

**Dan Petegorsky, Executive Director
Western States Center
December 1, 2006**

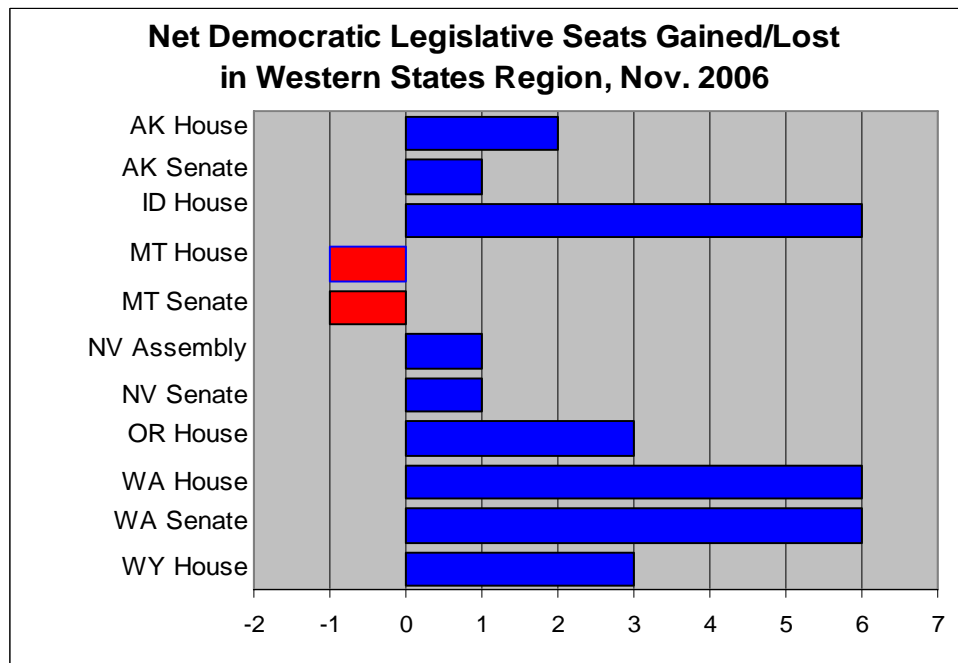
Make Justice, Not War

The scale of progressive wins around the region and the country from the midterm elections is just coming into focus. We'll see the true impact unfold over time, but this much seems clear at this early stage:

Party Realignment

The election was emphatically not an anti-incumbent backlash. Not a single Democratic incumbent Congressman, U.S. Senator or Governor was defeated anywhere in the country. Instead, it was a wholesale rejection of the President's war strategy and the rampant culture of corruption, self-dealing and holier-than-thou moral hypocrisy in the Republican controlled Congress. Equally impressive, in state legislative elections Democrats picked up a net gain of more than 300 seats and gave up no more than two seats in any single chamber in the entire nation.

The following chart shows seats won by either major party in legislative races in our region:



Notes:

- (1) In Montana, the House had been at 50D-50R, and will now be 50D-49R-1 Constitution Party. In the Senate, one R switched parties after the election.
- (2) Chambers not listed showed no net gain/loss (ID Senate, OR Senate, UT House & Senate, and WY Senate).

At the same time, independent voters swung towards Democrats – and much of the conventional wisdom coming out of 2004 about how voters express their values in elections was turned on its head. The Republican Party and its core right wing and corporate allies have come to embody a very specific view of government and society that voters are resoundingly rejecting. Even the so-called “conservative” Democrats elected from “red” states are more than anything strong economic populists whose sharply focused messages of support for constituents struggling to make ends meet trumped the usual right wing wedge issues this campaign. A fitting epitaph might be one of the less recited verses of “America the Beautiful”:

America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
Till selfish gain no longer stain
The banner of the free!

Purple Mountain Majesties?

This election further exploded the conventional references to “red” and “blue” states. It has become increasingly misleading to characterize states based solely on which party’s candidate receives the majority of votes for President. The “purpleness” of the Rocky Mountain West is more evident than ever, and this, again, solidifies a shift that has been taking place over the last decade.

