

December 2004

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Counting Catholics Votes

John Kerry's Catholicism...seemed to represent packaging rather than personal belief. Evangelicals generally expressed concern not that he was too Catholic but that he wasn't Catholic enough.

--World Magazine, 11/13/2004

An unprecedented third statewide count of votes in the Governor's race begins today. But it wasn't supposed to be this close. A year ago, polls showed Attorney General Christine Gregoire 19 points ahead of her likely Republican challenger, State Senator Dino Rossi. Dave Ammons, AP writer, said of Rossi at the time, "... he's a well-kept secret. Perhaps fewer than one in four voters recognize his name."¹ Well, they recognize it now!

Most reckon that Dino's amazing 42 vote win over Gregoire out of nearly 2.9 million votes cast, will earn a place in the record books. Indeed it will—at least in this century and the one preceding. But back when, there was even a closer gubernatorial finish. In 1839 in Massachusetts, according to the League of Women Voters in that state, "Marcus Morton was elected governor by a single vote out of 102,066 cast." Hypothetically it would have been a 29 vote difference in a race with 2.9 million voters.

Few races in this state were close—none comparable to the one at hand. Voters living near saltwater, but mostly in populous King County, sent a clear message on November 2. The Evergreen State is still a BLUE STATE. But it may be a shade lighter. Although John Kerry racked up an impressive 206,307 more votes than the President, his total vote should have been higher considering Ralph Nader wasn't on the ballot this time. Unless 100,000 "greeners" just didn't vote, the Democratic presidential ticket gained but 162,500 new votes from four years ago compared with Mr. Bush's increase of 196,000 new votes.

Generally speaking, voters were not inclined to make any sweeping changes, returning all incumbents to office, save four Republican legislators—two in the House and two in the Senate. Democrats gained control of the Senate, while also picking up an unprotected third House seat from Republicans, increasing their majority in that body 55 to 43.

The "Ds" also performed well in another department—winning margins. While only two Republican legislators topped the 70 percentile in votes (73% and 71%), at least a dozen Democrats easily trumped those numbers—most in the 80+ percentile. At least four incumbent Democrats waxed so confident, that while their counterparts elsewhere in the country were doing their best to downplay the gay "marriage" issue during the campaign, they were promoting it. All four are openly homosexual, and all four were easily re-elected.

State Representative Jim Moeller (D-Vancouver), for instance, received 60% of the vote in his district; Rep. Joe McDermott (D-West Seattle), 74%; Rep. Ed Murray (D-Seattle), 87%; and Rep. Dave Upthegrove (D-Highline) ran unopposed! Collectively, "the four" polled 156,410 votes—enough to keep "gay" representation in the Washington State Legislature the highest per capita in the nation. That the four represent a constituency of nearly 500,000 people makes it hard to ignore their voice.

However, the devastation he witnessed in Berlin exceeded it all. Says Joyner:

So with voters going with Democrats for President, U.S. Senator, six of nine for Congress, and both State Houses, why not Governor? Were there problems with voting machines or disqualified ballots as Christine Gregoire alleges? Not according to Republicans. They say their guy won on the issues, and he won at the ballot box—twice!

Many Christian activists agree that Dino's issues were important, but suggest there were other factors in the mix. They believe that his numbers surged in the closing hours of the campaign because of a huge get-out-the-vote effort in churches all across the state. But if Dino Rossi and Rob McKenna benefited from a new infusion of "values voters," what happened to George W. Bush and George Nethercutt who hold similar values?

"Follow the money," says Tom McCabe, Executive Director of the Building Industry Association of Washington, "it's still the mother's milk of politics." He points out that in races where the Democrats outspent their opponents, Democrats prevailed. Where Republicans raised and spent the most money, they won. Can't be argued.

Yet, there is a fourth proposition—admittedly a stretch—but certainly worth considering. While Murray, Rossi, McKenna (and Kerry here) did outspend their opponents, they shared something else in common—they are all Catholic. So is our other U.S. Senator, Maria Cantwell, and John Spellman, the last Republican to be elected governor—24 years ago.

For generations, Democrats have assumed the Catholic vote. But the 31 million Catholics who voted this year are no more monolithic than their Protestant counterparts. Some are liberal and some are conservative. A sign that Catholics are trending in a conservative direction is evident in the presidential vote. In 2000, George W. Bush received 47% of the Catholic vote compared to 52% this year—a significant shift! And in Ohio, arguably the most crucial battleground state this year, Bush took the Catholic vote from Kerry 55%-45%.

Certainly no one is claiming that a majority of Catholics in the Seattle area favored the President this year. But many of them who usually support Democrats admitted they were conflicted over the moral issues. In the 8th Congressional District race for instance, candidate Dave Ross would normally expect a large Catholic following because he is Democrat and he is Catholic. But he also supports abortion rights, and voting for him became problematic for many moderate Catholics.

The fact is, Washington State continues to move in the pro-life direction, and Catholics are powerful drivers of that movement. Voter preference for Governor-elect Dino Rossi and Attorney General-elect Rob McKenna, both pro-life Catholics, and both strong supporters of traditional marriage, provides strong evidence of a tide that is turning.

In January, our state will also send to Congress, two newly elected pro-life representatives who strongly support a federal marriage amendment. Dave Reichert and Cathy McMorris are replacing fellow Republicans who were not solid on the life issues and did not support a federal marriage amendment. Greeting them will be Representative "Doc" Hastings (R) from Yakima. Doc is pro-life, voted for a federal marriage amendment, and, oh yes, is Catholic.

Is there a message for both political parties? Yes. Catholics are concerned about moral issues and are trending to the Right. But their vote must be earned. And, if you will, their vote in this state is so important, it will probably be counted, recounted, and recounted again!

Rick Forcier

Executive Director

¹ Sen. Rossi steps down, starts governor's bid from scratch, *The Olympian*, 12/14/2003