

Christian educator considers informed voting a privilege and a responsibility

Life
lessons

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calling
faith.....
conviction

My earliest political memory happened when I was 7 years old. I was spending the afternoon with my friend "Aunt Gladys," a valued member of my pastor father's congregation. She told me to put on my coat and we walked a couple of blocks. When I asked where we were going, she said she was going to vote in the presidential election. I tagged along as she went into the mysterious booth with a curtain. On the way back, I pestered her about who she had voted for until she reluctantly told me. Later I heard that her candidate had not won, and I was sad.

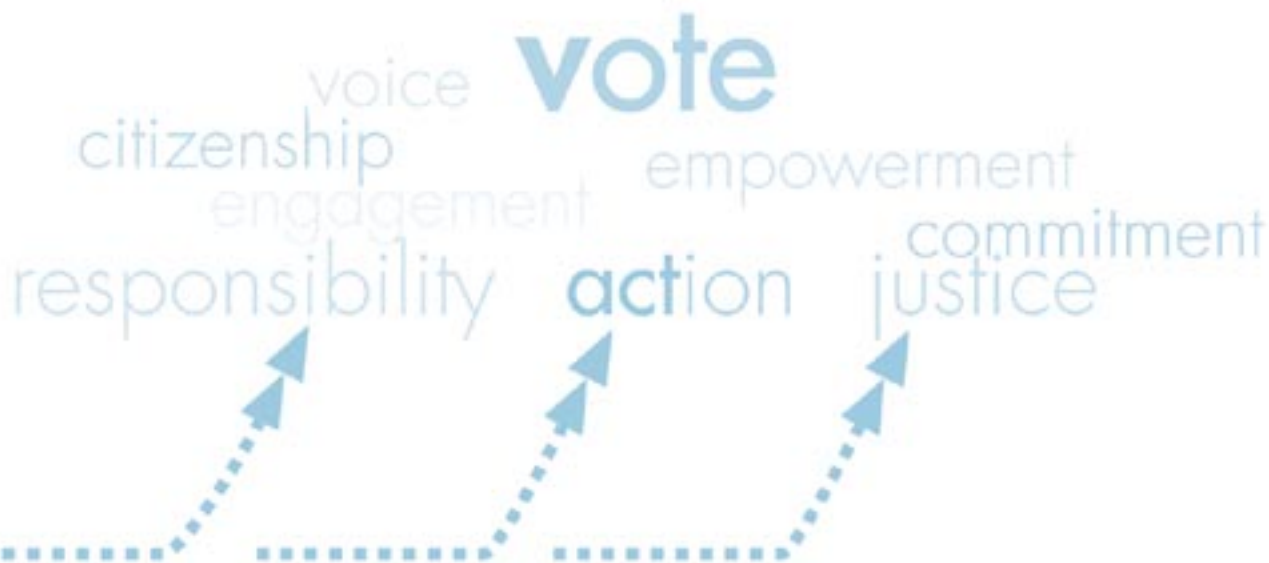


In fifth grade, we held a mock presidential election. I convinced lots of my classmates to vote for a minor candidate who had no chance in the real election, but he certainly swept Room 14! The teacher was surprised, and I was beginning to discover the power of campaigning for something in which I believed.

In my family of origin, an evangelical pastor's home, politics was not a big topic of conversation around the dinner table, although my parents read the paper and listened to Lowell Thomas and the news. We were comfortably conservative, which was expected of a clergy family. Table conversations were more likely to center around theological issues, like pre-millennialism or post-millennialism, or around political topics in our corner of the Kingdom.

One summer, when I was a teen, I provided childcare for a small boy who played quietly or napped much of the day. The political conventions were on television that summer, and in those days the networks provided gavel-to-gavel coverage – not the managed soundbytes that are typical today. I was fascinated, and I watched the whole Democratic convention, right up through the nail-biting nomination process. When the Republican convention came later in the summer, I watched that whole event as well. I was hooked, and have been actively interested in political processes since then – not always as an activist, but as an informed voter.

When I became an educator, I also became somewhat conflicted about my conservative political leanings. Politicians who



reflected most of my personal views were often quite negative or even punitive toward the needs of public schools. I participated in visits with legislators and tried to give them a more realistic view of schools, of children, and of the need for support for essential programs. Sometimes I could change their minds, often not. One extremely conservative state representative had a daughter who benefited greatly from an alternative high school in our area. This legislator became a real champion of our educational programs. On the other hand, politicians who were supportive of issues for public education often held other views that were repugnant to me as a Christian. It has been, and is, a real dilemma for me as I reach for my ballot. Advocacy for populations that are unable to advocate for themselves is part of my responsibility as a Christian educator. If that advocacy could be combined with other, more conservative positions, that would be my ideal political climate.

As a school administrator, I became aware of the difficulties of “selling” a certain point of view to voters when I was part of the district team trying to pass school levies and bonds. I tried for integrity in sending the message, encouraging satisfied families to spread the word about the need for ongoing tax support. Working the phones and talking with people at community events helped me understand their realities and their concerns about schools.

I have tried to describe some of my political “roots” in order to identify the basis upon which I make political decisions. So, what are the factors that cause me to vote for a particular candidate? These are some of my considerations:

1) When there is a clear biblical mandate on an issue, there is no question that I will vote the scriptural direction. However, there are few issues in which this mandate is clear cut, and sincere Christians may with all integrity disagree on how certain issues should be decided. For that reason, I believe that churches

should for the most part avoid taking political stands; when they do, they should take positions only on issues that have clear moral implications.

2) When candidates are equally qualified and reflect my positions on issues, I vote for the woman, believing that women are underrepresented in positions of influence in our democracy.

3) In order to vote my convictions and priorities, I sometimes have to vote for a candidate, not a straight party line. I read

voters’ pamphlets and editorial endorsement statements, and I listen to debates, when possible, in order to be an educated voter. I vote absentee so I can take time to be thoughtful.

4) I’m afraid I don’t fit neatly into a political box. I oppose abortion, but I also oppose the death penalty. For me, the sanctity of life

is the issue in both cases, but this is not the normal combination of positions on these matters. It’s sometimes difficult to find a candidate who shares both of these views, so I have to prioritize my beliefs in order to vote at all.

5) When in doubt, or when I don’t have a strong opinion on a race one way or the other, I tend to vote with the more conservative candidate, believing that our culture is deteriorating in many ways, and that conservative candidates tend to hold on to more traditional values. I’m sure this tendency comes from my family of origin and from the ongoing influence of my evangelical Christian community.

I strongly believe that Christians must be involved in the political decisions that are made in our democracy. Voting for me is a spiritual act – my duty as a Christian and as a citizen. It is also my duty to support those who are elected. As Paul says in Romans 13, we are to be subject to those in authority. I should pray for those who win elections, even those with whom I don’t agree. But that doesn’t mean I won’t also be working hard to have them replaced.

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