When I came to Western States Center ten years ago the political map of our region looked much different than it does today. The mid-90s had been catastrophic for progressives in the West. The watershed elections of 1994 had been followed by further consolidation in 1996, and the right wing had taken power across our region. Of the 16 legislative chambers in the Center’s region, which covers Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada and Utah, all but one (Nevada’s Assembly) were controlled by Republicans – and generally right wing Republicans.

A trip across the Northern Rockies following the 1996 elections might well have illustrated the scale of political realignment that had then reached its peak. Driving east on I-90 out of Seattle, after you crossed Lake Washington into the suburban 8th Congressional district you would have had to keep driving all the way to Minnesota before you could eat lunch in a district that sent a Democrat to the House of Representatives – a distance of some 1,500 miles.

Based only on Congressional district criteria, that drive would still only be a little bit shorter today. While South Dakota elected a Democrat (if of the self-identified Blue Dog breed) to its single at-large Congressional seat in 2003, the region’s Representatives across the length of I-90 will still all be Republicans. But it almost got a *lot* shorter, as incumbents in districts long held by Republicans were under siege in traditionally “red” states and districts – starting from Washington’s 8th.

Remarkably, while Democrats were contesting and winning seats across the Midwest and the Northeast, Republicans and conservative constituency and business groups had to spend millions of dollars and mount sometimes desperate campaigns just to hold on to seats in their core bedrock states like Idaho and Wyoming. These are states where they have maintained enormous registration advantages and where President Bush was reelected in 2004 with margins of 40%.

In Wyoming, for example, incumbent Rep. Barbara Cubin, who holds the seat that Dick Cheney was first elected to 30 years ago and which Republicans have held ever since, defeated Democratic challenger Gary Trauner by just 1,012 votes. The slim margin was reflected in races elsewhere around the region:

State	Race	Candidates	Vote Margin	%
MT	U.S. Senate	Tester over Burns	2,847	0.7
MT	State House	Kerns versus Eaton	3	0.0
NV	U.S. House	Porter over Hafen	3,966	1.89
WA	U.S. House	Reichert over Burner	2,653	2.18
WY	U.S. House	Cubin over Trauner	1,012	0.53

In Idaho, Larry Grant nearly became the first Democrat elected in the 1st Congressional district since 1994; only a late \$1 million from the Club for Growth and its allies and visits from Vice President Cheney kept the seat in the Republican column. Cheney paid visits to Montana and Wyoming as well, while President Bush had to put in appearances in places like Elko, Nevada to shore up base votes.

Other than Washington's 8th district and the Burns-Tester race, none of these contests were on anyone's target lists early in 2006 – not even the second tier. These had not been swing districts in any sense of the term. But disillusionment with the Iraq war and its effects on local communities took their toll, particularly in rural communities that have sent a disproportionate number of National Guard troops to serve.

