

DAVID GARTH AND ARLEN SPECTER

The relationship between David Garth and my father, Arlen Specter, was deep, complicated, successful and long-lasting. Arlen Specter was perhaps David Garth's longest running client, spanning from 1969-2003, with an interruption between 1975-79. I was a witness for most of this – having worked full-time or part-time in most of the campaigns.

The affinity between Specter and Garth was immediate from their first meeting in 1969. Born just three weeks apart in 1930 to Jewish parents, my father and Garth were both up-from-nothing, brilliant, driven, ambitious and committed to the best ideals of public service. Garth initially worked on my father's 1969 re-election campaign for District Attorney of Philadelphia, when each man was 39 years old. My father was Garth's first client from outside of New York City.

Philadelphia, like New York, was and remains a heavily Democratic city. For any Republican candidate to be successful, he had to appear independent to appeal to Democratic voters. Garth's campaign for Arlen Specter and Tom Gola produced memorable slogans: "they're younger, they're tougher, and nobody owns them," "tough young men for tough hard jobs," and "we need these guys to watch those guys." The first of those slogans won Garth a national advertising award for which Elliott Curson, an advertising agent in Philadelphia who also worked on the campaign, took credit. Garth was offended. Reportedly, Garth forwarded the award to Curson with a ripe note. Specter and Gola won landslide victories, the largest Republican victories in Philadelphia for decades and never since surpassed.

I got to know Garth during this campaign. While I was too young to contribute to the outcome, I was old enough to debate the merits of Philadelphia and New York with David. He told me, memorably, “I’d rather be a lamp post in New York than Mayor of Philadelphia.”

In 1973, Garth again represented Specter and Gola in their campaign for re-election. This was a much different year with a different result. My father had served as the chairman of President Nixon’s re-election campaign in Pennsylvania and the stench of Watergate rubbed off on he and Gola, as did scar-tissue from a few controversial prosecutions. They both lost in close races.

My father was undaunted by the 1973 defeat and planned to run for the Senate in 1976. He was to be opposed by young and handsome Congressman John Heinz of Pittsburgh, an heir to the Heinz food fortune. Garth had worked for Heinz’s 1972 and 1974 congressional campaigns, so a client conflict existed. My father and mother traveled to see Garth in New York in 1975. They returned home to find a letter hand-delivered to their front door from David advising that he would not represent my father in the 1976 Senate campaign. But Garth did not work for Heinz either. In deference to each client, he sat out the primary, which Heinz won narrowly. Heinz – now aided by Garth - went on to defeat Congressman Bill Green in the 1976 general election for the Senate.

Undeterred by the 1973 and 1976 defeats, my father sought the Republican nomination for Governor in 1978. Garth represented Dick Thornburgh, the former U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania, who was running against three Eastern Pennsylvania candidates, including my father. The professional fissure between my father and Garth now seemed complete. Thornburgh, backed by the Heinz family, was successful, with my father

finishing second. Soon after the 1978 gubernatorial primary, Garth was fired by Thornburgh's campaign manager, Jay C. Waldman.

Waldman and Garth were from the same mold: brilliant, strategic, difficult and imperious. Waldman later became one of my closest friends. There simply wasn't enough oxygen in the room to support both Jay Waldman and David Garth. Waldman was the campaign manager and had the ability to hire someone else, so he did. Thornburgh was elected Governor with the assistance of others who were more compliant to Jay Waldman's instructions. Much later, Rudolph Giuliani put David Garth and Jay Waldman back together when Giuliani ran for Mayor of New York and Waldman served as an informal advisor.

In 1980, an opening in the U.S. Senate occurred in Pennsylvania when Richard Schweiker retired. My father sought the Republican nomination for the open seat. He was opposed in the primary by the Republican State Chairman and former Delaware County Councilman, H. "Bud" Haabestad. Haabestad was supported by Governor Thornburgh, Senator Schweiker, Senator Heinz and most of the Republican establishment, even including my father's old friend and political mentor, Bill Meehan, the Republican boss in Philadelphia. My father, based largely on his underlying name identification from eight years as District Attorney of Philadelphia and two failed state-wide primary campaigns, narrowly beat Haabestad. Garth was uninvolved in the primary.

That set up a very interesting circumstance for the fall 1980 election. Senator Heinz had been elected by his Republican peers in the United States Senate as the Chairman of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, a highly coveted post. The Republicans were hoping to gain control of the Senate and their standard-bearer for president, Ronald Reagan, was

hoping to mold a governing coalition. They were all “stuck” with Specter, who was to run against the popular former Mayor of Pittsburgh, Pete Flaherty, whom Thornburgh had defeated in the 1978 gubernatorial general election. As Chairman of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, Heinz had available to him \$525,000, a fantastic sum of money in those days, to spend to elect my father. Heinz conditioned the spending of this money on my father re-hiring David Garth.

For my father, it was an easy choice. He was forward-looking, knew Garth was talented and was happy to have Garth’s help for the important purpose of finally winning another election.

