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**“Muslim-American Political Participation:  
US Congressional Candidates 2002, 2004”**

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The “face” of any minority group is perhaps not shown more powerfully than through political activity. Perhaps, it can be said that a community’s successful assimilation into the culture of a new country is achieved when it grasps its political way of life and elects its first-ever members to local, state and national offices. This study details Muslim-American involvement in United States politics from the years 2002 to 2004 through researching Muslim candidates for the two major branches of the American government—the Senate and the House of Representatives. Although it would have been ideal to document Muslim candidates for local and state elections as well, such a task would require much more time and resources.

The dates of 2002-2004 were chosen to highlight Muslim political participation after 9/11, as there are clear indications that Muslim political activity increased during the years following September 11<sup>th</sup>. For example, Zogby International, a polling and public opinion research firm that undertakes many projects related to the Middle Eastern community in the United States, conducted the first ever polls of Muslim-Americans in 2001 and 2004. Its research showed that while in 2001, 44% of Muslims considered participation

in American politics “very important,” in 2004, 53% did.<sup>1</sup> When Muslims were asked how often they discuss politics with family and friends, in 2001, 35% said they did while in 2004, 64% said they did.<sup>2</sup>

Much literature exists about the Muslim and Middle Eastern American community in the United States, especially their history and social characteristics. Some recent studies have dealt specifically with the issue of Muslim involvement in United States politics, most notably the works of Amaney Jamal, “The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque Involvement and Group Consciousness” and “The Determinants of Political Engagement and Participation of Muslim Americans.”

Still, the study of Muslim Americans in the American political system requires further development. There are many avenues that can be followed to study Muslim American political participation, such as through research of the Muslim electorate or Muslim political organizations. As mentioned above, the avenue chosen for this paper is the examination of Muslim candidates for office, specifically the United States Congress. Identifying Muslim candidates was a difficult process as the definition of who is a Muslim can be quite subjective. First, through the United States Office of the Clerk, which publishes names of candidates and election results for Congressional races, identifiable Muslim surnames were picked out for the years 2002 and 2004. Second, a list obtained by the American Muslim Alliance (AMA), a political organization, was consulted to make certain that Muslim candidates who didn’t have Muslim surnames were not excluded. A candidate was considered Muslim only if he or she identified themselves as such regardless of race or

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<sup>1</sup> Zogby International and Project MAPS. “American Muslim Poll 2004” [webpage]; available from <http://www.projectmaps.com/AMP2004report.pdf>; Internet; accessed 19 March 2005.

Ibid., “American Muslim Poll 2001” [webpage]; available from <http://www.projectmaps.com/AMP2001report.pdf>; Internet; accessed 19 March 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

ethnicity. This method attempted to produce solely an estimate of the number of Muslims running for seats in Congress rather than an exact number. Lastly, only candidates for the general elections were included, which ruled out candidates running in primary elections. After Muslim candidates were identified, their platforms, endorsements, and campaign financial records were researched, as well as their backgrounds, reasons for running, desired accomplishments, and the outcomes of their campaigns were provided.

The first candidate to be examined is Maad Abu-Ghazalah, who ran for a House of Representative seat in 2002 as a Libertarian candidate in California. Born in the West Bank, Abu-Ghazalah moved to the United States when he was 17 years old.<sup>3</sup> He has a computer science and law background, and he became interested in politics only after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>4</sup> As an active community member, Abu-Ghazalah had volunteered for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee before September 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>5</sup>

During his campaign, Abu-Ghazalah worked closely with the American Muslim Alliance. He found this affiliation very helpful to his campaign as they helped connect him with Muslims of various ethnicities, especially the Pakistani community, which contributed greatly to his campaign financially.<sup>6</sup> Abu-Ghazalah also says he got a great deal of help in terms of volunteers from local mosques in northern California where he was running, as well as other forms of support from the Arab community and the general anti-war movement.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, he mentions, the momentum his campaign helped build for Muslim Americans didn't last as no other Muslim candidate has run in his district for Congress since.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Maad Abu-Ghazalah, interview by author (phone), 30 August 2006

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

In terms of foreign and domestic policy issues, Abu-Ghazalah says his campaign ran strongly on issues relating to the US Patriot Act and the war in Iraq, both of which he considers remnants of old imperialist ways of thinking.<sup>9</sup> Abu-Ghazalah strongly believes the US Patriot Act undermines the United States Constitution and the balance of power.<sup>10</sup> He maintained that Congress had voted to give the Executive branch too much power by passing the Patriot Act into law.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the war in Iraq, he believes it has no benefit for the American people, and they must now pay for a war fought with the intention of hoarding oil and making wealthy companies, such as Halliburton even wealthier.<sup>12</sup> He strongly advocates for a pullout of US troops, a move he believes will calm the violence in the region.<sup>13</sup>

