

Old Country Lawyer, November 4, 2009
Essential But Not Sufficient

Having survived another November election, thoughtful folks may reflect on a citizen's participation in a Democracy, or a planetary resident's participation in an ecosystem.

While working at the polling place in the precinct where I live, during a busy period when several voters arrived at the same time and some had to wait in line until voting equipment became available, one of the voters in line said, "Well, it could be worse." I said, "Yup, we could have Taliban trying to blow us up." Another of the folks in line said, "Don't joke about that, we're retired military." I replied, "Ma'am, I wasn't joking. These three ladies and I are willing to risk possible infection from any of four hundred or so voters with whom we will trade pens and cards today, and we are really and truly glad that nobody is trying to blow us up." We were also really and truly glad that over fifty folks in our precinct voted early, so we did not have to risk trading infections with them.

Casting a ballot is an essential function of a citizen in a Democracy, but it is not of itself sufficient. Participation in the electoral process is a job we all need to do. In Kent, the office of mayor is going to be decided by the count of the provisional ballots, and that count will have been affected by what voters remembered to bring identification to the polling place, how many of those previously-forgetful voters remember to show up at the Board of Elections after election day to confirm their identity so their provisional ballots will be accepted, and how meticulously the workers at the polling place enforced the detailed rules governing provisional ballots over the course of a fifteen-hour work day. Of course, the fact that the result of the regular balloting in the election for mayor of Kent is so close that the count of the two or three or four provisional ballots in each of Kent's thirty-one precincts will decide the election, is a demonstration of the effectiveness of the efforts of the candidates and their respective supporters to communicate with the voters, and the level of interest the voters devoted to communications from the candidates. Most likely everybody who was involved in the campaigns for that position is thinking about what they could have done more, and anybody who cared about the election for mayor but declined to get involved is considering what they might have done.

Thus also with participation in the ecosystem. Many responsible citizens minimize their personal gasoline usage, recycle materials after they have used those materials, and consider environmental positions when they vote. All of these are essential, even admirable, but not sufficient. In Ohio, our retiring senior Senator, who has served Ohio honorably for a long time and served my old neighborhood in Cuyahoga County honorably for even longer, has joined with other members of the Republican Party in boycotting attendance to delay action on the climate change bill pending in the Environment and Public Works Committee. This is once again not a proposal for an alternative approach, but purely a delay of ANY action to limit carbon emissions.

This is not acceptable conduct for a member of the United States Senate. If you oppose the bill as it stands, participate in the discussion and propose an alternative. Picking up one's toys and going home is not an option. I propose that an obligation of a resident of

this ecosystem is to contact Senator Voinovich and let him know that the year before one retires is not the time to sully a reputation that has been so honorably built for so long.

- Christopher J. Mallin, Old Country Lawyer