Senior Vote Is Key in Battleground States

While there may be confusion over candidates and issues, one thing is clear about the 2012 Presidential election: It will be won or lost in the battleground states. These are the swing states that sometimes vote Republican and sometimes Democratic. Together they represent a significant portion of the 270 Electoral College votes necessary to win the White House.

**TWELVE STATES.** The battleground states include (along with their Electoral College voting strength): Colorado (9), Florida (29), Iowa (6), Michigan (18), New Hampshire (4), New Mexico (5), Nevada (6), North Carolina (15), Ohio (18), Pennsylvania (29), Virginia (13) and Wisconsin (10). If you live in one of these states, you are a very important voter. And you've probably been bombarded with mail and television ads from the Presidential candidates for months.

In these states and all others as well, citizens over age 65 tend to be the most reliable voters in every election. In 2010 (a non-Presidential election year), 64 percent of seniors went to the polls nationwide, compared with only 46 percent of younger voters. In some of the battleground states, the contrast was even sharper. In Wisconsin, for example, 72 percent of seniors voted in 2010, while only 54 percent of younger people did.

**SWING VOTE.** In the last few national elections, the senior vote has been a toss-up, with the Democrat winning in some years and the Republican in others. Recently, however, Republicans have held the upper hand. In 2008, GOP candidate John McCain won the senior vote by 8 percentage points, but lost the election to Obama's Strong Record for Retirees

AFSCME endorsed Pres. Barack Obama for re-election and it’s not hard to see why. Since taking office four years ago, he’s racked up a lengthy list of significant accomplishments, including affordable health care, Wall Street reform, and equal pay protections for women.

Here are some excerpts from that list:

- **PASSED HEALTH CARE REFORM:** After five presidents over a century failed to create universal health insurance, Obama signed the Affordable Care Act in 2010. It will cover 32 million uninsured Americans beginning in 2014 and mandates finding ways to cut health care cost growth, the number one cause of America’s long-term fiscal problems.

- **ELIMINATED OSAMABIN LADEN:** In 2011, the terrorist leader responsible for the September 11th attacks was killed at a secret compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in the White House.

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Beware of TV Ads from “60 Plus”

Retirees who live in Florida, Ohio and other election battleground states, have probably seen the recent television ads in which 1950s crooner (and current conservative crusader) Pat Boone rails against Democratic candidates for office. The ads are sponsored by a group called “60 Plus Association,” which claims to be the alternative to AARP for conservative seniors. It favors privatization of Social Security and Medicare and a “less government, less taxes approach to seniors issues.” Funding appears to come from deep pockets on the right.

FRONT GROUP. Founded in 2002, 60 Plus is located in Alexandria, Va., where it shares offices with several well-known and very conservative political consultants. According to Republic Reports, which calls 60 Plus a “shadowy front group,” the same offices house the managers of such super-pacs as Karl Rove’s American Crossroads and Mitt Romney’s Restore Our Future.

Under the law, 60 Plus does not have to reveal its donors, but anyone able to connect the dots can track the sources of its funding. For example, The Washington Post reported that in 2002, when the pharmaceutical industry tried to defeat a Medicare drug-cover- age plan that allowed Medicare to negotiate lower prices with drug companies, the trade association PhRMA gave 60 Plus an unrestricted “education” grant of $11 million. Soon after, 60 Plus started running a multi-million dollar “education” campaign to convince seniors to oppose the plan.

KOCH CONNECTION. According to the Annenberg Center’s FactCheck.org, 60 Plus spent more than $5 million in the 2010 elections on ads that made false claims about the Affordable Care Act in order to defeat Democratic candidates. The ads told seniors the law would cut their Medicare benefits and hurt the quality of their care. The sources of the ad-funding have never been revealed, but Republic Reports says that, in 2010, a non-profit corporation set up by an operative working with billionaire conservatives Charles and David Koch appears to have provided $11 million to 60 Plus.

Huge Ad Buys. Last year, The Hill reported that 60 Plus was “running a six-figure ad campaign” in congressional districts across the country, pricing Republican Representatives who voted in the House for the Ryan-Republican budget. The newspaper said that 60 Plus spent “more than $800,000 on a combination of radio ads, direct mail and automated calls” in districts targeted for the 2012 elections. The ads tried to convince seniors that Paul Ryan’s Medicare voucher plan would preserve Medicare, not lead to cost-cutting and lower benefits.