Garth’s commercials for my father in the 1980 Senate campaign were in line with the now familiar Garth style: straightforward, factual, with written information on the bottom of the screen, conveying the impression of seriousness of purpose. The best person to undercut Pete Flaherty’s popularity in Western Pennsylvania was Senator Heinz, who was popular across the state, especially in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Garth requested that Heinz do a commercial for my father’s campaign. Heinz agreed, believing that the ad would simply be an endorsement of Arlen Specter. But Garth knew that one Republican endorsing another Republican would not be meaningful to the voters. So Garth asked Heinz to make an ad critical of Flaherty’s stewardship as Mayor of Pittsburgh. Heinz balked. Garth said to Heinz “let’s make both ads and if you don’t want to run the negative, we won’t.” Both ads were made, Heinz withdrew his objection and the more effective ad aired.

Garth detected a problem for my father in rural communities, no doubt owing to the fact that my father was from Philadelphia. Together, they conceived a campaign position where my

father would seek a seat on the Senate Agriculture Committee, if elected. No Pennsylvanian had held a seat on “Ag” for many decades. They went to a farm in exurban Philadelphia to film the commercial. I marveled at the juxtaposition of these two men of the city -- Garth resplendent in his safari jacket, long, thin cigar and tall, slim blonde -- and my father, wearing a suit and tie while standing astride a hay bale, advancing the absurd proposition that he would waste his ample knowledge of urban issues in order to sit on Ag. As it worked out, my father was elected and was fortunately unable to serve on Ag because other, more senior Senators expressed a preference for this committee.

The professional relationship between my father and Garth blossomed into a close professional and personal relationship and friendship in the 1980s. They would meet in Philadelphia, Washington or New York. When in New York, they would eat together, joined by my mother. Usually, Garth and another New Yorker, such as Howard Cosell or Michael Bloomberg would round out the table. My mother would roll her eyes at the conversation among these three men who competed for the floor.

In the 1986 Senate re-election campaign, my father faced six-term Delaware County Congressman, Robert Edgar. Edgar, a Methodist minister, had a wholesome image and was a tough match. Garth again utilized his factually based documentary style commercials. But by 1986, he had a lot more to work with, as he poured over my father’s accomplishments in Pennsylvania’s 67 counties and conceived of commercials segmented by region on both television and radio to take advantage of various locally based initiatives.

The polling for the 1986 campaign was handled by veteran Republican pollster Robert Teeter from Market Opinion Research. Pollsters sometimes got in Garth’s way and Garth would

say so. On one occasion, Teeter was explaining the results of his recent poll, but the numbers didn't add up to 100. When this was pointed out to Teeter, Garth couldn't stop laughing.

On another occasion, a poll showed the race narrowing to a 4 point lead. Teeter recommended that Garth's ads be submitted to focus groups. My father agreed. I was tasked with the job of getting the commercials from Garth to give to Teeter for the focus groups. Garth initially refused to turn over the commercials, saying "I'd rather jump out the fucking window with the ads under my arm than give them to Bob Teeter for his focus groups." Eventually, Garth relented. Each of his ads tested better than each of Edgar's ads. My father was re-elected in 1986 by 9 percentage points over Edgar.

The re-election campaign of 1992 brought much more complex challenges. In October 1991, my father was asked by Strom Thurmond, the Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to lead the questioning of Anita Hill during the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of then-Judge Clarence Thomas. My father was seen as the right person for the job, as he was a skilled examiner with a moderate image. He took the job of questioning Hill very seriously and came at it from the standpoint of a trained investigator and prosecutor.

This approach, regrettably, was tone deaf to much of America, who saw Hill as a victim, not as someone to be closely questioned. While initial polling after the Hill-Thomas hearings showed my father's questioning to be strongly approved by the public, relentless editorial and opinion leader criticism took a rapid and substantial toll. My father's popularity in Pennsylvania plunged by a permanent 5 percent, made up mostly of moderate and liberal women who were deeply offended by his questioning of Anita Hill. Doubtlessly, some of Garth's close associates

and friends in New York were aghast at his client's conduct during these hearings, but Garth never complained. He set about the business of re-electing my father.

In the primary, my father was opposed by pro-life State Legislator Stephen Freind. Freind had support among the growing far right wing in the Pennsylvania Republican party. My father had enraged conservatives with a variety of votes in his now 11 years in the Senate. Freind's chances for election, however, plummeted during a statewide televised debate, where Freind made a direct appeal to the voters on the basis of religion and one of his aides picked a fist fight with my father's press secretary during a post debate news conference. Garth was reluctant to run negative ads against Freind, but did so to good result and my father won handily.

After the primary campaign against Stephen Freind, my father faced Lynn Yeakel in the general election. Yeakel was a community activist in Philadelphia, having served as President of Women's Way. She had no political experience but was smart, well spoken and had substantial financial support, much of which was based on antipathy toward my father over the Hill-Thomas hearings. After her primary victory over Lt. Governor Mark Singel, Yeakel led my father in polling by six percent.

