

Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Knock on a stranger's door to talk politics? These Minnesotans say - Sure! 01GHHGN6CGH4MN7406Z09HZZ8F

CATHY WURZER: Well, the Minnesota election results are in after a long season of campaigning that included an avalanche of advertisements, phone banking, and yep, good old fashioned door knocking. In a news conference yesterday, the director of the Senate DFL Caucus, Megan Hondl, credited the DFL's success partly to door knocking.

MEGAN HONDL:As a Senate DFL campaign caucus, we knocked on over half a million doors this cycle. And just in the last handful of days, we knocked on over 40,000 doors. There were a lot of volunteers that were excited to talk to voters because they knew what was at stake.

CATHY WURZER: Well, we wanted to talk with some of those people who volunteered their personal time to walk up and down streets and knock on stranger's doors to talk politics. Krista Gomez is a Movement Politics Fellow at the progressive Saint Paul-based nonprofit, TakeAction Minnesota. Aaron Farris is the Chairman of the Freeborn County Republican Party. And they knocked on doors for their candidates this season. Krista and Erin, thank you so much for joining us. And thanks for what you've done over these past many months.

AARON FARRIS:It was our pleasure.

KRISTA GOMEZ:Thank you, Cathy. It was my pleasure.

CATHY WURZER: I am so happy that you joined us. Thank you so much. Say, Aaron, what made you want to get involved with door knocking this year?

AARON FARRIS:Yes, so what really made me want to get involved is because I wanted to give back to my community. I'm someone who likes to be a part of the solution instead of just sitting around and complaining, and really wanting to give back to my community and help people who I believe are trying to make our country, and our state, and our communities a better place for everyone.

CATHY WURZER: And Krista, what got you involved?

KRISTA GOMEZ:Yeah, I've been somebody who follows all the issues and cares about it really deeply for a long time. But this year it was my time, I felt, to get involved myself, and get on those doors and have some conversations with people.

CATHY WURZER: Say, can I ask you-- I have never door-knocked a day in my life, obviously, as a journalist. It sounds like it would be kind of a hard thing to do. I mean, you're going out there in all kinds of weather. You're talking to people who you don't know. They're maybe not terribly excited to see you. What's the goal, Aaron, of when you knock on a door? What are you looking for?

AARON FARRIS:Well, when you're knocking on doors, you're looking to have a conversation with as many people as you possibly can. And early on in the election cycle, you're trying to convince people that, we deserve your votes. Our party and our values are the way to go. And as you get closer to Election Day, you're still trying to convince people.

But you're also really trying to turn out your base, your voters, and get your people out to vote. And this year, thankfully, the weather was pretty kind to us. This is my first election cycle door knocking that we haven't had snow on the ground, early, down in Southern Minnesota where I live. So it was a pretty good year to be door knocking. But it's not always the case.

CATHY WURZER: How do people act when they open the door for you?

AARON FARRIS: It depends on the house. But most people, and this is Minnesota, so we're all Minnesota nice. Most people are very open. It's usually a pretty quick conversation. People usually don't want to talk for too long. But occasionally, you get those people who do want to have a conversation, do want to talk about the issues, and want you, as someone who is in some way, shape, or form, connected to the candidates, they want to tell you what's on their mind and what's important to them, in hopes that you'll take it back to the candidate. And of course, we do.

CATHY WURZER: Interesting because Krista, I'm wondering, Minnesotans are largely-- we're kind of private. Do folks share their opinions with you?

KRISTA GOMEZ: Yeah, so we at TakeAction do a different style of door knocking. We really focus on deep canvassing. So we are looking to have those deeper conversations with people, really try to understand what is important to this year, what their values are, and share that connection with each other and connect it back to the candidates that we're supporting, and the issues that they are running on. So yeah, people absolutely do open up. It surprises me, too. But they do. They will share a part of themselves. And I've shared a part of myself, too.

CATHY WURZER: Say, what do you consider a win when you're at the door?

KRISTA GOMEZ: A win for me is having that connection, that conversation. When somebody is sharing a story, something they've experienced in our health care system, or with access to voting, and access to reproductive rights, a win would be being able to connect those issues that they've seen in their lives to what's on the ballot and what's at stake this year.

