

FOEPAC Gears Up For Election Day

"None of the Above" is Official: Proposition 23

All phases of the "None of the Above" ballot initiative are complete. Over 650,000 signatures were gathered along with 60,000 new registered voters. Proposition 23, as it is now also known, will appear before the voters in the California March 7 election. The debate has been ongoing for a year in newspapers throughout California as well as through FOEPAC's NOTA website (www.nota-cal.com). Director of Special Affairs Chris Shugart says, "We get responses from individuals as well as political organizations, both pro and con. Some people have requested literature, including a high school student who needed the material for his Civics class project."

As the March 2000 election approaches, media interest in FOEPAC's None of the Above ballot initiative is heating up. FOEPAC Director of Communications Judy Plummer says most of the major newspapers throughout California are featuring campaign

highlights as part of their daily news. Articles on Proposition 23 have appeared in the *San Jose Mercury News*, *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, just to name a few. Judy adds, "We expect media coverage to continue right up until election time."

FOEPAC Executive Director, Teri Erickson notes, "One of the most remarkable things about the campaign has been the opposition. The Green Party is the only organization that's come out formally against Prop. 23. Their main argument is that our initiative just doesn't go far enough. They actually seem to support the 'None of the Above' concept."

Simplicity has been one of the main themes throughout the campaign. "The Concept is Simple" has been a prominent slogan from the beginning. FOE Chairman and President of FOEPAC Al Shugart has remained steadfast that "Voter reform doesn't have to be complicated." ■

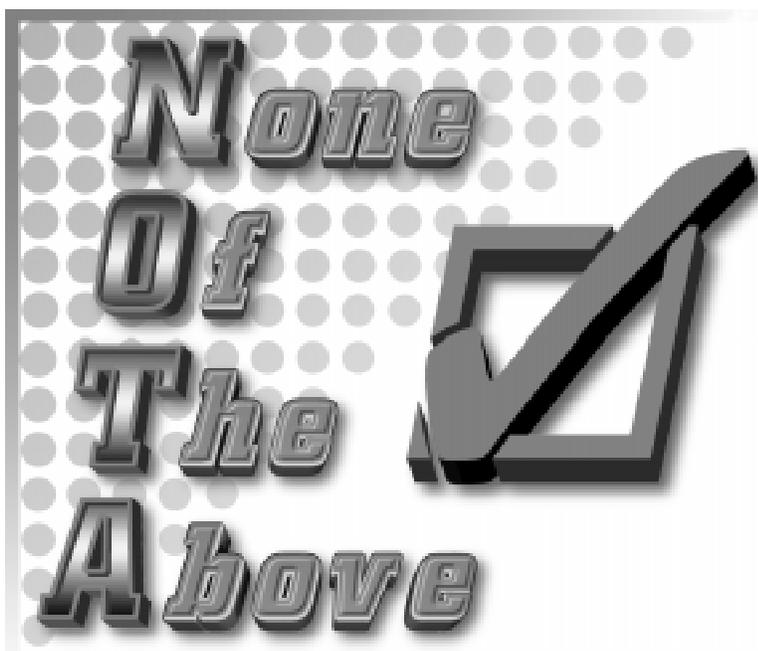


What Exactly is Proposition 23?

Here's how Proposition 23 works: in every federal and state election in California (except judges), Californians could vote for "None of the Above" instead of a named candidate. Those results would be tallied and reported along with all other election results, but the candidate with the most votes would still get the job. It's that simple.

The initiative is patterned after a similar ballot option that's been in place in Nevada for over 20 years. "None of the Above" has won four times in Nevada, each time in hotly contested races where the vote for None of the Above was a deliberate choice to express dissatisfaction with the candidate choices.

We believe that Proposition 23 will accomplish several things: more citizens will register to vote (our initiative signature gatherers registered over 60,000 new voters), more registered voters will vote, better candidates will be nominated (what candidate or party wants to lose to None of the Above?) and negative campaigning will be reduced. Proposition 23 won't cure all voter participation problems, but it is a step forward, and the cost of putting it into place is negligible. ■



From the Editor

One Fine Day in the World of Politics

It was just another ordinary morning in May. I had just gotten out of the shower and had the Rush Limbaugh show on as I got ready for work. What I heard really caught my attention. Rush reported that there was a ballot initiative being proposed in California that would allow voters to choose “none of the above.” Then he said the proposal was being put together by a group of “staunch moderates.” Well, anyone who knows anything about our staff on the Friends of Ernest Political Action Committee, moderate we certainly are not. In fact it would be impossible to box us in any type of ideological category. We’re as politically diverse as any organization could possibly be. Left, Right, Liberal, Conservative, Republican, Democrat—these labels are irrelevant. That’s because when it comes to FOE activities, we are genuinely nonpartisan.

