

Public Domain

by Steve Krulick, Senior Civics Columnist

Vote... If You Feel Like It

(Putting on my best Andy Rooney whine:) Have you ever noticed... that whenever you get a stuffed nose, every other TV commercial suddenly seems to be an ad for cold remedies? Have you ever noticed... that whenever an ad comes on for something you have no interest in (restless leg syndrome, a new car), or is for something you will never buy (diapers, lottery tickets), you tend to zone out? (Sometimes, however, I like to talk back to the TV with something like “Boy, are you wasting your ad dollars putting *that* in front of *me!*”)

Have you ever noticed... that whenever a political ad comes on that insults your intelligence, or incites fear and hate, or lies to you with no sense of shame, you want to throw a brick at the screen – while secretly hoping the candidate gets caught in a compromising position in an airport restroom?

Normally, around election time, we get bombarded with ads for candidates... on TV, radio, newspapers, mailings, road signs, phone calls... ARGGGHH!!! Of course, with a presidential (s)election that has gone on since, it seems, the last Ice Age, it sure has felt like all-campaigning-all-the-time. (Which makes you wonder what those “undecided” voters are waiting for! It’s not like they’re gonna hear anything new and game-breaking after two years of the stuff being out there!)

Ironically, because New York is considered a safe state for Obama, neither he nor McCain have done much stumping or advertising here (one of the reasons the Electoral College is a bad – or good – thing, depending on how you choose to look at it); Ralph Nader has done more campaigning in this state than either Republican!

But, alas, we have not been spared from this year’s hard sell, particularly with two new county positions, and, in Ellenville and Wawarsing, at least, some competitive judge races, for a change. (Most of the other local races are either uncontested, Soviet-style – Ellenville Board, State Senate – or no *real* contest – Congress, Assembly – or baffling – various unknown non-local mystery judges.)

The nastiness down at our local level has only missed reaching the national level of venom because, I’ll guess, the stakes aren’t as high. Much of the bile has been spilled behind the scenes, in blogs, forums, letters to the editor, columns, often by anonymous partisans who may, I believe, even be the candidates themselves, unable to get others to do their praising or hatchet work for them. (By the way, is it just me, or does the “Little Bit o’ Luck” NYS Lottery Guy look, dress, and sound bizarrely like Comptroller candidate Auerbach?)

Fortunately, I have found a personal solution, as per my Rooneyesque observation: I already voted by absentee ballot in mid-October. Hence, *nothing* any of the candidates can now say to me will make *any* difference in my decision! So, like the ads for pimple cream and vinyl siding, I find that the political ads – 30-second spots, post cards, billboards, robocalls – simply roll off my consciousness as being irrelevant and impotent; indeed, it’s as if the election were already OVER, which, except for the results, it already *is*, for me. (But, as 2000 taught us, we can learn to live without those results for *weeks!*)

Which is a strange sensation, even though, for a variety of reasons over the years, many of my votes have been absentee. For example, in 1996 and 1998 I was in Florida helping my brother with his Congressional runs in Orlando. In 2004, I was in Warsaw, Poland, apologizing to Poles,

who took democracy seriously, for the stupidity of my fellow citizens in not giving Bush the boot. (Not until I returned home did I discover that Bush stole that election, as he had the 2000 race; hence the *real* stupidity was not in electing him, which they didn’t actually do, but in not catching on to the pattern of the thefts, or in rising up and bringing the thieves to justice.)

In any event, I voted for Nader for the fourth time since 1996. My vote for Nader in New York will be no more responsible for the results of who winds up in the White House than it did in 2000 or 2004 (which elections were stolen outright anyway). As I had NO intention of voting for any major party candidate in those years or now, my vote for Nader took NO votes away from any other candidate, and added NO votes to any other candidate. The mathematical results, in the end, were identical to not voting at all; one does not “siphon” votes from another candidate and “hand the election” to an opponent, as no candidate OWNS your vote... only YOU own it!

As Eugene V. Debs said, “I’d rather vote for something I want and not get it than vote for something I don’t want, and get it.”

Or as 2nd President John Adams said: “Always vote for principle, though you may vote alone, and you may cherish the sweetest reflection that your vote is never lost.”

I mentioned earlier this year that I was seriously considering not voting at all for president. First, the winner was guaranteed to be a corporatist centrist who favored the death penalty, would increase the military budget, was not going to promote universal single-payer health care, would promote nuclear energy and offshore drilling, would keep military bases in Iraq and troops in Afghanistan, would keep spying on Americans in violation of the Fourth Amendment, would keep the Patriot Act and Homeland Insecurity, would increase our debt and deficit, and would take no serious action to deal with global climate chaos or peak oil before it’s too late (which it already may be). Now, with the nation and world facing a financial and credit meltdown, the next president will be stuck in a quagmire that will make FDR’s inheritance of Hoover’s market crash look like a stroll in the park.

I decided to vote against the status quo by supporting the one candidate who actually stands on a platform I can get on board with, and, if Nader gets enough votes, by sending a message that not everyone is merely settling for the lesser of two evils. It may help, but I’m not optimistic, either for the nation, which has taken a very wrong turn, or our democratic experiment, which has clearly failed, and has become a national socialist fascist kleptocratic oligarchic plutocracy.

So if you decide not to vote because you have determined that elections are a rigged farce, where you are given no choice, or a choice that might as well be no choice, I’ll understand, and won’t get on your case with an “It’s your duty to vote” guilt trip. I leave you with some comments by the late, great George Carlin, who, as usual, punctures the hypocrisy and knee-jerk conventionalism:

“...I have solved this political dilemma in a very direct way: I don’t vote. On Election Day, I stay home. I firmly believe that if you vote, you have no right to complain. Now, some people like to twist that around. They say, “If you don’t vote, you have no right to complain”, but where’s the logic in that? If you vote, and you elect dishonest, incompetent politicians, and they get into office and screw everything up, you are responsible for what they have done. You voted them in. You caused the problem. You have no right to complain. I, on the other hand, who did not vote – who did not even leave the house on Election Day – am in no way responsible for what these politicians have done and have every right to complain about the mess that you created.”