



TO: Florida Chamber Political Institute, Florida Chamber Board of Directors  
and Friends of Free Enterprise

CC: Mark Wilson, President and CEO, Florida Chamber of Commerce

DATE: August 25, 2016

RE: Low-Propensity Voters Likely to Create "Big Surprises" on Primary Election Night

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Please consider this a confidential briefing and please know that you are receiving it because of your close connection to, and support of, the Florida Chamber Political Institute and Florida Chamber of Commerce.

As we come into the home stretch of the 2016 primary election, I want to share important information that our entire political team and I believe will play a significant role in who wins and who loses certain primary elections next Tuesday, August 30.

First, turnout for the 2016 primary election is likely to set statewide turnout records, and appears to be driven largely by two factors.

1. A large number of competitive primary contests across the state resulting from legislative redistricting, and a U.S. Senate primary in both parties.
2. The record number of absentee ballots provided to low-propensity primary voters.

While the impact of competitive races on voter turnout is well documented, the sudden increase in absentee voting by low-propensity primary voter participation is brand new and worthy of further exploration.

**Why are Low-Propensity Absentee Voter Returns Significant?**

Historically, absentee voting is the domain of high-propensity voters, because voting absentee required a high degree of motivation from a voter. High-propensity voters go to the trouble of requesting a ballot from their local supervisor of elections and then take the time to fill it out, apply a stamp and return the completed ballot.

On the other hand, low-propensity voters simply wait until Election Day and make a decision to vote based on convenience. Hence, low-propensity voters are (by definition) not a major factor in most primary elections, generally not polled, and receive little direct campaign communication.

In the 2016 primary, however, **low-propensity voters are requesting and returning absentee ballots at numbers that exceed higher-propensity voters**, creating what the Florida Chamber of Commerce believes is a “dark horse” effect where no one can predict how they will influence the outcome of races. Some campaigns will say they “chase” absentee ballots, but very few have the resources or know how to chase massive numbers of voters who, heretofore, rarely or never voted in primaries.

While we and others discussed low-propensity voter performance during the March presidential preference primary, this is the first time we’re seeing its full impact on U.S. Senate, Congressional, state senate, state house and local elections.

#### **Low-Propensity Absentee Voting by the Numbers:**

In the 2016 primary, 2.3 million vote-by-mail ballots were distributed to Florida voters. Voters with no prior record of voting in primaries received over one million of those ballots, while voters who voted in all four of the previous four primary elections requested only 269,000 ballots.

The Florida Chamber’s data and analytics team scores voter propensity using a simple 0 to 4 scoring method. The scoring method is described in more detail below.

Florida Chamber Voting Score	Florida Voter Propensity Definitions
4	Voted in 4 of last 4 Primaries
3	Voted in 3 of last 4 Primaries
2	Voted in 2 of last 4 Primaries
1	Voted in 1 of last 4 Primaries
0	Voted in 0 of last 4 Primaries

Absentee ballot requests for the 2016 primary are distributed with a skew towards Republican voters among all propensity score levels excluding 0 score primary voters. Among 0 score primary voters, Democrats requested 30,000 more ballots than Republicans.

	<b>Absentee Ballots Requested (8/24/16)</b>					
	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>REP</b>	369,698	198,199	156,629	152,270	154,896	<b>1,031,692</b>
<b>DEM</b>	401,529	176,776	117,226	97,897	101,050	<b>894,478</b>
<b>NPA</b>	240,815	65,627	29,774	17,421	11,114	<b>364,751</b>
<b>Other</b>	31,199	10,942	5,915	3,818	2,416	<b>54,290</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,043,241</b>	<b>451,544</b>	<b>309,544</b>	<b>271,406</b>	<b>269,476</b>	<b>2,345,211</b>

Absentee ballot returns are similarly skewed in favor of low-propensity voters - with the exception of Republicans, where high-propensity voters still maintain a slight edge.

