

ANALYSIS OF THE 1976 36th ASSEMBLY RACE

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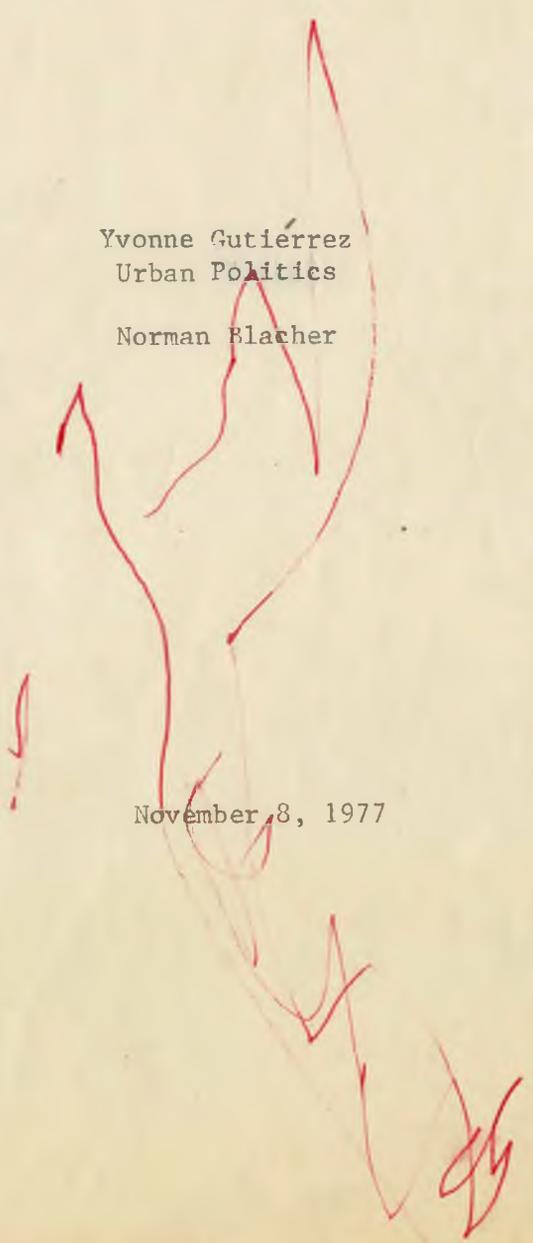


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INTRODUCTION

When Jane Tolmach lost the election I couldn't believe it. I wanted to find out why she was defeated. Since my son's pediatrician is her husband, Daniel Tolmach, I asked him. He responded by saying that he had warned Mrs. Tolmach if she won he would get a mistress. Perhaps the answer can be explained that easily, but I doubt it.

I was delighted to have the opportunity to analyze this campaign. I wanted to investigate and understand the reasons why a local favorite lost at the polls. I hope I was objective in this paper.

I thought the best place to first look for the information I sought would be in interviews with the candidates. In the following pages, I will summarize my findings. Next, I searched the local newspapers for the views of the candidates, editorial support, and any connecting facts, i.e. Proposition 14, which could shed light on the situation.

In my research, I went to the Elections Office and the Ventura County Planning Division. While at these offices, I was asked what I was writing. One of the persons laughed when she heard what my topic was. She told me if I found out why someone won or lost an election I would make a million dollars. Well, analyzing the defeat isn't something new, and coming up with a reasonable explanation is not rare. For instance, why would anyone be defeated by Lagomarsino? The answer is obvious to anyone living in this area; he is too popular and too good of a representative to lose. So, my task was not as difficult as the election clerk indicated, but at the same

time, the Imbrecht-Tolmach race was not so clear cut.

There were a few facts that emerged, and I felt they warranted attention in making it clear why Tolmach declined in popularity. I believe I can prove that she lost because of the support given to her from Governor Brown and his endorsement of Proposition 14. In addition, the backing in the local newspapers helped Imbrecht, while their dislike for the farm labor bill hurt her. I hope to show also that the advertisement each candidate put out caused the final edge to go to Imbrecht.

