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FROM THE PAN TO THE FIRE

KATHY DAHLKEMPER BROUGHT HOME THE BACON IN 2008,
BUT CAN SHE STAND THE HEAT OF ANOTHER ELECTION?

There is a storm reflecting in Kathy Dahlkemper's rose-colored glasses. Two years ago, the landscape of Dahlkemper's political career looked almost picture perfect. She beat longtime incumbent Phil English for the congressional seat in a race touted by national pundits as one-to-watch. Dahlkemper, then a virtual neophyte with no past political experience outside of raising money for her numerous charitable activities, won on the merits of presenting herself as the very representation of her constituents, a dedicated community member, doting mother, and small business owner through the company she and her husband purchased from her in-laws, Dahlkemper Landscaping. An almost polar opposite to English, who as a longtime incumbent had a Congressional seniority promising an important spot on the House's Ways and Means Committee if re-elected, (albeit the only thing English's long tenure in Congress was delivering, according to detractors from both parties). Dahlkemper won the election in a narrow win – although underground grumblings have hinted that the local Republican party may have turned their back on English at the last minute to get the aging, and occasionally liberal-leaning, Congressman out of office in hopes of new blood in 2010.

Today, the first-time incumbent Congresswoman from Pennsylvania's 3rd District, Dahlkemper is caught in the midst of the national hangover facing the Democratic Party's 2008 election victory. The GOP has come down hard on the left, and she has not avoided the accusations of a lack

of accomplishments from the Democratic Congress and more and more of her delegates (and one-time voters), have expressed disgust with what are being called empty promises of job growth and allegations that the Congresswoman has managed to lose touch with her delegates in less than two years – ironic seeing how one of the politician's biggest attacks in her victorious bid against English was the lack-of-connection to his delegates.

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“I find it humorous when people say I'm out of touch,” says the Congresswoman in an August interview with *GLL*. “I've been in Congress for only a year-and-a-half, but I've been in the private world my whole life. I still come home every weekend. I was born and raised here, and I have stayed in-touch with what goes on in the everyday life here.”

In a strange case of voter déjà vu, her opponent, Mike Kelly, a car



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dealership owner and former high school football star from Butler, has been running a campaign that sounds oddly familiar to Dahlkemper’s 2008 bid. Terms like “small business owner” and “out of touch politicians” are being thrown around with what would appear to be much success. Kelly’s bid has been steadily gaining momentum since the spring primary, with the GOP entering his race in their “Young Gun” program, which is designed to identify the party’s top pick-up opportunities for victory. A *National Review* poll shows Kelly in an 11-point lead over Dahlkemper with 51% of voters thinking Dahlkemper doesn’t deserve reelection. “This race is only going to get tougher,” she states. “The first time you take a seat from a Republican they are going to want it back. And this is the best chance for them to defeat me. It doesn’t matter what is going on in the political landscape, this comes with the territory.”

But Dahlkemper’s unflappability is only expected to be further tested in the coming month as the Tea Party movement (both locally and nationally) and other independent groups have put her right in their crosshairs. Dahlkemper’s support of the health care reform bill – she wrote an amendment to the bill extending coverage for young adults on a parent’s policy to the age of 29 – has resulted in GOP It-Girl and former Vice President candidate Sarah Palin including Dahlkemper on a list this past March, (just days after the passing of the health care reform bill) along with other Democratic members of Congress she intended to target for defeat this year. Palin announced she’ll go after lawmakers who voted for health care reform and hail from districts she and Arizona Senator John McCain won in the 2008 presidential election. Dahlkemper was also one of several Congress members to receive anonymous threats in the aftermath of the bill’s passage. “It is unfortunate that a small but vocal group of people are using insults to convey their opinions and alarming that anyone would make threats against me or my family,” she told the *Associated Press* after the incident.

Dahlkemper has also come under fire for being a “Pelosi-crat” (a term she laughs off) and a member of the Blue Dog Coalition – defined as a group of moderate-to-conservative Democratic House members – in name only, a claim difficult to discourage when looking at her 94% record of voting with Pelosi. “*The National Journal* listed me at 88%, but percentage doesn’t matter,” reiterates Dahlkemper. “Most of the time in the House we are all voting on the same thing – a lot of small pieces of legislation that comes through in a very bi-partisan way. It’s only the very partisan ones you hear of.”

And then there are claims Kathy can only sum up as political nepotism. The Susan B. Anthony List, a political committee dedicated to helping pro-life women gain election to Congress, revealed intentions to spend \$300,000 educating PA-03 constituents against Dahlkemper this past June. “They say their goal is to get pro-life women into office, but when I ran as a pro-life woman two years ago, they supported my opponent,” she states. “I believe they are coming after me as a political motive. Their spokesperson is a former member of Congress, an extremely conservative Republican who I believe is trying to get

more Republicans into office and the fact that I am a pro-life Democrat is sometimes a threat for Republicans who seek to follow the issue of pro life.”

“It’s an election year and it doesn’t matter what I do, [the detractors] are going to find fault,” continues Dahlkemper. “I don’t take those things seriously because the voters are smarter than that. They will look at what I’ve done for this District. I’ve never worked harder in my life.”

— Mark Toriski

