NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

One Election that Does Matter

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 27, 2009 NCR Today

Yesterday, I argued that the outcomes in the two gubernatorial elections next Tuesday will not portend very much for the more important 2010 midterms. But, there is one race that is worth watching, the special election in New York?s Twenty-Third congressional district. The incumbent Republican left to become Secretary of the Army. The local Republican committee nominated a moderate, Dede Scozzafava, but that did not sit well with social conservatives who have rallied around the Conservative Party candidacy of Doug Hoffman.

The race has become something of a proxy war for control of the Republican Party. The leadership in Congress, and their political arm, the National Republican Campaign Committee, backs Scozzafava but those with their eyes on the GOP nomination in 2012 have broken ranks. Former Senator Rick Santorum and former Governor Sarah Palin have both endorsed Hoffman as has Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty. It tells you something about what they think of Minority Leader John Boehner that they are willing to stick their finger in his eye so blatantly.

But, it tells you something else too. Pawlenty has governed as, and positioned himself, as something of a moderate. Worried that the 2012 nomination will be decided by the increasingly rabid GOP base, he declined even to stay out of the race and, instead, sent a check for the maximum legal contribution to Hoffman?s campaign. I suspect this is a dumb move on his part: Pawlenty?s best shot at the GOP nod in 2012 is to have Palin and Santorum and other far-right conservatives eat each other alive, and dilute the power of the conservative base by splitting their vote. In the New Hampshire primary, only 30 percent of Republicans might consider themselves moderate, but 30 percent might be enough to win the state if four or five conservatives are splitting the remainder.

So, why did Pawlenty do it? Because, while the right may or may not have the votes to decide the GOP nomination three years hence, they have the noise machine in the meantime and they are prepared to turn their ire on anyone who supports to too-moderate Scozzafava. Still, he should have punted and stayed out of it. The ultimate irony may be that the GOP and Conservative shares of the electorate cancel each other out and the Democrat picks up the seat. And, that would be a lesson the GOP needs to take to heart.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/05/2015 - 07:55*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/one-election-does-matter