

## CASE STUDY: CERC TIME CAPSULE

### 2006 General Special Election

**SITUATION:** In 2006, California's 50th Congressional District needed to choose a new member of the U.S. House of Representatives to fill the vacancy caused by the 2005 resignation of disgraced Republican Randy "Duke" Cunningham.



**Nearly 20 candidates jumped into the race amid the scandal, including former Republican Congressman Brian Bilbray. He forced a run-off with Democrat Francine Busby, who had received 44 percent of the vote in the Primary Special Election.**

Long-considered a Republican stronghold district, the Cunningham scandal and subsequent sentencing to more than eight years in federal prison just months before the General Special Election cast a cloud over Bilbray's candidacy.

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Polls showed a very close race developing. As a result, both the Democratic Congressional Committee and the National Republican Congressional Committee spent millions trying to win the seat.

**STRATEGY:** For the June 2006 election, Competitive Edge Research & Communication (CERC) set up a specialized strategy. CERC ran an aggressive last-minute GOTV program (3,800 contacts) reminding supporters to vote for Bilbray in the general special election.

**RESULTS:** The project was a success. Bilbray won the election with 53.2% of the vote. The significance of the victory did not go unnoticed. Political analyst Larry Sabato wrote in his Crystal Ball newsletter: "What a difference four percentage points makes! That was Bilbray's margin over Busby, a gaffe-prone, lackluster candidate who was out of her league. With six years (1995–2001) under his belt from another California House district, former congressman Bilbray understood what it took to win a tough campaign, and riding the immigration issue, he did so. The DCCC forced the NRCC to pull out all the stops and spend a large fortune for Bilbray, but given the dam that might have burst had Busby won, it was worth every GOP penny for them."