

A trip to the polls can make lasting impact for the good

Here's a story about a friend of a friend that underscores the importance of voting.

The story involved a man who at the time was building a reputation as a top trial lawyer and correspondingly soon discovered that the price of success can be high.

He was a graduate of one of the top law schools in the country and after working for a prominent big city firm for nearly 7 years, decided to form a boutique firm with two of his colleagues. It was a risky proposition, but one that he – and they – were willing to take in hopes of enjoying a greater share of the fruits of their labors in the years to come.

Married and the father of two school-age children, he and his wife chose their place of residence principally because of its small-town flavor and the fine reputation of its school system.

That summer, on a Tuesday in June, there was a proposed increase to the school millage that was on the ballot, an issue that sparked several months of spirited pro-and-con debate in the run-up to the election. He and his wife, not surprisingly, were in favor of the increase, viewing it as a long-term investment in their children's education and the overall welfare of the community.

But on election day, the man was swamped at work as he prepared for an upcoming trial. His wife also had her hands full that day, tending to a sick child who was dealing with an unexpected illness. By the time he got home from work and she had finished her at-home nursing responsibilities, the polls had closed.

The next morning, they learned that the proposed millage increase had been

defeated – by one vote.

The outcome, of course, would have been different if their two “votes” to pass the millage increase had been cast.

For them, and for me, it was a reminder that we have a duty to show our passion at the polls. It is our constitutional right, privilege, and responsibility.

The supposed hero of the democratic system is the voter, commonly described as the ultimate source of all authority. The fact that tens of millions of Americans are so unresponsive to the system that they do not vote is the single most remarkable fact about it.

People apparently do not participate because they feel the system holds no benefits for them, or are generally apathetic about politics and political issues. Perhaps even more distressing is the fact that Americans are as a lot poorly informed, and are increasingly gullible to misleading statements and outright deception by those who have a political axe to grind.

Even more alarming is our unwillingness to realize that today's problems have long-term consequences for future generations, perhaps most notably in the area of climate change, where kicking the political can down the road will spell disaster for millions who live in the nation's coastal cities.

Activists who work for a cleaner environment, support gun reform legislation, or oppose efforts to restrict individual rights, make tangible contributions to society, whatever the merits of their cause. When individuals speak out at the polls, whether in support or dissent, they fulfill an obligation of citizenship, one that all too



often is buried in passive indifference.

At its core, voting is all about democracy. The more that people exercise their right to vote, the more important it becomes for politicians to represent voter interests. For a political system to function properly, the number of players in the game cannot be limited except by individual choice.

Which is why everyone needs to view the upcoming mid-term elections in an altogether different light, especially because of ongoing voter suppression efforts that are intensifying in states across the nation and are designed to subvert the will of the people.

Those efforts, if successful, have the potential to lead us down the inevitable road to an autocratic state, where the opportunity to vote is no longer a fundamental right to be freely exercised. It's a fate that we can prevent by consistently showing up at the polls – and by voting intelligently in support of candidates and issues for the greater good.

Best regards,
Jack Buchanan, President