

Conservative Christian voters may not Nov. 3

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After turning out in large numbers to help elect President Reagan last November, many conservative Christians apparently are sitting out the upcoming statewide election.

It is difficult to determine the extent of the apathy among the conservative Christians, many of whom became involved in politics only recently, because voter apathy has been widespread.

"It's not just within the conservative Christian people," Glenn Sumrall, an administrator at Liberty Baptist College and a Lynchburg Republican, said of the lack of voter interest.

But party officials, both Democrats and Republicans, are turning up evidence that the enthusiasm of last fall is not there among the Christian vote.

The people working the telephone banks are finding others on the telephone are finding a large number of people who registered last year — when the conservative Christians had a large voter registration drive — sitting out this election.

Political observers believe one reason for the apathy is that the two gubernatorial candidate came down on the wrong side of two issues dear to conservative Christians — the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion.

Lt. Gov. Charles S. Robb, the Democratic candidate, cast a tie-breaking vote in the state Senate in favor of a bill that would have allowed Medicaid funding for abortions in cases of gross physical or mental deformities.

Attorney General J. Marshall Coleman, the Republican candidate, said he would have voted the same way.

Both candidates favor the Equal Rights Amendment, which is strongly opposed by conservative Christians.

Sumrall said he thinks the conser-

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vative Christians would be more active in the governor's race "if there were a candidate running who took the negative stance on those two issues."

One such candidate was in the early running. Guy O. Farley Jr., a born-again Christian, received widespread support from conservative Christians — particularly in the Lynchburg area — in his bid for the Republican nomination for attorney general. When Farley dropped out at the GOP convention, his backers shifted to state Sen. Nathan Miller, who captured the nomination. But Miller has been unable to capture the same allegiance that Farley had.

The low public profile on the governor's race by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, is another possible reason for

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the low activity by his followers.

The Moral Majority Report, the newspaper published by Falwell's political group, had a lengthy story about Robb's vote on the abortion bill — without saying that Coleman would have voted the same way. That was the last story about the governor's race to appear in the newspaper, however.

Harry Covert, the editor of Moral Majority Report, said the lack of stories about the statewide elections is a result of the nature of the paper's circulation. "We just felt it would be smart to stay out of the statewide race because Moral Majority Report is not a state newspaper," he said.

Falwell met with Robb at the minister's house in July, and Coleman spoke at a Moral Majority-sponsored meeting of conservative ministers in April.

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