CATHY WURZER: And Aaron, what do you consider a win when you're at the door?

AARON FARRIS: I consider a win having an in-depth conversation at all, to be honest with you because even if you don't walk away from the door having convinced that voter-- I'm a Republican. Say I go to a Democrats door. And obviously, they're not convinced. I'm still going to go away. And they're going to go and they're going to talk to their family, their friends, and even just at the dinner table, and say, well, we had someone come by the house today. And it's going to be a part of the conversation. So having any conversation is really what I consider to be a win.

CATHY WURZER: Say, what's your strategy, Aaron, for talking to folks who are maybe aligned a little differently than you politically?

AARON FARRIS: Really just to be honest about where we stand on the issues. Obviously, the two parties have some pretty significant differences. But we do have a lot of things in common. And this year, I know a lot of the top issues were the economy, gas prices, crime. And that's something that both parties need to talk about. And that's something that a lot of voters care about.

CATHY WURZER: I'm very glad to hear that people are friendly to you all when you get out there because face-to-face interaction can be sometimes difficult, right? Do you find it can be a little demoralizing at times or not?

AARON FARRIS: Obviously, every day has its days. I know getting volunteers out to door-knock is kind of like pulling teeth. It's something that not a lot of people want to do because, like you said earlier, Minnesotans are pretty private. And that includes the people we're trying to get go door knocking. So it's kind of like pulling teeth to get volunteers sometimes. But I think there's always some kind of payoff. Even if you don't win a race, you still make inroads. You still have those connections. And who knows, maybe a few cycles down the road, you can actually win that seat. So I don't think it's demoralizing.

CATHY Krista, what do you think?

WURZER:

KRISTA GOMEZ: The only thing that's been demoralizing for me is when nobody answers the door. You have a lot of people in a row who just aren't home. But when we do have those conversations, it is worth it, all the rest of those people who don't answer the door.

CATHY What's the most memorable thing that's happened to you when you're door knocking?

WURZER:

KRISTA GOMEZ: I've had a number of memorable conversations. For me, one that really made an impact on me was when we were knocking down in Rochester and talking to people about health care because that is an issue that the candidates we were talking about there were really concerned about. And of course in Rochester, we talked to a number of people who work in health care.

And a nurse I talked to said she has seen patients of hers choose which surgeries or procedures to have based on what their health insurance will cover over what the doctor recommends. And it definitely broke her heart to see people have to choose one over the other so they don't go into debt. But they also are caring for their health.

CATHY And Aaron, memorable conversations for you?

WURZER:

AARON FARRIS: I'd say the one that sticks out to me the most is a conversation I had in Winnebago with a veteran from the Korean War. And just talking about the treatment that he gets now-- I mean, in my opinion, our veterans are one of our nation's greatest assets. They've given up so much for our country and put so much on the line. And they deserve everything they've been promised and more. And just talking with him, it really opened my eyes to what our veterans go through, and what they need coming back from serving our country, too. So I'd say that's probably my most memorable conversation.

CATHY So by the way, the election is over. And I'm sure you've gotten some sleep at this point. Do you feel like all of

WURZER: your work was worth it? Aaron?

AARON FARRIS: Yes, I do, yep. I know in my area of the state, down in the 1st Congressional District, we did very well. In some areas, we did much better than we were even expecting to do. So I know for me, it feels like it paid off. Obviously, on the Republican side, we wish statewide, we would have had a different outcome. But it's just going to motivate us to try harder in 2024. We're going to get out there. We're going to do more. And we're going to be unified heading into that election.

CATHY And Krista?

WURZER:

KRISTA GOMEZ: Yes, it was absolutely worth it, worth all of it. A lot of our candidates were elected into office. It's really thrilling to be a part of that. And we had over 20,000 conversations with people. And from our primary data, we've seen that the people that we've made that initial connection with and then followed up with are almost 30% more likely to turn up and vote. So yes, it's worth it to have these conversations.

CATHY It was nice to have this conversation with you both. Thank you for your time. Thanks for the work you've done.

WURZER:

AARON FARRIS: Thank you.

KRISTA GOMEZ: That was Krista Gomes and Aaron Farris. They both spent a fair amount of time this campaign season, door knocking for votes for their political parties.