

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

What you can do for your country



This last Sunday I attended a pow-wow in Springfield of Democrats and county chairmen; it lasted five hours. We heard speeches from all the 17 individuals who say they will be candidates for State offices in the Democrat primary election in March, 2002. Members of the State Central Committee asked questions of the candidates, then after the meeting, that committee and the County Chairman's Association met separately to either endorse candidates or not.

The county chair meeting was pretty much of a zoo, but the results were good. We endorsed incumbents, like Senator Dick Durbin, Secretary of State Jesse White, Comptroller Dan Hynes. We postponed decisions on two hotly contested races for Governor and Lt. Governor. Of course the Knox County Central Committee supports the nomination of our own State's Attorney, Paul Mangieri, for Lt. Governor.

In the midst of all the speeches and moans and groans, someone said, "Of course, with all that's going on in the world, none of this is very important."

I quickly responded, "Quite the opposite, this is the most important thing we could be doing."

Not only have United States citizens taken our security for granted, we have taken our whole way of life and form of government for granted. When barely 50 percent of us vote in a general election that includes election of the President of the United States, we are disgustingly apathetic. Politics is always a bit messy because individuals and groups are pitted against one another, money flows and influence peddling abounds. But in my experience, there are far more honest and good people in government than the opposite. We do ourselves a huge disservice when we sit around in coffee shops and bars panning everyone who runs for or wins political office, categorizing them as self-serving crooks.

I've had people say to me, quite pointedly, that they admire someone who, "just does a lot of work in the community without any fanfare or recognition." Well, that's a lovely idea, but lack of recognition and fanfare is

not how a candidate wins elections. In fact, if a candidate wants to win, he or she *must* have name recognition and lots of positive public exposure. In fact, all campaign expenses are related to getting out information about the candidate and his position on issues. We may not like someone who is capable of pushing themselves to the forefront, but let's get real — it has to be done. On the other hand, being in a tough political campaign is a sacrifice of time, money and ego.

If we didn't know it before, we know after the last three weeks that our government and whom we elect are of vital importance to our lives and our security. President Bush has literally grown into his incredibly tough role of making life and death decisions while assuring us that our Democracy will prevail. The mayor of New York City, Rudolph Giuliani, has become an international figure because of his ability to organize and provide compassionate leadership.

Other mayors, governors and small town officials have faced huge disasters and provided extraordinary leadership when it was needed. But we mustn't forget the unglamorous and everyday leadership needed to keep our precious representative democracy intact. From the election of township officials on up, in our own best interests, we must take an interest in candidates and the elections. Political parties are now recruiting people to run in the March, 2002 primary, when parties choose their candidates for the November General Elections. This is important work. This is the bedrock of our form of government and freedom. If we excuse ourselves from this process, we are thumbing our noses at all we hold dear.

To support the men and women who have and will be putting their lives on the line for our unique freedoms and to honor the 7,000 men and women who lost their lives September 11, the *least* we can do is take responsibility for our political process and vote.

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