



## Endorse liberty: Cast your vote

By Jim Waters

My libertarian buddy surprised me by blurting out that the whole “you-need-to-vote” mantra reminds him of sociology class in college in which “the Marxist professor” bragged about how everybody turned out to vote in countries that ordered it while complaining about how few go to the polls in America.

“I think it’s great that we have a choice to decide to vote or not to vote,” my friend extolled. “That’s what freedom allows us to do.”

He’s right. But that’s exactly what this week’s missive is all about. Whether you read this column before or after Tuesday’s primary, the point here applies to all elections in our great nation.

You can choose not to vote. And you can even do so without one of Kentucky’s perennially losing Democrats – Otis “Bullman” Hensley – coming to your house and trampling his bull around in your front yard.

In fact, if you opt out of voting, you join a large majority. Only 17 percent of registered voters cast ballots in Kentucky’s 2003 gubernatorial primary. Yes, it’s the right of 83 percent of registered voters to choose not to show up at the polls on Election Day.

But it’s the *wrong* choice.

That’s the distinction my friend’s confused professor likely failed to make. Turnout for Iraq’s final election in which Saddam Hussein reelected himself was 100 percent. There’s a reason why.

Failing to show up had dire consequences. To paraphrase comedian Tina Fey: Nobody overslept. Nobody forgot. Nobody had to work a double shift the night before. Nobody ate some bad lamb, picked up a bad bellyache and couldn’t get up all day.

Saddam Hussein won in a landslide – 11 million to zip.

The difference is, not voting remains a choice in the United States. No death threats or terrible punishments come with failing to perform this most basic of civic duties.

Mind you, I am not naive enough to think that anyone can get 100 percent of Kentuckians to do *anything*. In fact, I’m probably living in Oz to think that even a majority of voters may someday turn out for a primary election, uninspiring or otherwise.

But 10 percent – which some estimated could be the predicted turnout for this year’s primary?

During the first post-Saddam election, 58 percent of Iraqis voted, absent threats of dire consequences for not voting and facing death threats for going to the polls. Even 44 reported deaths during several attacks on Election Day did not keep 8.4 million people from voting.

Again, do not confuse citing voter turnout in Iraq as approval for everything the United States does – or Iraqis do – in

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that country. Nor should anyone mistake my call for voting in the primary as a stamp of approval on ideas floated during the campaign.

Don't interpret my vote as endorsing government-run health care, protecting teacher unions at the expense of quality education or building economic development on the quicksand of gambling. I understand the lack of enthusiasm that comes with candidates who repeat – as if by rote – these and other lame ideas.

And I do not support the theory that one individual's vote can tip an election, which involves the kind of math used by the governor to come up with the state's revenue surplus. My single vote – or yours – cannot swing an election.

Rather, I view my call to vote not as a statement of support for failed, tired ideas but as an endorsement of individual liberty.

This may be the only time I ever publicly agree with President Lyndon Johnson, the patron saint of big government whose presidency largely devolved into a political quagmire. But Johnson said voting was “the first duty of democracy.”

To that I say: “LBJ all the way!”

You might debate his definition of “democracy” but not the importance he placed on voting.

Since I work for a nonprofit, I cannot endorse candidates without jeopardizing the organization's tax-free status. But nothing in the law prohibits me from wholeheartedly endorsing our precious right to vote.

So, hold your nose if necessary and complain if you must.

Then get to the polls and vote.

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