

Sanders defeats Carroll



ALDEN PELLETT, *Free Press*

LEFT: Unsuccessful Republican candidate John Carroll greets supporters at his election night headquarters.



PETE KENDALL, *Free Press*

RIGHT: Incumbent Rep. Bernard Sanders meets with an outpouring of support from campaign workers after learning he was the winner.

Incumbent barely avoids national Republican wave

By Mark Lewis

Free Press Staff Writer

Fighting a nationwide Republican tide, U.S. Rep. Bernard Sanders appeared early this morning to have defeated GOP challenger John Carroll.

Sanders, the only independent in Congress, took an early narrow lead, lost it, then had forged ahead by 51 percent to 44 percent with 75 percent of the vote counted. The Associated Press had declared Sanders the winner.

"We don't have the GOP pumping money into this campaign," Sanders told his supporters late Tuesday. "We don't have and we don't want the NRA pouring money in."

Carroll said his enthusiastic campaign staff got him within striking distance of the two-term incumbent.

The populist Sanders "wrote the book on grass-roots, energetic campaigning — and you just wrote the sequel," Carroll told supporters at the Sheraton Burlington Hotel and Conference Center.

No Democrat was in the race.

Carroll, the state Senate Republican leader from Norwich, watched the returns with his family at the Sheraton while downstairs hundreds of confident Republicans sang, "Bye Bye Bernie."

Results

With 195 of 261 precincts reporting:

- Bernard Sanders (I): 69,222
- John Carroll (R): 63,041

Even if he loses, Carroll's strong showing has positioned him for another statewide race in 1996. Unlike the U.S. Senate race this year, the House race was fought primarily on the issues.

"By focusing on the differences between us as people and on the issues, it allowed us to stay away from any negative campaigning, because we are so different," Carroll said.

This fall's ballot lineup fell into place last summer when Sanders decided against challenging U.S. Sen. James Jeffords, R-Vt., and Lt. Gov. Barbara Snelling declined to take on Gov. Howard Dean.

Political insiders expected a boring campaign as the four incumbents marched to victory. The best challenge was expected to come from Carroll, but he got off to a slow start.

See SANDERS, 8A

SANDERS: Independent retains House seat

Continued from Page 1A

Carroll was seen as a rising GOP star since he entered the Senate in 1989. He made no secret of his gubernatorial ambitions, but Dean's popularity was daunting, and the governor's centrist politics are not that different from Carroll's. When he made his move, it was against Sanders.

But hampered by the extra-long legislative session and some campaign organizational problems, Carroll stumbled coming out of the gate. One July poll indicated Sanders had a 29-point lead.

Then a longer-than-usual congressional session kept Sanders from hitting the campaign trail full-time in the fall, and Carroll slowly built momentum.

He went on TV early with ads introducing himself to voters and attacking Sanders as an out-of-touch big spender. Carroll also showed his policy-wonk side, unveiling detailed position papers on health care and balancing the federal budget.

Sanders, meanwhile, was holding campaign rallies and emphasizing his legislative accomplishments to counter the idea that as an independent he has little influence in Congress.

Battle over issues

Carroll's ads attacked Sanders' record but avoided the harshly negative tone that characterized the U.S. Senate race. Sanders' TV ads did not even mention Carroll, although the incumbent's flyers and direct-mail pieces did criticize Carroll's legislative record.

Sanders emphasized his campaign against BST, the synthetic bovine growth hormone for cows, and pushed his environmentalist and consumer-advocate credentials.

Carroll attacked Sanders as divisive and anti-business. He portrayed the incumbent, nationally known as the only independent and only self-described socialist in Congress, as pursuing an out-of-state, "liberal fringe" agenda that did not represent most Vermonters.

Ironically, Sanders during the campaign was also attacked by a columnist in the liberal Nation magazine for precisely the opposite reason: that he had abandoned the left and turned into a mainstream "hack Democrat."

Sanders gave high-profile support to Central Vermont Railroad union workers, many of whom could lose their jobs if the railroad was sold to a Texas company. The Interstate Commerce Commission's decision last month to delay the sale may have given his campaign a boost.

This was Sanders' ninth statewide race in 23 years, plus four runs for mayor of Burlington, and some observers detected a certain flagging of energy in the campaign machinery.

Sanders, for example, printed up more lawn signs than Carroll, yet there seemed to be more Carroll signs actually planted in yards, even in Sanders' Chittenden County stronghold.

Meanwhile the National Rifle Association mounted an aggressive anti-Sanders campaign, complete with 10,000 "Bye Bye Bernie" bumper stickers and a controversial radio ad calling him a communist sympathizer.

The NRA and some other sportsmen's groups had vowed to punish Sanders for voting for a ban on certain assault weapons.