

Election Night Results and the Pro-Life "Increment"

By David N. O'Steen, Ph.D.

Although the overall election results November 7 were very disappointing, polling clearly demonstrates that many pro-life candidates who otherwise would have been defeated prevailed because of their position on the abortion issue. As has been the case in election after election since 1973, election eve and post-election polling showed that the majority of those who voted on the basis of abortion voted for pro-life candidates. This difference between those who vote for pro-life candidate because of the abortion issue and those who for pro-abortion candidates is known as the pro-life "increment."

Unfortunately, this pro-life increment was not enough to save other pro-life Republicans who were swept away by the larger anti-Republican tide.

National Right to Life PAC was active and highly visible. As a testimony to the hard work and reach of NRL PAC, a nationwide poll of 800 voters taken by The Polling Company found that fully 22% of voters said that they recalled hearing advertising or receiving information from National Right to Life PAC.

The Polling Company also found that 36% of the voters said abortion affected their vote. Of those, 23% said they voted for pro-life candidates while only 13% said they voted for pro-abortion candidates. This yielded a significant advantage for pro-life candidates in contest after contest.

The 23% who said they voted for pro-life candidates voted overwhelmingly for Republicans, according to the poll, while a large majority of the 13% who voted for pro-abortion candidates voted for Democrats, reflecting the fact that most pro-life candidates were Republicans.

However, the 60% who said abortion did not affect their vote voted heavily for Democrats. So, too, did the remaining 4% who were undecided on the question. In many races, this was enough to negate the pro-life increment.

The Polling Company found that 3.4% said abortion was the most important issue affecting their vote, and 70% of these said they voted for pro-life candidates. This yielded a 2% advantage for pro-life candidates among these voters.

In an election year in which there were many very close contests, this plus for pro-life candidates saved many from defeat. The same voters voted better than 4-1 for Republicans over Democrats.

However, 22% of the population said that the most important issue affecting their vote was Iraq. Those voters voted approximately 4-1 for Democrats over Republicans.

The Polling Company also asked how voters felt about abortion. It found that a majority of voters would prohibit almost all abortions.

Twenty-eight percent felt abortion should be prohibited in all circumstances, or only be legal to save the life of the mother—the position of National Right to Life. An additional 24% believed abortion should be legal only to save the life of the mother or in cases of rape or incest.

When these two groups are combined, it means that 52% took a pro-life position that would prohibit almost all abortions.

Forty-two percent took a “pro-choice” position of allowing abortion for any reason. Twenty percent said they would allow abortion either through the first six months or throughout pregnancy. And 22% told The Polling Company they would allow abortion for any reason but only in the first three months. Seven percent were undecided.

Pro-Life Advantage for Senatorial Candidates

Statewide polls of approximately 2,000 voters in each of a number of key Senate races taken by Zogby International also showed a pro-life increment for both winning and losing pro-life U.S. Senate candidates.

In Ohio, 27% said they recalled seeing information or hearing advertisements from National Right to Life PAC. Thirty-two percent told Zogby that abortion affected their vote. Of those, 21% said they voted for candidates who oppose abortion and 10% for candidates who support abortion.

Of those who said abortion affected their vote 20% voted for pro-life Republican incumbent Sen. Mike DeWine and 11% voted for pro-abortion Democratic challenger Rep. Sherrod Brown. Unfortunately, the pro-life advantage for Sen. DeWine was not enough to overcome the strong Democratic vote among other voters.

In Missouri, where pro-life Republican incumbent Sen. Jim Talent was defeated by pro-abortion Democratic challenger Claire McCaskill, 36% told Zogby International that they recalled seeing information or hearing advertising from National Right to Life PAC. Moreover, 36% said that abortion affected the way they voted.

Of those, 26% said they voted for pro-life candidates and 9% said they voted for candidates who support abortion. Further, of those who said abortion affected their vote, 24% voted for Talent and 11% voted for McCaskill. Unfortunately, this strong advantage for Sen. Talent among those who voted on the issue of abortion was more than countered by a strong vote for Claire McCaskill among other voters.

In the agonizingly close race between pro-life Republican incumbent Sen. George Allen and pro-abortion Democratic challenger Jim Webb in Virginia, 30% said the abortion issue affected their vote. Zogby found that 19% said they voted for candidates who oppose abortion and 11% voted for candidates who support abortion.

The Zogby poll also found that among those who voted based on a candidate’s position on abortion, 18% voted for Allen and 12% voted for Webb. Nineteen percent recalled hearing advertising or seeing information from National Right to Life PAC.

Once again, unfortunately, this pro-life advantage for Sen. Allen did not overcome the Democratic advantage for Jim Webb among voters who did not vote on the issue of abortion.

In the race for Tennessee's open Senate seat, where pro-life Republican Bob Corker won a very close race against pro-abortion Rep. Harold Ford, Jr., 35% said the abortion issue affected their vote. Of those, four in five (28%) said they voted for pro-life candidates and 6% voted for candidates who support abortion.

When cross-tabulated with their vote specifically for the Senate, 26% voted for Corker and 9% voted for Ford. Twenty-six percent said they recalled receiving, seeing, or hearing information from National Right to Life PAC.

Pro-lifers are especially grateful to National Right to Life Western Regional Director Brian Johnston, who flew to Tennessee to work for NRL PAC in the final weeks, and Stan Schulz, a former National Right to Life director from Tennessee, who volunteered for NRL PAC. With the outstanding assistance of National Right to Life Hispanic Outreach Director Raimundo Rojas and State Organizational Development Coordinator Marji Higgins, both of whom were also working for NRL PAC, Brian and Stan organized NRL PAC's grassroots volunteer efforts for Senator-elect Corker.

Truly, NRL PAC's efforts provided the margin of victory in Tennessee where Corker won by just 3%.

While a few ballots remain to be counted (with recounts a possibility in a few instances), there are approximately 15, U.S. House races where NRL PAC was involved in which the pro-life candidate won by 3% or less. It is quite fair to say these candidates won because of the pro-life increment.

Eight of these races in which the margin was 3% or less found an NRL PAC-backed candidate defeating an EMILY's List candidate. (EMILY's List, which backs only the most militantly pro-abortion Democrats, had over \$30 million at its disposal in this election.) According to NRL Political Director Karen Cross, there were a total of 18 races where an NRL PAC candidate went head-to-head with an EMILY's List candidate. NRL PAC won 14.

Without these wins provided by the pro-life increment, the pro-life loss in the U.S. House would have been twice as great as it was. In every race, whether won or lost, every volunteer who worked to build the pro-life margin deserves the thanks of the entire movement.

Even in the adverse conditions of 2006, the pro-life margin produced victories and the pro-life movement is in a much better position in Congress than it would have been otherwise. The pro-life increment is alive and well and with our hard work and perseverance will produce many victories in the future.