

Down Ballot: How a Local Campaign Became a National Referendum on Abortion

Patrick Wohl

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Patrick Wohl's page-turning political history *Down Ballot* covers a suburban Chicago election that drew wide attention because of the candidates' stances on abortion.

In 1990, Illinois House of Representatives incumbent Penny Pullen was challenged by pro-choice newcomer Rosemary Mulligan. Their clash on the controversial topic of abortion ignited passionate support on both sides of the aisle. Thus, this local election makes a good, tense story and touches on social and legal themes felt far beyond Des Plaines; it made national headlines, and the book includes cameos from famed political figures in addition to the two candidates.

In the years leading up to the election, Pullen played a conservative role in Reagan's AIDS task force, foreshadowing the future politicization of public health; Wohl covers that important history via a balanced, in-depth discussion. Also made relevant to the election are topics including the Equal Rights Amendment, gerrymandering, the deformed Floridian ballot chads of the 2000 presidential election, and the 2022 overturning of *Roe versus Wade*.

The book draws from the ample media coverage that Pullen and Mulligan garnered, as well as authorial expertise and familiarity with election campaigns. The underdog's scrappy campaign offices, and the approaches and attitudes of people on both sides, are described in detail, from petition signing to election night. It explains political situations with such savvy that it becomes both entertaining and educational. Herein, as election night nears, the stakes keep getting higher as new hurdles appear, securing excitement up until the end.

With human interest elements that are as compelling as the race's effects, *Down Ballot* is a whip-smart insider's history of a local election with real suspense and big consequences.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (January / February 2024)

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