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

Election Time: CT-Senate

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 24, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

UPDATE (10/25): Cook Political Report still has this race rated as a "Toss-up" and Real Clear Politics still rates it as "Lean Dem." RCP is right. The RCP poll average sits at a 10.2 percent lead for Blumenthal and the most respected poll in the state, the Quinnipiac poll, had him up by 11 percent. None of the GOP House candidates have caught any breaks, and Connecticut appears ready to put a Democrat in the Governor's mansion for the first time since 1994.
The GOP candidate, Linda McMahon, has spent over $40 million on the race but to no avail. Blumenthal is going to win handily.

ORIGINAL POST: At first blush, Connecticut?s Senate race is of no particular interest to progressive Catholics. The Republican candidate, Linda McMahon, is a self-financing candidate, a newcomer to politics, touting her business experience as her principal credential. I have found no reference to any religious affiliation on her website or in articles about her, although Wikipedia says she is Roman Catholic and she met her future husband at church. The Democratic challenger is Richard Blumenthal, who has been Connecticut?s Attorney General since 1991. Blumenthal is Jewish, although his religion has never been as central to his political persona as it is to Connecticut?s other Senator Joe Lieberman. So, why does this race interest me?

Many people are trying to measure the strength and power of voter anger, most obviously manifested in the Tea Party. McMahon is tapping into the same voter anger, even though she has no explicit ties to the Tea Party and during the GOP primary most Tea Party groups in Connecticut supported the campaign of an opponent. Since winning the primary in August, she has been endorsed by groups like Freedom Works which are closely tied to the Tea Party. And, in her campaign literature, McMahon is strongly emphasizing her commitment to smaller government and lower taxes. She says she was opposed to the bailout of Wall Street, which may not sit well with her Greenwich neighbors, but it sells well with everyone who doesn?t work at a hedge fund.
What makes McMahon different from almost all of the other Tea Party candidates is that she is pro-choice. Her campaign website [1]states unambiguously: ?I am pro-choice; however, I oppose partial-birth abortion and federal funding of abortions unless the life of the mother is at stake. I?m in favor of parental notification/parental consent legislation.? Perhaps the oddest part of this statement is that I suspect it is wrong, and evidences how little attention McMahon has devoted to the issue. I am reasonably certain McMahon also supports federal funding of abortions caused by rape and incest. It is a measure of how socially liberal Connecticut is to note that all three contestants in the GOP primary were pro-choice. The last unapologetically pro-life candidate to win statewide office in Connecticut was Democratic Governor Ella T. Grasso. She died in 1981.
One of the more interesting questions about the Tea Party is whether its brand of libertarian economic and political positions can be reconciled with the social conservatives who still make up a decisive part of the GOP base. The Democrats faced this difficulty in the 1970s when it adopted a social libertarianism regarding abortion that did not fit well with its central, animating belief that government is a force for good in society. Liberals who had succeeded in ?legislating morality? via the Civil Rights Act in the 1970s suddenly decided you ?can?t legislate morality? regarding abortion. Republicans have faced this division between their pro-big business posture and their more conservative social instincts. Patrick Allitt?s masterful book, ?Catholic Intellectuals and

Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985,? shows some of that sad history. Today, almost all Tea Party candidates are pro-life, and generally, one?s position on abortion has come to represent one?s general stance on other social issues such as gay rights. But, a libertarian is hard-pressed to explain why they want government out of the boardroom but want government in the bedroom. New Hampshire has a long tradition as an anti-tax state but it also recently approved same sex marriage. This tension between libertarians and social conservatives may or may not manifest itself on election night, but if McMahon wins and Sharron Angle loses, look for some Republicans to try and distance themselves from the agenda of social conservatives.
Blumenthal has never served in elected office in Washington (curiously, he worked for the Nixon Administration!), but being the Attorney General for almost twenty years makes running as an outsider an impossibility. His popularity in the state may have dulled his competitive sensibilities and earlier this year, a Connecticut politician told the New York Times that Blumenthal could be ?Martha Coakley in pants,? referring to the Massachusetts Attorney General who lost the special election to fill Ted Kennedy?s seat to Scott Brown after running a thoroughly lackluster campaign. Blumenthal, like Coakley, carries an air of inevitability (which did not do much for Hillary Clinton in 2008) and entitlement, which is always offensive, into the race. He has six weeks to shed that image and fight for this seat. His greatest asset is his record, but being a politician, even a very successful one, for many years may not be what the voters are looking for this year.

Many consider Connecticut as blue a state as blue can get, but that is not exactly right. Until 2006, three of the five congressional seats were held by Republicans and the last Democrat to win the governorship was Bill O?Neill in 1986. And Nutmeggers are notorious ticket-splitters. This could hurt Blumenthal because in the race at the top of the ticket, Democrat Dan Malloy appears to be coasting to victory. And, only one of the five Democratic congressional candidates has much of a challenge. Those who like to split their votes may vote for McMahon to avoid voting the straight Democratic ticket, especially Independents who are decisive in swing districts like CT-2.

Money is not much of an issue for either candidate. McMahon has pledged to use $50 million of her own money in the race, but she could ask her neighbor Ned Lamont how that works out. Lamont spent a bundle of his own cash challenging Sen. Liberman last election and came up short. Blumenthal had raised about $3.5 million at the end of June and still had $2 million in the bank with no primary to run. He will not be able to match McMahon, but he will have plenty of money to run an effective campaign.

Nate Silver at Fivethirtyeight.com [2]gives the McMahon only a 3 percent chance at taking the seat. But, the Cook Political Report moved the race [3]from ?Lean Dem? to ?Toss-up? earlier this month. RealClearPolitics [1] still rates the race as ?Lean Dem.? The most recent poll from Quinnipiac, in early September, had Blumenthal up by 6 points. If McMahon pulls off a win, we will know two things. It is going to be a miserable night for Democrats and the Tea Party?s economic message is not everywhere dependent upon an alliance with a social conservative agenda.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/16/2014 - 17:56*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/election-time-ct-senate

Links:
[1] http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2010/senate/ct/connecticut_senate_mcmahon_vs_blumenthal-1145.html
[2] http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/
[3] https://cookpolitical.com/node/3343