Garth approached the campaign in his usual methodical manner. Again, he utilized regional ads on both radio and television touting accomplishments county by county and media market by media market. He went to Theresa Heinz and, along with my father, convinced her to cut a television commercial. Ms. Heinz was very popular in Pennsylvania as the widow of Senator Heinz, who had been killed in a plane crash in April 1991. The commercial began with her saying that she didn't always agree with Arlen Specter, a tacit nod to Anita Hill. Ms. Heinz

went on to talk about the work that my father had done in Senate partnership with her husband. It was classic Garth: admit the weakness, thereby giving more credibility to the strengths.

The campaign was aided by two Yeakel gaffes. First, she had failed to pay Philadelphia wage taxes on her income. Garth made an effective ad exploiting this mistake. Second, Yeakel held a press event in Pittsburgh accusing my father of being a “waffler” on the issues. When asked by a television reporter to give an example of an issue on which Arlen Specter waffled, Yeakel paused for 11 seconds. We got a copy of the television news story featuring the 11 second pause and turned that silence into a commercial. The tag line was another Garth classic: “If she can’t answer a question in Pennsylvania, what’s she going to do in Washington?” Public opinion polling showed that the tax ad and the waffle ad combined were worth about a four to five percent swing in the vote. My father was narrowly re-elected.

David Garth and I had worked together in the 1980 and 1986 campaigns. By 1992, we had a relationship that was independent of Garth’s relationship with my father. David had sufficient trust in my abilities that he invited me to join him for the post-production work in the studio on many of the ads during the 1992 campaign, including those mentioned above. He told me I was the only client representative he’d ever permitted into the studio. But I think he regarded me as a colleague as much as a client. He knew that he could trust me to sift, mold and successfully articulate our views and advice to my father in what was an extraordinarily difficult campaign, with intense national attention. And apparently he thought I could help him craft the ads. He was willing to sublimate some independence for the good of the effort. David was so committed to the campaign – and overwrought by anxiety – that he would not leave his apartment in New York to join us on election night in Philadelphia, to our disappointment, but understanding. That slim victory was one of David Garth’s greatest accomplishments.

Throughout the 90s, the relationship between Arlen Specter and David Garth continued to flourish. As before, they were frequent dinner companions in New York and Garth would occasionally travel to Washington to see my father in the Senate or to Philadelphia. In 1998, my father had the only easy re-election of his 45 year career in elective politics. He faced a well-qualified, but unfunded state legislator from remote Somerset County, Bill Lloyd. Although Lloyd had no money, Garth urged my father to undertake a paid media campaign. I opposed this, reasoning that the money would be needed for a future election, probably a primary where we would need every cent to stave off a challenge. Eventually, my father compromised and spent \$2 million on television. We won in a landslide.

From 1969 through 1998, Garth and my father had worked together on eleven primary and general elections. Nearly all were fiercely contested. They had amassed a record of ten wins and one loss. They had become good friends. Their work together covered the spectrum of issues that came before the United States Senate.

David Garth and Arlen Specter were both tough men. They were hard bosses. I saw each raise his voice at others, but never at one another. I never saw David Garth tell Arlen Specter what to do, even about matters that pertained directly to the execution of Garth's campaign strategy. Correspondently, I never saw Arlen Specter tell David Garth what to do. They liked - really loved - each other too much to have cross words, even though the stakes were so high for each of them and even though there were moments of intense pressure, difficult decisions and mistakes. Their relationship was a marvel to all of us who saw it up close.

By 2003, my father had served 23 years in the Senate. His record was at odds with the increasingly conservative tilt of the Republican party in Pennsylvania. He was now 73, as was Garth. It was 34 years since “they’re younger, they’re tougher and nobody owns them.”

Congressman Pat Toomey of the Lehigh Valley was to challenge my father in the 2004 primary. I closely studied Toomey’s record and thought he would be extremely formidable. Toomey had initially won a Republican primary for Congress in 1998 as the sole pro-choice candidate in a field of three and then quickly tacked to the right. When his wife was pregnant, he used his viewing of the ultrasound of the fetus as a basis for changing his position on abortion. His voting record in Congress mirrored the precise center of the Republican Party’s rightward tilt in Pennsylvania. Toomey was young, hard-working, clean cut and relentlessly on-message: “I represent the Republican wing of the Republican Party.”

The primary was shaping up as a very difficult race to win. It was rare for a moderate Republican to beat a conservative Republican anywhere in America in a one-on-one race. I thought David Garth was not the right person for the job of communicating why the Republican party should re-nominate Arlen Specter. I urged my father to replace Garth with Chris Mottola, who had played a minor role in the 1992 re-election campaign and had worked for many Republican candidates across the United States. My father agreed and dissolved their professional relationship in a painful telephone conversation with David in 2003. Thus, the work between my father and David Garth ended unceremoniously.

Lord Palmerston said that “nations don’t have permanent friends, just permanent interests.” That’s probably true of successful business relationships as well. But, in this case, the interests of Arlen Specter and David Garth produced an extraordinarily successful alliance

spanning all or parts of five decades with a stunning winning record – one of the most durable and successful in American political history.

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