	<b>Absentee Ballots Returned (8/24/16)</b>					
	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>REP</b>	86,238	73,333	73,358	83,400	97,157	<b>413,486</b>
<b>DEM</b>	83,929	69,141	57,358	54,758	64,586	<b>329,772</b>
<b>NPA</b>	39,047	23,555	14,726	10,234	7,603	<b>95,165</b>
<b>Other</b>	5,927	4,160	3,009	2,319	1,670	<b>17,085</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>215,141</b>	<b>170,189</b>	<b>148,451</b>	<b>150,711</b>	<b>171,016</b>	<b>855,508</b>

As expected, the return rates for low-propensity voters are much lower (at 20 percent) than for high-propensity voters (at 63 percent). Low-propensity voters however, control most of the ballots and **even with low return rates they easily account for the largest portion of the absentee vote statewide.** (Ex: 20% of 1,043,241 is higher than 63% of 269,476)

	<b>Returns Summary (8/24/16)</b>				
	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Return Rate</b>	20.62	37.69	47.96	55.53	63.46
<b>% of Returns</b>	25.15	19.89	17.35	17.62	19.99

#### **Potential Causes of Increase in Low-Propensity Voter Participation:**

In 2013, the Florida Legislature amended Chapter 101.62 F.S. to read:

#### **101.62 Request for vote-by-mail ballots.—**

(1)(a) The supervisor shall accept a request for a vote-by-mail ballot from an elector in person or in writing. One request shall be deemed sufficient to receive a vote-by-mail ballot for all elections through the end of the calendar year of the second ensuing regularly scheduled general election, unless the elector or the elector's designee indicates at the time the request is made the elections for which the elector desires to receive a vote-by-mail ballot. Such request may be considered canceled when any first-class mail sent by the supervisor to the elector is returned as undeliverable.

The change allowed voters to **request their absentee ballot up to four years in advance of an election**. Many supervisors of elections further provided an option that allowed voters to **check a single box to blanket request an absentee ballot for every election** in the upcoming four years.

Many local tax collectors partnered with supervisors of elections to allow voters to **request absentee ballots when renewing a driver's license or vehicle registration**. The result has been a convenient method for many low-propensity absentee voters to request a vote-by-mail ballot while conducting other business with their county.

Additionally, some supervisors of elections are now **providing postage paid absentee envelopes (at local taxpayer expense)** to voters eliminating the need for some voters to even affix a stamp.

#### **What Low-Propensity Absentee Voting Means for Future Races:**

Chasing low-propensity voters is a costly and uncertain proposition for most campaigns. If campaigns spend money communicating with low-propensity voters, current returns suggest there is only a one in five chance of those voters returning their ballot. On the other hand, these low-propensity voters account for a large portion of absentee voters and failure to communicate with this segment leaves campaigns vulnerable.

At the Florida Chamber, as we began to notice this trend weeks ago, we made a strategic decision to identify these voters in targeted races and then to begin communicating with them. Needless to say, we've learned a lot – more on that at a later time.

Moving forward, campaigns must find tactics for identifying low-propensity absentee voters who are most likely to return their absentee ballot and focus resources on only those voters. Campaigns and organizations with access to the deepest data sets and analysis are most likely to discover the subtle demographic or lifestyle patterns that distinguish those who return their ballot from those who do not return their ballot.

**So, when next Tuesday's primary results come in, please know there are a few races in Florida where our team's discovery and execution literally made the difference in some of the close calls. As our President, Mark Wilson, has said, we won't win every race, but**

**we'll be the deciding factor in several of them and that's good for job growth, limited government and to securing Florida's future. "I believe there are going to be more zeros and ones that vote absentee than threes and fours," Mark explained. "We're in unprecedented, uncharted territory."**

To the hundreds of Florida businesses who invest in our efforts to recruit and elect pro-jobs candidates – thank you.

For regular election updates, visit the Florida Chamber's elections center at **[ww.FloridaChamber.com/Election](http://www.FloridaChamber.com/Election)**