

The “Fall Classics”: Politics and Baseball

This week Americans find themselves right in the middle of two Fall classics, the Presidential election and the World Series. By the time my weekly column goes to print next week both of these great contests will have been decided, the cheers and groans of millions of Cardinals and Red Sox fans will have faded and the speech-making, political commercials and arguments around the water cooler will be just a memory.

However, there is one major difference between these two time-honored American pastimes. In the final analysis baseball really is just a game. With the start of spring training, last year’s champion will be nearly forgotten and we’ll once again root for the home team, hoping that this is finally their year. The story is different when it comes to political contests. Choosing our elected representatives is a solemn duty that has real consequences. Stop for a minute and think of just how many ways our lives are affected by the decisions of our government, from decisions made by our local city council, school boards, and state legislature to the decisions coming out of the Oval Office in Washington.

When we were born it was a government agency that sent a birth certificate to our parents and regulated the training of the doctors and nurses present in the delivery room. When we grew older, the government told us the age at which we would start school and how long we’d be there, what we had to know to get our license and how fast we could drive. After school, when we got a job many of us found that it was some arm of government that told us what we had to do to be licensed to work in our chosen profession (e.g. barbers, dentists, lawyers, counselors, engineers, and real estate agents to name a few) and how much of our hard-earned paycheck we actually got to keep.

At the national level it is our government that makes decisions affecting the safety and security of our country, manages foreign affairs, regulates commerce between the States and helps guarantee our Constitutional rights.

Yet despite all of the hundreds of ways our lives are affected by government far too many citizens don’t vote. Many of them have even registered but just won’t find time to make it to the polls on Tuesday. Of the nearly 4.3 million Missourians that are eligible, 2 out of 10 are not registered to vote and of the registered voters in this state, only about 51% voted during the general election in 2002. More recently, in Missouri’s primary election last August only 43% of the registered voters statewide turned out to vote, which was considered a relatively high turnout.

This year’s election is an especially crucial one. Voters will determine who represents them in the Missouri House of Representatives, who our next Governor will be, who we send to Washington to speak for us in both houses of Congress and finally, who will be our next President, the most powerful position in the world.

People often feel that their vote doesn’t really matter. I hope that the 2000 Presidential election proved that this is simply not the case. Each vote does matter and even if the election isn’t decided by razor thin margins, voting is the right thing to do. It is a privilege to be a free people and freedom is a fragile thing. It is important that we lead by example and show our kids that being involved in choosing our leaders is part of being a responsible American citizen.

Let me encourage you to have a plan for next Tuesday. Find out ahead of time where your polling place is. Allow extra time to vote since lines may be long. Also, take some time to get familiar with the candidates and the issues so you can cast an informed vote. A list of candidates and links to many of their websites can be found at the Secretary of State's website at: <http://www.sos.mo.gov/elections/2004general/candidatelist.asp>

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us or by phone at (888) 711-9278.