To most of us, politicians are super individuals and it's always refreshing to meet one that is ordinary folk. At least, this was my first impression of Chuck Imbrecht. He is unpretentious, modest, and likable. After finding out about his background, however, my original thought of a politician returned. He is an extraordinary person.

A graduate from Loyola Law School¹, one of the most prestigious in Southern California, he started the practice of law in Ventura County two years after he graduated. Prior to putting out his shingle, Mr. Imbrecht worked as a congressional intern and an attorney for the Interstate Commerce Commission, both in Washington D. C.² From this experience, he received valuable knowledge of how the government operates.

Running for office was not new to him since he was Associated Student Body President at Ventura High School. As well, he was in partisan politics as a delegate in the Republican Central Committee.³

Though his experience was limited prior to throwing his hat into the ring for the 36th Assembly District, he had a lot of energy. This energy was shared by his loyal friends from law school who helped him win the 36th seat. There were seven individuals all under thirty with brilliant ideas on how to organize his campaign. His slogan was "I am different from all the rest"⁴ (of the politicians in Ventura County).

They focused their attention toward Republicans and Independents by spending most of their money on first class mailers to them.⁵ What was put in these mailers was based on questions geared from a Bench Mark Public Opinion Survey costing \$4,500.⁶ This gave them the information they needed on how Venturans felt about issues.

Issues were something he wanted to stay clear of while he was speaking to service groups prior to election. He was mainly interested in exposure, but he wanted to debate Jane Tolmach on the current issues at an open forum. She refused, though I can understand that her refusal was due to the fact that it could only help her opponent. Subsequently, there were two debates, which I will discuss later. His speaking ability helped in his campaign because in his radio ads he used his own voice.

Jane Tolmach, on the other hand, used other peoples' voices, i.e. Governor Brown, and Mayor Tom Bradley.⁷ This left her wide open to the attack that she could not speak well in public. In one newspaper it was said, "Chuck Imbrecht is considerably more articulate."⁸

Turning away from the subject of the assembly race for a moment, I will briefly give a bibliography of Councilwoman Jane Tolmach. She admits that politics just came to her out of boredom of being a housewife. Her initiation into the political arena came at a tea to help a Congressional hopeful.⁹

Later, she became Vice Chairwomen of the local Democratic Central Committee, which led her to two Democratic National Conventions, first as an alternate in 1958, and then as a delegate in 1968. Some years later, after working many long hours for the Central Committee she became disenchanted. Mrs. Tolmach decided to run for the High School Board in 1965, and won.

In 1970, she ran for Oxnard City Council and won. In her second term, she was mayor for one year. She is currently completing her second term.

Jim Basil~~k~~, former Democratic Central Committee head, explained to the class that party volunteers won't always work for people that seem to be a shoe-in. This is what happened to Jane Tolmach when she ran for assembly. Another reason for her defeat was she had too much involvement in the organization itself and the fund raising part of her campaign.

Due to the fact that she had an inexperienced campaign manager, her campaign was not aggressive. Because of his lack of sophistication, he did not know how to present a politician to the public.¹⁰ She recognized too late the importance of projecting a favorable image. Instead, she focused her attention of informing the public she had favorable relations with famous Democrats.

Associating oneself with a politically well-known name is good common sense. But it can also be turned against the candidate. So, an association must be looked at carefully. It would have seemed perfectly logical to show a good relationship with the popular Governor Brown. When Mrs. Tolmach first had Mr. Brown come to Ventura for a fund raising dinner all looked well.

Then, as they say, all hell broke loose. After the California Primary, Governor Brown expressed his feelings toward Proposition 14. As some might recall, this was a farm labor bill that gave laborers a right of access to land, which was looked upon with fear in the agricultural, rich Ventura County.