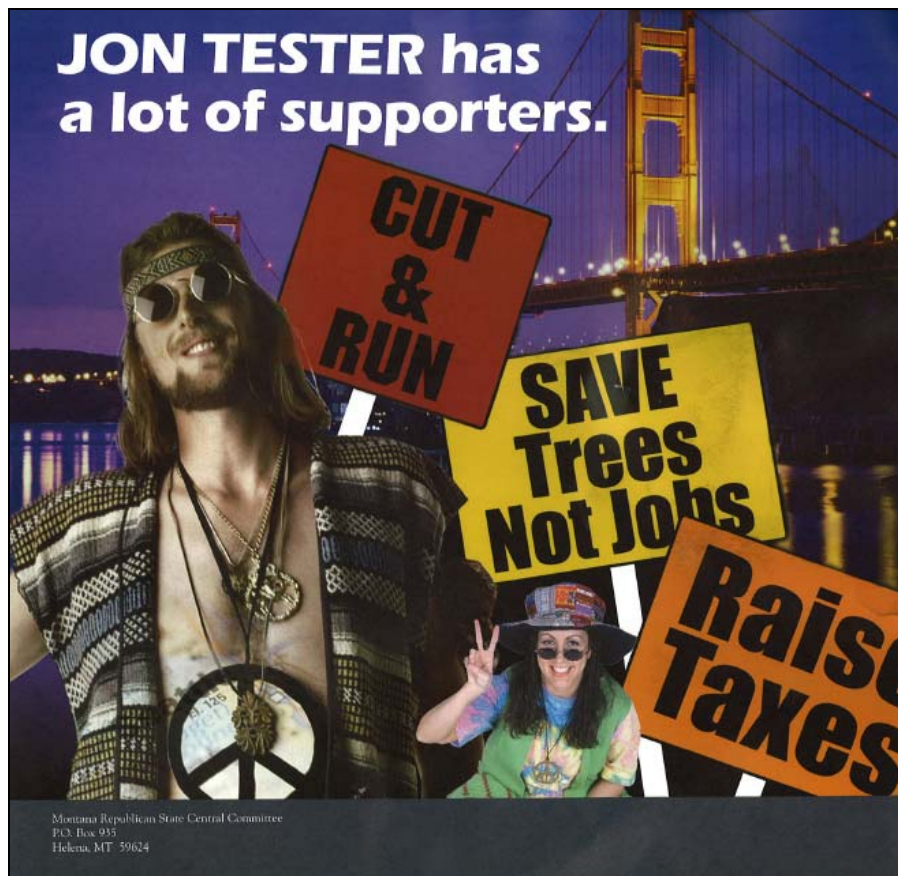
While heightened expectations for Congressional races in Idaho and Wyoming weren't realized, Democrats picked up half a dozen Idaho legislative seats, including one in Twin Falls, which hadn't elected a Democrat for three decades. So while all statewide office holders will be Republicans, new faces in the legislature will include longtime progressive leaders like Sue Chew and Les Bock. And although United Vision for Idaho's director Jim Hansen lost his bid for incumbent Mike Simpson's Congressional seat, he visited scores of communities all across the district that hadn't seen a Democratic candidate for many, many years. A longer piece on Jim's campaign appeared on Daily Kos: <http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2006/11/6/1642/24726>.

In Wyoming, where Democratic Governor Dave Freudenthal was reelected by a huge margin, Democrats will now have 17 out of 60 seats in the House, up from 14. And while that may seem bleak by "blue state" standards, according to Dan Neal at Equality State Policy Center it likely means the House Democrats will change the committee split to 6-3 rather than 7-2.

Similar if even stronger shifts will take place in Nevada. While Republicans held onto two out of three Congressional seats and won the Governor's race, they lost four out of the remaining five statewide constitutional offices that they had held, including attorney general and secretary of state. Democrats increased their control of the Assembly, and by pulling to within one vote of control of the state Senate (10-11) will also have much more power in committees. Since Nevada will gain at least one additional Congressional seat (and electoral vote) after the 2010 census and redistricting, increased control will translate into greater influence over that process.

Of course, on the national stage these wins paled beside Montana's U.S. Senate race, where state Senate president and organic farmer John Tester defeated incumbent Conrad Burns, paving the way (or should I say, hoeing the row) for Democrats' takeover of the Senate. Of all the new faces on their way to D.C. when the new Congress convenes, Tester's will undoubtedly attract singular attention. See, for example, this post-election profile that appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/13/us/politics/13tester.html?hp&ex=1163480400&en=0dce525b53932e52&ei=5094&partner=homepage>.

The authenticity of his appeal to state voters was as strong a factor in his win as were incumbent Conrad Burns' ties to Jack Abramoff. Burns' attempts to convince voters that Tester actually represented the vanguard of some Bay Area hippie takeover of the Big Sky State were as laughable as they were unconvincing. Here's one sample:



Democrat Jon Tester

is being supported by extreme liberal special interests

Jon Tester is being supported by liberal special interests because he will support them in Washington.

Who are Jon Tester's supporters?