Abu-Ghazalah says raising money for his campaign was one of the toughest tasks. “People don’t want to give money to a losing cause,” he said.<sup>14</sup> Although Abu-Ghazalah knew his chances for winning a Congressional seat were minimal, his main objective was to set a foundation for future Muslim candidates.<sup>15</sup> On that note, Abu-Ghazalah thinks he was successful in that he was able to voice his opinions and those of many Muslims to a wide audience.<sup>16</sup> Abu-Ghazalah does not foresee himself running for Congress again anytime soon, but says he may run for a local office, such as city council member, or he may even work with other Muslim candidates on their campaigns.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

For now, however, Abu-Ghazalah is out of politics, instead focusing on his software company.<sup>18</sup> As far as the likelihood of a Muslim Congressman in the future, Abu-Ghazalah believes the first Muslim to be elected to Congress will most likely come from the African American Muslim community and not from the immigrant Muslim community, which is comprised mostly of Southeast Asians, Arabs, and Iranians, as well as other ethnic groups.<sup>19</sup> His prediction might be correct, as Keith Ellison, a Black Muslim from Minnesota, is a favorite to win a house seat in the 2006 general elections.

Below is more information about Abu-Ghazalah’s campaign, including his platform, endorsements, and campaign expenditures, as well as election results in table format for easy review.

Table 1

Platform

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Out of Iraq Foreign Policy</li> <li>▪ Quick return to Iraqi self-rule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No to the USA Patriot Act</li> <li>▪ In favor of</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Internationalize rebuilding efforts</li> <li>▪ US to have an even-handed policy in regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict</li> <li>▪ US is hypocritical to say Iran is violating UN charter (with its nuclear ambitions) and stay silent about the “illegal” Israeli occupation of Palestine.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ immigration</li> <li>▪ No secret evidence</li> <li>▪ Stricter pollution regulations for corporations</li> <li>▪ Limit corporate influence in US politics</li> <li>▪ Reduce military budget</li> <li>▪ Support research to find alternative energy sources</li> <li>▪ Against standardized testing in</li> </ul>

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

	education
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Sources:

- 1) [www.maad4congress.org](http://www.maad4congress.org), "Platform" [webpage]; available from [http://www.maad4congress.org/plat\\_form.htm](http://www.maad4congress.org/plat_form.htm); Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.
- 2) Maad Abu-Ghazalah, interview by author (phone), 30 August.

Table 2

Endorsements and Campaign Expenditures

Endorsements	Total Campaign Expenditure
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mexican American Political Association of the Greater Bay Area</li> <li>▪ Citizens Against Violent Crime</li> <li>▪ San Mateo Daily News</li> <li>▪ American Muslim Alliance</li> <li>▪ Armenian National Committee of America</li> <li>▪ Libertarian Party of California</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ \$132,691</li> </ul>
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Sources:

- 1) [www.maad4congress.org](http://www.maad4congress.org), "Endorsements" [webpage]; available from <http://www.maad4congress.org/endorsement.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.
- 2) [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), "Total Raised and Spent: 2002 Race: California District 12" [webpage]; available from <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.asp?ID=CA12&Cycle=2002>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.
- 3) Maad Abu-Ghazalah for Congress, "Endorsements" [webpage]; available from <http://wasearch.loc.gov/e22k/20021202101940/http://www.maad4congress.org/endorsements.html>; Internet; accessed 8 September 2005.

Table 3

Percentage of Votes and Election Results

Percentage of Votes	Result
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6.5%	<b>Lost.</b> Placed last among 3 candidates
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Source: California Secretary of State, “United States Congress, District 12” [webpage]; available from <http://primary2004.ss.ca.gov>Returns/usrep/1259.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

The second Congressional candidate examined is Arif Khan, who declared his candidacy in 2004 for a Senate seat from Wisconsin’s Libertarian party.<sup>20</sup> Khan was born in India. He moved to the United States to further his education, studying computer engineering.<sup>21</sup> He currently owns and runs his own manufacturing company.<sup>22</sup> Khan says he has been interested in the American political system since the day he came to the US, and he calls the Constitution “very eloquent.”<sup>23</sup> In fact, Khan originally decided to come to the United States because of the political freedoms the country offered.<sup>24</sup> When Khan accepted the nomination of the Libertarian party for the US Senate, it was the first time he had ever run for public office.<sup>25</sup> He decided to accept the nomination because he believes the US has strayed from the values on which the founding father’s had originally built the country.<sup>26</sup>

Khan’s most important domestic issues are individual liberty and the abolishment of the US Patriot Act, a law he believes instills fear in people, and violates the Constitution.<sup>27</sup> He believes that the Patriot Act was passed under complete duress and that it gives the Executive branch of the federal government too much power.<sup>28</sup> Khan also favors the

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<sup>20</sup> Arif Khan, interview by author (phone), 31 August 2006

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

abolishment of the Department of Homeland Security.<sup>29</sup> He is against the war in Iraq, as well as the campaign on terror, all of which he says, “The US has unleashed on the world.”<sup>30</sup>

