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Election Time: MI-Governor

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 10, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Michigan was the last state in the nation, along with North Dakota, to hold a referendum on liberalizing state abortion laws before Roe v. Wade. In November 1972, Michigan voters roundly defeated a proposal to that would have permitted abortions for any reason in the first twenty weeks of pregnancy by a whopping margin of 61% to 36%. According to Catholic historian John McGreevy, Catholic union workers constituted the largest part of the majority voting against the effort to legalize abortion.

A lot has changed since November 1972. There was a Chrysler bailout in 1979, followed by the emergence of Lee Iacocca as an America corporate hero. The bailout and Iacocca notwithstanding, the decline of the American auto industry, combined with the increased productivity of that industry, meant that Michigan workers or at least fewer of them would no longer look forward to the prospect of making a good living working at plants in Detroit. The largest city on the state continued to shed jobs and residents at an alarming rate. Today, Michigan has the highest unemployment rate in the country. The current Governor of Michigan, Janet Granholm, is a pro-choice Democrat who is term-limited but might not be able to win an election for dog catcher given the state?s economy.

The state remains socially conservative. Grand Rapids, in the southwest corner of the state, is home to both the quasi-cultic Amway Corporation and several conservative Protestant colleges and nearby Andrews University is the flagship university of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The Upper Peninsula is exceedingly rural and conservative. The upper part of the Lower Peninsula and the entire Upper Peninsula constitute the First Congressional District which has been represented by Bart Stupak for many years. Stupak was a champion of pro-life Democrats for many years and his pro-life credentials were a part of what made him so popular with his conservative constituents. The suburbs of Detroit, like suburbs everywhere, have plenty of conservatives too.

This year, in the GOP primaries, the Michigan Right-to-Life Committee declined to endorse Rep. Peter Hoekstra and, instead backed third place finisher Attorney General Mike Cox. Dividing the pro-life forces allowed venture capitalist Rick Snyder to win. Snyder supports embryonic stem cell research and has not been enthusiastic in his opposition to abortion either. One conservative group blamed [1]the Michigan NRLC for Snyder?s primary victory. ?The lack of a pro-life gubernatorial candidate being on the general election ballot in November sits squarely? with Michigan?s NRLC Steve Dennison, president of Citizens Alliance for Life and Liberty, told the Grand Rapids Press. The Democratic candidate for governor, Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero is pro-choice, but Michigan?s NRLC is not likely to endorse Snyder [2]according to the Detroit News because of his support for embryonic stem cell research. Michigan's NRLC may not have been able to pick a winner in the primaries, but GOP candidates count on them to turn out the vote in November.

Snyder ran a set of innovative ads during the primaries, labeling himself ?One Tough Nerd.? His campaign is focused [3]on his managerial and business resume, hoping that the economic challenges facing the electorate will turn voters his way, and he barely mentions social issues. Bernero touts his own commitment to new technologies and his experience as a mayor, but being a politician, even a successful one, is unlikely to be a key selling point in 2010. According to most polls, Snyder is headed to a romping victory. Unlike some non-

political candidates this year, Snydar is no angry Tea Partyer. He projects the image of political moderation and professional competence. He is an outsider, to be sure, but an outsider from the boardroom not from the angry tea Party nor from the Michigan Bible Belt.

What is interesting about this race is what affect it will have on down-ballot races. In addition to the open seat in MI-1, where Stupak is retiring, Michigan?s Seventh Congressional District race, where incumbent Democrat Congressman Mark Schauer is seeking re-election, is considered a toss-up by the Cook Political Report. And Michigan?s Ninth Congressional District, is considered a ?Lean Democrat? race: Incumbent Democrat Gary Peters had almost $2 million cash-on-hand according to the last FEC filings, while his GOP opponent had only $200,000. MI-9 also has a +2 Democrat Partisan Voting Index according to Cook, while MI-7 has a +2 GOP rating. But, both GOP challengers will need a strong turnout from pro-life voters and, while the Michigan Right-to-Life Committee explicitly says it supports ?single issue voting,? look for some of those voters to stay home because of all the controversy surrounding the GOP gubernatorial battle.

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