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

Election Time: PA-11

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 23, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

UPDATE (10/26): In my initial look at this race, I predicted that Rep. Paul Kanjorski was headed for defeat. Every poll published this year shows him trailing former Hazleton mayor Lou Barletta. Kanjorski has ethical problems, and regular readers know that I have no sympathy for those who, given a public trust, violate that trust. Still, the thought of Barletta, who came to fame by pushing racist anti-immigrant policies as mayor will be a blight on Congress. This district is based in the heavily Catholic Scranton and Wilkes-Barre region, and it is criminal to think that so many good Catholics are about to play a role in elevating a bigot to national office. But, there it is.
ORIGINAL POST: Rep. Paul Kanjorski has represented Pennsylvania? Eleventh Congressional District since 1984. It?s been a long time. Kanjorski survived the Reagan Revolution, winning in a year when Reagan swept every county in the district and won Pennsylvania as a whole with 53% of the vote. He survived the 1994 wave that handed the GOP control of the House for the first time in decades. He survived a stiff challenge in 2008, when his penchant for steering earmarks to his district became controversial when it was disclosed that some of those earmarks not only came to the district but to his relatives.

This year, Kanjorski is not going to survive. His challenger is the same man who almost beat him in 2008, former Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta. Barletta led his home city in an anti-immigrant fervor, culminating in local ordinances that were ruled unconstitutional last month [1]by a federal court. That ruling does not make the anti-immigration posture any less popular in the economically challenged 11th District. But, that is not why Kanjorski will lose. One of the key indicators of electoral success or failure is whether a candidate has faced a strong primary challenge. (Think Gerald Ford in 1976, Jimmy Carter in 1980, George H.W. Bush in 1992.) This year, Kanjorski faced a strong primary challenge and though he prevailed, he did so with only 49% of the vote.

Kanjorski not only has a more difficult political climate this year because of voter antipathy to Washington. In 2008, this overwhelmingly working class district, centered in the cities of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, gave Barack Obama 57 percent of the vote, while Kanjorski trailed with only 52 percent. Obama is not on the ticket and, Lord knows, he is not as popular in 2010 as he was in 2008. But Kanjorski?s name has become synonymous with dreaded Washington as well. According to Nate Silver at Fivethirtyeight.com [2], recent polls show why the ?generic? ballot polls, which only ask if a voter intends to vote for a generic Democrat or a generic Republican, may underestimate residual Democratic strength. Silver assembled a chart that shows when you name the candidate, rather than ask the generic question, the incumbent Democrat?s numbers improve. For example, in CT-4, if you ask the generic question, the GOP wins by four points but when you name incumbent Democrat Rep. Jim Himes he wins by four points. Most races do not show such a huge swing to the Democratic incumbent, but they usually pick up one to three points. But, in PA-11, the generic Republican is winning by four points. When you name Kanjorski, the Republican is up by 11 points.

RealClearPolitics rates the race as ?Lean GOP? and Cook Political Report has it listed as a ?Toss-Up? noting that Barletta has challenged Kanjorski twice before and come up short. Sometimes, multiple challenges do not yield a different result. In Connecticut?s Second Congressional District, a classic swing district, Ed Munster challenged Democrat Congressman Sam Gejdenson four times, and came within 21 votes of beating him in

1994, but he never won. Conversely, in the same district in the next decade, Joe Courtney challenged Republican Rep. Rob Simmons in 2002 and lost by eight points, but he challenged Simmons again in 2006 and won. The difference was partly attributable to the changed voter climate ? 2006 was a better year for Dems than 2002. But, another factor was that Courtney and Democrats improved their Get-Out-The-Vote plans after 2004.

Like most incumbents, Kanjorski has a lot more money, with more than $1 million on hand at the end of June compared to Barletta?s $236,806. But, the Media Market in Scranton/Wilkes-Barre is very inexpensive, ranked 54th nationwide, so money is not as essential here as it might be in a suburban Philadelphia district. Additionally, we now know that independent groups supporting GOP candidates have spent $23.6 million compared to only $4.8 million for pro-Democratic independent groups, so whatever local disadvantage Barletta may face can be easily compensated by these independent groups.

Kanjorski is a great guy. He is one of the Democrats for Life?s ?Whole Life Heroes,? those pro-life Democrats who voted for the health care reform bill once they secured sufficient restrictions on abortion funding. He is pro-labor. He cares about all the kinds of issues I care about and that seem to me to be obviously drawn from Catholic social teaching. But, that will not be enough to protect him this year. Cong. Kanjorski should start looking for his retirement home.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/01/2015 - 00:19*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/election-time-pa-11

Links:
[1] http://www.philly.com/inquirer/local/pa/20100910_Federal_appeals_court_strikes_down_Hazleton_s_immigration_ordi
[2] http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/21/why-the-generic-ballot-may-underestimate-democrats/