Perhaps a few comments from the newspaper at that time will shed some light on the feelings expressed a couple of months prior to the November election. One report said, "The assembly leader was appalled at Brown for plugging Proposition 14." Still another was shown when the chairman of

the Agriculture Committee said it was "a sad reflection on the integrity and dignity of the office of governor" (to express his support of the proposition).¹¹ It is obvious from these statements that to the detriment of Jane Tolmach's campaign, Governor Brown spoke too openly and hurt her by association. She was subject to attack due to the statements as editorials in the local newspapers showed.

In addition, her views were opposite of that of Governor Brown in the four year college idea. Both campaigners were asked this question in the Oxnard PRESS COURIER Forum. Tolmach felt it was necessary for higher education to exist in this area.

Imbrecht carefully pointed out when asked, "I agree with Governor Brown that we don't need it and cannot afford it."¹² Connections can hurt the politician as we see here. Though this was a minor instant, the votes were close and every mistake counted.

Most of the newspaper reports were favorable toward both candidates. "Both candidates have qualities and qualifications worth endorsing."¹³ Though the Star Free Press gave an endorsement to Chuck Imbrecht, they were kind to Jane Tolmach. On the other hand, the Press Courier supported Tolmach, but also have generous comments to Imbrecht. For example, a "fat cat" issue was raised with Imbrecht, but they gave him plenty of room for retaliation. Contrariwise, Tolmach was accused of partisan politics,¹⁴ and was given rebuttal by the Star Free Press.

The questions asked by the Oxnard Press Courier were of wide interest and variety. In most cases, the candidates had the same views.

After reading the answers I have to agree with Jim Basil~~e~~, again, when

he said that people don't vote for the candidates in state elections due to their stand on the issues, but instead on their personal charisma. I will speak on this subject later.

However, at present, I wish to speak on the few questions that Tolmach and Imbrecht disagreed upon. First, I will say that Imbrecht's answers of these questions and his picture were put ahead of Tolmach's, which could have given him psychological edge. To the matter at hand, the first questions they disagreed on were the Liquified Natural Gas controversy and Proposition 14.

To both of the above questions Tolmach simply said she was neither pro or con. This allowed Imbrecht to label her as a politico.

On the question of educational financing, both felt that taxes should be cut from property taxes. Imbrecht thought revenue could be generated by a progressive income tax. Tolmach said the burden was too heavy on property owners and should be put into the laps of industry.¹⁵

On the question about crime, they agreed that police procedures should be made more efficient. Imbrecht favored stiffer sentences, while Tolmach agreed with the Democratic Assembly that we should abolish indeterminate sentencing.¹⁶

Not only did they agree with most questions asked, but the press coverage of their debates even stated their like and dislikes were similar. As a result, the debate at the Oxnard Forum turned ^{into} a barb flinging contest. Imbrecht charged Tolmach with holding hands with Democrats outside the district, and Tolmach accused Imbrecht of false advertising by a misleading mailer that indicated he was an incumbent.¹⁷

Though these issues were important at the time, I felt they were minor ones as to why Tolmach lost. I thought that the answer for her defeat lay

within the votes cast for Proposition 14, So, my next step in my research, was going to the Elections Office.

Here I was somewhat elated to find evidence that out of 158 precincts, only 8 carried Proposition 14 by a majority.¹⁸ Thus, my evidence that it played an important part in the campaign was strong; especially, when bolstered by the bad publicity in the newspapers. This led voters away from Tolmach to Imbrecht.

There were other interesting facts I discovered at the Elections Office such as: the contributions made to each candidate. This discovery was the most fun in my research. By far, Ms. Tolmach received more contributions from small contributors. I found something interesting--a sum of \$110 from Richard E. Erwin, my husband's boss.

