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Chancellor heads voter registration drive

December 01, 2008 | Teresa Dunham

Electoral votes didn't tip to the conservative side in the recent presidential race, but Liberty University students still made their voices heard on Election Day 2008.

More than a month prior to Nov. 4, LU enjoyed a wave of media attention for its campus-wide campaign to register student voters locally. The innovative campaign, initiated by Chancellor Jerry Falwell Jr. in September, netted 4,200 registration forms and drew high-profile coverage from the national and international media including National Public Radio, the Washington Post, the Associated Press, the CBS Early Show, an Australian television network, and news crews from France and Norway.

"The students who were interviewed handled the media masterfully like seasoned professionals, representing Liberty and the cause of Christ very well," Falwell said.

The Chancellor told students they could make a bigger impact by voting together Chancellor heads voter registration drive Efforts garner widespread media attention than scattering their votes across jurisdictions and that local elections can make a difference in issues concerning their education, such as tuition costs and approval of key campus facilities. He also sent out an email asking LU's nearly 4,000 faculty and staff to vote.

"Several statewide elections in Virginia have been decided by very slim margins in recent years, so many believed that Liberty University students could have been a key factor in deciding which candidate won the state. I am proud that Liberty University students understand that it is their obligation to vote to protect their Christian values," Falwell said.

Beyond the registration campaign, Falwell felt so strongly about encouraging students to vote that he cancelled all classes on Election Day, coordinating with the local transit authority to bus them to the polls.

Among those students was Chris Pascarella, a 21-year-old senior studying pastoral leadership, who was originally registered to vote in New Jersey but switched to vote in Virginia because of the campus voter registration campaign. Pascarella, whose nod went to Republican candidate John McCain, said he believed his vote would carry more weight in the Commonwealth.

On election evening, students followed televised news during dinner in the Reber-Thomas Dining Hall and then made their way to a non-partisan evening extravaganza in the Vines Center. The high-energy event featured four big screens with live election updates, a performance by Christian rapper Humble T.I.P., board games, food and prize drawings.

Campus radio station 90.9 FM The Light launched a live broadcast from the Vines Center and provided personalized coverage throughout the night.

Though LU never endorses a candidate, Republican students were a vocal force on campus. Senior Claire Ayendi, president of the College Republicans at LU, even made the front page of the Washington Post for her campaign efforts.

After working so hard for a conservative White House, many students emailed Falwell to express their disappointment at the election results. Offering words of encouragement in convocation the next day, Falwell applauded the students' efforts and reminded them that God is still in control. Some conservative victories came on Nov. 4, he said, referencing the marriage protection amendments that passed in several states.

“Lynchburg went for McCain because of Liberty University,” the Chancellor said, adding that LU students will continue to make a difference in the future. “I really believe the next generation of leaders who will stay true to the Christian principles will come from this university.”