



To: Interested Parties
Fr: Joel Foster, NARAL Pro-Choice America Political Director
Da: June 14, 2017
Re: Lessons from the VA GOV primary

After pundits spent months debating the electoral importance of defending abortion rights, last night's gubernatorial primary in Virginia proved that the issue remains a strong political advantage for Democratic candidates who embrace it.

The Virginia primary turned into the first major political test for abortion rights in the Trump era, with the issue quickly becoming the most salient point of contrast between the two Democratic campaigns. **While both campaigns emphasized their plans to defend abortion access, the candidate who focused his campaign and much of his career on the fight for reproductive freedom won handily.** The primary also saw record-setting turnout, indicating that abortion access and women's health are driving a great deal of energy and enthusiasm in this electorate.

For Democratic candidates across the country, Ralph Northam's successful decision to campaign on abortion access and women's health is a blueprint for navigating primaries and building a durable coalition of support from an increasingly energized base. **Embracing reproductive rights and defending abortion access will be a key to victory for Democratic candidates in 2018.**

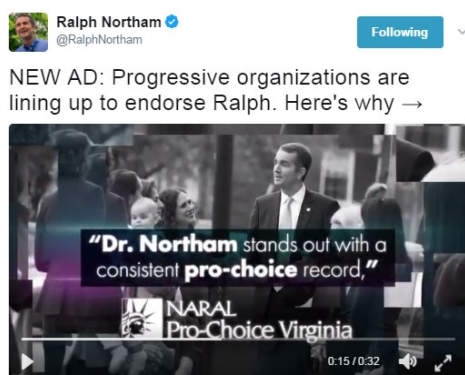
I. REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM WAS KEY TO NORTHAM'S VICTORY

Northam won big, and with record Democratic turnout

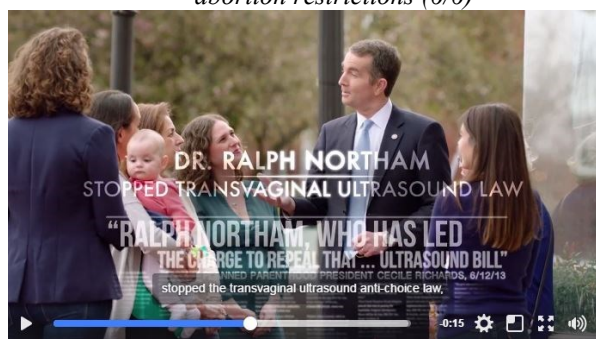
- Northam won by 11.8%
- The race saw the highest turnout of any non-presidential primary election in Virginia history – about 540,000 voters
 - This was 220,000 (170%) more Democratic voters than the last competitive primary in 2009
 - GOP enthusiasm was much lower, with just 360,000 votes cast
- Northam's issue-focused strategy helped him build a [durable multi-racial coalition](#) that included white suburban voters and voters with an advanced degree
 - Northam won Millennials, Middle Age voters, and Seniors.
 - Northam won the African American and the white suburban/urban vote by over 2-to-1
 - Northam won in every region of the state except his opponent's old congressional district
 - Northam won 2/3 of voters with advanced degrees

Northam won because he centered his campaign on unapologetic support for abortion access

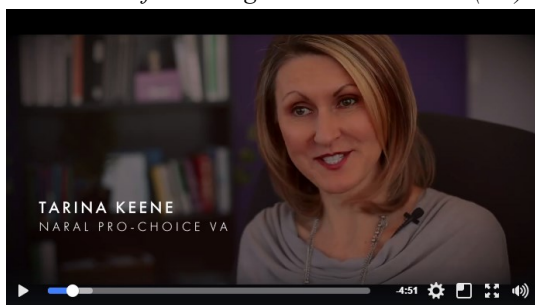
- Northam has built his career on support for reproductive freedom ever since his first campaign in a conservative region of the state. He famously [led the fight](#) in 2012 against a deeply unpopular GOP law forcing women to undergo forced transvaginal ultrasounds if they wanted an abortion.
- Voters wanted a champion who would stand up for their rights, not just someone who was a relatively better option than the GOP candidate. In a primary in which both Democratic candidates ran as defenders of abortion access, **it was not enough for a Democratic candidate to merely be better than the GOP candidates on the issue.**
- Northam unapologetically embraced this issue and **made abortion access a focus of his paid media efforts:**



Northam's ad "[Agree](#)" highlighted his fight against GOP abortion restrictions (6/6)



Northam's ad "[Principles](#)" highlighted his fight to stop the GOP's forced vaginal ultrasound law (5/2)



Ralph Northam
May 9 ·
Five years ago, Virginia Republicans thought they could sneak an invasive, medically unnecessary transvaginal ultrasound bill through the General Assembly—but Democrats were ready to fight back. If we want to keep making progress every day, we have to make it clear that we will not negotiate on a woman's right to abortion. As long as I'm in office, Virginia women will always have someone in their corner.

