



Down Ballot

How a Local Campaign Became a National Referendum on Abortion

Patrick Wohl

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

In 1990, a Republican primary for an Illinois state House seat in suburban Chicago turned into a national fight. Penny Pullen opposed abortion. Rosemary Mulligan supported abortion rights. Both were Republicans.

The race drew national attention and money, and the result was so close it took a recount, a coin toss and the Illinois Supreme Court to settle. The case was later cited in *Bush v. Gore*. Patrick Wohl, a former campaign staffer, tells the story from the inside and makes the case that down-ballot races shape national politics.

WHY WE PICKED IT

Local races are where a handful of votes can change everything, and they get the least attention. This book makes that point with a true story, told from inside the campaign.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TABLE

- 01 Why do you think a state House primary in the Chicago suburbs became a national story?
- 02 Both candidates were Republicans. What does the race show about how issues can divide people inside the same party?
- 03 What is coming up locally that deserves more attention than it is getting?

CONNECT IT TO RIGHT NOW

In April 2026, a South Carolina Senate committee voted 8–4 to advance a bill that would replace the state's six-week abortion law with a near-total ban and remove exceptions for rape and incest. The debate exposed divisions among Republicans and anti-abortion groups.

Like the Pullen–Mulligan race, this fight is happening inside one party. How do disagreements within a party get settled, and who gets a say?

State lawmakers wrote South Carolina's current abortion law. All 124 House seats are on the November 3 ballot.

Do you know where your own state representative stands on this or other issues you care about? How would you find out?