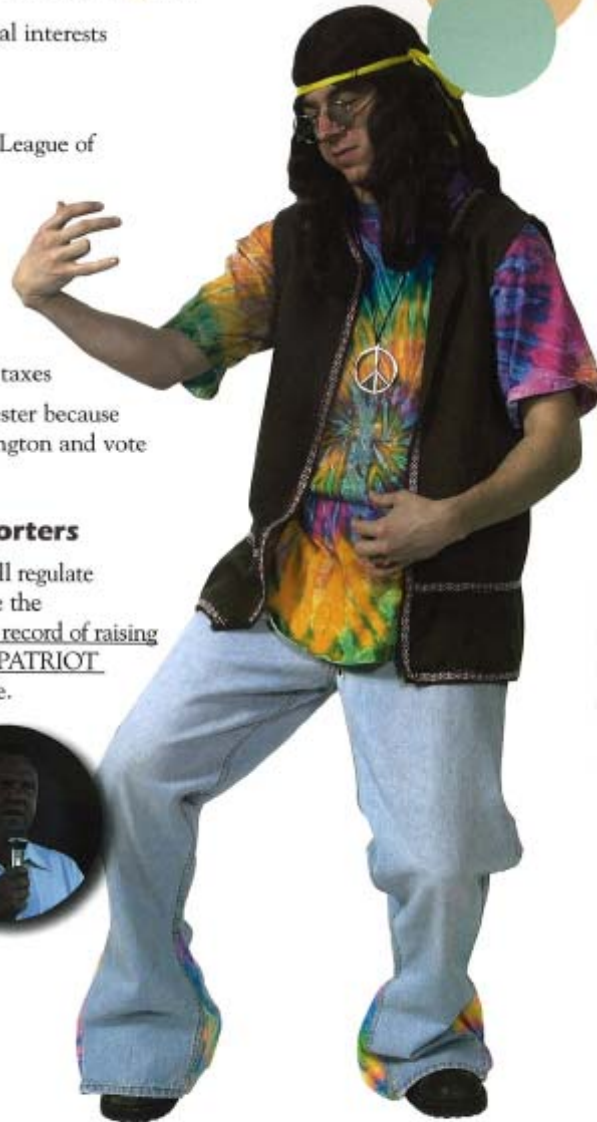
- **Extreme environmentalist groups** like the League of Conservation voters who want to end logging, cripple energy production, tear down dams and destroy jobs
- **Anti-war extremists** like the Daily Kos who mocked American deaths in the War on Terror
- **East Coast liberals** who want to raise your taxes

These liberal special interests support Jon Tester because they know he will take them with him to Washington and vote the way they want him to.