To the contrary, Imbrecht received more funds from businesses and most of them outside the county. I found the ratio to be 2 to 1. ^{The most interesting individual contributor I found was the former mayor of Santa Paula, Milton Teague.²⁰ I must admit I found nothing wrong with these outside contributions. Most ranged between \$200 to \$400.}

At the end of the campaign, their contributions totaled about the same for cash on hand; Imbrecht had \$45,993.39; Tolmach, \$54,237.16. In non-monetary contributions, Imbrecht was ahead \$38,559.93 to Tolmach's \$4,963.15. The above amount was given to Imbrecht mainly from United for California in the form of mailers and computer work. At the end of the campaign, Tolmach had a deficit of \$4,120.27. It was a personal loss since she and her husband had loaned her campaign \$5,000. Imbrecht broke even.

Alon Teague was Mayor of Santa Paula. Milton is his uncle.

Thus far, everything the candidates did for their campaign seems to be equal. Each attacked the other. Each had good qualities, qualifications, and such was so stated by both the local newspapers. Their difference was in the Advertisements.

Jane Tolmach's posters were on a red background with blue lettering, plain and simple. Chuck Imbrecht's posters were on a blue background with white lettering. He added a check in front of his name that gave a positive image. Their newspaper ads were also in contrast to one another. Tolmach, in a half page ad, compared her background to Imbrecht's. It consisted of a lot of words and a small picture of herself. Chuck Imbrecht's half page ad was a picture of him alone with a few words. Another ad he used was full page, with several pictures of politicians and himself and a sentence or two.²² My impressions and interpretations of these ads will follow in my analysis.

ANALYSIS

There are thousands of reasons that can add up to why someone lost or won a political race. These are the major reasons for the victory or defeat in the 36th Assembly District.

First, was Proposition 14; secondly, was Brown's support of Tolmach and Proposition 14; thirdly, the endorsement of the Star Free Press and the Oxnard Press Courier. (I left out the Santa Paula Daily Chronicle, the Ojai Valley News and the Camarillo Daily News. They are important newspapers, but access to them was not available in the local libraries:) In addition to the above, there are other aspects that should be covered, such as: The candidate's advertisements and personal charisma. Though charisma is a stale and overused word, it does have some meaning in our present mass media world.

I will address myself to each of these characteristics of the campaign separately in order to clearly state my answer as to why Imbrecht won the 36th Assembly seat. Each point I have brought out is important, but some will receive more emphasis due to my personal biases.

First, I believe Proposition 14 operated in an important manner because it was on television and in the newspapers almost every other day several months prior to November 7, 1976. If it did not play a direct role, certainly it could be argued that advertisement (pro and con) created an emotional reaction in voting, which I believe carried over to those who gave support in either direction. Governor Brown endorsed Proposition 14 to the resentment and delight of many. Those that sponsored Imbrecht must have been ecstatic to see him bury Tolmach with a two fisted punch in backing

the dreaded bill and her at the same time.

From what I have read at that point in time, the county newspapers hated the idea that Brown was aligning himself with Chavez: "Want as we will the Brown-Chavez team will not go away."²³

In the interview I had with Tolmach, she said his announcement in favor of the farm bill hurt her as well as him.²⁴ She cited a poll taken at that time which showed he dropped in popularity. The only significant difference that would explain the drop from the primary to the fall of 1976 was Governor Brown saying he was in favor of the bill. Since campaigns are more often than not emotionally inspired, Tolmach lost hundreds of votes due to Governor Brown's platform for Proposition 14.

As I have previously stated, Proposition 14, was one factor in the campaign. In as much as the election was close, every event obviously warrants discussion. Then I should also say that the articles in the two local newspapers were biased against Proposition 14, which in turn hurt supporters of the bill and people associated with them.

The next question is how much formal endorsement did either candidate receive from the local newspapers? For me, it was not surprising to hear Imbrecht and Tolmach say the newspapers favored each of them, since both papers did.

