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Voting sends stronger message than ignoring polls

By [David Shapiro](#)

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CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARADVERTISER.COM

Primary Elections at Kaiser High School.

This year's election season has been so pilau that when my ballot arrived in the mail last week, I felt I should put on a hazmat suit before opening it.

Instead, I gingerly pinched the envelope and shook out the contents.

There was little to excite: major races with few appealing candidates and little real competition, lackluster incumbent legislators and City Council members running unopposed, and poorly explained proposals to amend the state Constitution and City Charter.

But I put aside any temptation to join the majority who don't vote and filled out my ballot — for the simple reason that, however you rationalize it, not voting is a cop-out that leaves others to make important decisions for you.

It empowers the entrenched and leaves policy-making to special interests that take care of their own at the expense of the broader public interest.

If low voter turnout didn't serve the status quo, be assured the Legislature would be quicker to make voting more accessible.

Whether or not you or I vote, somebody will be handed the keys to a big office. And notions that candidates are all the same are almost always false.

If you doubt that, remember the 2000 presidential election when unhappy Democrats cast protest votes for Ralph Nader and handed the election to George W. Bush over Al Gore, believing there was no difference between the two.

If they had thought it through more carefully, they likely would have spared us the Iraq War and its massive cost in lives, national wealth and ongoing instability that threatens world peace.

However unhappy you may be with ballot choices, you can always make more of a statement by voting than not.

Turned off by poisonous political campaigns that have become blood sport for the malicious?

Staying home says much less than going to the polls and rewarding candidates who are civil and show respect — for both their opponents and our constitutional democracy.

Tired of the same people being elected year after year and accomplishing little?

Then don't be so quick to vote for the familiar name. If you can't think of any positive difference your incumbent has made, why not give the opposing candidate a chance? If your district is lucky enough to have one.

Bothered that your incumbent is running unopposed? Leaving your ballot blank instead of checking off the incumbent's name can speak volumes; a large number of blank ballots raises questions about the incumbent's strength and increases chances of a formidable challenger the next time.

Do proposed amendments to the constitution and charter make little sense to you?
Vote no and make sponsors do a better job of justifying the changes.

Any way you vote has more impact than opting out and letting special-interest money
decide how you're governed.

Reach David Shapiro at volcanicash@gmail.com.