Jon Tester is as liberal as his supporters

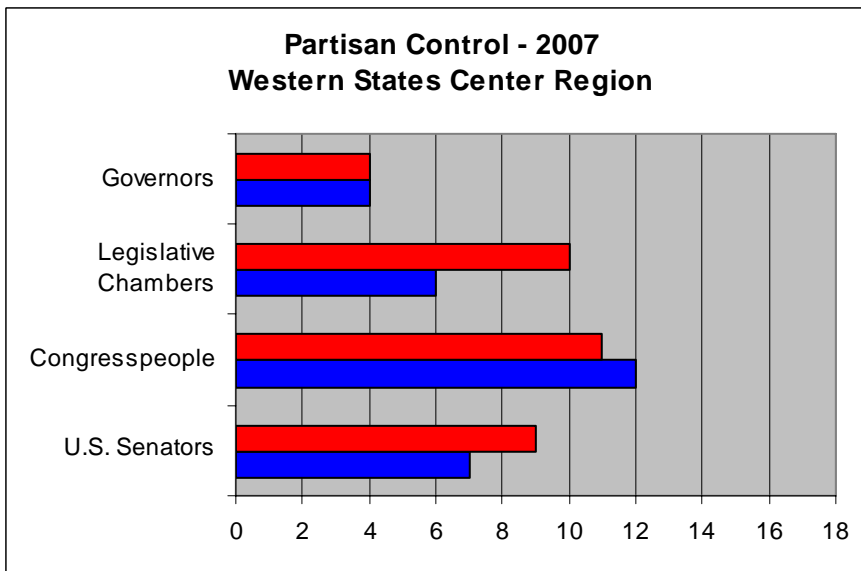
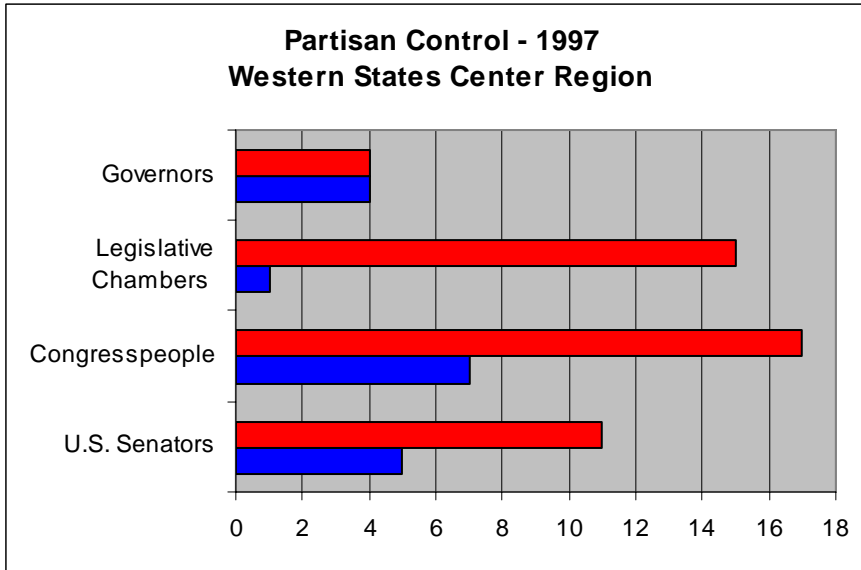
Tester proudly states on his website that he will regulate farms, energy production and even water—just like the environmentalists want him to. He also has a long record of raising our taxes, supports gay marriage and is against the PATRIOT Act even though it is helping keep our families safe.

November 7th
Vote No
on Jon Tester.
*He's too liberal
for Montana.*



Paid for by the Montana Republican State Central Committee, PO Box 935, Helena, MT 59624.

In the end, by the time the newly elected legislators and Congressional delegations take office in January, the balance of power in the region will have changed dramatically from what it was ten years ago:



Democrats now control both chambers in the Oregon legislature after reclaiming the House, while Republicans will now control the Montana House.

More than Measuring Up

The most remarkable story across the region was how progressives fared on ballot initiatives. The results were nothing short of breathtaking, as much for the margins of victory as for the results themselves:

- Oregonians rejected an anti-abortion parental notification measure 46%-54%.
- They *crushed* a TABOR (“Taxpayers’ Bill of Rights”) measure 29%-71% and another reactionary tax measure 37%-63%.
- They also rejected term limits 41%-59%, and approved expansion of a prescription drug purchasing pool.
- Washington voters demolished an attempt to repeal the state estate tax 38%-62%, and beat back a “takings” measure 42%-58%.
- They also approved a renewable energy initiative.
- Idahoans defeated a “takings” measure by an even more remarkable 24%-76% margin, underscoring both the strength of conservation groups’ organizing and the broad appeal of conservation values across the mountain West.
- Minimum wage measures won by wide margins in Montana and Nevada.

There was also some bad though not unexpected news on the initiative front:

- Idaho’s “defense of marriage” (DOMA) referendum was approved 63-37
- Voters in both Nevada and Oregon approved “Eminent Domain” measures. [Note: No campaign to defeat the measure was mounted at all in Oregon.]

These wins included some amazing mobilization efforts to reverse initially bleak polling – particularly in Oregon’s defeat of the anti-abortion measure. The coalition opposing the ban was broad and deep, and included constituencies and organizations who in the past would not have been such strong public supporters, from immigrant rights groups to a labor backed coalition.

In many cases, the ballot measure campaigns proved much more motivating than candidate races, generating enormous volunteer energy and enthusiasm. In Idaho, for example, while those working to defeat the DOMA referendum were fighting an uphill battle, they raised more money and mobilized more volunteers than anyone had expected.

