

# Chaka Fattah ousts Blackwell



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As political battles go, the race for the Second Congressional District between Congressman-elect Chaka Fattah and soon-to-be former Congressman Lucien Blackwell was a "doozy."

Both camps hurled legal mud at each other, campaign workers were accused of misconduct and the race featured a classic struggle: "Old school" politician, Blackwell, 62, who built his 23-year career on delivering services to his core constituency versus Fattah, 37, a "New Jack" who was able to package his ideas into political action and an electoral victory.

Fattah had to overcome several obstacles before he was able to win the race. When he announced that he was going after the powerful seat held by Blackwell, Fattah was dismissed by the Democratic machine.

Mayor Rendell, City Council President John Street and other powerful pols such as State Rep. David P. Richardson Jr. (D-201st) felt Fattah should wait his turn, that he wouldn't be able to raise enough money to defeat Blackwell and that Blackwell's seniority was too important to lose.

Fattah pushed on, however, and Tuesday night's defeat of the noble Blackwell has been attributed to Fattah's presumed similarity to former Second District Congressman Bill Gray, most notably because of Fattah's consensus-building capabilities and Blackwell's perceived lack thereof.

"God has been very good to me," Blackwell said.

"I'm not sad at all, I gave God the glory coming in and I'll give God the glory going out."

Fattah led the entire evening in the middle-class districts of Center City, Chestnut Hill and Manayunk, where his coalition-building abilities served in his favor.

What became clear as the battle raged on was that Fattah's victory was plain old nuts and bolts political moxie and a commitment to an energetic campaign. "He ran a hell of a race, he ran one of the best campaigns I ever saw, he kept us on the defensive, and we were never able to develop an offense," said Blackwell's Chief of Staff Maurice Floyd.

For example, Fattah had workers holding hand-written billboards chest-high at every intersection on Lincoln Drive and the Art Museum Circle: "Fattah for Congress — NOW!"

Following his defeat for the same seat in 1991, Fattah never stopped campaigning and continued to deliver services that were more unique than traditional.

"All politicians say they are for education, but when Sen. Fattah developed the graduate school opportunities conference and made sure I got a scholarship, I know that when he talks about changing education, he means it," said Fattah pollster and AT&T Account Executive Joe Quinones.

Fattah also was the only candidate in the entire electoral field of '94 who championed the causes of urban areas with a coherent agenda.

"We will never solve the problems of Philadelphia until we solve the troubles penetrating all of our cities," Fattah said at an "American Cities" conference he convened in Philadelphia.

Accessibility was another factor in the race, in a district which encompasses West and Northwest Philadelphia, parts of Center City, North Philadelphia and Delaware County.

"There's a feeling that Fattah cares. There is a feeling of access. In today's political world, access means you can be empowered and enfranchised, and that means that people are again a part of the process," said a city worker who wanted to remain anonymous.

"In my neighborhood, the 38th ward, Blackwell never came around. About three months ago, Blackwell sent his first newsletter to the constituents in my neighborhood. For an entire term in Congress I didn't hear one word from him until the election. That's depressing and that feeds the idea that he wasn't doing much more than the minimum," said Robin Kolodny, assistant professor of political science at Temple University.

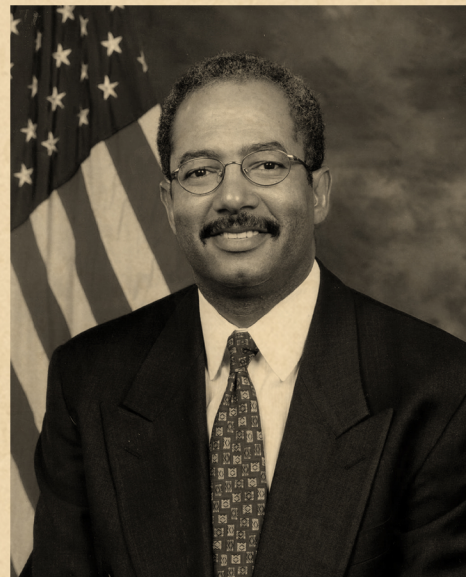
Despite not having the Democratic Party endorsement, Fattah's attainment of the political support of powerful political opinion leaders like State Sen. Hardy Williams, businessman Jim Wade, attorney/activist Charles Bowser and union leader Henry Nicholas served as Fattah's political trump card.

With their support, he had the blessings of Philadelphia's Black political vanguard and the most important field operations workers of Nicholas' 1199C union, which numbers 15,000 members.

"The political machine is non-existent in this city, there is no such thing as a political machine. The 10-to-one defeat of the Charter vote has proved that. The only machine is the people," said Nicholas, president of the National Hospital Workers Union.

State Rep. Dave Richardson agreed with Nicholas' observation, and added that there is a lesson to be learned.

"Power is not transferable, no matter the support of the Dave Richardsons, Dwight Evanses, or Roxanne Joneses, reality tells us that the people choose. The people chose not to support old line politics, and believe that Chaka can make a difference regardless if it is true or not," Richardson said.



Although people have been downplaying the political fall out of Blackwell's surprise defeat, rumblings in the street suggest that this is the beginning of the end for many of Philadelphia's entrenched politicians.

"One more to go! Now we have to take the fifth district!" shouted Fattah campaign volunteer Edwina Baker.

Baker is a community activist who has been involved in politics for several years and said that when she was talking about the "fifth" she was referring to Councilman John Street's Fifth councilmanic district and that Fattah's victory was one of two that she wanted.

"Fattah is the winner because he has a new dimension, a new philosophy, and there is a new day and a new dollar and it's gotta be spent right," she added.

The victorious Fattah recognized his responsibility to supporters such as Baker.

"The responsibility is sobering, but we are prepared. We are prepared to work hard, and focus on results for real people in the immediate future. This is a great political victory but this is not disconnected from the policy and programmatic issues that I have worked on for a long time and I plan to continue to work on in the future."

