



What is My Role as a Citizen?

by Jennifer L. Crull

What does it mean to be an American? This is a question that everyone believes they know the answer to when they are celebrating the 4th of July, but do we really know and understand what the expectations of our Founding Fathers were? The Founding Fathers made it clear the role government is supposed to play in our Constitution. The Constitution lays out the powers of all branches of government as well as the individual states, which most people would not argue with. Yet there is another role that is laid out by our Constitution and the Bill of Rights. This role falls to every citizen in our great nation. No other country has our amazing form of government even with our problems. But at least with our problems, we have the ability to have a say.

When we, the citizens of this great nation, look back upon our history and remind ourselves as to the one most important inalienable right that we, as Americans, possess, but few exercise, this one right that sums up our very existence as a nation is our individual right to VOTE. By exercising this right, we, as Americans, stand above all other nations because we have the choice to select the leaders of this nation. Unlike many other nations we are not told who we have to vote for. The candidates are not limited to the one and only name of the individual that the rest of the government chooses. I find it sad that many American citizens choose not to exercise this right. It is appalling to think of the thousands of Americans before us who have fought and died to protect this right. Those individuals, who fail to exercise this right to VOTE, are in essence refusing to honor their sacrifices.

The voter turnout for the 2008 elections was 61.7 percent for the United States and 70.0 percent for Iowa.¹ These results were for a presidential election and were slightly higher than for the election in 2004, in which the turnout was 60.1 percent for the United States and 69.9 percent for Iowa.² Then when we look at the midterm elections, the turnout just shocks me. The turnout for the 2006 midterm election was 40.4 percent for the United States and 48.1 percent for Iowa.³ Granted this is a better turnout than the 2002 midterm elections of 39.5 percent for the United States and 47.9 percent for Iowa, but this is shameful for our country.⁴ There is only one word to describe this level of voter turnout, pathetic. How can the few decide for the majority?

Now is the time that you, as a citizen of this great nation, should look at all levels of government and take stock in what it is our leaders are doing. Do you agree with what they are doing? Do you disagree with what they are doing? Only you, as the backbone of this Nation, have the power to change the direction of where we are going as a Nation. Imagine that you are the captain of a great ship. You are the one who must make the correct decisions to ensure its safe passage to port. The seas are rough and the journey is difficult, but it is you and only you who can bring it home safely. This is your responsibility as a citizen and a voter in this nation. Without studying the issues and making the right choices that YOU believe and feel are the best choices to ensure our Nation's safe passage to the future, you will fail in your role as a citizen.

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Whether you agree with the status quo or you believe that it is time for a change, either way it involves you getting out and voting. So, now is your time to learn about your candidates for all offices and decide who can represent you the best. Then get out and help spread their message. For if you can't stand up for what you believe in, how passionate are you about it? Encourage people to get informed about the candidates and learn the issues that will be shaping their lives over the next couple of years. The Gallup Poll in April of 2010 reported that the approval rating of Congress was 23 percent, which is up from March when its approval rating was at 16 percent.⁵ How many of us would keep our jobs if our boss was only 16 to 23 percent satisfied with the job we were doing?

Until the tide turns and the majority votes in all elections, our form of government is at risk. Abraham Lincoln stated in the *Gettysburg Address* "that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom; and that this government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."⁶ While he was referencing the sacrifice of our citizen soldiers at the Battle of Gettysburg, this issue has not changed today, for our form of government is in jeopardy. We are being told that the government knows what is best for us and making decisions based on that ideology. As Ronald Reagan once stated, "Government exists to protect us from each other. Where government has gone beyond its limits is in deciding to protect us from ourselves."⁷ Now is when you have to exercise your power as a voter. Get informed, help your friends understand what is happening, and let's lead the change. Think how our elected officials would feel if this midterm election had the highest turnout ever and over 50 percent voted in the election. They thought we wanted "HOPE" in 2008, and in 2010 we want "CHANGE." So, now let us unite and send a message to all the members of Congress and our state officials that the time of the minority speaking for the majority is over and take back control of "the government of the people, by the people, for the people."⁸ Celebrate this 4th of July with renewed patriotic feelings and know that you can make a difference by exercising your right to vote in November.

(Endnotes)

¹2008 General Election Turnout Rates, United States Elections Project, March 31, 2010, <http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html> (May 10, 2010).

²2004 General Election Turnout Rates, United States Elections Project, October 3, 2008, <http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2004G.html> (May 10, 2010).

³2006 General Election Turnout Rates, United States Elections Project, December 23, 2009, <http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2006G.html> (May 10, 2010).

⁴2002 General Election Turnout Rates, United States Elections Project, October 3, 2008, <http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2002G.html> (May 10, 2010).

⁵"Congress' Job Approval Rating Improves, but Still Low," *GALLUP*, April 13, 2010, <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/127343/congress-job-approval-rating-improves-low.aspx>> (May 7, 2010).

⁶Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address," <<http://www.gettysburgfoundation.org/lincoln-address.htm>> (May 7, 2010).

⁷Ronald Reagan, Ronald Reagan Quotes, <<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/r/ronaldreag393026.html>> (May 10, 2010).

⁸Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address," <<http://www.gettysburgfoundation.org/lincoln-address.htm>> (May 7, 2010).

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