Khan says that throughout his campaign he got better reception from the non-Muslim community than he did from Muslims. “The Muslim community wasn’t on board,” he says.<sup>31</sup> He points out that he was nominated for a senate seat by non-Muslims.<sup>32</sup> Muslims, he believes, were hesitant to contribute financially to his campaign because they thought he wouldn’t win.<sup>33</sup> Wisconsin is the home of approximately 40,000 Muslims, Khan says, and many of them are doctors, lawyers, and engineers.<sup>34</sup> He was surprised by the lack of political interest and participation in such a highly educated group.<sup>35</sup> He says trying to educate Muslims was a very frustrating experience, and despite the fact that many have been living in the US for a number of years, they still don’t really know what the Constitution is.<sup>36</sup> He voiced disappointment in the likelihood that many Muslim Americans have probably never read the US Constitution or the Declaration of Independence.<sup>37</sup> Many Muslims come to the US with an attitude of just wanting to make money and care for little else, he added.<sup>38</sup> Until the Muslim community becomes part of the system, he says, there will always be a distinguished group, which is unfortunate.<sup>39</sup> Khan believes the identity of Muslims should not be based merely on religion. “I have different affiliations” he says. “I am a father, husband, businessman, (so) why should I distinguish myself just on my religion?”<sup>40</sup> Khan

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

strongly believes religion is a personal issue that should be kept to oneself.<sup>41</sup> In terms of receiving aid from Muslim political organizations, such as the American Muslim Alliance, Khan said he didn't receive much help.<sup>42</sup> He believes in the objectives of these organizations, but he adds that the idea is not to just put Muslims in power, but to get them generally more involved in the system.<sup>43</sup>

In term of endorsements and campaign contributions, Khan mentions that he wasn't actively seeking endorsements and that his campaign was run more by principles than money.<sup>44</sup> The only endorsements he said he received were from the Father's Rights movements.<sup>45</sup> His opponents came into the race with millions of dollars, but Khan raised all of his money, he says.<sup>46</sup> Based on the comparatively little money he raised, he thinks his campaign did well in many respects.<sup>47</sup> He walked away from his campaign very "enlightened" and with a positive outlook, he says.<sup>48</sup>

Khan doesn't believe he will run again, "I'd rather be a statesman than politician."<sup>49</sup> He would, however, like to educate and encourage others to run, and he would be willing help them with their campaigns.<sup>50</sup> He says he hopes his campaign cleared the path for more Muslim involvement in the political process, and although he sees that ambition in the younger generation, he unfortunately does not see it in his own.<sup>51</sup>

Below is the platform, campaign expenditures, endorsements, and election results for Arif Khan:

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Table 4

Platform

Foreign Policy	Domestic Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ US should not have attacked Iraq.</li> <li>▪ US military should leave Iraq.</li> <li>▪ President lied about reasons for going to war with Iraq.</li> <li>▪ US must have a moral responsibility toward poor nations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Oppose USA Patriot Act</li> <li>▪ Less government involvement in economy</li> <li>▪ Privatize Medicare and Medicaid</li> <li>▪ Deregulate health care industry</li> <li>▪ Take away FDA</li> </ul>

Sources:

- 1) [www.arifkhan.org](http://www.arifkhan.org), “Issues” [webpage]; available from <http://www.arifkhan.org/6901/index.html>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.
- 2) Ibid., “Iraq” [webpage]; available from <http://www.arifkhan.org/6901/21401.html>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.
- 3) Ibid., [webpage]; available from <http://www.arifkhan.org/4436.html>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.
- 4) Ibid., “Issues” [webpage]; available from <http://www.arifkhan.org/6901/index.html>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

Table 5

Endorsements and Campaign Expenditures

Endorsements	Total Campaign Expenditure
	\$3,928

Source: [www.opensecrets.com](http://www.opensecrets.com), “Total Raised and Spent: 2004 Race: Wisconsin Senate” [webpage]; available from <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.asp?ID=WIS2&Cycle=2004>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

Table 6

## Percentage of Votes and Election Results

Percentage of Votes	Result
9%	<b>Lost.</b> Placed last among 3 candidates

Sources:

1) Office of the Clerk: U.S. House of Representatives, “Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Elections of November 5, 2002” [webpage]; available from <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/2002/2002Stat.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

2) [www.usaelectionatlas.org](http://www.usaelectionatlas.org), “2004 Senatorial Elections” [webpage]; available from <http://www.uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/state.php?year=2004&fips=55&f=0&off=3&elect=0>; Internet; accessed 9 August 2006.

The third candidate to be looked at is Goli Ameri, who ran for a seat to represent Oregon in the House of Representative. Ameri was born in Tehran, Iran, and she received her education in Communications and French Literature at Stanford University.<sup>52</sup> Before running for a congressional seat, Ameri’s career was in the high technology industry, where she successfully founded her own company, eTinium.<sup>53</sup> Ameri was involved in the political arena before her run for office, serving as a leading member of a senator’s finance committee. She also served on the Executive Committee of the San Francisco and Oregon Republican Parties and was an Oregon Delegate to the National Republican Women’s Congress.<sup>54</sup>

Ameri’s motivation for running for Congress relates back to her background as an Iranian. “Those of us with a Persian heritage have much to be proud of, but we’ve also seen how government can be used to abuse its people, attack their freedom, and undermine their

