Low young voter turnout hurts Democrats

Liberals' reliance on young voters proves unsuccessful

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Apathetic young voters stayed home this midterm election and hurt Democrats as a result, according to UNC Asheville professors and student party leaders.

"They have to excite young people again," said **Mark Gibney, a UNCA political science professor** who offered postelection analysis with colleague Bill Sabo on local public radio station WCQS last Wednesday.

Data from The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement indicates about one out of five young people ages 18 to 29 voted in this election. This is a sharp drop from the 51 percent who voted in 2008, but relatively on par with recent midterm turnout, like the 23 percent who voted in 2006.

Gibney said the number of seniors and women who went from blue to red in 2010 surprised him. Gibney said the female vote, which traditionally votes heavily Democratic, split almost 50-50 between the major parties.

"Cuts in Medicare seemed to fuel a lot of the ways that older people voted, and to me, if there's any party that is associated with Medicare, it's the Democrats," Gibney said.

Gibney said Medicare, originally a Democratic initiative from the 1960s, traditionally draws criticism from Republicans, who dislike the socialist nature of the program.

"Yet, for the Democrats to do nothing to counter that argument, to me, that is astounding," Gibney said.

Gibney said another weakness of the current administration is President Barack Obama's inability to connect with the electorate.

"I have always been surprised by how little he has reached out to the American public," Gibney said. "I don't know why there has not been almost weekly press conferences. He's very good in these settings."

ELECTION RESULTS OF YOUTH VOTING

2008:

- DEMOCRATS AGE 18-29: 60 PERCENT VOTED
- REPUBLICANS AGE 18-29: 33 PERCENT VOTED

2010:

- DEMOCRATS AGE 18-29: 57 PERCENT VOTED
- REPUBLICANS AGE 18-29: 40 PERCENT VOTED

*According to The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

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Gibney said Sabo's main argument during the analysis suggested there may be a political change occurring toward the Republicans, but Gibney himself was more skeptical.

"I would be willing to admit that in the short term you may be seeing that, but I don't believe that in the long term," Gibney said.

UNCA College Democrats President Katja Greeson said the turnout to her organization's election day poll shuttle service reflected the low turnout in general.

"I feel like we gave a lot of information out, but we didn't actually get a lot of turnout to the polls," Greeson said.

Greeson said she believed the Democrats and Republicans would have to reconcile in order to avoid congressional gridlock.

"Initiatives from both sides of the House and Senate, like Republicans and Democrats, won't come through as strongly as they want them to, but they'll definitely be moderated out," she said.

As for the congressional focus for the next two years, Greeson said she thinks the economy will prove to be the most pressing issue.

"The next two years will have a definite focus on economics and the economy, more so than social issues, because I think those will be kind of gridlocked more," Greeson said.

Sophomore German student Hannah Clark voted for the first time on Tuesday. About 9 million Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 voted in this election.

"It was a little confusing because it's not really something you're taught in school," Clark said. "So I had to study the sample ballot."

Clark said she felt frustrated when it took organizers several minutes to find her correct address, but enjoyed the experience overall.

"It felt good to exercise my right for the first time," Clark said.