



## Christian Coalition

### MEMORANDUM

TO: STATE DIRECTORS/CONTACTS, CHAPTER COORDINATORS

FR: GUY RODGERS *GR*

DT: NOVEMBER 4, 1993

RE: POST-ELECTION ANALYSIS

The implications of the Virginia elections are so important that I wanted to share the results and analysis with each of you so that you can utilize this information in your state and local efforts.

#### Background:

The Republican candidates for Governor, Lt. Gov. and Attorney General were George Allen, Mike Farris and Jim Gilmore, respectively. Allen is a former congressman and state legislator. Farris is an attorney who founded an organization for home educators and who has represented such organizations as Concerned Women for America.

The Democratic candidates for Gov., Lt. Gov. and Attorney General were Mary Sue Terry, Don Beyer and Bill Dolan, respectively. Terry is presently serving the last few months of her second term as attorney general. Beyer is the sitting Lt. Governor. Dolan is a northern Virginia lawyer.

In June, Allen trailed Terry by 29 points. She had amassed over \$2.5 million, while Allen had approximately \$250,000. It was widely assumed she would win handily.

#### Results:

But when the votes were counted, Allen had won 58% of the vote. Terry made the worst showing by any Democratic gubernatorial candidate in Virginia in this century. Farris lost, 54-46, in a race most acknowledge was much closer than expected. Gilmore won, 56-44.

In the Virginia House of Delegates, Republicans picked up six seats, leaving the Democrats with a slim 52-47 (one independent) advantage. In fact, as one political analyst observed, Republicans missed "by a whisker" of winning control of the House. Democrats won ten seats by less than 1,300 votes each,

1801-L Sara Drive, Chesapeake, Virginia 23320 804-424-2630 FAX: 804-424-9068

won five seats by less than 1,000 votes each, and won three seats by less than 500 votes each.

### Analysis:

Beyer made attacks on Mike Farris as a "religious extremist" the centerpiece of his campaign. Literally 80 - 90% of his ads were along the lines of warning voters that if Farris were elected he would be a puppet of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. They were vicious, mean-spirited, and in many cases outright untrue.

For instance, a series of ads charged that Farris wanted to ban books like Cinderella and The Wizard of Oz. The truth is that Farris had represented parents in a Tennessee case who had appealed for the right of their children to be given an alternative reading list. There was no attempt to ban any books. Beyer was simply repeating distortions of the facts that had appeared in the press, and he continued doing so, even when area newspapers criticized him for running misleading ads.

Beyer had a huge financial advantage, and thus was able to run TV spots for weeks without Farris being able to run advertising.

Meanwhile, Allen began to gain on Terry. By early fall he was within striking distance. Allen ran an aggressive "people" campaign, traveling the state in a mobile home. As Allen pulled closer in the polls, his fund raising skyrocketed and Terry began employing the same anti-religious attack strategy that Beyer was using. During one debate, Terry accused Allen of running a campaign of "hate", making clear reference to "the religious right".

In the final days of the campaign, Allen pulled ahead of Terry. Her campaign decided to focus on attacks on Allen for being too close to the "religious right" and the "gun lobby", illustrated by her criticisms of educational choice and Allen's support for second amendment rights. In one particular ad, the announcer stated "The bad guys are ganging up on Mary Sue Terry," and then the ad proceeded to finger followers of Lyndon LaRouche, the National Rifle Association, and Pat Robertson and his supporters as "the bad guys."

Our own polling data, coupled with analysis of numerous political experts, as well as the election results themselves, reveal that the anti-religious tactics backfired. Note the following results from a scientific poll we commissioned:

- \* Mike Farris ended with a negative rating of 30.7%, not nearly as high as would normally be expected given the saturation of negative ads against him.
- \* Only 15% of voters felt Terry did the right thing in attacking George Allen for being too close to Pat Robertson. However, 78% said she should have focused on other issues.

- \* Only 18% of voters felt Beyer did the right thing in his attacks on Farris, while 75% said he should have focused on other issues.
- \* Only 4% of voters indicated that religious conservative support of the Republican candidates figured prominently in their voting decisions, meaning the attack ads just didn't stick.
- \* Attacks on religion made 17% of the voters more likely to vote for the Republicans, while it made only 9% of the voters more likely to vote for the Democrats. This is another illustration that the attacks were a net loss for the Democratic candidates.
- \* Terry ended up with a negative rating of 41.7%, a full 11 points higher than Farris'.
- \* 38% of the voters identified themselves as born-again evangelicals, revealing that Farris' campaign had a major impact in activating conservative Christians and likely contributed to the landslide won by George Allen.
- \* The abortion issue was an asset to Republicans. Those who listed abortion as their most important issue (13% of the voters) voted Republican by a 55-44% margin.

#### Other insights:

Farris got 50,000 more votes than Mary Sue Terry got against George Allen. In fact, Farris ran better against Beyer than Eddy Dalton did in 1989. Polls only a week prior to the election showed Farris trailing by as many as 20 points, so his eight point loss was a major surprise to most observers.

Given the fact that Farris' negative ratings were not any higher, probably the best answer as to why he lost was that he got outspent by such a wide margin. In effect, it was not the content of the Beyer ads that hurt Farris as much as the saturation without Farris running his own ads defining his own message. Farris was unable to adequately get his message to the voters.

#### Conclusions

As noted in the accompanying articles, there is a growing consensus among political observers that making the "religious right" a whipping boy has great risks, and indeed has the potential to backfire. With our own polling data showing that some 3/4 of the voters wishing the Democrats had discussed issues, it is clear that they had the wrong message.

Paul Goldman, former Virginia Democratic party chairman, criticized the attack strategy, as did Doug Wilder, the Democratic governor.

We have now witnessed the failed use of this tactic in the Los Angeles mayoral race, the special election for Lt. Governor in Arkansas, and here in Virginia. The tactic is failing because voters are interested in issues like crime, education, taxes and jobs.

It is also clear that there is a consistent message coming from the voters throughout the country: hold the line on taxes, fix the problems in education, address the problems of crime -- in short, a generally conservative philosophical approach to politics.