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<sup>52</sup> United States Mission to the United Nations, “Biography of Goli Ameri” [webpage]; available from [www.un.int/usa/ga60-ameri%20bio.htm](http://www.un.int/usa/ga60-ameri%20bio.htm); Internet; accessed 12 September 2006.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> National Iranian American Council, “Congressional Candidate Goli Ameri: I’m Proud of my Persian Heritage.” [webpage]; available from <http://www.niacouncil.org/pressreleases/press159.asp>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

dignity. I'm running for Congress because I want to help make certain that never happens in this great country," she told the National Iranian American Council, an Iranian civic organization.<sup>55</sup>

Ameri's platform addresses a wide variety of domestic issues. One such issue is unemployment, mentioning that her state of Oregon has the second worst unemployment statistics in the country.<sup>56</sup> Ameri is also against higher taxes that stifle the growth of small businesses, and she wants to make healthcare more affordable for families.<sup>57</sup> In terms of international issues, she follows her party's lines by supporting the war in Iraq.<sup>58</sup>

In 2006, two years after her run for Congress, Ameri's life has taken a different turn. She was nominated by President George W. Bush as a public delegate to the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.<sup>59</sup>

Below is the platform, campaign expenditures, endorsements, and election results for Goli Ameri.

Table 7

Platform

Foreign Policy	Domestic Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supports war in Iraq</li> <li>▪ Believes Iraq was a threat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supports pay raise for military</li> <li>▪ In favor of creating higher paying jobs</li> <li>▪ Set higher standards for public schools</li> <li>▪ Hold schools</li> </ul>

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>United States Mission to the United Nations, "Biography of Goli Ameri" [webpage]; available from [www.un.int/usa/ga60-ameri%20bio.htm](http://www.un.int/usa/ga60-ameri%20bio.htm); Internet; accessed 12 September 2006.

	accountable for higher standards
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Sources:

1) National Iranian American Council, "Congressional Candidate Goli Ameri: I'm Proud of my Persian Heritage," [webpage]; available from <http://www.niacouncil.org/pressreleases/press159.asp>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

2) Oregon Secretary of State, "Representative in Congress: Goli Ameri," [webpage]; available from [http://www.sos.state.or.us/elections/nov22004/guide/cand/ameri\\_g.html](http://www.sos.state.or.us/elections/nov22004/guide/cand/ameri_g.html); Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

Table 8

Endorsements and Campaign Expenditures

Endorsements	Total Campaign Expenditure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Citizens for a Sound Economy</li> <li>▪ Oregon Association of Taxpayers</li> </ul>	\$2,183,277

Source: [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), "Total Raised and Spent: 2004 Race: Oregon District 1" [webpage]; available from <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.asp?ID=OR01&Cycle=2004>.

Table 9

Percentage of Votes and Results

Percentage of Votes	Result

38%	<b>Lost.</b> Placed 2 <sup>nd</sup> among 3 candidates
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Source: Washington Post, “Oregon” [webpage]; available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/elections/2004/or/>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

The last candidate to be examined is Syed Mahmood. Mahmood was nominated by the Republican Party to run for Congress from California’s 13<sup>th</sup> district. Born in India, Mahmood grew up in Pakistan and moved to the United States thirty years ago for the same reason many others immigrate to the United States—individual and political liberties.<sup>60</sup> He considers himself a perfect example of the “American Dream.”<sup>61</sup> Mahmood’s educational background is in business administration, beginning his career in marketing and sales management.<sup>62</sup>

Mahmood has always considered himself a political activist as president of United Muslims of America, a public affairs origination committed to encouraging new Americans to participate in the political process.<sup>63</sup> Mahmood has been an active member of California’s Republican party, as Co-Chair for the Bush Campaign in California for the 2000 Presidential elections, Bush delegate to the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, and a member of the Executive Committee of California’s Republican Party.<sup>64</sup> Mahmood considers himself an active participant in local civic, educational, and cultural activities.<sup>65</sup> He

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<sup>60</sup>Syed Mahmood for Congress, “Biography of Syed Mahmood” [webpage]; available from <http://wasearch.loc.gov/e22k/20021112115559/http://www.syedmahmood.com/biography.html>; Internet; accessed 8 September 2006.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup>Ibid

<sup>64</sup>Syed Mahmood for Congress, “Experience in Public Affairs” [webpage]; available from <http://wasearch.loc.gov/e22k/20021112121638/http://www.syedmahmood.com/accomplishments.html>; Internet; accessed 8 September 2006.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

is founding member of the Islamic Society of East Bay–San Francisco and an active participant in inter-faith activities and dialogues.<sup>66</sup>

In terms of his stance on issues, Mahmood was opposed to the Iraq war right from the very start.<sup>67</sup> In other issues relating to the Middle East, Mahmood says he was one of the few candidates who dared to stand up to Israel and the Israeli lobby in relation to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and the problems plaguing the Middle East.<sup>68</sup> Foreign policy aside, he says his biggest campaign issue was corruption in the political system.<sup>69</sup> “There needs to be a complete overhaul of the campaign system. It has been taken over by lobbies and special interests,” he says.<sup>70</sup>

