

Headlines from the Hill

2008: The year of pro-nurse advocates

By Rachel Conant and Hilary Hansen

ON TUESDAY, November 4, Americans will elect the next president of the United States. This will be an historic election on many levels:

- It's the first presidential race since 1952 in which neither an incumbent president nor an incumbent vice president is on the ballot.
- It's the first in history in which two sitting senators are running against each other.
- It's the first presidential election in which one of the major party nominees is African-American.

The nation is captivated by what will no doubt be an exciting election campaign. But along with this historic race, 435 U.S. House of Representatives seats and 33 Senate seats are up for election. In addition, there are 11 gubernatorial races across the country.

You often hear people lament, "Why should I vote? My vote doesn't count!" But think about this: During the 2006 midterm election, Congressman Rob Simmons (R-CT) lost his congressional seat by a mere 83 votes. In Pennsylvania, challenger Patrick Murphy (D) beat incumbent Mike Fitzpatrick (R) by 1,518 votes. Political experts believe 2008 will be no exception to the recent tight races we've seen.

Despite the historical importance of this presidential election and the excitement of the congressional races, what excites ANA the most about this election season is that it's another chance to bring pro-nursing advocates to Washington, DC.

With some recent elections being decided by a few hundred votes, it is imperative that ANA members not only be registered to vote, but actually do vote on November 4. Most states allow residents to vote early in the general election so they don't have to wait in long lines on Election Day. Also, if you know that you'll be traveling on or around Election Day, remember to fill out an absentee ballot. Check with your local election board to find out your state's regulations regarding absentee voting.

A good way to make a difference in this year's election is to "adopt" a pro-nursing candidate. As an RN in your community, it's crucial that you know how your district candidates stand on nursing issues. The campaign season is the optimal time to research

their positions on the issues and start to build a relationship with them—especially if they are nonincumbents. ANA's continued legislative success hinges on ANA members helping to elect pro-nursing candidates to Congress. Electing such candidates puts ANA's foot already in the door and gives us a connection in the district—you.

Other ways to help garner support for pro-nursing candidates include holding a fundraiser at your house and inviting fellow nurses. This not only raises campaign funds, but provides a forum for you and your colleagues to ask the candidate questions and provide feedback. Another idea is to volunteer full- or part-time for a campaign; most campaigns need volunteers for such tasks as handing out literature, making phone calls around the district, helping with various events and town-hall meetings, or providing assistance at the polls on Election Day.

Legislators elected in November will confront a bevy of issues that affect not only nursing but health care in general—including nurse staffing, education funding, and healthcare reform. Without maximum voter turnout from ANA members, their friends, fami-

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lies, colleagues, and even patients, it will be impossible to elect legislators who will pass nurse-friendly legislation in the upcoming 111th Congress.

Remember—every state has different voter registration deadlines. Also, many states allow residents to vote early. For voting information specific to your state, visit www.canivote.org/, a nonpartisan website run by the National Association of Secretaries of State.

Let's make nurses' voices the difference in the midterm elections. Volunteer for a campaign. Make sure friends, families, and colleagues are registered to vote. Vote on November 4. ★

Rachel Conant and Hilary Hansen are Senior Political Action Specialists for ANA's Department of Government Affairs.