The Star Free Press, at the end of their editorial on the two, gave final acknowledgement to their choice, Chuck Imbrecht. Prior to stating this, they actually had me believing that they wanted Tolmach to win. Their support for Imbrecht was so loosely put that I went away feeling their heart was not in it. On the other hand, the Oxnard Press Courier had endorsed Tolmach but also gave warm comments in behalf of Assemblyman Imbrecht.

In capsule form, this is what people might have thought prior to going to the election polls in November.

Both papers in the community liked each of the candidates for different reasons. Imbrecht is a young lawyer and a man (the latter still counts for a lot and should not be overlooked). Tolmach has represented this area for over a decade and is a woman (in this day and age, her gender could have aided her). Each had support from groups outside the county through contributions public endorsements and/or speeches.

Both had support from their parties, but Imbrecht seemed to have more precinct workers than Tolmach. One reason for this could be that Tolmach looked like a shoe-in, whereas Imbrecht, a Republican, in a time where that party is unpopular, needed more support by his party. Other than this, each candidate was fortunate to have their party behind them.

The Proposition must have been in the voter's minds when they went to the polls. I believe this had much to do with Tolmach's decline; comparison analysis of the yes and no votes on Proposition 14, and her and Imbrecht's votes showed this to be one of the main reasons for her defeat.

I believe their qualifications and support were so equal that the deciding factor in the race was their advertisement. Without a doubt, Tolmach's publications in the newspapers were boring, especially in this age where Madison Avenue advertising dictates what to buy and wear as well as who looks good.

For instance, Chuck Imbrecht's biggest attribute is his voice. After meeting him I can say that it is not his looks. Not that he isn't pleasant looking, but he has a rough appearance. In contrast, his pictures in the paper showed him to^{be} attractive and personable.

On the other hand, Tolmach, who is a beautiful, calm, serene woman came off in the paper as a calloused woman. These statements may sound a little strong, but it shows what a well planned news campaign can do for one's image.

I have no doubt in my mind that Imbrecht and his seven associates made a wise move by concentrating heavily on projecting a favorable likeness of him.

I did a small survey at a party (obviously not very scientific) on that very question. From the twenty-odd people (professionals, business people, lawyers and teachers) I talked to regarding this, they felt the same way in that the image of the candidate was vital to victory.

The point is, the advertising game influences those voters who are undecided. When advertising, Tolmach forgot that many voters vote for a candidate due to a favorable first impression rather than on an intellectual basis. This is where Imbrecht's dynamic image hurt her. She also lost because she couldn't project the charisma she has. Imbrecht knew people looked for a good profile, so he worked on this and won. However, next time he will have the edge since he is the incumbent. If Tolmach has learned from her mistakes she could even the score.

FOOTNOTES

1. Conversation in class, Chuch Imbrecht, Oct. 11, 1977.
2. Conversation over the phone with Chuck Imbrecht, Oct. 22, 1977
3. Ibid. footnote 1,
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Taped interview with Jane Tolmach, Oct. 23, 1977
8. Star Free Press, Oct. 10, 1976
9. Ibid, footnote 10
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Oxnard Press Courier, Oct. 23, 1976
13. Ibid. footnote 8 Oct. 22, 1976
14. Ibid. footnote 8
15. Ibid. footnote 12, Oct. 21, 1976
16. Ibid. footnote 12, Oct. 26, 1976
17. Ibid. footnote 12, Oct. 20, 1976
18. Files from the Elections Office
19. Oxnard Press Courier, Oct. 1, 19, 20, 30; Nov. 1, 1976. Star Free Press, Oct. 5, 11, 18, 23; Nov. 2, 1976
20. Ibid. footnote 12
21. Ibid
22. Ibid. footnotes 8 and 12; dates Oct. 20, 31; Nov. 1, 1976
23. Ibid footnote 12
24. Ibid footnote 7

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Maps, Campaign Contribution Files, and Votes Cast, Nov. 1976. Election Office, Ventura County.

Political Trends of Ventura County #10. Environmental Resource Agency, Planning Div. Nov. 1976