Mahmood received a great deal of support from the Muslim community.<sup>71</sup> Ninety percent of the Muslims he had spoken to told him that they had voted for him.<sup>72</sup> In terms of receiving support from leading Muslim political organizations, such as the American Muslim Alliance, they surprisingly decided to endorse his opponent.<sup>73</sup> “There was a jealousy factor in the Muslim leadership,” Mahmood explains.<sup>74</sup> Mahmood’s campaign experience with the general American public seemed to be both positive and negative.<sup>75</sup> He states that when graffiti was drawn on his campaign posters, many Americans called his office voicing their support for him.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid

<sup>67</sup>Syed Mahmood, interview with the author (phone), 8 September 2006.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

“I was not elected, but I was not defeated,” Mahmood says confidently.<sup>77</sup> In elections, of course, you run to win, but also to express the views of the mainstream public,” he says.<sup>78</sup> “Campaigning gives an opportunity for name recognition for you and your community,” he adds.<sup>79</sup> As to whether he will run again, Mahmood says he simply doesn’t know.<sup>80</sup>

Below is Syed Mahmood’s platform, campaign expenditure, endorsements, and election results.

Table 10

Platform

Foreign Policy	Domestic Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Against Iraq war</li> <li>▪ Supports creation of a Palestinian state and US involvement</li> <li>▪ Against military tribunal for terrorist suspects</li> <li>▪ Against Patriot Act</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strengthen and protect Social Security</li> <li>▪ Need more affordable housing</li> <li>▪ Tax incentives and breaks for small businesses</li> <li>▪ Crack down on corporate fraud</li> <li>▪ Better law enforcement</li> <li>▪ Lower tax burden</li> <li>▪ Create education Savings account</li> <li>▪ In favor of Campaign Finance Reform</li> </ul>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Source: Seyed Mahmood for Congress, "Mahmood on the Issues" [webpage]; available from <http://wasearch.loc.gov/e22k/20021112113123/http://www.syedmahmood.com/issues.html>; Internet; accessed 8 September 2006.

Table 11

Endorsements and Campaign Expenditures

Endorsements	Total Campaign Expenditure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 17 in all, including:</li> <li>▪ California Secretary of State</li> <li>▪ Former Congressman</li> <li>▪ California State Assembly member</li> <li>▪ California Young Republicans</li> </ul>	\$51,307

Sources:  
1) [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org),  
2002 Race: California  
available from

"Total Raised and Spent:  
District 13" [webpage];

<http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.asp?id=CA13&cycle=2002>.  
2) Seyed Mahmood for Congress, "Endorsements" [webpage]; available from <http://wasearch.loc.gov/e22k/20021112121101/http://www.syedmahmood.com/endorsements.html>; Internet; accessed 8 September 2006.

Table 12

Percentage of Votes and Results

Percentage of Votes	Result
22%	<b>Lost.</b> Placed 2 <sup>nd</sup> among 5 <sup>th</sup> candidates

Source: Office of the Clerk: U.S. House of Representatives, "Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Elections of November 5, 2002" [webpage]; available from <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/2002/2002Stat.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

Now that extensive information about each of the candidates has been given, some analysis on their campaigns follows. Thus, in 2002 and 2004, four Muslim candidates had

run for seats in the United States Senate and the House of Representatives. Considering this small number, it is impressive that one of the candidates was a woman. None of the candidates ran as a Democrat, and half ran as Republicans. Half of the candidates ran outside of the two-party system (as Libertarians) perhaps to increase their chances of making it to the general elections. Considering that a poll taken in 2004 by Zogby International of nearly two thousand Muslims<sup>81</sup> showed that 50% of those surveyed identified themselves as Democrats and only 12% Republican, it is surprising that half of candidates ran on the Republican ticket.<sup>82</sup>

Half of the candidates ran in California, where there is a large Muslim population, while the other half surprisingly ran in Wisconsin and Oregon, states with a smaller number of Muslim residents. Of the four, all ran for House seats except one. Regarding the ethnic background of the candidates, half are of Indian origin, one is of Iranian origin, and one is of Palestinian/Arab origin.<sup>83</sup> None of the candidates were born in the United States.<sup>84</sup>

In regard to campaign expenditures, there is a huge difference in campaign spending between most Muslim candidates and their opponents. The four Muslim candidates spent

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<sup>81</sup>“Zogby International conducted interviews of 1,846 persons, 18 years and old, nationwide, who identify themselves as Muslim. From Thursday, August 5 to Wednesday, September 15, 2004, phone interviews were conducted. All calls were made from Zogby International headquarters in Utica, New York. The telephone list was created by matching the zip codes of 300 randomly selected Islamic centers against their respective local telephone exchanges. Listings of common Muslim surnames were then identified from the local telephone exchanges and called. An additional sample of Afro-American Muslims was interviewed in-person from September 1 to 15, 2004, at locations in New York, New York, Washington D.C., Atlanta, Georgia, and Detroit, Michigan. The additional surveys were required to account for Afro-American Muslims with Anglo-American or non-Muslim surnames who were not called on in the telephone survey. A slight weight was added to ethnicity to more accurately reflect the Muslim population. The margin of error is +/-2.3 percentage points. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.” Source: Zogby International and Project MAPS, “American Muslim Poll 2004” [PDF Document]; available from <http://www.projectmaps.com/AMP2004report.pdf>; Internet; accessed 19 March 2005; 4.

