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Dear John, Please Vote

by Mark Binder

“How’s your campaign going?” John’s a friend I only see at the gym.

“Fine,” I said, puffing away.

“When’s the Primary? Tuesday the 14th?”

I nodded.

“I’m an Independent,” he said.

“Oh? Well, you can register as a Democrat, vote for me, and then disaffiliate. It doesn’t hurt.”

“No.” He shook his head. “I don’t have the time.”

I was floored. The cross-trainer peddled for a while without me.

I wanted to yell, “You don’t have time to vote? It takes maybe five minutes....”

While I silently fumed, he went on to tell me how busy he was, how long his days were, and how his son was asking when could they play baseball. Kids don’t get enough exercise in school, John said.

“Sure,” I agreed. “Why don’t you bring your children to the polls? They can see Democracy in action.”

“No.” He shook his head. “Maybe I’ll play baseball.”

I bit my tongue. Experience has shown me that when I’m angry, it’s impossible to change somebody’s mind – even if I’m right.

On my way home, I started to make a list:

- If you vote, you can change the course of history. A few hundred voters did just that in 2000. That election proved that your vote matters.

- If you don’t vote, you don’t get to complain about the government

- This country is at war for Democracy. I don’t agree with the war, but I think the right to vote is worth fighting for.

- If you aren’t going to vote, who is?

Primaries aren’t very sexy. Only 22.5% of eligible Rhode Islanders voted in the 2002 primary. Big issues don’t seem to be at stake, and candidates are largely unopposed or unknown.

However, in 2002, Donald Carcieri won his primary with 17,227 votes – just 4 percent of the eligible Republican vote. He’s Governor now. Four percent.

If you want to have an impact, even a tiny one, vote. Vote in the primaries, vote in the elections. It’s not too late to register for the November election. Tell your friends.

Vote early and vote often – but just once per election.

BIO: Mark Binder is a Democratic candidate for the US House of Representatives in Rhode Island’s first Congressional district.

NOTE: Please use this on the OP Ed Page. Text is 357 words. 2 pages.

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