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the youth vote matters

Written by Nate Doyle
 Thursday, 02 October 2008

My name is Nate Doyle. I am 27 years old and live in Portsmouth. I work as a waiter at The Friendly Toast and play in a punk rock band called The Guts. I have hopes and dreams, fears and insecurities. I have a toothache but can't afford to go to the dentist and get it checked out. I live paycheck to paycheck, month to month.

In other words, I am basically an average young adult. When I turned 18 and became old enough to vote, I was not much into politics and had a complacent attitude toward voting. I didn't really give it much thought, as the things candidates were talking about didn't really affect me at the time—or so I thought.

That all changed, though, when I got a chance to go to the Democratic National Convention in Boston in 2004. I went with an open mind, not knowing what to expect. As I entered the Fleet Center, the atmosphere was like a rock concert, only instead of young people dancing around to their favorite band, the stadium was filled with people of all ages talking about politics with that same type of excitement.

After hearing politicians from all over the country speak, including Sen. Barack Obama and former President Bill Clinton, I left the convention with a seed planted. That seed would grow into the understanding that whether you are a Republican, a Democratic or an independent, you have a voice, and that voice is important.

Now, four years later, the political waters are deeper than ever, with an endless stream of information coming at you from the Internet, 24-hour news channels and your local newspaper. Republicans and Democrats debate their stances on issues like abortion, gay marriage, taxes, the Patriot Act and No Child Left Behind legislation.

This sea of information can have you lost and frustrated in an instant. As I waded through these waters, though, I realized something: knowledge is power. The choice of who to vote for is there for you to make, and it is a privilege. But that privilege comes with the responsibility to make an informed decision.

It's not so much about which party you choose, but about knowing which candidate you support and why. See, you owe that to yourself and to the person standing next to you. We young people have given the country away through years of thinking, "My one vote doesn't matter," or, "There isn't a candidate that I fully agree with." Sorry, but I don't think we will ever find a candidate who we all fully agree with. There are just too many people and opinions for that to happen.

Through our general complacency, we have let older generations dictate our future. Your one vote might not alter the election, but your vote plus that of all your friends and all their friends could make a big difference. And although there might not be a candidate who perfectly matches your views, there may be one who comes close enough to earn your support.

In 2004, 18- to 29-year-olds made up 21.8 percent of the population, while people ages 58 and older made up 24.7 percent. Now let's look at voter turnout. People 58 and older made up 29.3 percent of voters in the 2004 election, while 18- to 29-year-olds made up just 16 percent. In population, there was just a 2.9 percent difference. In voter turnout, however, there was a 13.3 percent difference. It's right there in the numbers.

This choice that we face is just too important to squander. People who work in big corporate offices, drive BMWs and make more money in a week than I do in a year are making their voices heard. So why aren't people like me, who don't have any savings, wait tables for a living and have no health insurance, doing the same?

The current administration seems to care more about the wealthy than the poor. All the more reason to stand up and say, "Enough is enough." We will never do that, though, if we are too concerned about what's on TV or what's happening at the local bar.

I'm not saying you must devote your entire life to politics. I understand that there are other things going on in people's lives, and sometimes there is just not enough time. You're too worried about that doctor's appointment and how you are going to pay for it. You can't stand your job and you just feel stuck. Let's face it, politics aren't that fun. It's much easier to escape your problems by going out or watching TV. But politics offer ways to try and ease some of those problems. So instead of

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ignoring your problems or hoping they will solve themselves, maybe you should take a little time to get informed and determine who is best fit to guide this country into the future.

The presidential election only happens every four years, and the 2008 polls are just a month away. My challenge to you is to set aside some time this month and get informed about the candidates. Do some research and find out where they stand and where you stand. Then, on Tuesday, Nov. 4, find out where your polling center is, make a choice and cast a ballot.

If not for yourself, do it for the person standing next to you.

For information on how to register to vote, visit www.presidentialelection.com. For a guide to local races, visit www.ontheissues.org. For a guide to the federal issues, visit www.procon.org.

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