<sup>82</sup>Zogby International and Project MAPS, “American Muslim Poll 2004” [PDF Document]; available from <http://www.projectmaps.com/AMP2004report.pdf>; Internet; accessed 19 March 2005; 12.

<sup>83</sup>Maad Abu-Ghazalah, interview by author (phone), 30 August 2006

Arif Khan, interview by author (phone), 31 August 2006

Syed Mahmood, interview by author (phone), 8 September 2006

National Public Radio, “An All American Race in Oregon” [webpage]; available from

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1963061>; Internet; accessed 12 September 2006

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

\$2,331,572 while the winners of the elections spent \$15,076,175, a difference of \$12,744,603.<sup>85</sup> Although it should be taken into account that all of these candidates ran against incumbents, the difference in the amount of money spent is still large. It is interesting to note is that even though Goli Ameri's campaign expenditures were just about the same as her opponent David Wu's, the winner of the race who had raised \$2,216,813, Ameri still lost by a considerable amount of votes, 20% less than the winner.<sup>86</sup> Another argument might be raised that these candidates placed so poorly because they ran outside of the two-party system. Their main reason for running outside of the two-party system was that they knew that their chances of getting the Republican or Democratic nominations and making it onto the ballot for the general elections were very slim. For example, Maad Abu-Ghazalah also ran in the 2004 primary elections for a House seat as a Democrat, but he did not win to become the party's nominee, placing last out of three candidates and winning 6.5% of the vote.<sup>87</sup>

A general theme noticeable in the campaigns of the candidates is the emphasis on one or two aspects of the war on terror: 1) the US Patriot Act and the challenges presented to civil rights, especially for Muslim citizens after September 11<sup>th</sup>, and 2) the Iraq war. Maad Abu Ghazalah's background shows his passion for such human/civil rights issues as a

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<sup>85</sup>Syed R. Mahmood spent \$51,307 and the winner spent \$438,055. Source: [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), "Total Raised and Spent: 2002 Race: California District 13" [webpage]; available from <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.asp?cycle=2002&id=CA13>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005. Goli Ameri spent \$2,183,277 and the winner spent \$2,752,272. Source: [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), "Total Raised and Spent: 2004 Race: Oregon District 1" [webpage]; available from <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.asp?cycle=2004&id=OR01>; Internet; accessed 7 August 2006. Arif Khan spent \$3,928 and the winner spent \$11,230,411. Source: [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), "Total Raised and Spent: 2004 Race: Wisconsin Senate" [webpage]; available from <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.asp?cycle=2004&id=WIS2>; Internet; accessed 7 August 2006. Maad Abu-Ghazalah spent \$93,060 and the winner spent \$1,190,646. Source: [opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), "Total Raised and Spent: 2004 Race: California District 12" [webpage]; available from <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.asp?cycle=2004&id=CA12>; Internet; accessed 7 August 2006.

<sup>86</sup> Washington Post, "Oregon" [webpage]; available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/elections/2004/or/>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

former volunteer for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. Abu-Ghazalah's main campaign focus was the US Patriot Act and efforts to get it repealed. Arif Khan said he decided to accept the Libertarian party's nomination for Congress because of the lack of freedoms brought about by the war on terrorism. Khan said his most important domestic issue was liberty of the individual. Khan even says he is against the whole war on terror and even the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. Syed Mahmood, even as a Republican, was opposed to the war on Iraq, and that is apparent in the many articles he writes for a think tank he has created called The American Institute of International Studies."<sup>88</sup> In an article co-written with Pete Stark, his opponent in the 2002 Congressional race, Mahmood called the invasion of Iraq a "monumental blunder."<sup>89</sup> They further comment on the Iraq war, saying, "By alienating our allies and starting an unjust war, the Bush Administration obliterated any hope of international cooperation and exposed Americans to greater risk."<sup>90</sup> Goli Ameri, as opposed to the all the other candidates, supported the war, and says in an interview with the National American Iranian Council, "I support America's efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of course, I don't agree with every decision the President has made, but on the whole, I think he's right that if we don't fight this war in Iraq, we'll eventually fight it here in our own backyard."<sup>91</sup> Ameri's other policy platforms also related to the war on terror in many respects, such as her support for a pay increase for the military.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>The American Institute of International Studies, [www.aiis-website.org](http://www.aiis-website.org).

