

Working America Labor 2010 Update, 9/16/10

Greetings! Working America has kicked into high gear election mode, and I will be reporting to you each week on our activity. At the beginning of the month, our canvass program wrapped up our issue and legislative work for the year. 2010 was a productive year: We grew to 500,000 Working America members statewide, and mobilized 10,000 of our members to take actions writing handwritten letters and signing petitions on issues like jobs, financial reform, and the Pennsylvania budget. And, on September 2nd, we transitioned into our statewide Get-Out-the-Vote effort for labor-endorsed candidates, wherein we will knock on tens of thousands of union, Working America, and general public doors before Election Day.

Please note that Working America's role in the elections has changed this year given opportunities provided by changes in the election law, but we are as active as ever.

President Trumka had this to say about our work:

"The AFL-CIO has always spoken for all workers, even those who don't have the benefit of a union on the job. In this election year, Working America has an opportunity to reach beyond union membership to members of the general public who do not have a union at their workplace but are supportive of labor issues. This election cycle, in addition to the Labor 2010 program that works directly with our members, Working America is conducting an independent expenditure campaign that allows them an opportunity to expand our voice and speak on behalf of all workers. I support this effort by Working America and see it as critical to success in the fall elections and subsequent legislative priorities."

Even though this year Working America will be conducting an independent expenditure program, we will be reporting each week where we have been and what we have accomplished. Below is a report of our work in the field from 9/2—9/14.

WALK UNIVERSE

Working America canvassers knocked on union, Working America, and targeted general public households in the following counties: Allegheny, Bucks, and Philadelphia. If you would like to know more detailed information about where Working America has been, please feel free to contact me.

CANVASS STATS

From 9/2-9/14, our canvassers collected ID's and had persuasive conversations on the Federal Senate and PA Governor's Race. We knocked on 17,242 doors, with the following results:

PA Senate (7779 ID's): Sestak-36%; Toomey-8%; Undecided-57%

PA Governor (7780 ID's): Onorato-36%; Corbett-10%; Undecided-54%

Our canvassers also asked people to identify the most important issue affecting their vote, and statewide found the following responses (out of 7843 people asked):

Jobs/Economy—58%;

Health Care---15%
Retirement/Social Security: 7%
Education: 3%
Gov't Spending/Deficit: 2%
Government Corruption: 2%
Taxes: 3%

MESSAGING/INTEL FROM THE FIELD

Governor's Race

In the Western part of the state, we have found more name recognition of Dan Onorato. Of the large percentage of Undecided's, we heard a lack of enthusiasm for either candidate, especially in Western PA. Many members expressed a feeling of choosing between the "lesser of two evils". A significant number of people in Allegheny County brought up taxes as a concern with Dan Onorato, both his "drink tax" and property taxes. Of those who mentioned the drink tax, the general sentiment was that the tax - intended to help the Port Authority stay solvent - had failed, as evidenced by the transit system's ongoing budgetary problems. We found that emphasizing the role of the taxes in maintaining vital services like assistance to the unemployed was effective, as was a pivot to a "fair taxes" frame. When discussing fair taxes, canvassers emphasized the importance of taxing corporations fairly so that taxes do not increase for working families, and then contrasted the candidates on that issue.

Canvassers also found that they could pivot away from negatives on Onorato by emphasizing that he has invested heavily in helping the unemployed gain education and training, and how this has helped Allegheny County have one of the lowest unemployment rates of any county in the state.

Senate Race

In Philadelphia and surrounding areas, we have naturally found more recognition of Rep. Sestak. Of the large percentage of Undecided's in this race, the main issue seems to be lack of name recognition and awareness of candidates' stance on issues. Many of those to whom we spoke responded to information about Rep. Sestak with statements like, "I didn't know that. I only knew what I saw on TV. That's really good information."

A notable number of people have been mentioning an ad targeting Sestak on health care. While this is coming up significantly less than jobs and the economy, it is still a prominent issue, especially among older contacts. A successful response has been to first discuss popular aspects of the health care bill without getting into a discussion about the bill overall. For example, canvassers may say "Sestak voted to ensure that insurance companies couldn't deny people care for having pre-existing conditions". Canvassers then contrast that with Toomey's support for privatizing social security and how dangerous it would be if health care were privatized in the same way. We have found this response and pivot on the issue persuasive at the door, and a strong response to an ad that has clearly had some resonance.

In their endorsements, canvassers delivered positive messages on Rep. Sestak, with an emphasis on his commitment to closing tax loopholes for companies that outsource, creating infrastructure jobs and putting people back to work. We have also coupled our Sestak endorsements with negative messages on Pat Toomey. Thus far, three Toomey negatives are getting the most traction: 1) his opposition to investing in infrastructure and jobs, 2) his statement that corporations shouldn't be taxed (particularly effective when connected to peoples' concerns about Marcellus Shale drilling not being taxed); 3) his support for privatizing social security.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions about our program!

In Solidarity,
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