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Guest editorial: Informed voters an antidote to cynicism

BY AMY FLEMING • SEPTEMBER 26, 2008

Why should we be political people? The comedian Jon Stewart puts it this way, "I know we were supposed to bequeath to the next generation a world better than the one we were handed ... so sorry."

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A national election brings a sense of urgency. No other time is it more important to be truth seekers than during this time. Leaders in a democracy are a reflection of what we as individuals have chosen and are willing to tolerate.

When it comes to politics, there are two important questions we have to ask ourselves "Are we willing to learn and are we willing to change?" Information is power. One of my social justice lessons learned is that sometimes it is more important to know the questions than the answers.

I see in this race the media not focusing on the important questions. Who needs to know about lipstick on pigs when our economy is failing, we are in two wars, our education system is a disgrace, and poverty is rampant?

Power is the ability to achieve purpose. The power of truth is the power to liberate people. However, when learning about issues, another lesson learned is in knowing who is giving you the information. What is their bottom line? Where do their interests lie? When you know that, you can better understand their position and their opinion.

Elections should not be won by raising shadow issues based on fear, rejection, hostility to change, and narrow-mindedness. We deserve to see what we are getting, without disguise. I once heard that it is not love that makes the world go round; it is fear. Never is that more prevalent than during election season.

For those with Internet access, there are innumerable sites to find information. But intelligent people realize it is also the Internet where misinformation and disinformation can be spread faster than a spam second. Just as important is the fact that we cannot and must not be one-issue people.

No one candidate will fill all our needs and profess all our issues to our satisfaction. We have to go with the one who may be closest and then educate and agitate them.

Many have become cynical in the face of what we see, read and hear today. Cynicism comes from despair. The antidote is not optimism but action, and from action hope is born.

Here are suggestions on where to get information you need:

*www.factcheck.org -- Sponsored by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, it was developed to hold politicians accountable.

*www.commoncause.com -- Sponsored by Common Cause, it will lead you to watchdog groups in your area.

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www.NAALife.com

*www.publicintegrity.org/oi -- The Center for Public Integrity ranks politicians.

*www.procon.org -- Promoting education, critical thinking, and informed citizenship by presenting controversial issues in a simple, nonpartisan primarily pro-con format.

*www.smartvoter.org/ny/state -- This League of Women Voters web site provides Campaign Information and online Voter Information Services.

Most important, get out and vote. Oct. 10 is the last day to postmark your voter registration form. For more information about registering, call the Broome County Board of Elections at 778-2172 or visit them at 44 Hawley St., Binghamton -- 2nd floor. They can also tell you where your voting place is located.

Do not allow anyone to tell you your vote does not make a difference. In Broome County we have had one election end in a tie and many elections decided by absentee ballots.

I close with a quote from Kenneth Himes: "A democracy can accommodate many things in people--passion, ambition, selfishness and even corruption. But cynicism, especially when it is widespread, eats away at democracy's fundamental assumption--namely that what the people want shapes what the government does."

Amy Fleming works at the Justice & Peace Resource Center in Binghamton.

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Irishatheart wrote:

"Elections should not be won by raising shadow issues based on fear, rejection, hostility to change, and narrow-mindedness. We deserve to see what we are getting, without disguise. I once heard that it is not love that makes the world go round; it is fear. Never is that more prevalent than during election season."

Hostility to change eh? Why is hostility to change a bad thing? Maybe the changes being proposed will cause a far worse situation than already exists. Perhaps the political leanings of this writer are the ones that are narrow minded? But then again she obviously does not think so, otherwise she'd never be able to so self assuredly lecture the rest of us, would she?

9/26/2008 4:33:07 PM

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sidtierney wrote:

This was very well written, regardless of what the Limbaugh types might say.

9/26/2008 12:16:31 PM

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KarlMarx2 wrote:

Oh yes.... and for those who've been itching for an impeachment of politicians for crimes, let's start with Barney Frank, Chris Dodd and Chuck Schumer for high crimes and misdemeanors and financial malfeasance.

We need to get those jokers out of pin stripes and into jail stripes....

9/26/2008 11:28:53 AM

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KarlMarx2 wrote:

To paraphrase an old saying, "to err is human, but to really screw things up requires the government"

and another old saying "the definition of insanity is to repeat the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result"

Government is not the solution, it is the problem. Government is what got us into the financial crisis to begin with.

This proposed government bailout will not only negatively affect us as taxpayers, but the regulations that they are proposing to go along with it all will have negative consequences to us as investors (which is anyone who has a 401(k), a pension, an IRA, in short just about all of us!)

For socialists, the past several weeks are about the best thing they could hope for. A government take over of a large segment of the economy.

The way out of this mess is with People power (i.e. the free market), not by turning over more power to the same group of idiots that got us into this mess to begin with (as in "Washington DC")

9/26/2008 11:25:39 AM

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EdArzouian wrote:

Ms. Fleming seems to have forgotten the words of Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, Speaker of the House, declared, "All politics is local."

When she write, "in this race the media not focusing on the important questions. Who needs to know about lipstick on pigs when our economy is failing," we learn two things.

First, she supports Barack Obama. Secondly, only national issues & national media concern her.

How about things at a local level? How about issues & candidates here at home where people can really make a difference?

This newspaper has all but ignored the impressive grassroot efforts of a local young man, a teacher with with extensive poiitcal & policy experince in Washington.

George Phillips was born in Johnson City & grew up in nearby Endwell. He is mounting a real challenge to the seemingly permanently incumbent Maurice Hinchey but this newspaper and, by default, the rest of the local media ignore Mr. Phillips.

You want change? Take a look at George Phillips.

9/26/2008 9:21:36 AM

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