

Pennsylvania

Commentary

Younger voters need to start paying attention — and soon

Most think the issues do not affect them. They could not be more wrong.

By Debra Bell

In the 2000 presidential election, about 40 million 18- to 30-year-olds were eligible to vote. Only 18 million did.

There are many reasons why members of my generation do not vote. Most of us find politics to be rather dull. We don't think matters in Washington affect our lives. We aren't old enough to run for major positions in public office. Politicians don't pay attention to us, and they're all corrupt anyway.

MTV has tried to rock the vote. But MTV can't even get us to pay for music, so how do they expect to get us out there voting? The only way to get youth to vote is to combat these cynical attitudes we have concerning politics. We need to realize that our votes do count, these matters do affect our lives, politicians are not all corrupt, and our votes can make a difference.

Politics may seem dull, but political issues do affect our daily lives. Are you going to be in debt after graduating college? Do you want to find a job when you graduate? Do you want the war in Iraq to continue? Do you want to choose what's best for you or do you want your parents to decide? If you want your parents to make these tough choices for you, then let them vote and sit out this election. If you want to have a say, then the best way to let your voice be heard is to register and

vote in November.

I know some people think that by not voting, their voice will be heard, as not voting is a form of protest. But how can anyone hear you if your mouth is taped shut? Politicians ignore our concerns simply because we don't voice them. By not voting, you are choosing to be ignored.

If the 20 million young men and women who did not vote in 2000 had cast ballots, then this year politicians would be giving us more notice because they would realize that our votes can make a major difference. The only way for 20 million people to be ignored is to not speak. Until we show candidates that we care, no candidates we care about will have a chance to win.

I don't need to remind you how close the 2000 election was. We all know that several states had the election called by the smallest of percentages. Every time you say, "my one vote does not count," you are among millions of others in the same frame of mind. In Florida, nearly 12 million people were eligible to vote in 2000. Nearly nine million were registered, and only about six million turned out. Six million people decided that their votes wouldn't matter.

Pennsylvania is a swing state, meaning its 21 electoral votes could go to either candidate in November. President Bush has campaigned in Pennsylvania during nearly every free moment he has had. The candidates know how impor-



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tant our state is, but what they don't realize is how we, the young voters, can affect the final outcome.

Don't accept the media's portrayal that all politicians are corrupt and the only way to make a difference is to go outside the system. Reflect on the issues yourself. Consider what each politician could do for you over the next four years. Seek out the differences between the candidates, as there are major differences if you choose to educate yourself. And take the 10 minutes

to register and vote. The few minutes you take out of your schedule could affect your life for years to come. Even if your candidate doesn't win, you won't have to suffer with the regret of what could have been for four years.

To register to vote, go to <http://www.youthvote.org/> or <http://www.rockthevote.org/>. The deadline for registration is Oct. 4.

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