<sup>89</sup> Syed Mahmood and Pete Stark, "Bipartisan Rebuke of Bush's Policies," The American Institute of International Studies [webpage]; available from <http://www.aiis-website.org/cms.cfm?fuseaction=articles.viewThisArticle&articleID=13&pageID=191>; Internet; accessed 12 September 2006.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> National Iranian American Council, "Congressional Candidate Goli Ameri: I'm Proud of my Persian Heritage," [webpage]; available from <http://www.niacouncil.org/pressreleases/press159.asp>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

<sup>92</sup> Oregon Secretary of State, "Representative in Congress: Goli Ameri," [webpage]; available from [http://www.sos.state.or.us/elections/nov22004/guide/cand/ameri\\_g.html](http://www.sos.state.or.us/elections/nov22004/guide/cand/ameri_g.html); Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

For some of the candidates, their campaign goals had one thing in common: they weren't running to actually win. Although they would have been happy to make it to Congress, some were in some way resigned to the fact that they would eventually lose. Perhaps this is one reason they did lose—and by such considerable margins. Maad Abu-Ghazalah described this sentiment when he was saying how hard it was to raise money. “People don't want to give money to a losing cause.” He said his main campaign objective was to set a foundation for future Muslim candidates and to give Muslims a voice on the issues. Arif Khan mentioned his decision to run came only when the Libertarian party nominated him.<sup>93</sup> Khan wouldn't run again because, as he said, “I'd rather be a statesman than politician.”<sup>94</sup> At the end of the day, Abu-Ghazalah and Khan shared the main campaign goal to widen the path for more Muslims of the younger generation to pursue politics.

None of the candidates had an educational background in politics. Abu Ghazalah has a computer science and law background, Arif Khan has a computer engineering background, Syed Mahmood has a business administration background, and Goli Ameri has a communications and French literature background. Still, their work experience in the political arena varied. Although Syed Mahmood was the only candidate who had previously run for office (state assemblyman), Goli Ameri had extensive experience working within the Republican party, such as serving the finance committees of a member of Congress and a Congressional candidate.<sup>95</sup> Syed Mahmood had also served as co-chair for Bush's campaign

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<sup>93</sup> Arif Khan, interview by author (phone), 31 August 2006

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> National Iranian American Council, “Congressional Candidate Goli Ameri: I'm Proud of my Persian Heritage,” [webpage]; available from <http://www.niacouncil.org/pressreleases/press159.asp>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

in California for the 2000 Presidential elections and was a Bush delegate to the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia.<sup>96</sup>

One point of difference among the candidates was the way in which they perceived the Muslim community and Muslim political organizations helping or hindering their campaign. For Maad Abu Ghazalah, the American Muslim Alliance helped introduce him to the wider Muslim community, which helped him financially with his campaign. Abu Ghazalah also received help from local mosques, whose members volunteered for his campaign. On the other hand, Arif Khan was frustrated when dealing with the Muslim community, not only because they wouldn't support his campaign financially, but because of their lack of knowledge of the American political system and more importantly, what he saw as their reluctance to learn about it. For Syed Mahmood, his experience with the Muslim community was lukewarm to say the least. Although he says most Muslims he encountered on the campaign trail were supportive of his campaign and said they had voted for him, the Muslim political leadership, such as heads of Muslim organizations like the American Muslim Alliance, decided to endorse his opponent. As with Goli Ameri, in her interview with the NIAC, she made no mention of receiving aid from either Iranian or Muslim organizations, but mentioned endorsements from Citizens for a Sound Economy and the Oregon Association of Tax Payers.

Of the four candidates, the most successful was certainly Goli Ameri. According to Federal Election Commission reports, Goli Ameri is ranked number one among

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<sup>96</sup> Syed Mahmood, "Experience in Public Affairs," [webpage]; available from <http://wasearch.loc.gov/e22k/20021112121638/http://www.syedmahmood.com/accomplishments.html>; Internet, accessed 12 September 2006

Congressional candidates challenging incumbents.<sup>97</sup> With her ability to raise \$2,183,277, close to what her opponent raised, one is curious to know what made her campaign so successful. One reason might be her pro-Iraq war stance. As the Iraq war drags on and brings about more and more Iraqi civilian deaths and American military casualties, Americans in 2006 are increasingly turning against the war. In 2004, however, when Ameri was running, Americans were less anti-war, and her strong position that going to Iraq was necessary to fight the war on terror, undoubtedly won her a great deal of support from conservatives and Republicans. When one reviews the list of those who contributed to her campaign, this becomes more evident. The National Republican Congressional Committee gave her campaign over \$72,000, which is more than the entire campaign expenditures of most of the other candidates with the exception of Abu-Ghazalah.<sup>98</sup> Ameri had been named as one of the National Republican Campaign Committee's super six candidates.<sup>99</sup> Ameri's other stances were much in line with the popular sentiment of the day, such as support for the military men and women by being in favor of increasing their pay wages. It was certainly very valuable for the country, especially the Bush administration, which was under increased scrutiny for misleading the public about weapons of mass destruction, to have a Muslim on their side that sees eye-to-eye on many of the crucial issues.

Looking forward to the 2006 Congressional elections, Muslims have high hopes for one candidate, Keith Ellison of Minnesota.<sup>100</sup> Ellison is currently a state legislator who was

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<sup>97</sup> National Iranian American Council, "Congressional Candidate Goli Ameri: I'm Proud of my Persian Heritage," [webpage]; available from <http://www.niacouncil.org/pressreleases/press159.asp>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

<sup>98</sup> Federal Election Commission, "Contributions made by this Candidate's Committees" [webpage]; available from [http://query.nictusa.com/cgi-bin/can\\_give/H4OR01089](http://query.nictusa.com/cgi-bin/can_give/H4OR01089); accessed 12 September 2006.