But getting back to the story—I quickly finished getting dressed and hurried to the office, anxious to set the record straight. When I got to my office, I immediately e-mailed the Rush Limbaugh show in an effort to clarify exactly who we were. The problem was I didn’t know who I was. That is, I didn’t have an official position, much less an official title. NOTA was still a new activity and things ran pretty loose. Not wanting to affect my credibility and that of FOEPAC, and with time of the essence, I promoted myself right then and there to Director of Special Affairs. It sounded appropriately important and seemed to carry some weight of authority. I got off a message as quickly as I could.

It seemed that someone on the Limbaugh staff received my e-mail and checked the story out, perhaps logging on to our website as I had recommended. Within 30 minutes, Rush clarified his previous report and gave an accurate account of the ballot proposition.

And by the way, the title stuck. I continue to be to this day Director of Special Affairs for FOEPAC. As for what a Director of Special Affairs does, that’s a story for another issue of *The Ernest Voice*.

- Chris Shugart,
Executive Director, Friends of Ernest

In Memorium

Ernest passed away on June 27, 1999 at the University of California at Davis Veterinary Hospital. Cause of death was cardiac arrest arising from an internal infection he had been fighting for some time. He was six years old.

Ernest touched a lot of lives, both human and canine, and has left a legacy of trying to make the world a better place to live.

While Ernest will be certainly missed, the activities of Friends of Ernest will continue with vigor such that he will not be forgotten.



From the Rooftop

Where’s the Party? by Al Shugart

Are you a member of a political party? Did you sign an oath or agreement? Did you contribute money or pay dues to a party? Can you belong to more than one party? These questions prompted me to recently inquire about membership in the Democratic and Republican parties.

I got no response from the Democratic party. The Republican Party responded with a “Congratulations. You are now a member of the California Republican Central Committee. Please send \$35.00.” I replied that I didn’t choose to be a member of the committee. I only wanted information on how to become a member of the party. I got no further correspondence, but I am now on their E-mail list.

I think the only controlled list of party “memberships” is the State, which keeps track of party affiliations chosen by registered voters. Best case is that this is an approximation since it doesn’t account for voters who have changed their minds, or eligible but not registered voters. Oh well, it’s certainly not clear that registered affiliation has any kind of binding or social significance anyway.

Just as I was completing this article, I received a letter from the Republican National Committee. It says: “Our records show we have not received your 2000 Republican National Committee membership contribution.” My records show the same thing, since I don’t recall making a membership contribution to any political party. ■

The Ernest Voice

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Democrats and Republicans: What's the Big Difference?

By Chris Shugart

Introduction:

When I began to do the research for this article I had no idea where it would go. I didn't have any specific ideas of what I might find. Political experts and commentators take great pains in attempting to distill the differences between the parties into simplistic terms. Unfortunately, the stereotypes of Republicans and Democrats are firmly embedded in the American political lexicon. I think this article takes a fresh look, lays out a few facts, and allows you to draw your own conclusion.

The difference between Democrats and Republicans depends a great deal on who you ask—and to some degree whom you choose to believe. And that doesn't even take into account those who will tell you there really isn't any difference at all.

Friends of Ernest decided to start from scratch and conduct its own study of the two major parties. What do Democrats believe that make them any different from Republicans? What principles do Republicans have that distinguish them from Democrats?

Opinions abound on these questions, and frankly do more to confuse the issue than clarify it. That's why FOE has purposely avoided the opinions of political consultants, news analysts, scholars, and all of the other so called "experts." Instead, FOE has conducted its study based on verifiable facts and objective observation.

One set of sources we examined were the official 1996 national platforms of the Democrat and Republican National Committees. The principle members of these parties, according to their own platforms, do make a point of distinguishing themselves from each other. But that only means that in theory they're different. Experience has taught us that what politicians say doesn't always hold up to the facts.

Perhaps a more accurate gauge would be to define Democrats and Republicans according to where they stand on the issues. After all, every elected politician has a voting record. In politics, it's not what you say, it's what you do that defines

who you are. We have therefore taken congressional voting records into account.

