

The Recall of John Morse

September 2013



What's at stake in this recall election is the definition of the relationship between citizens and their government officials. We hire you. We can fire you."
- Laura Carno

The Colorado State Senate Fires the First Shots

On March 4, 2013, the Democrat controlled Colorado State Senate was scheduled to hold hearings on seven sweeping gun-control measures. Under the leadership of Senator John Morse, testimony was limited to just 90 minutes per side for each measure. This arbitrary limitation left thousands of Coloradans without a voice and without a method to halt the infringement on their Second Amendment freedoms. Those not

able to testify took their frustrations to the streets. With



protests occurring outside of the Capitol, cars circled the building and honked their horns in opposition. They wanted to be heard, whether the legislators

liked it or not. On March 20, 2013, the expedited process concluded with the signature of Governor John Hickenlooper on five of the seven bills. The passion of thousands of concerned Coloradans was awakened and someone had to be held accountable for what had just transpired. Activists and previously unmotivated citizens began to band together and plan for how to respond.

The Morse Media Tour

Colorado's gun-control showdown soon became national news. MSNBC provided plenty of favorable media coverage and Senator Morse appeared on *The Rachel Maddow Show*, demonstrating the arrogance that got so many citizens involved.

"It's not worth getting into that argument with them (constituents), so just move along and don't read anymore of these (e-mails) than you absolutely have to, because that will wear on your psyche." - Senate President John Morse



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The Donor Wars:

Out-of-State Money for Morse

Once the tides were clearly moving toward a recall election, an anti-recall organization was created to fund a defensive media campaign against the recall.



A Whole Lot of People for John Morse was founded and headquartered in Colorado Springs. The vast majority of funding and support for this organization was provided by national progressive groups and big donors, such as *America Votes* and *Michael Bloomberg*. There were even additional out-of-state groups buying up radio and TV ads for the sitting Senator, such as *Adelstein Liston* in Chicago.



By the day of the recall, local opponents had raised over \$3 million from across the country, outspending the \$540,000 raised by recall supporters and activists within Colorado by a margin of almost 6:1.



The Basic Freedom Defense Fund & I Am Created Equal Alliance

Building the Coalition

Supporters of the Second Amendment had the benefit of public sentiment being overwhelmingly on their side. A Quinnipiac poll conducted after the passage of the gun control bills showed 78% of Republicans and 56% of Independents opposed to the new laws. In response to the proposed legislation, the Basic Freedom Defense Fund was created in February of 2013, ready to take



action against legislators who violated our freedoms. When Senator Morse became the principal target, the El Paso Freedom Defense Committee was created to collect the necessary signatures to initiate the recall.

I Am Created Equal

While the El Paso committee had the enthusiasm and recall framework in mind, they lacked the resources and messaging to



guarantee a successful campaign. I Am Created Equal worked alongside them, financing some of the signature gatherers with an initial \$14,000 in April, and then a further \$42,500 in May, all from Colorado donors. The robust funding allowed recall supporters to turn in over 16,000 signatures to the Secretary of State's office. This large number of signatures was over double the required amount and more importantly, over 2,000 greater than the number of votes Senator Morse received in 2010.

Media Buys

In order to launch a complete attack that could rival the big money interests funding Senator Morse, *I Am Created Equal* ran 5 hard-hitting ads on radio and TV leading up to the election. Although we were outspent by more than 11-to-1 when accounting for all pro-Morse ads, our strategy and messaging broke through to the residents of El Paso County. We targeted [women](#), [Independents](#), [conservatives](#) and [any individual who was just sick of politics](#) as usual.

Laura Carno Interviews

I Am Created Equal's involvement in the funding and messaging of the recall against Senator Morse generated a large amount of earned media and interview requests. Through the entire process, Laura Carno appeared in 82 radio and TV interviews along with speaking at 11 in-person events across the state. She became the most recognized face of the recall effort both locally and nationally, receiving recognition from the likes of [NRA News](#) and [CBS Evening News](#).



The Messaging

The *El Paso Freedom Defense Committee* was effective at bringing out the passions of ordinary citizens. Their lack of political experience however, could not provide the effective messaging to win the ensuing campaign. *I Am Created Equal* took that torch and became the mouthpiece for the messaging of the recall in El Paso County.

[“Don’t You Dare” Radio Ad](#)

Voters would not have turned out to support the recall if they had not grasped the impact that the gun control bills had on their daily lives. Our first radio ad was produced with this in mind. It made the case that because some individuals may not like guns, does not mean that they have the right to tell other law abiding citizens how they should be able to defend themselves. This ad was powerful for undecided women voters and received positive press.

[“Ethics” TV Ad](#)

After a controversial ethics investigation against Senator Morse, our organization chose to capitalize on his inappropriate use of taxpayer funds. Colorado Springs voters needed to hear of his most egregious violations, and they did.



A Victory for Gun Rights

On September 10th, 2013, Senate President John Morse was successfully recalled by a majority of the constituents whose wishes he had arrogantly voted against. It was the first of two successful recalls in the history of the state of Colorado. The story could not have ended on this high note without the financial support and media messaging spearheaded by *I Am Created Equal* and Laura Carno. It will now be a long time before an elected representative returns to television to proclaim that he is ignoring the will of his constituents.