Thanks to our energetic staff and funding from key partners like the Tides Foundation, Western States Center was able to provide some \$178,000 to constituent based organizations and key ballot measure committees all across the region during this election cycle. A more detailed report on that work was described in an earlier report: <http://www.westernstatescenter.org/publications/e-archives/2006/Oct2006.html>.

With these and other victories in hand, and with the wide scale shift in political control at the state and federal levels, progressives are now in a position to begin making progress on key issues. Some state and national leaders have already indicated support for issues such as increasing the minimum wage, getting troops out of Iraq, expanding access to affordable health care, developing renewable energy sources and restoring fairness to a tax system that has increasingly benefited the wealthy over working people.

Fundamental changes, however, will not take place without continued and concerted organizing – especially in areas where splits within the Democratic Party and progressive constituent groups have been as wide as partisan splits themselves.

Immigration

While we had feared a raft of anti-immigrant measures this cycle, none actually made it to the ballot. And Robert Vasquez – one of the poster children for right wing anti-immigrant groups across the country – had earlier lost his bid to become the Republican nominee for Idaho's open 1st District Congressional seat, even though newly elected Bill Sali may be an all 'round more frightening prospect as a Congressman than Vasquez. (The state's other Republican Congressman once threatened to throw Sali out of the Capitol window.)

Still, many candidates used the issue of illegal immigration to stoke up support and pander to what they thought was a prevailing nasty public mood – despite public opinion research for both Democrats and Republicans showing strong support for a comprehensive approach to immigration reform:

<http://www.westernstatescenter.org/ImmigrationMemo.pdf>.

In Nevada, for example, Danny Tarkanian, the Republican candidate for Secretary of State and son of UNLV basketball coaching legend Jerry Tarkanian, ran TV spots alleging the need for photo IDs based on voter fraud:

<http://www.westernstatescenter.org/Tarkanian.wmv>.

In Oregon Republican gubernatorial hopeful Ron Saxton made a similar gambit. Previously, Saxton had a reputation as a moderate Portland Republican best known for his service on the school board.

This year, however, Saxton ran considerably to the right to win the party's primary. He used immigration and a get-tough approach on "illegals" as one of the central components of his primary campaign, and he renewed the theme as he sought to narrow the gap with incumbent Governor Ted Kulongoski during the general election. In early October Saxton ran a fear-mongering TV spot [<http://www.westernstatescenter.org/Saxton.wmv>] declaring that illegal immigrants had become Oregon's "second largest city." He claimed that by providing them with driver's licenses Kulongoski was allowing them to cast fraudulent votes.

The spot drew quick condemnation, most notably from Secretary of State Bill Bradbury. In an October 3rd *Oregonian* article Bradbury delivered a succinct and strong response: "I looked at the past 15 years of general elections...Of more than 10 million votes cast, only 10 prompted investigation into citizenship...and of those 10, only two were prosecuted."

Bradbury's stance and the media coverage it generated provided a solid basis for what could have been an equally strong and principled response by the Governor. It didn't. Rather than blasting Saxton's fear-mongering ads and advocating for a comprehensive approach to immigration reform, the Democratic Party of Oregon and the Governor's campaign responded defensively, attempting to portray Kulongoski as even tougher than Saxton:



The **Kulongoski** immigration record.



Troops to the Border. Kulongoski authorized the Oregon National Guard to deploy volunteers to enforce immigration laws at the border.



Crackdown on Driver's Licenses. Kulongoski launched an investigation that identified 11,000 suspicious driver's licenses and demanded proof of residency. (http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/DMV/news/ir_20060707.shtml)



Supports Increased Employer Sanctions. Kulongoski supports stepping up enforcement and increasing penalties on employers who hire and exploit illegal immigrants.



Leading the Anti-Fraud Effort. Kulongoski is leading the state's compliance with the new Federal law to ensure that non-residents don't obtain driver's licenses.



The **Saxton** immigration record.



Opposes Crackdown on Employers Who Hire Illegals.