Northam paid for a [highly produced mini-documentary](#) chronicling his fight against the GOP's forced ultrasound bill, declaring "we will not negotiate on a woman's right to abortion." (5/9)

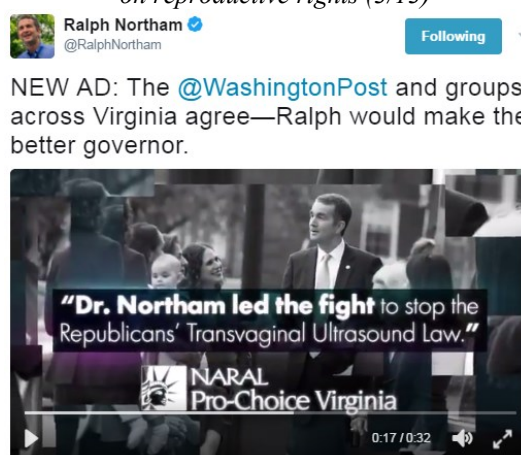


Northam's ad "[Making Progress Every Day](#)" highlighted his work to stop the forced ultrasound law (4/25)



Ralph Northam
March 13 ·
As governor, I'll be a brick wall between Virginians and attacks on reproductive rights and healthcare.

Northam said he would be a "[brick wall](#)" against attacks on reproductive rights (3/13)



Northam's ad "[Post](#)" also touted his fight against abortion restrictions (6/7)

II. CAMPAIGNS ACROSS THE COUNTRY SHOULD HEED THE LESSONS FROM THE VA PRIMARY

Nationwide, Democratic voters overwhelmingly support abortion access.

- [84% of Democratic voters](#) oppose limiting abortion access. This support is even more pronounced amongst women, particularly women of color, who have always been core to the Democratic base.
- Engaging and turning out these base voters will be key in 2018, especially for maximizing down-ballot pick-up opportunities. As the results of the Virginia Democratic gubernatorial primary make clear, support for reproductive rights is crucial to earning the support of the party's base.

Voters as a whole broadly support abortion access.

- **Seven-in-10 Americans support legal access to abortion**, in red, blue, and purple states. Importantly, this finding is true regardless of a voter's personal feelings about whether they would choose abortion themselves.
 - This is true across geography, age, and ethnicity.
 - Even the majority of self-identified Independents (66%) and Republicans (53%) support legal access to abortion – and a significant number of those who identify as pro-life themselves believe that abortion should remain legal and that politicians are not best equipped to make those decisions for others.
- **Sixty-three percent of Catholic voters support abortion rights**.
 - In the 2016 presidential election, 46% of Catholics said they would definitely or likely vote for Clinton, versus 40% for Trump. That's a tight margin, but much tighter than overall Catholic support for legal abortion. Sixty-three percent think abortion should be legal and 60% say deciding to have an abortion is morally acceptable. Even a majority of Catholics (54%) believe insurance should cover abortion care if the woman wants it.
- **Support for reproductive freedom holds across all education levels:** Strong majorities across all levels of education support the values enshrined in *Roe v. Wade*. (Pew Research, [2017](#))
 - Nearly 9-in-10 of those with postgraduate degrees (88%) oppose overturning *Roe*. This holds true for roughly 7-in-10 of those with a college degree (74%) or some college experience (70%). Even 62% of those with a high school diploma or less education do not believe *Roe* should be overturned.

The record-breaking turnout in Virginia's Democratic primary shows that Democrats have a highly motivated electorate that responds to candidates who champion reproductive freedom. On the road to taking back the majority in states across the nation, it is critical for Democratic campaigns to harness this energy by leaning into the strong voter support for defending abortion access and supporting reproductive freedom.