<sup>99</sup> National Iranian American Council, "Congressional Candidate Goli Ameri: I'm Proud of my Persian Heritage," [webpage]; available from <http://www.niacouncil.org/pressreleases/press159.asp>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2005.

<sup>100</sup> Keith Ellison for U.S. Congress, "About Keith>Bio" [webpage]; available from <http://www.keithellison.org/about-bio.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 September 2006.

elected in 2002.<sup>101</sup> He is an attorney by trade and still maintains his practice.<sup>102</sup> Below are tables that show his platform, campaign endorsements, expenditures, and campaign contributors for the primary race.

Table 13

Platform

Foreign Policy	Domestic Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Immediate withdrawal of U.S. Troops from Iraq</li> <li>▪ Two-state solution for Palestinian-Israeli conflict</li> <li>▪ Hamas should denounce terrorism, recognize right for Israel to exist</li> <li>▪ Iran's pursuit of nuclear power should be stopped</li> <li>▪ Nuclear-armed Iran poses threat to world</li> <li>▪ Iran is leader in supporting terrorism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Universal healthcare</li> <li>▪ Increased use of renewable energy</li> <li>▪ Equal education for everyone</li> <li>▪ Pro-immigration</li> <li>▪ Strong law enforcement</li> <li>▪ Pro-choice</li> </ul>

Source: Keith Ellison for Congress, "On the Issues," [webpage]; available from <http://www.keithellison.org/issues.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 September 2007.

Table 14

Endorsements and Campaign Expenditures

Endorsements	Campaign Expenditures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nearly 100 people and organizations :</li> <li>▪ 4 elected officials, including former Vice President Walter Mondale</li> <li>▪ 16 Congressmen, including Maxine Waters, Dennis Kucinich and John Conyers</li> <li>▪ 1 former Attorney General</li> <li>▪ 30 Labor and Organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ \$69,210</li> </ul>

Source:

1) Keith Ellison for U.S. Congress, "Endorsements," [webpage]; available from <http://www.keithellison.org/endorsements.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 September 2007.

2) [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), "Total Raised and Spent: 2006 Race: Minnesota District 5" [webpage]; available from <http://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary.asp?ID=MN05&Cycle=2006>

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

Table 15

Campaign Contributors

United Steel Workers National Association of Letter Carriers Minnesota Democratic Farmer Labor Party Congressional Black Caucus Association of Trial Lawyers American Federation of Teachers American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees And many more
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Source: Federal Election Commission, “Contributions made by this Candidate’s Committees” [webpage]; available from [http://query.nictusa.com/cgi-bin/com\\_rcvd/C00422410/](http://query.nictusa.com/cgi-bin/com_rcvd/C00422410/); Internet; accessed 1 September 2006.

Keith Ellison’s campaign shows great promise for various reasons. First and foremost, he was born in the US and has an American—not Muslim or Middle Eastern—name, which most likely will have a positive effect when his name appears on the ballot. Ellison is in many ways probably seen as more “American,” even though the rest of the candidates are American as well, the difference being that they were naturalized as opposed to being born here. Perhaps for these reasons, Ellison is someone Americans can relate to a little more. Second, he is probably viewed in the eyes of most Americans as black first, then Muslim. Also, as an African American, he has the support of various African Americans in Congress and other high-ranking political offices, as well as in African American political action committees. Other reasons include the fact that Ellison had previous experience in public office, serving as a state legislator. This undoubtedly gives him campaign knowledge and the service experience that constituents are looking for when electing a candidate. What is interesting about his platform on his campaign website was that it makes no mention of the US Patriot Act or the civil rights of Muslims after September 11<sup>th</sup>, an issue which has

been a pressing topic with all Muslim Americans since 2001. It is also an issue—as seen throughout this paper—that was at the forefront of many of the other candidates’ campaigns. His only mention of the war on terror is his stance against the war, which is popular these days, so this will not hurt his campaign. What will also win him votes is his stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From his statements on his website, he is clearly not as sympathetic to the Palestinians cause, as one might think considering he is Muslim. Although he calls for a two state-solution to the conflict, his position points fault at the Palestinians by outlining steps they must take while making no mention of Israeli policies and changes that require implementation. “Terrorism is the greatest impediment to peace. At this point, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has yet to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure in Gaza and the West Bank. The United States cannot support any government that condones or embraces terrorism, he says”.<sup>103</sup> Although everyone, Muslim or otherwise, agrees that terrorism and terrorist groups such as Hamas must be dismantled wherever they exist, his reluctance, except for a two-line statement about the hardships of the Palestinian civilians through this crisis, does not do justice to their suffering brought about by Israeli policies, such as overuse of military force, illegal settlements, etc.

Muslim-Americans have certainly come a long way in being active in the American political system. Although none have been successful as of yet to reach the position of a US Congressman, it will not be long, as demonstrated by the success of Keith Ellison’s campaign, that one will. To the extent in which the future Muslim-American Congressman will truly represent the “voice” of Muslim community will be a challenge and is yet to be seen.

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