

5 People Donald Trump Should Be Thankful for This Week

The world is still reeling from what *The Economist* called the “biggest political upset in American history.” Many factors came together for Donald Trump’s electoral victory; some point to how Cracker Barrel triumphed over Whole Foods, while others to how 81 percent of white evangelicals backed Trump.

Behind every trend is a key figure who represents why Trump gained traction. As President-elect Donald Trump sits down to Thanksgiving dinner, here are five people he should be thanking God for—including a few surprising choices.

5. Mikey Weinstein and the Freedom From Religion Foundation

With an unexpected sweep of the Rust Belt states, the Trump campaign relied on voters formerly courted by the Democratic Party—but whose fears and values have lately been cast aside. Relentless legal threats over the public expression of faith by Mikey Weinstein (of Military Religious Freedom Foundation), the ACLU and Freedom From Religion Foundation backfired when Americans raised their voices through their vote.

Trump spoke directly to the concerns of blue-collar families who have seen an assault on their Christian faith backed by the force of government in recent years. The hit independent film *God’s Not Dead* reflected this same theme, based in part on true stories rarely reported in mainstream media outlets.

There was Atlanta fire chief Kelvin Cochran, fired for writing a men’s Bible study; Catholic nuns who fought the Obama administration for refusing to cover birth control in health care plans; an Oregon family fined \$135,000 for recommending a same-sex couple use another bakery; and the list goes on. Without the attack on faith, many voters would not have been as motivated.

4. Matt Drudge and the Ultra-Right Media

In 2016, certain media outlets cast off the “restraint” of attempting fairness to both sides. Few took it further than Matt Drudge, whose news aggregation site Drudge Report sets the agenda for talk radio hosts nationwide—a site updated hourly with fresh content, thanks to deep contacts in conservative media. One study revealed Drudge links account for 7 percent of all online news media traffic.

By spring, Drudge began to promote only stories praising the New York businessman while also elevating links critical of Senator Ted Cruz and others in the running. Many followed suit, notably Sean Hannity, Breitbart News and Laura Ingraham. While the strategy was effective in helping Trump, it remains to be seen if certain media voices will lose some of their audience due to the erosion of trust.

3. Hillary Clinton—Her Misdeeds, Agenda and Allies

Anyone who lived through the 1990s hardly needs a refresher on why legions of voters found Hillary Clinton an unacceptable choice for U.S. president: The corruption and criminality associated with the Clinton machine are all too real.

Ongoing scandals involving the former secretary of state’s private email server (thwarting government policy) and the Clinton Foundation (revealed as a pay-to-play scheme), along with her unprecedented embrace of the abortion industry, raised too many questions for too many citizens. Whether slamming the energy industry or Christian beliefs, Clinton focused narrowly on her liberal base.

Yet relying on media that relied on suspect polls (Mitt Romney’s pollster still has clients?), the Clinton campaign and supporting Super PACs blew through over \$1 billion without realizing its fate—double what Trump and allies spent. Maybe pricey concerts with Beyoncé and Katy Perry weren’t the

best call.

2. Franklin Graham and Conservative Evangelical Leaders

On election night, Google Trends tweeted out a chart showing how 180 percent more people were using the phrase “pray for Trump” online versus “pray for Hillary.” It was a telling indicator of how strong Trump’s evangelical support had become—and how prayer had more campaign emphasis than ever.

When Franklin Graham launched a prayer tour through all 50 state capitols in January, it carried no partisan message—only one of standing up for religious liberty, marriage and innocent lives in the womb. By May, it became clear which major candidate carried that message.

Once Rubio and Cruz dropped out, many leading Christian voices ended up backing Trump, including Pastor Jim Garlow, James Robison, Alveda King, Dr. James Dobson and Dutch Sheets, whose Appeal to Heaven events carried a strong pro-life emphasis. Tony Perkins’ daily radio show, heard on 250 outlets nationwide, became one of the best sources for Trump campaign outreach to evangelical voters.

1. Kellyanne Conway and the Campaign Team That Pulled Off a Win

Two events in early July enabled Donald Trump’s campaign to ultimately capture the presidency. One everyone noticed: When Trump named Indiana Gov. Mike Pence as his running mate on July 16, reassuring conservatives with a leader of rock-solid principles and real experience in public policy.

An earlier behind-the-scenes event was even more important. On July 1, messaging expert Kellyanne Conway joined the Trump team. Within six weeks, she would be elevated to campaign manager. Conway immediately steered the Trump campaign to wedge issues on which he could win, showing by example how to voice positions on school choice and health care reform that

Trump soon began to echo.

On top of righting the campaign strategy, Conway had the training and temperament to stay on message during the most hostile interviews—winning over women who watched *The View* and other mainstream shows. When men and women alike were unsure they could get behind Trump, Conway's sincere and measured voice convinced voters someone on his team knew how public policy affects real people.

As Americans sit down to their Thanksgiving meals this week, prayers will surely be offered on behalf of President Barack Obama and President-elect Donald Trump. And, perhaps, a few others too. {eo}

Josh M. Shepherd, contributor to *Christian Headlines*, has served on staff at The Heritage Foundation, Focus on the Family and Bound4LIFE International. He earned a degree in Business Marketing from the University of Colorado. Josh and his wife Terri live in the Washington, D.C., area. Follow Josh on Twitter @joshmshep.