Saxton has received hundreds of thousands of dollars from industry sectors that are known to employ illegal immigrants, and he adamantly opposes the state increasing penalties and tougher enforcement for businesses that hire illegals. (City Club Debate, 4/14/06)



Punish Innocent Kids. Saxton opposes allowing the children of undocumented immigrants to attend public schools. (Willamette University Debate, 3/14/06)



Scare Tactics. Saxton falsely claimed that scores of illegal immigrants are fraudulently voting in Oregon. In the last decade, there has not been a single documented case of an illegal immigrant voting in an Oregon election. (KATU, 10/3/06)

**When you know the facts,
you know whose side Saxton's on.**

A post-election article in the *Oregonian* (11/9) described the dynamics:

"To get off of "dead center," as Saxton pollster Bob Moore put it, the Saxton campaign decided to introduce the illegal immigration issue into the fall campaign. In early October, Saxton launched an ad charging that Kulongoski gave driver's licenses to illegal immigrants that allowed them to vote in Oregon.

The ad scared the Kulongoski campaign in a way that the attacks on the governor's record on taxes never did. The governor's office was flooded with phone calls and blue-collar union leaders were expressing concern. "Our Teamsters and plumbers perked right up in a way they didn't with the other ads," said Ross.

The Saxton campaign, worried the issue could backfire on their candidate if pressed too hard, dropped the ad after a week. It was part of a larger tension that faced the Saxton campaigners. They needed to attack Kulongoski and keep the Republican base in line, but they also didn't want to come off as too harsh and scare away moderates."

This was not one of the bright spots this season, and indicates just how far we have to go on this issue, even with allies. Ironically, the right wing has already expressed alarm that the new Democratic controlled Congress may give President Bush the support he needs to pass comprehensive immigration reform – even though the electoral dynamics in our region show that this issue is as divisive among Democrats as among Republicans

The issue has really become a double-edged sword. Across the country, Republicans used the fear of terrorism linked to illegal immigration to impose new voter identification requirements as part of a broader voter-suppression strategy especially aimed at blacks and Latinos. But those tactics may well have backfired this election, both in the publicity generated when they were exposed as well as in their effect on the single largest emerging demographic constituency in the country, Latinos.

The harshness of right wing anti-immigrant attacks was undoubtedly a key factor in one of the most dramatic overall shifts in this election: the scale of Latino support for Democratic candidates. Exit polls that had showed President Bush pulling in 44% of the Latino vote in 2004 (though that figure has been disputed) showed that Latino support for Republican candidates in 2006 had dropped to just 29%. That figure is especially important in relation to Karl Rove's assertion that a 40% level of Latino support would guarantee Republican electoral hegemony for 50 years. Rove's math just didn't work out this semester.

In that respect, we can also draw hope from another less publicized feature of the 2006 elections: the continued effort to register and mobilize new citizens to vote. Though news accounts have pointed to the difficulties that Latino organizers have had achieving the scale of registrations they desired following last spring's mass mobilizations, we saw modest but significant efforts from Wyoming and Idaho to the Willamette Valley.

In Washington, Hate Free Zone worked with immigrant communities to register, educate and mobilize new citizens as voters. For the first time they published a voter guide with recommendations on Washington's ballot measures based on an analysis of how they would affect the immigrant/refugee community, and they sponsored ballot parties and forums to assist new citizens in understanding the logistics, as well as the content of the ballot. And they registered over 11,000 new voters.

Alongside gains on progressive issue campaigns, these efforts are energizing and inspiring organizers across the region as we head into the 2007 legislative sessions and beyond. We commend the hard work and enthusiasm of all those who made this possible.

Dan Petegorsky

--

Some useful links for election analysis:

Election Results: State and Federal Numbers

<http://www.npr.org/news/specials/election2006/results/>

Exit Polls:

State by state - CNN

<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/>

State Legislatures

<http://www.ncsl.org/statevote/statevote2006.htm>

Ballot Measures

<http://www.ballot.org/>

Trends in Regional Legislative Elections:

<http://www.westernstatescenter.org/LegislativeTrendlines.doc>