

# The Right To Not Vote (Or Just Say “No”) by J. Conrad Guest

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*Bad politicians are sent to Washington by good people who don't vote.*

— William E. Simon, 63<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Secretary of Treasury

MR. SIMON'S STATEMENT is certainly red, white and blue, until one reflects upon the quality of politicians that run for office. Consider that Bill Clinton (praised as one of our best presidents) had low morals; while Jimmy Carter, because he was a poor politician and delegator, achieved very little while in office but had high morals; we forgave the former his transgressions because he cleaned up the budget, the economy was healthy and unemployment down; the latter we wished to throw out of office for admitting he'd lusted for women in his heart because of hostages in Iran, gas prices escalating to nearly \$1 a gallon, and a sagging economy. Sometimes the best politicians are the most corrupt, as was LBJ, which leaves open for debate their ability lead.

All of which brings to mind a discussion I recently had with a colleague regarding the upcoming presidential election. She was of the mind that he who doesn't participate in the election process forfeits the right to complain; while I'm of the belief that a vote for the lesser of two evils is not only an endorsement of one candidate over the other, but also an endorsement of our election process. That got me to thinking of the power of the "no" vote, or a dissatisfaction with all candidates.

Consider that George Bush won the 2004 election with 62,040,610 popular votes to John Kerry's 59,028,444 votes, which translates to Bush winning 50.7 percent of *the votes cast*. Not an impressive figure but it was a majority.

Of the 197 million eligible citizens, 72 percent claimed to have been registered voters, and of those 89 percent claimed to have voted, or approximately 62 percent of the population.

But what of the 38 percent that didn't vote? At the risk of proving the adage that figures never lie and liars always figure, if we throw that 38 percent into the equation as "no" votes, we end up with the following election results:

Candidate	Popular vote	
	Count	Percent
Bush	62,040,610	31%
Kerry	59,028,444	30%
Others	1,175,648	1%
No votes	74,755,298	38%
Total	197,000,000	100%

Becoming the leader of the globe's super power with 31% of the popular vote hardly seems impressive, and it *shouldn't*. Granted, we can't assume that all 38 percent of those who didn't vote translate into "no" votes, but it gives one pause to con-

sider adding to the ballot a "No vote" option, perhaps with the provision that in order to win the presidency a candidate must amass greater than 50 percent of the total votes. Would that result in better candidates running for office? Who can say? But until then, the good people who vote, as well as those who don't, will continue to send bad politicians to Washington.



**J. CONRAD GUEST's** fiction and essays appear in *Cezanne's Carrot*, *Saucy Vox*, *River Walk Journal*, *63 Channels*, *The Writers Post Journal*, *Redbridge Review*, and *Blood and Thunder: Musings on the Art of Medicine*. He is also cofounder of and the cigar editor for *The Smoking Poet*.

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