

W13 - Government writing

Trump and Biden completely ignored 37 states this election. Virginia is not one of them.

By ELIAS WEISS

Star-Tribune Digital Coordinator

CHATHAM, Va. (Oct. 21, 2020) — A study this week tracking presidential campaign events found that 37 states and D.C. have been completely ignored in the 2020 presidential election. Virginia is counted among the mere 1 in 4 states to host even a single campaign event this year.

Dr. Joshua Sperber is the Assistant Professor of Political Science at Averett University in Danville. He holds a PhD in political science from the City University of New York Graduate Center, where he focused on American Politics.

"While it is not unprecedented in the modern era, presidential candidates ideally attempt to visit as many battleground states as they can," Sperber said in an interview with the *Star-Tribune*. "Since the advent of the airplane, politicians, especially for the office of president, travel the country making appearances in numerous states, depending on their resources. More recently, you'll focus on closely-contested states—Hillary quite famously did not spend time in some of the blue Midwestern states. So it's not a given that a candidate will visit every state, but in recent history, candidates will visit every contested state that they can."

The study this week, jointly conducted by voting reform organizations National Popular Vote and FairVote, also found that over \$1 billion in televised ads alone was spent by the Biden and Trump campaigns in the 13 states that collectively hosted every one of their campaign events.

"This seems to be different," Sperber continued. "To what degree, if any, is this offset by the reach of digital media? It's certainly a very different media than we had in the late 1800s, early 1900s."

Secondary to Virginia's historic status as a swing state (although it has now become rather safely blue, experts say) Sperber says travel restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic could be one reason for these 13 states to be the only to hold campaign events this year.

"If you're Joe Biden, you won't waste time in Mississippi for very long, if at all," Sperber said. "It has to be a relative swing state. Virginia, on the national level, is blue with a democratic governor and senators, but there are plenty of red districts, specifically here in the south."

Red areas of Virginia like Pittsylvania County can't be overlooked, Sperber explained.

"It can't be taken for granted," he said. "I would guess Virginia would go blue again, but that can't be taken for granted."

Sperber also posited that geographic proximity could have some consideration.

"If you live in the mid-Atlantic or spend your time in D.C., it's not very hard to get to Virginia," he said, thinking out loud. "It's harder to get to California or Hawaii. It's a possible consideration."

Officials who conducted this week's study say this unprecedented event "should never happen again."

"With just two weeks left until Election Day, the Trump and Biden campaigns have made it clear that nearly three out of four states will be ignored in this election," said Dr. John Koza, Chairman of National Popular Vote, in a statement. "To date, the presidential candidates have concentrated their 95 campaign events in just 13 states, relegating voters in 37 states and the District of Columbia to being mere spectators for the 2020 presidential election. The concentration of campaign visits parallels the concentration of advertising spending."

Koza said Virginians, among other voters in these 13 potential swing states, are the only relevant voters left in today's America.

"An American voter should not have to be from a battleground state to be relevant with the President of the United States," Koza said. "Every voter in every state should be politically relevant in every presidential election, guaranteeing the presidency to the candidate who wins the national popular vote is the only way to get that done."

He also posits that non-election-related policy issues are neglected in the same 37 states overlooked by the Biden and Trump campaigns, and that the inverse is also true.

"Campaign events by the candidates are an indication of a state's relevance in presidential elections, and, by extension, the influence they will have with the next President, once he is elected," continued Koza. "The recent extension of the offshore oil drilling ban for Florida and the allocation of coronavirus supplies to Florida

illustrate the influence of closely divided battleground states on government policy. Meanwhile, wildfires are being ignored because the damage is being done to western states.”

Besides Virginia, only North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Florida, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Minnesota, Iowa, Nevada and Arizona have hosted campaign events.

The study this week also found that more than half of the 2020 general-election campaign is concentrated in just four states—56 of the 95 events have been in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Florida and North Carolina.

Seven out of eight dollars has been spent in just six states: Florida, Pennsylvania, Michigan, North Carolina, Wisconsin and Arizona.

Campaigns spent \$884 million of the \$1,015 billion collective sum here.

These same six states have also received over two-thirds (69 of 96) of the presidential and vice-presidential campaign events since the nominating conventions, according to the study.

Virginia Senator supports DeJoy as Kaine, House Dems blast USPS policy

By ELIAS WEISS

Star-Tribune Digital Coordinator

DANVILLE, Va. (Aug. 10, 2020) — House members in Washington, D.C., Thursday called for the immediate reversal of new regulations implemented by Louis DeJoy, the recently-appointed Republican Postmaster General from North Carolina, which they say would slow U.S. Postal Service operations ahead of a projected surge in mail-in voting.

New operational changes include the elimination of overtime for postal carriers, holding onto mail an extra day when distribution centers get backlogged and cutting mail delivery hours.

Sen. Frank Ruff (R), representing Virginia's 15th District (covering most of Southside Virginia, including parts of Pittsylvania County and Danville) told the *Star-Tribune* he disagrees with House Democrats that the directive will slow operations to the point that the integrity of mail-in voting becomes compromised.

"All of us need to be concerned about the security of this election," Ruff said. "Absentee ballots are a necessary evil, especially in this pandemic year, but we should not be careless about how we handle ballots."

Ruff said he isn't fond of the projected surge in the vote-by-mail option and the security risks many Republicans and some Democrats say it could bring with it, but backs DeJoy's new operational regulations within the USPS.

"The postal system has to change to adapt to modern society," Ruff said.

He claims the Postal Service operates today with less mail-flow than before.

