

LETTER TO EDITOR – Bay View Electoral Activism Starts Early This Year

You may have already seen the signs, the commercials, or been invited to a house party. Election season has begun. Doors are going to be knocked on, voters called, and there already is a lot of effort going on to register voters. Observers say that the level of interest and activism approaches that prior to the 2008 election of Barack Obama.

As most observers are aware, Americans vote in extraordinarily low numbers. School board races rarely get much more than a 10 percent turnout, and statewide, the gubernatorial election sees a turnout of 40 or 45 percent (or less).

Nationally, voter turnout for presidential races since 1968, on average, has been between 49 and 59 percent. This is very low by international standards. Moreover, there is a class difference in voting. Members of the lowest third of the income scale tend to vote in dramatically lower numbers than members of the middle or upper income scale.

Some people blame the time of elections (work day), some people blame the political parties that represent narrow interests, but most experts would say that our arcane process of voter registration is one of the many causes. This, of course, is exacerbated by voter identification rules. Analysis has shown that voter identification may have negatively impacted some 200,000 voters in the last presidential race.

The parties, of course, are split on the voting system. Democrats want to make it as easy as possible for people to vote and Republicans want to make it difficult and have passed restrictive voter ID laws in some states.

To help offset historically low turnout and the impact of Voter ID laws, groups have actively begun conducting voter registration campaigns. In the Milwaukee area, members of the League of Women Voters have been in the schools registering older high school students. In the Bay View area, there is an active presence at the farmers market and other park events. According to Dale Nook, a local Bay View political activist, his group registers or reregisters about 10 people every Saturday at the South Shore Farmers Market. That may not sound like much, but if you add that to four to five other local farmers markets and other community events, it can add up to well over a 100 each week. Perhaps more importantly, the number of people offering to volunteer and to get involved is heartening.

Bay View is seen as a largely liberal area where Democratic voting is relatively high and thus is getting more attention from Democrats and groups associated with them. Perhaps this is why Republicans more or less ignore Bay View. The Milwaukee County Democratic Party opened an office in Bay View at 2999 S. Delaware Ave. Some Democratic operatives see that Bay View has a large millennial population, which has liberal views but lacks a history of voting consistently. Activists in Bay View are focused on trying to change that.

If you want to learn more about these activities, contact Dale Nook, dwnook@aol.com.

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