Then there's the registered party members. Is there any difference between the rank-and-file voters? Census figures and other survey data were examined to discover if any distinctions were apparent among voters who call themselves either Democrat or Republican.

If their party platforms are any indication, the Democrats and Republicans are indeed different. At least they earnestly believe they are. And they both like to point out that they are significantly different than their political counterpart.

Friends of Ernest has noted that along with their officially stated differences, there's a political constant contained in all party platforms. It holds true regardless of which party holds the office of President. The party in power always claims that their agenda is working fabulously to improve the country. Conversely, the opposing party will claim that those very same policies are failures. And they insist that it's their agenda, not their opponent's, that the country sorely needs.

So are Democrats and Republican different? They certainly think so.

In some particularly obvious cases, Democrats and Republicans believe in the same things: like building a good economy, supporting education, or reducing crime. These are the sort of issues that everybody is for. Who could possibly be against them?

Like the economy, for example. Democrats believe in "promoting economic growth and opportunity for all Americans." The Republicans want "an America with a vibrant and growing economy that improves the standard of living for all." On education, Democrats say "all children should have the opportunity and education to make the most of their lives." Republicans want "an America where our children receive the best education in the world." On crime, Democrats "believe that people who break the law should be punished." Republicans call for "tough law enforcement."

These sort of no-brainer issues are beyond debate. In these cases their differences aren't so much about the issues, but rather how they present their positions. It's not much different than Coke and Pepsi trying to convince you how different they are. It simply comes down to the promotion and the packaging and how the product is perceived by the public.

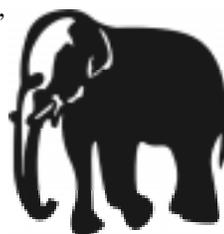
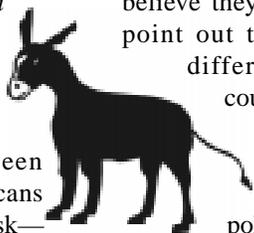
There are particular issues that, according to their respective National Committee platforms, Democrats and Republicans find themselves more distinctly divided. The most significant of these (and perhaps most politically charged) is abortion. Here, the Democrats stand "behind the right of every woman to choose, consistent with *Roe v. Wade*." Republicans "oppose abortion," but they further qualify "our pro-life agenda does not include punitive action against women who have an abortion."

There are some Democratic policies that, while Republicans do not officially oppose them, do not endorse them either. For example, government policies concerning "minimum wage" and "public support for the arts" are exclusively Democratic issues where there is no Republican counterpart. Similarly, Republicans support a constitutional amendment to "safeguard Old Glory" as well as "a Balanced Budget Amendment," —issues that aren't addressed in the Democratic platform.

If you continue to examine these platforms, you will find a miscellaneous assortment of differences. Democrats "vigorously oppose Republican efforts to pass Right-to-Work legislation." Republicans believe that "'Clintoncare' would have been a poison pill for the nation's health care system." While Democrats took credit for passing "Goals 2000," Republicans want to "call for prompt repeal of the Goals 2000 program."

There's one aspect to these party platforms that is worthy of note: that is, to what extent they align their policies with the U.S. Constitution.

The Democratic Party Platform refers to the Constitution only once, making a perfunctory mention of "the free exercise





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of religion." They take an easy-to-defend stand that "all Americans have a right to express their faith."

The Republican Party platform on the other hand, refers to the Constitution five times and invokes it with considerably more zeal. The Republican's "agenda for change" is based on the Tenth Amendment; They promote "private property rights" in accordance with the Fifth Amendment; and they claim that the "U.S. Supreme Court, has overstepped its authority under the Constitution."

But again, this is all theory. Their respective platforms are merely statements that purport to establish what it is they believe. What do Democrats and Republicans actually do when put to the test? Do their actions back up their words?

We used voting records compiled from the 104th Congress between 1995 and 1997 as a basis for our survey of the Democratic and Republican legislature. While it would be unrealistic to expect that each party would consistently vote in absolute lockstep, there are discernible differences in their official politics.

