

ELDER VOTE SHIFTS TO BUSH WITH REST OF U.S.

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One age group departed significantly from other demographic segments of the U.S. electorate on November 2. Young voters, those ages 18-29, preferred Sen. John F. Kerry by a 54% to 45% margin. But the 17% of voters in that group were outweighed by their elders from middle to older ages, who handed George W. Bush a second term in the White House by an overall margin of 51% for Bush to 48% for the senator from Massachusetts. Voters age 60 or more cast 54% of their votes for President Bush.

AARP policy director John Rother said his office is searching election data to divine significant differences between what older voters told the organization in preelection surveys and what they were saying in exit polls on election day. The concerns we know were most important to older people were not among the reasons for the election outcome, he said. Before the election, elders



George W. Bush

said their most important issues were the economy and the cost of healthcare, with Social Security as an important secondary issue. These issues, however, did not surface in the campaign as the election became a referendum on war, terrorism and moral issues, the concerns older people mentioned to exit pollsters. Rother added, The senior vote was split, but that may be because they didn't hear anyone speaking to their particular concerns as such.

In the coming months, Rother speculated that President Bush will take advantage of the traditional six-month legislative window to focus on making his tax cut permanent. Although the president prominently mentioned Social Security reform following his reelection, Rother thinks he may use the White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA), scheduled for October 2005, as a building-block issue for his grand realignment. He added, That is, you put it out there and make a case to the public in its purer partisan form without making an effort to see it through Congress with bipartisan support. If conference debate on the issue results in a marked split of opinion on revamping Social Security with private accounts, he said, the White House could then tell Congress, The advocates are divided, so don't pay attention

to that.

Generally, Rother said, advocates in aging should watch for efforts by the administration to use the once-a-decade conference to score some political points pushing the conservative agenda.

Robert B. Blancato, who was executive director of the 1995 WHCoA and now sits on the public policy committee for the 2005 event, said he is hopeful this scenario will not happen. Generally, though, he believes the second Bush administration will seek market-sector options in the areas of Medicare, including prescription drugs, Medicaid, long-term care and Social Security.

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