



## Elections: Long hours, hot days, cold nights don't stop these door knockers



*Kerry Doyle of Clean Water Action knocked on 60 doors a night from May until the Midterm Elections getting to know what matters most to constituents.*

*COURTESY SERENA IACOVIELLO*

**By Jaimie Julia Winters**

[winters@montclairlocal.news](mailto:winters@montclairlocal.news)

In a state known for its toxic waste dumps, most homeowners don't slam the door on a Clean Water Action canvasser, especially one that is nine months pregnant, said Montclair resident and Clean Water Action field manager Kerry Doyle.

Since May, the Montclair-based group, which has 15 to 40 canvassers out on weeknight evenings, has knocked on 66,000 doors in New Jersey's 11th Congressional district.

Created in 1972, Clean Water Action is an environmental advocacy group focused on canvassing and gaining support for political issues and candidates.

"Hello, my name is Kerry Doyle with Clean Water Action," she said to a woman answering the door on Valley Road last week.

The conversation then turns to New Jersey's landfill legacy, how the state is now leading the way in clean

energy such as wind turbines, how constituents can get involved by writing letters and volunteering and, finally, who Clean Water is backing in the midterm elections and why.

Doyle, who has been with Clean Water Action since 2006, and her group of canvassers knock on 60 to 80 doors a night. They get to know who is registered to vote, hand out registration forms to those who aren't, and discuss what matters to constituents. The environment is a top issue, contends Doyle.

"We are an issue-based organization," Doyle said. "When we go door-to-door, we build relationships based on issues. People remember growing up with waste sites and don't want that for their children. Some parents talk about the increase in asthma in their children, so want cleaner air. Lead in the water is another issue. They want a healthier and safer community. There is an excitement and energy we have not seen before. People are craving interaction beyond social media."

This year, Doyle said the group handed out fewer voter registrations, as most said they were registered already.

Candidate endorsements are saved for the end of the conversation.

"We back [candidates] who are clean energy champions and want to transition to clean energy and away from fossil fuels," Doyle said. "With President Trump's administration dismantling key environmental protections, we need a Congress that will fight for safe drinking water, clean air and a strong green economy."

In this year's U.S. House elections, CWA backed four Democrats: Mikie Sherrill in the 11th, Tom Malinowski in the 7th, Andy Kim in the 3rd, and, for the second time, Josh Gottheimer in the 5th.

[READ: Montclair's Mikie Sherrill wins U.S. Congressional seat](#)

Clean Water Action political endorsements do carry some weight. In 2016, the group helped unseat Scott Garrett in NJ-5, one of the few red-to-blue flips nationwide that year — and in a district Trump won.

"We talk to tens of thousands of voters per district, and for many voters, we may be the only conversation they have about their candidates all cycle," said Greg Nasif, field manager with Clean Water Action. "The needle can move fast, and here in New Jersey that can have major electoral consequences."

Nasif describes Doyle as "super in-tune" with New Jersey activism, but said "she's no hippie ... she's very mainstream," which is why so many relate to her approach.

Doyle said that during this electoral season, more parents wanted their kids in on the conversations. Doyle has a knack for explaining complex environmental issues to children, and this has resulted in many children writing letters or sending drawings to their legislators, she said.

And parents and women might have better related to Doyle this year, as she and her husband — whom she met on her first canvassing night — are expecting their first child Nov. 29.

“It was really joyful being pregnant during the canvassing this year,” she said. “People offered me their bathrooms, cold drinks in the summer and hot cider on cold nights in the fall.”

In fact, Doyle recently returned to the home where she first met her husband. The woman who greeted Doyle at the door remembered her from that canvassing night in 2006, and offered her congratulations on the baby like they were old friends.

“We are growing a future voter,” said Doyle.

Nasif said Doyle reflects today’s movement of motivated, determined and fired-up college-educated suburban women.

“But she’s the one who’s been here the whole time, waiting for the rest of them,” he said.