Currently, 60 Plus is mounting ads against vulnerable Senate Democrats, such as Ohio’s Sen. Sherrod Brown ($2.3 million in 60 Plus ad buys!) and Florida’s Bill Nelson, who oppose the Ryan voucher plan. It’s not clear where all the money comes from, but 60 Plus Exec. Dir. Jim Martin told Republic Reports last year that he expected the Koch brothers and other wealthy donors to contribute heavily to 60 Plus in 2012.

Obama Record (from page 1)

Sept. 11 attacks was discovered.

• PASSED THE AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT: Signed the $787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009 to spur economic growth amid the great- est economic crisis since the Great Depression. Weeks after the ARRA went into effect, unem- ployment claims began to subside. Twelve months later, the private sector began produc- ing more jobs than it was losing, creating a total of nearly 3.7 million new jobs.

• PASSED WALL STREET REFORM: Signed the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act in 2010 to better regulate the financial sector after its practices caused the Great Recession. (AFSCME members’ pensions dropped by $644 billion, or 19 percent, during this crisis.) The new law limits banks’ ability to throw our money around in risky trades for their own profit. The act created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to crack down on abusive lending practices.

• TURNED AROUND AMERICAN AUTO INDUSTRY: In 2009, injected $82 billion (on top of $33.4 bil- lion in loans from the Bush administration) into ailing GM and Chrysler. Since then, the auto industry has added more than 100,000 jobs.

• INCREASED SUPPORT FOR VETERANS: With so many soldiers coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan with serious physical and mental health problems, facing long waits for services, increased 2010 Department of Veterans Affairs budget by 16 percent and 2011 budget by 10 percent. Also provided multiple tax credits to encourage businesses to hire veterans.

• PASTED CREDIT CARD REFORMS: Signed the Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility, and Disclosure Act (2009), which prohibits credit card companies from raising rates without advance notification, mandates a grace period on interest rate increases, and strictly limits overdraft and other fees.

• ELIMINATED CATCH-22 IN PAY EQUALITY LAWS: Signed Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009, giving women who are paid less than men for the same work the right to sue their employers whenever they find out about the discrimination.

• PROTECTED TWO PRO-WORKER SEATS ON THE U.S. SUPREME COURT: Nominated and confirmed Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina and third woman to serve on the Court in 2009; and Elena Kagan in 2010.
Senior Obama (from page 3)
Barack Obama. Two years later, with Republicans pounding Democratic congressional candidates on the Affordable Care Act — falsely claiming that it would hurt Medicare and seniors — the GOP had a 21 percent lead among senior voters and went on to win the House of Representatives.

The lesson here may be that even if candidates lose the senior vote, they can still win the election... as long as they don’t lose seniors by too wide a margin.

GOP LOSES GROUND. At the start of 2012, polls showed that seniors once again might be in the GOP column and by a significant margin. But after the political party conventions, a turnaround was in the air. A late September poll by Reuters/Ipsos indicated that what previously had been a 20-point lead among seniors for Republican Mitt Romney had become a very small 4-point lead.

How did Romney lose so much senior support in such a brief period of time? AFSCME Pres. Lee Saunders believes seniors started to hear more about Romney’s positions on issues and realized he was not their friend. “Many seniors had no idea that Romney was a longtime supporter of Social Security privatization and Medicare vouchers, as well as cutting benefits and raising the age of eligibility. But, then, Romney chose Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) to be his running mate,” Saunders said.

ROMNEY/RYAN BUDGET. “Suddenly everyone was talking about Ryan’s budget, which passed the House in March. That budget bill, including its attacks on Social Security and Medicare, had received a glowing endorsement from Mitt Romney. One that came out, seniors started to reconsider which candidate was really on their side.”

A September survey by USA Today/Gallup seems to prove that point. Fifty percent of voters in battleground states said they trusted President Obama on Medicare, compared with only 44 percent who trusted Romney.

“The Romney-Ryan budget would devastate Medicaid – the nation’s biggest funder of long term care. Three million seniors and people with disabilities would be at risk of losing these life-saving services.”
— Lee Saunders, AFSCME President

# In Memoriam: Stuart Leibowitz
Retiree leader Stuart Leibowitz, President of AFSCME’s 27,000-member New York City Retiree Chapter 37 (The Retirees Association of District Council 37), died in August after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage. He was 74. Leibowitz was also co-chair of the DC 37 pensions committee, helping to win a permanent COLA for retirees. He represented Chapter 37 on the national AFSCME Retirees Council and was president of the New York City Alliance for Retired Americans.

