

## IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

# Methinks thou doth protest too much



This quote from a play by William Shakespeare is my favorite because it's so often appropriate. In this column I may rant and rave about politics, but when I am amongst friends, relatives and acquaintances in other areas of my life, I rarely broach the subject. I try to be friendly with a good sense of humor. But my humor is wearing thin with those dear Republicans who keep telling me jokes about the stupid voters in Florida. Why they feel the need to discuss it with me, I can only guess.

I guess it's because they feel guilty and defensive about the way their presidential candidate won the election - by the disenfranchisement of thousands of voters in Florida. They continue to joke about "how many times" do we need to count the votes, like it's funny that hundreds of people registered but were unable to vote on election day. They think it's funny that a ballot was arranged illegally and the reason the format is against Florida election law is because that arrangement of candidate names and punch holes is a mess and totally confusing.

They make fun of older people who were confused at the polls. Too bad we don't have more respect for our elders in this society. Maybe if we honored them and valued their experience and wisdom, we'd be more civilized and compassionate. Many conservatives are prejudiced against African Americans, Jews, non-English speaking people and poor people who would probably vote for Democrats - so who cares if their votes are counted? The conservatives conveniently forget that their ancestors couldn't speak English too good either when they got off the boat. Many African and Mexican-Americans were on American soil long before the rest of us.

In a previous column I told of votes being lost right here in River City because of computer programming mistakes and election officials putting the wrong Votomatics in the wrong precincts. A news story in the Orlando Centinal last month pointed out that Orange County has the most effective voting machines made, like ours in Galesburg, but they won't work if the election judges don't know how to operate them. These wonderful machines not only automatically count the votes in each precinct, but if the ballot is bad, it spits it out. This is a strong clue that something is wrong and the voter should be given a new ballot.

In most precincts in Orange County there were literally no uncounted votes or spoiled ballots because the judges did their jobs well. In some precincts, however, because the personnel were new, inexperienced and untrained, when the ballot was returned they did not offer the voter a new one but punched a button on the machine that instructs it to accept the ballot as is. A tape in each machine records this action and there were photos of the tapes, clearly showing that an uninformed judge had

punched that button 66 times, let spoiled ballots go through the system and the votes were not recorded.

I'm sure that if the spotlight had been on any other state besides Florida, the same irregularities would have been evident. In Cook County alone more than 80,000 ballots were spoiled. When spoiled ballots are immediately detected and votes are counted in the precincts instead of returned to a central counting place, the election results are far more accurate.

There are always voters who are confused about the process. It's a judge's responsibility to assist voters. Shortly after 6 am. on election day in 1986, my husband and I arrived at a polling place in Alexis to cast our votes. A few seconds after entering our booths I heard my husband bellow, "What the hell is this?" The judges scurried over to investigate and found his Votomatic was the "demonstrator," with the names Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin and other dead notables on the

ballot. The Votomatics were switched and he proceeded to vote. Only one gentleman had voted on the demonstrator before us. It was the Republican precinct committeeman and we figured he probably voted straight Whig. We laughed until we cried. Between the judges' mistake and his inattention, his votes were down the toilet. Now that's stupid.

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at (309) 342-1337 or [cporter@galesburg.net](mailto:cporter@galesburg.net).