"When I first came to Richmond, I'd get a bundle the size of a bushel-barrel of mail," he continued. "Now, I get very little mail, other than newspapers. People communicate by e-mail, by text. That is the reality."

Ruff said that, as long as voters are conscious of the mail-in voting deadlines and don't wait to the last minute, despite the USPS operating on a deficit during the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be adequate resources to move ballots from voters to registrars.

"If people are aware of these changes, they can deal with it before the last minute," Ruff said. "If they wait until the last few days, then there could be a problem."

Eighty-four House members, including 80 Democrats and four Republicans, signed a letter of disapproval against DeJoy's new rules Thursday and demanded a revocation.

"While we share the goal of ensuring the Postal Service's solvency, the rhetoric used in these documents compares the Postal Service to a private company concerned only with the bottom line, rather than the constitutionally mandated public service that it is," the letter states. "Eliminating overtime and directing postal workers to leave mail on the floor of postal facilities will erode confidence in the Postal Service and drive customers away, resulting in even worse financial conditions in the future."

This is just another largely partisan issue in the House.

"The operational changes being made within the Postal Service could threaten mail-in voting and the overall mission of what has traditionally been an apolitical agency for the past 245 years," Tim Kaine (D), a U.S. senator from Virginia, told the *Star-Tribune* Monday. "USPS has become even more important in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and will be critical to ensuring we have safe elections. Delayed mail service is unacceptable, especially as many Americans will rely on vote-by-mail this fall. We should be doing everything we can to make voting easier for people, not harder."

Kaine's stance is nearly universal throughout the Democrats in D.C.

"Not only is it morally unacceptable to implement significant cut-backs at the height of a global pandemic when Americans are relying on the mail more than ever, it's questionable business practice," Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-Md.) said in a statement Friday.

Apart from the new regulations in place, Ruff has more concerns about mail-in voting and urged Virginians in the 15th District to postmark their ballots themselves.

"The Governor's Board of Elections has chosen to do some things that make no sense as far as security is concerned," Ruff said. "First, there is a national change-of-address system. All the states have to do is click into that, and if someone moves from Chatham to Charlotte, N.C., it strikes them off the voter registry in Chatham. The State's Department decided to wait until after the November election to do that. There is no logical reason to do that."

"More problematic, the policy has always been that a member of each party must look at each ballot that comes in absentee to make sure it's proper," Ruff continued. "The new guidelines say that one person can open those ballots and vote them, which means that, while that person is hopefully trustworthy, there is no double-checking."

Despite these concerns, studies have shown that voter fraud is very uncommon in the U.S.

"All forms of voting fraud are extremely rare in the United States," a New York Times study concluded. "A panel that Mr. Trump charged with investigating election corruption found no real evidence of fraud before he disbanded it in 2018."

Local registrars are also unworried about election fraud and have said that USPS regulations are only a problem for those who will wait to vote at the last minute.

"Personally, I'm not concerned," Danville City Registrar Peggy Petty said. "I do not feel like there will be a problem in Virginia."

Bob Good: 'The voters have proven that a bright red conservative can win'

By ELIAS WEISS

Star-Tribune Digital Coordinator

LYNCHBURG, Va. (Nov. 4, 2020) — Dr. Cameron Webb, the political newcomer from Spotsylvania County and democratic candidate for Virginia's 5th congressional district, called Republican challenger Bob Good last night to concede the congressional race.

Virginia's 5th congressional district covers a narrow swath of land in the center of the commonwealth that spans all the way from Danville-Pittsylvania County to the outskirts of Washington, D.C.'s suburbs and runs through the heart of reliably-blue Charlottesville.

The district is so oddly shaped, it actually served as one of the primary indicia for Virginia's Amendment 1 question on yesterday's ballot, which passed and will see a redrawing of congressional district lines.

"I look forward to working to earn the support of all the citizens in the 5th District, and validating the trust placed in me by the hundreds of thousands of voters who cast their votes in this all-important election," Good said.

Good secured a more than seven-point win over Webb in the end, tallying 209,703 votes worth 53.6 percent.

As has been the case with nearly every district and county in the nation, the unprecedented absentee vote has been dominated by Democratic voters, while Republicans showed up to in-person voting precincts in droves on Election Day.

Webb won over 58 percent of the absentee vote. In fact, over 70 percent of Webb's votes were submitted by mail.

For Good, however, this victory to replace Rep. Denver Riggleman (R), who failed to receive the Republican party's nomination after serving just two years, is about humbly proving the rhetoric wrong.

"The political elite said that a true conservative couldn't win here, that this district was turning blue, that this race was a toss-up, but the voters have proven that a bright red conservative can win by standing on principle, despite being vastly outspent from outside the district," Good said.

"Tonight is a victory for the conservative values that founded and sustain this nation, for biblical principles, the sanctity of life, religious liberty, free-market capitalism and the importance of faith and family," he continued.

Good has also notably supported President Donald Trump, saying his policies have delivered a growing, vibrant economy and that "we must ensure that our representatives back his agenda."

"Tonight, we've said that America is still a great nation," Good said. "I have been elected to hold the line for the idea that government exists for the people and that our rights come from our Creator. To God be the glory."

Good thanked Webb last night for a hard-fought campaign and thanked him for acknowledging Good's win with his concession.

"Congratulations to Bob Good on his victory," National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Tom Emmer said early this morning from Washington. "Bob Good is a true conservative leader who will uphold Virginians' values and never cave to the radical left. Bob will always fight against socialism and for freedom. I am proud to welcome Bob Good to Congress."

Republican Party of Virginia Chairman Rich Anderson added, "Republicans put Virginia on the map last night... We made Virginia a battleground once again. The fight for Virginia is not over."