Leibowitz began his public service career in 1961 as a social investigator for what was then called the city’s Welfare Department. Later, he served as vice president for research and negotiations at the Social Service Employees Union, Local 371, DC 37. In 1994 he retired from the union and was named deputy chairman of the city’s Office of Collective Bargaining.

Leibowitz returned to DC 37 as a retiree activist and was elected president of the retiree chapter in 2001. As president, he organized thousands of new members and led the successful fight for full city reimbursement of Medicare Part B premiums for retiree and spouse.

PRES. Lee Saunders said Leibowitz was a good friend. “We worked closely together a few years ago, when I served as Administrator of DC 37,” Saunders said. “Stu was a smart man and a great politician, who knew how to deliver for his members. They loved him for his passion about people and issues and will be mourning his loss for a long time to come.”

“We want a country “where no one will steal your purse on Main Street or your pension on Wall Street.”
— Elizabeth Warren, candidate for U.S. Senate from Massachusetts

“We seniors ... depend on Social Security and Medicare, which they paid into and earned. They deserve policies that protect these earned benefits, not undermine them.”
— U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, candidate for re-election in Ohio
E nsuring citizens’ right to vote is critical for democratic nations like the U.S., yet many states are making this basic right increasing difficult to exercise. They’re passing restrictive voter ID laws, barriers to registration and limits on early voting periods and hours, all of which could affect voter turnout and election results.

Claims that these restrictions will prevent voter fraud are a smoke-screen for the real aims of supporters of the new rules. No legitimate study has shown that voter fraud is anything but a rare occurrence in any state. Instead, those who advocate the new rules are intent on narrowing the electorate to exclude more minorities and low-income Americans. These groups tend to include more people who are not currently registered to vote, who do not have a driver’s license or have jobs that make it hard to vote during work hours. They may also include elderly people born at home instead of in a hospital, without an official birth certificate.

Similar to the poll taxes and literacy tests of earlier days, these attempts to reduce access to a hospital, without an official birth certificate, also include elderly people born at home instead of in a hospital, without an official birth certificate. They may make it hard to vote during work hours. They may also include elderly people born at home instead of in a hospital, without an official birth certificate. They may make it hard to vote during work hours. They may also include elderly people born at home instead of a hospital, without an official birth certificate.

To find out which candidates for House and Senate have AFSCME’s endorsement in your area, check with your local union. Some of the Senate candidates endorsed by AFSCME in the most hotly contested races nationwide include: Chris Murphy in Connecticut; Bill Nelson in Florida; Mazie Hirono in Hawaii; Joe Donnelly in Indiana; Elizabeth Warren in Massachusetts; Shelley Berkley in Nevada; Sherrod Brown in Ohio; Tim Kaine in Virginia; and Tammy Baldwin in Wisconsin.

Threats to Voting Rights Nationwide

Check with your local election office to see if your state requires voters to show a government issued photo ID. If so, and you do not have a driver’s license, you may need to obtain a non-driving photo ID, issued by your state government. Check with your local election office to see if your state requires voters to show a government issued photo ID. If so, and you do not have a driver’s license, you may need to obtain a non-driving photo ID, issued by your state government.

Voter ID continues to be a high-profile issue in many state legislatures this year. Last year, 34 states considered voter ID legislation. In 2012, legislation was considered in at least 32 states. Legislation includes new voter ID proposals in 14 states, proposals to strengthen existing voter ID laws in 10 states, and bills in 10 states to amend existing laws, many of them new voter ID laws passed in 2011.

2003
New voter ID laws were passed in Alabama, Colorado, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota.

2005
New voter ID laws were passed in Indiana, New Mexico and Washington; Georgia tightened an existing voter ID law to require photo ID.

2006
New voter ID law passed in Ohio; Georgia passed a law providing for the issuance of voter ID cards at no cost to registered voters who do not have a driver’s license or state-issued ID card; Missouri tightened an existing voter ID law to require photo ID.

2008
New Mexico relaxed an existing voter ID law, and now allows a voter to satisfy the ID requirement by stating his/her name, address as registered, and year of birth.

2009
New voter ID law passed in Utah.

2010
New voter ID law passed in Idaho; Oklahoma voters approved a voter ID proposal placed on the ballot by the Legislature.

2011
New voter ID laws passed in Kansas, Mississippi, Rhode Island and Wisconsin; Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas tightened existing voter ID laws to require photo ID. Governors in Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire and North Carolina vetoed strict new photo ID laws in 2011.

Since 2001, nearly 1,000 voter suppression bills were introduced in a total of 46 states. Most require voters to show a government-issued ID. New voter ID laws passed in 2011.

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