

The Delray Democrat

There Is No Such Thing As “Not Voting” So Don’t Waste Your Vote¹

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Every vote counts, but every vote *not cast* counts as well. That’s because there is no such thing as “not voting,” as David Foster Wallace explained: “you either vote by voting, or you vote by staying home and tacitly doubling the value of some Diehard’s vote.” The same applies if you vote for a third-party candidate who has no chance of winning. Until we have instant-runoff voting, that’s a vote *against* the candidate who would have been your second choice.

I learned that 42 years ago, after dismissing Jimmy Carter as “the lesser of two evils” and voting for Barry Commoner in the general election. I didn’t anticipate the devastation Reagan would unleash, using racist dog whistles to launch a four-decade-long assault on American workers. I watched Carter’s human rights presidency get supplanted by Reagan’s love affair with Central American death squads and terrorists. That’s when I resolved to always and only vote for the Democrat in the general election. In 2020, some clever wordsmith turned that strategy into the meme, “Vote Blue, No Matter Who.”

That’s why I voted for Al Gore in 2000 even though Ralph Nader was clearly the best candidate. The gap between Gore and Nader was nothing like the chasm between George W. Bush and Gore, and the danger of putting Bush in the White House was simply too great, as we subsequently learned.

If only 540 of Nader’s 97,488 voters in Florida had done the same, Al Gore would have appointed the replacements for William Rehnquist and Sandra Day O’Connor, *changing the composition of the Court from 5-4 conservative to 6-3 liberal*. Instead, the three justices appointed by Reagan joined Rehnquist and Clarence Thomas to end the Florida recount and award the presidency to Bush in one of the most nakedly political and reviled decisions in Supreme Court history. *You can draw a straight line from Reagan’s election to Bush’s selection.*

Bush was given the opportunity not only to double the deficit and launch multi-trillion-dollar wars and violate international humanitarian laws but to appoint John Roberts (author of *Shelby County v. Holder*, the decision that gutted the Civil Rights Act) and the odious Samuel Alito (future author of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, the opinion that will overrule *Roe v. Wade*). Neither decision nor *Citizens United v. FEC* (which affirmed Bob Dylan’s complaint that “money doesn’t talk, it swears”) would have been written had Gore been president.

Yet even after all that, even after Mitch McConnell outrageously blocked consideration of Merrick Garland to replace Scalia for the last ten months of Obama’s presidency (an appointment that

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, May 2022, page 1.

would have *flipped the Court from 5-4 conservative to 5-4 liberal*), many Democrats still missed the memo.

Instead, Donald Trump was able to pack the lower courts with swarms of Federalist Society sharks and appoint another three Torquemadas to the Supreme Court. Now the end of June will spell the end of a constitutional right granted a half-century ago in a decision that was affirmed a quarter century ago (“precedent on precedent,” as Brett Kavanaugh claimed during his confirmation hearings, gulling credulous fools like Susan Collins).

If what I’ve seen on social media is any indication, we are on our way to making the same mistake in November: a Florida committeemen boasted that if Charlie Crist is the nominee, he’ll stay home and tell everyone he knows to stay home because Charlie was once a Republican. Actually, Crist was a RINO who restored voting rights to more Floridians than any other governor, including Bob Graham and Lawton Childs, and a refusal to vote for him if he is nominee is tantamount to a vote for Ron DeRacist.

Unfortunately he is surely not alone in failing to recognize that this is yet another in a long line of world-changing (and winnable) elections that we continue to lose. The “fool me once” aphorism that Bush so memorably bungled stops at “twice,” but many Democrats have been fooled three times already and are working on a fourth.

Is there anyone who seriously believes that DeRacist is preferable to whoever is the Democrat? After Trump was elected, Noam Chomsky suggested that the Republican Party had become “the most dangerous organization in human history.” It is hard to argue with that. No other organization, however savage and malignant – neither the Nazis under Hitler nor the Communists under Stalin or Mao – had the capacity to make vast stretches of the earth virtually uninhabitable. Donald Trump’s Republican Party is well on its way to achieving that goal.

In many ways, DeSantis would be even worse than Trump. He is smarter (not hard) and more vindictive (not easy) than Trump and motivated by an overweening ambition to be president.

Unless we send him packing in November, we will be seeing him at either the top or the bottom of the Republican ticket in 2024. The obvious corollary to “When We Vote, We Win” is “When We Don’t Vote, We Lose.” And it will not be only “we” that lose, it will be our democracy and our planet.