

The Return of the Catholic Vote

this article can be found today on The American Spectator's website:

The most accurate prognostication of the 2010 Catholic vote was made months ago when Rep. Bart Stupak (D, MI-01) decided not to run for reelection. Stupak, a “pro-life” Catholic, was the leader of a small hold-out group of House Democrats, also mostly Catholic, refusing to vote for a health care bill that included federal funding for abortion.

Stupak's sudden change of mind on [May 21](#), without any concurrent changes to the health care bill, led to the passage of the health care legislation when his fellow hold-outs caved with him.

A veritable tsunami of pro-life outrage among Catholics ensued, in spite of attempts of White House shills like Sr. Carol Keenan, president of the Catholic Health Association, to dispute the [statements](#) of the Catholic bishops about the presence of abortion funding in the health care legislation.

This outrage was apparent on November 2 when eight members of Stupak's coalition were defeated. They included Catholic Rep. Steve Driehaus (D, OH-01), who brought a case to the Ohio Elections Commission, arguing the Susan B. Anthony List had misrepresented his vote on the health care bill. Other Catholics, Reps. Kathy Dahlkemper (D, PA-03), Charlie Wilson (D, OH-06), Chris Carney (D, PA-10), Paul Kanjorski (D, PA-11), Baron Hill (D, IN-09), and Brad Ellsworth (D, IN-08), who ran for the Senate, made pro-life claims a prominent campaign theme, and were also rejected by the voters.

Pushed, in part, by concern about the health care bill, Catholic voters across the nation returned to the GOP in

numbers resembling the presidential victory of George W. Bush in 2004. CNN [exit polls](#) record 55 percent of Catholics voted for the GOP while [AP polling](#) showed a whopping 58 percent, a twenty point increase since 2008. Either way, the 2008 Catholic support for Obama has completely reversed itself, perhaps with a vengeance.

In all, over 17 pro-life Catholics will be added to the Congress, while roughly 26 pro-abortion Catholics will be departing.

The heart of the Catholic vote belongs to voters who attend Mass regularly. Parse out these active Catholic voters from less active Catholics, and the results have consistently shown more support for socially conservative and Republican candidates. When I led Catholic outreach for George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004, we based our outreach on a [comprehensive study](#) that pointed repeatedly to the importance of making this distinction.

Those who argue there is no Catholic vote usually ignore this distinction, as did Jody Bottum, former editor of *First Things*, in his [recent article](#) at the *Weekly Standard*.

The exit polling did not contain a question for religiously-active Catholics as a separate group, as is done in presidential elections. But CNN did find that religiously active voters, in general, supported the GOP 59 percent to 40 percent. Thus, there is good reason to infer that active Catholic voters were a driving force behind the Catholic move back to the GOP, as they have been in previous swings since the late '60s.

Consider the additional evidence:

In the [Illinois Senate race](#) for Obama's former seat, according to CNN, Catholics voted an amazing 56 percent for the GOP candidate and 39 percent for the Democrat. White Catholics voted at a 70 percent level, which means blue collar Catholics

deserted the Democratic Party. That's in a state whose parishes have been deeply influenced by the Archdiocese of Chicago, where Cardinal Bernardin, author of the "seamless garment," was bishop for fourteen years.

In another heavily Catholic state, [Wisconsin](#), Catholics voted 53 percent to 47 percent for the Republican Senate candidate, Ron Johnson, to defeat incumbent Russ Feingold. In [Pennsylvania](#), pro-life Catholic Pat Toomey defeated a Catholic who voted for Obamacare, Rep. Joe Sestak. PA Catholic voters favored Toomey 51 percent to 49 percent. Along with Toomey, the election of Catholic Marco Rubio to a Florida Senate seat means that body will have two dynamic pro-life voices to replace Sen. Sam Brownback, who was elected Governor of Kansas in a landslide victory.

The darling of the Catholic Left since 2008 has been Rep. Tom Perriello (D, VA-05). Touted by fake Catholic groups like Catholics United and Catholics in Alliance, Perriello was the epitome of the "social justice" Democrat and described as pro-life in spite of his consistent support of abortion and the health care bill. Perriello was [defeated](#) by pro-life Presbyterian, state senator Robert Hurt, in spite of Obama's personal trips to Charlottesville.

Perhaps the biggest news of all for Catholics on election night was the emergence of a pro-life Catholic Speaker of the House, Cong. John Boehner (R, OH-08) to replace Nancy Pelosi, a pro-abortion Catholic. With Boehner at the helm, Catholics can be assured that a real fight will be underway for ridding our nation of federally funded abortions.

Catholic voters will never be a voting block, but they will respond in large and politically significant numbers to candidates on the basis of their Catholic values and world view. What does that mean for the 2012 presidential race? The magnitude of the mid-term swing of Catholic voters we just witnessed translates to 7 million of the 30 million Catholic

voters who the GOP needs to keep or the Democrats need to win back by 2012.

Deal W. Hudson is president of Catholic Advocate and author of Onward Christian Soldiers: The Growing Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States (Simon & Schuster, 2008).