron (with Kevin Talley)
May 25, 2010

Klingensmith, Jim (with other leaders from organized labor)
June 15, 2010

Lally, Jim (with other leaders from organized labor)
June 15, 2010

Martz, Russ (with James McGregor)
May 7, 2010

McGregor, James (with Russ Martz)
May 7, 2010

Meehan, Michael (with other Pennsylvania Republican Party leaders)
June 2, 2010

Poprik, Patricia (with other Pennsylvania Republican Party leaders)
June 2, 2010

Sanko, David (with other former Republican State Committee staff members)
June 2, 2010

Saylor, Pat (with other former Republican State Committee staff members)
June 2, 2010

Scranton, William
June 1, 2010

Scranton III, William
June 1, 2010

Seif, Jim (with Murray Dickman)
May 11, 2010

Shea, Jack (with other leaders from organized labor)
June 15, 2010

Specter, Arlen
May 24, 2010

Stanizzo, Rich (with other leaders from organized labor)
June 15, 2010

Stefanko, Marylou (with other leaders from organized labor)
June 15, 2010

Talley, Kevin (with Ron Kaufman)
May 25, 2010

Thornburgh, Dick
May 25, 2010

Thurman, Ollie
June 8, 2010

Wilson, Sylvia (with other leaders from organized labor)
June 15, 2010

Zimmerman, LeRoy
June 18, 2010

Cover photo: Elsie Hillman as a teenager
at the lake at Beaumaris, Ontario, Canada

FROM HILLMAN'S PERSONAL ARCHIVES

Inside back cover: Elsie Hillman
photographed at her home in 2007

FROM HILLMAN'S PERSONAL ARCHIVES



