



Vote No on Proposal 5

Martin Waymire Advocacy Communications and Defend Michigan Democracy, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Public Affairs — Associations / Nonprofit Organizations.

Our NO on 5 campaign out-performed every ballot question and candidate (including President Obama and our incumbent U.S. Senator) on Michigan's 2012 ballot. NO on 5 was the only Michigan ballot question or candidate to exceed 3 million votes (260,000 votes more than the next best-performing statewide campaign). We won all 83 counties. Our cost-per-vote was 67 cents (we were outspent more than 2-1). Every newspaper that editorialized on Prop 5 said "VOTE NO." One of our online ads was named a Michigan political video of the year. We launched the campaign trailing 2-1 in the polls, and won 69%-31%.

Public affairs includes programs specifically designed to influence public policy and/or affect legislation, regulations, political activities or candidacies — at the local, state or federal government levels — so that the entity funding the program benefits.

Full Text: **BACKGROUND**

With two decades of experience managing ballot question campaigns, Martin Waymire Advocacy Communications was retained to lead the campaign to defeat Proposal 5, a proposed constitutional amendment on Michigan's Nov. 6, 2012 General Election Ballot. We were retained by Vote NO on Prop 5, Defend Michigan Democracy, which began as a small coalition of the Michigan Health & Hospital Association, AARP Michigan, the state's public universities (University of Michigan, Michigan State University, etc.), some organized labor groups, some business organizations, the Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan League for Public Policy, and a few others. With its roots in the Tea Party, Proposal 5 would have put fiscal handcuffs on Michigan state government — requiring two-thirds "supermajority" votes (instead of simple majority votes) any time the state Legislature would move to create a tax, raise a tax, or end any tax break or loophole already in the law for individuals or corporations. Initial voter surveys conducted for the state's largest newspapers/TV stations showed Proposal 5 passing with 68% in favor. Initial voter surveys conducted for our NO on 5 campaign found similar overwhelming support. Many of the state's leading political "pundits" also predicted passage. Given the obvious populist appeal of Proposal 5, we knew a strategic, targeted and cost-effective campaign would be required to win. We also knew we could never compete with the financial resources of our opponents, who were backed by a lone Michigan billionaire named Matty Moroun, whose corporations would benefit from Prop 5, and by the national anti-tax organization Americans for Prosperity, which is funded by two billionaire brothers. By enlisting the help of Michigan organizations and citizens often opposed to each other — Democrats and Republicans, business and labor, teachers and school administrators, community colleges and universities, and many more — we launched our NO on 5 campaign in early July, nearly six months behind our opponents and trailing badly in the polls.

Goal: Defeat Proposal 5 on Michigan's Nov. 6, 2012 statewide ballot

RESEARCH

Primary research

We commissioned two statewide voter surveys (a 600-sample survey, followed a month or so later by a second survey with two split 600-samples). We were also given access to quantitative research conducted independent of the campaign for the state Democratic Party.

Secondary research

The YES on 5 campaign claimed states with supermajority taxing requirements were more prosperous than states without. To test the accuracy of this claim, we researched the prosperity indicators (unemployment rates, per capita income levels, public school performance, crime rates, etc.) in the supermajority states. We also did opposition research on Matty Moroun, testing what we found in our quantitative voter surveys. Finally, we were part of two nights of focus groups in east and west Michigan, where our messages were tested.

PLANNING

Campaign planning and management

We urged the client to form a steering committee to make decisions about funding, strategy and tactics, and to manage us directly. We developed the campaign plan and budget, which were regularly updated to meet changes in the coalition and political environment. We held two weekly calls: Monday mornings with the steering committee to review budget, fundraising and major changes in plan and strategy, and Tuesday mornings with the full coalition to discuss strategy, tactics, and major activities / events / assignments for the week. Martin Waymire partner Roger Martin, APR, was the lead strategist, campaign manager and spokesperson for NO on 5. David Waymire, our other principal, drafted the campaign plan and executed the secondary research.

