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Abortion Lessons From the ’90 Election

Abortion was not the “silver bullet” in the 1990 election that some were predicting a few months ago. But it is a knife with an edge that cuts identifiable political patterns.

One of the clearest patterns is that the voters consistently reject pro-abortion Republican women for higher office, even though voters will sometimes elect a pro-abortion Democratic woman.

Three capable pro-abortion Republican Congresswomen left their safe House seats to run for the U.S. Senate, and all three were defeated. Lynn Martin in Illinois was trounced by Senator Paul Simon, Claudine Schneider in Rhode Island was defeated by Senator Claiborne Pell, and Pat Saiki in Hawaii was edged out by Senator Daniel Akaka.

It is a mistake to think that, because all three of those Democratic incumbents were also pro-abortion, abortion didn’t matter. Abortion was not an “issue,” but it was a factor: the voters simply will not exchange a pro-abortion Democrat for a female pro-abortion Republican.

The Republican woman candidate for Governor of Pennsylvania, Barbara Hafer, campaigned pro-abortion but was defeated in a landslide by the pro-life Democratic Governor, Bob Casey. Meanwhile, the voters were reelecting the number-one pro-life legislator in Pennsylvania, Representative Stephen Friend, whom the abortion industry had targeted as the man they most wanted to defeat.

The same thing happened in Wyoming, where a pro-abortion Republican woman gubernatorial candidate was buried by a pro-life Democrat. Governor Mike Sullivan got 67 percent of the vote against Mary Meade.

The gubernatorial election in Alaska was one of the most remarkable turns of events in recent political history. The Republican Party nominated a pro-abortion feminist activist, Arliss Sturgulewski. At the last minute, a pro-life candidate Wally Hickel, entered the race as a third party independent, and won!

The Michigan gubernatorial race was a stunning victory for the pro-life movement. The predicted winner (14 points ahead two days before the election, according to

the **Detroit News**), incumbent Governor James Blanchard, had a strong pro-abortion record of vetoing pro-life bills and picked a pro-abortion woman as his running mate. They were defeated by pro-life State Senator John Engler who had the good judgement to select a pro-life woman as his running mate, State Senator Connie Binsfeld.

This ticket energized the pro-life movement all over the state. Taxes are said to be the key issue in Engler's upset victory, but the Michigan experience shows that pro-life activism produces more votes than pro-abortion activism.

The Michigan election also shows that pro-life Republican candidates don't need to worry about pro-abortion defections. Helen Milliken, wife of the former Republican Governor, announced her endorsement of the Democratic pro-abortion candidate; but it didn't help him.

The election of pro-life George Voinovich as Governor of Ohio teaches another political lesson. He defeated Anthony Celebrezze, who had a strong pro-life record until he declared for Governor, at which time he flip-flopped and turned pro-abortion. Changing one's position on abortion is the worst mistake a character can make.

The easy victory of Senator Dan Coats over Baron Hill, who switched from pro-life to pro-abortion and then accepted contributions from the National Abortion Rights Action League, is another race that shows how foolish it is to switch positions in the hope of picking up votes.

In Kansas, the surprise winner for Governor was pro-life Democrat Joan Finney, who Dan Rather said had as much chance as "a fortune cookie in an Italian restaurant." She scored an upset victory over incumbent Republican pro-abortion Governor Mike Hayden.

Oregon provided another interesting lesson in abortion politics. While pro-life Republican Senator Mark Hatfield was being reelected, the voters chose a pro-abortion female Democratic Governor, Barbara Roberts. The Republican candidate for Governor, Dave Frohnmayer, endorsed the agenda of the National Abortion Rights Action League and put his name on an invitation welcoming radical feminist Molly Yard to Oregon. He then couldn't understand why NARAL endorsed his Democratic female opponent.

It's time that Republican candidates wake up and understand the political and psychological dynamics of the abortion issue.

The big majority of Republicans are pro-life. A pro-life Republican candidate can campaign from a solid base of support and then appeal to pro-life Democrats and independents who will cross party lines on this issue.

But a pro-abortion Republican walks away from his base of support and is unable to attract many pro-abortion Democrats because the abortion lobby is a subset of the left wing of the Democratic Party and will almost always stick with the Democratic candidate.