



Submitted by
Dale Gehman
DIRECTOR

OTSEGO COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING

120 Grandview Blvd., Gaylord, Michigan 49735

*We Help.
We Care*

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Election Day



RIGHT? RESPONSIBILITY? ENTITLEMENT? PRIVILEGE?

People describe our American opportunity to vote in a lot of different ways. Some look to our ancestors who fought, and in many cases, died, to give us or preserve for us the opportunity. Others look at the social responsibility aspect and say that voting is a duty. And, yet others say that one vote doesn't matter anyway, so why bother? Today is one of our annual opportunities to vote on local and state-wide issues, and so it seems appropriate to think about our voting history, the impact of just a few votes, and some views on voting.

If you think average citizens have been able to vote in the US since 1776, you'd be wrong. Voting was limited to white, landowning men until most states granted voting rights to all white men, regardless of wealth or property, in the 1820s and 1830s. Black men got the right to vote with the passage of the 14th Amendment in 1868 (which made all "men" citizens) and the 15th Amendment in 1870. Women in the US were finally granted the right to vote in 1920.

And who do you think uses that right the most? Older adults! According to U.S. News, "Some 61 percent of citizens age 65 and older voted in the November 2010 election, the best turnout of any age group. More than half (54 percent) of those ages 55 to 64 also cast a ballot. People under age 45 are much less likely to vote. Just 37 percent of 25 to 44 year olds made it to the polls in November 2010. And not even a quarter (21 percent) of the youngest citizens, ages 18 to 24, entered a voting booth in 2010."

But does every vote count? Consider these results:

- 1649 Charles I of England was executed after falling 1 vote short
- 1776 English was chosen over German as America's language by 1 vote
- 1845 Texas became a state by 1 vote
- 1896 President William McKinley won in Kentucky over William Jennings Bryan by 277 votes out of 445,000
- 1923 Adolf Hitler won leadership of the Nazi Party by 1 vote
- 1960 Hawaii voted for John F. Kennedy over Richard Nixon by 115 votes
- 2000 George W. Bush won the US Presidential election by 1 electoral vote, and Florida by 537 votes out of almost 6 million total votes, which was the deciding factor in the nationwide electoral vote.



Locally, the impact of a single vote to a candidate or issue is magnified by the small voter pool. The May 2014 county-wide election saw only 2,048 votes cast, while 12,166 Otsego County voters cast ballots in the 2012 November presidential election. So, even in a contest with national implications, a voter's single voice can be heard.

Speaking of voices, there is no shortage of quips and quotes regarding voting and democracy from people of all walks. Humorist Dick Gregory reminds us that in Chicago, voting is done a little differently. "In most places in the country, voting is looked upon as a right and a duty, but in Chicago it's a sport," he says. And rap musician Chuck Dee says of course voting is important, "Voting is about as essential as washing yourself. It's something you're supposed to do. Now, you can't go around bragging...because you voted. That's stupid."

Franklin D. Roosevelt points to the importance of preserving the right to vote. "Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves, and the only way they could do this is by not voting." He further reinforces our role as voter, adding, "Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country."

Our responsibility as voters, though, goes beyond just showing up at the polls on Election Day. "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education," says F.D.R. President John F. Kennedy put it even more pointedly, saying, "The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all."

My favorite, though, is Winston Churchill, who had a sharp wit, and a dim view of voters. "The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter," he once said. Of course, all things are relative, and, in the end, Churchill was a fan of our system, saying "It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried."

This essay should hit the newsstands on

ELECTION DAY, AUGUST 5TH

We all have some choices to make that day, what to wear, what to eat, and who and what we will support on our ballots.

But, like the others, voting is a choice, one that has been hard won by many before us, and it is important.

WE HOPE YOU INVEST TIME LEARNING ABOUT THE ISSUES, AND WE HOPE YOU VOTE.



989.732.1122 • www.OtsegoCountyCOA.org • Advocacy 989.732.9977

IN-HOME SERVICE ~ 989.705.2574 • MEAL PROGRAM ~ 989.732.1746 • SPECIAL EVENTS ~ 989.732.4702 • VOLUNTEER ~ 989.705.2572 • WEATHER ~ 989.731.5652

Fax: 989-731-2739 • occoa@occoaonline.org • Weekdays 8:00 am to Noon and 1:00 to 3:30 pm

120 GRANDVIEW BLVD. • GAYLORD, MICHIGAN 49735