Message development

For our plan, strategies and tactics, the research guided us to these five messages:

- Proposal 5 permanently changes the state constitution and is way too extreme: it creates minority rule in the Legislature by giving super powers to a small minority of just 13 senators. It means fewer Michigan citizens would have a say in their government.
- Proposal 5 is funded almost entirely by a lone Detroit billionaire named Matty Moroun, whose agenda is to buy a constitutional amendment to forever protect his state tax breaks.
- Because Proposal 5 is so extreme and would have so many unintended consequences, long-time and often bitter political enemies from across Michigan are united in opposition: business and labor, Democrats and Republicans, Gov. Rick Snyder, and many more.
- Proposal 5 would make it almost impossible for the Legislature to pass balanced solutions to the state's budget problems. That would mean partisan gridlock in Lansing, higher local taxes, and more cuts to health care, public safety and other essential services.
- States with super-minority provisions in their constitutions tend to be poorer, and have struggling economies and ongoing budget crises. We don't want Michigan to suffer like those states under minority rule.

EXECUTION

Coalition development

Because of our years of experience as political journalists and former legislative staffers, and because our firm is non-partisan, we assembled and activated one of the largest and most diverse coalitions in Michigan history for a ballot question campaign. It included leaders and organizations that often are bitter political enemies, including leading Republicans and Democrats, Gov. Rick Snyder and the Democrat who ran unsuccessfully against him; the state's largest and most powerful business *and* labor organizations; teachers and school managers; hospitals, nurses, doctors and nearly every major health organization; every major

police and fire association; cities, townships, counties and villages; a leader of the west Michigan Tea Party; and dozens more. The NO on 5 campaign became one big “odd couple” coalition.

Earned media

We held a kick-off news conference in Lansing and weekly news conferences in the state’s major media markets, featuring the Governor and prominent local leaders from our odd couple coalition. (Generally, we keep politicians out of ballot campaign communications, but Gov. Snyder at the time was testing at about 60% positive among independent voters.) Each news conference had a different theme to give media fresh story angles. We won editorial page support (urging voters to reject Proposal 5) from every editorial page in the state. In two decades of managing ballot campaigns, we’ve never seen that before. The campaign wrote and placed op/eds in daily papers statewide and generated hundreds of letters to the editor. Martin Waymire’s Roger Martin completed more than 80 media interviews, and was the lead representative at public and media debates with YES on 5 supporters.

Speakers bureau

We coordinated the speakers bureau that provided NO on 5 representatives to more than 35 public election forums across the state (community groups, churches, student and faculty groups at colleges and universities).

Social/digital media

We researched, wrote, designed, coded and maintained the campaign website. We created and managed all social media activities including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. We wrote and produced five “odd couple” videos, one-minute online “ads” that featured people who are typically political enemies appearing together to say Vote NO on Prop 5 (the governor and his campaign foe; the editorial page editor of The Detroit News and Free Press; a business and a labor leader; a U-M and an MSU fan; a cop and a fire fighter). We created a new campaign graphic every day that was shared with the media and via all of our social media forums.

Paid media

The messaging we developed became the primary messaging in our TV and radio ads. We helped develop and accuracy-check scripts. We managed the Facebook ad campaign and budget, which featured the odd-couple videos described above and new daily campaign graphics that we created and distributed through the various forums.

Daily e-newsletters

We researched, wrote and sent daily late-afternoon e-mail updates to our followers, subscribers, and the news media. They emails contained new favorable editorials, news stories from our day’s events, helped generate engagement for future campaign activities, reported on our opponents’ activities, and more.

RESULTS & EVALUATION

NO on 5 Out-Performed Every Question and Candidate on the Ballot

- NO on 5 got the most votes — by far — of any candidate or question on Michigan’s ballot (including President Obama, who won the state by a landslide for the second time).
- NO on 5 was the only ballot question or candidate campaign to exceed 3 million votes on the Michigan ballot.
- NO on 5 out-performed the next best-performing statewide ballot campaign by 260,000 votes.
- Our cost-per-vote was roughly 67 cents. We were outspent more than 2-1 by the YES on 5 campaign.
- We won all 83 Michigan counties.
- Every Michigan newspaper in the state that editorialized on Proposal 5 said “VOTE NO.” In two decades of managing ballot campaigns, we’ve never seen that before.

- While we spent nearly every dollar raised, the campaign was executed within budget.
- One of our odd couple videos was named one of Michigan's political videos of the year for 2012.
- We won! Coincidentally and ironically, Michigan voters defeated Proposal 5 by a better-than supermajority vote of 69-31, the largest margin of any of the questions or candidates on the statewide ballot.

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