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Capitol

Oklahoma Prosperity Project's baby poster campaign goes national



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by: Brian Brus

OKLAHOMA CITY – Several other states will be using Oklahoma City babies to get out the vote in the general election, Prosperity Project organizer Kris Rush confirmed Tuesday.

And RedHouse Studios photographer Paul Wilkes said he's nearly as tickled as the subjects in his photos.

"It's been a blast to work on this. Honestly, it was a really fun campaign," Wilkes said. "Every time we got together on this project, we all ended up laughing and smiling. ... It's an honor to be part of something on a national level, especially when it's involved in the election season."

The Prosperity Project is a nonpartisan, election education program headed locally by The State Chamber that shows voters where candidates stand on issues affecting jobs and the economy.

In the 2006 get-out-the-vote campaign, Oklahoma Prosperity Project posters focused on overtly patriotic elements such as eagles, capitols and flags, Rush said. But the one poster showing a volunteer staffer's baby sitting on the American flag was the clear winner of the election.

"Within 24 hours, moms and grandmoms from all over Oklahoma deluged us with pictures of their kids with flags," she said.

Wilkes said he was given general direction from Prosperity Project organizers and allowed to develop the baby concept into a series of 18 posters this year. Joe Savarise, regional vice president of the nonpartisan political action committee BIPAC, said his national organization quickly recognized the potential impact of the images and asked to buy six for use in 33 other states' Prosperity Project campaigns.

Washington, D.C.-based BIPAC focuses on employers and business organizations. Savarise said the posters appeal to members because "they speak to issues that are really important to them: their children's future and their own prosperity."

Savarise said, "The ideas that have come out of the Oklahoma Prosperity Project really are setting the standard nationally for ways of communicating information about the election process and public policy issues. They really are doing cutting-edge stuff."

Wilkes said RedHouse has handled prestigious jobs internationally, but never before with this much distribution and exposure.

His favorite poster conveys the message that voters can still cast absentee ballots even if they're on vacation. It features children playing with flippers and sitting in an inner tube.

"I don't know if it spoke to me, but it was really, really cute," Wilkes said. "And then there's one coming out in the next week where we got the baby to wear an (Albert) Einstein wig. It's pretty ridiculous, but I love it."

He found most of his subjects in the day-care centers of Sonic and Integris Health, supporters of the Prosperity Project.

"The point of the campaign was to catch the eye and turn heads. ... We all agreed that babies could do that universally," he said.

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