In the House of Representatives, a bill to increase the minimum wage (HR 1277) passed 266-162. The Democrats were markedly in support of the bill 188-6. Most Republicans opposed the bill, but were somewhat divided, voting 77-156. A vote to repeal the "assault weapons ban" (HR 125) passed 239-173. Although more Republicans than Democrats approved, there was noticeable disagreement within

each of the parties. (D: 56-130; R: 183-42) On the issue of national defense (HR 32300), the Republicans were virtually unanimous (R: 2-228) in opposing a bill to cut anti-missile defense. The Democrats were just about as equally united in support of the bill. (D: 182-12)

In the Senate, some trends can be observed as well. A bill to limit product liability damages (HR 956) passed 59-40. While Democrats were not so much in accord (12-34), Republicans were clearly in favor 47-6. On the issue of gay rights, there was a definite distinction between the parties. The Senate defeated a bill (S 2056) that would prohibit job discrimination based on sexual orientation. (D: 41-5; R: 8-45) The Senate tightened the U.S embargo on trade with Cuba when they passed HR 927. While Democrats were equally divided 23-22, Republicans overwhelmingly favored the bill 51-2.

The U.S. Census Bureau provides us with some basic demographics that indicate some differences between voters who are registered as Democrats or Republicans. According to census figures, the largest proportion of Democrats fall within the very young (17-24 years) and the very old (75-99 years). The largest proportion of Republicans fall within the 45-54 age group. While men are distributed in equal percentages between Republicans and Democrats, women favor the Democratic Party over the Republican party 50-40%. Census figures show an even greater disparity when comparing blacks and whites. Black voters are overwhelmingly Democrats by 80%. Trends of varying degrees can even be found according to religion, income, level of education, and region. Political consulting firms make their living calculating these more detailed characteristics among voters.

Another factor that can characterize political parties are financial contributions.

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For example, the two top contributors to the National Democratic Committee from 1995 to 1996 were the Communications Workers Of America and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. In that same span of time, the two top contributors for the National Republican Committee were Phillip Morris and RJR Nabisco. There are dozens of organizations and corporations that have each donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to their preferred political party.

Then add to the mix a few variables that might change from election to election. Both major parties survey their members in regard to their views, and what they consider to be the important issues. The Republican Party's "Contract With America" was a platform created by the results of a national questionnaire. To some degree, what makes Republicans and Democrats different is in part determined by the views of their respective constituencies.

What is the difference between Democrats and Republicans? No two things are ever exactly alike. Just as individuals are different, so are their organizations. Perhaps a better question would be: How important are their differences? In the final analysis, how much do their differences really matter?

If you ask a loyal Republican or Democrat, they'll tell you there's plenty of difference between the two major parties. And the debate is sure to continue as to which difference is better.

So what's the difference? Go ask a Democrat. Or a Republican. You just might get a different answer each time you ask. ■

Where Are The Rest of the People?

Confusion at the Census Bureau

The actual enumeration shall be made within three years after the first meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent term of ten years, in such manner as they shall by law direct."

From Article I, Section 2, U.S. Constitution

Ever since the first census in 1790, people have been concerned that not everybody was getting counted. George Washington believed that people avoided being counted for fear of being taxed or because of religious scruples. Since that first census, studies have shown that there are populations that are unwilling to be counted and therefore make themselves scarce, such as illegal immigrants, legal immigrants who mistrust the government, and suspicious citizens who also happen to mistrust the government. Some groups of people are just hard to count, like the homeless.

For the first 150 years of census taking, the Census Bureau had a firm suspicion that the census wasn't counting everybody, but they had no empirical evidence. It wasn't until the 1940 census that the Census Bureau got that empirical evidence: more men registered for the draft

in the 1940s than were counted in the 1940 census. (The census had only counted 97% of those men.) Also, 1940 marked the first time that the Census Bureau compared birth records to the number of babies counted by the Census Bureau. They discovered lots of babies (and their parents) missing from the census count.

This ushered in the era of the demographic method. It started with simple analyses, like comparing vital statistics records to the census records. Then in 1950, the Postenumeration Survey ("PES") was introduced. This was a "sample numbers v. actual numbers" comparison to look at census coverage. The idea was simple. After the regular census, interviewers were sent out to a sample of households to re-interview them. Using different lists (why didn't the Census Bureau just use those lists in the first place?), and more experienced

interviewers, the Census Bureau discovered an undercount in their sample. They concluded that an undercount existed in the entire census taking.

What the Census Bureau empirically knows is that there's an undercount. What they don't empirically know is what that undercount is. Based on estimates and surveys, the Census Bureau produces an incredible amount of detailed information about the people it has never counted. They use samples of samples, and then publish results that make their estimates and guesses look like established fact. The error is compounded by the media, who report these undercount numbers as fact. Almost every news article written about the undercount over the last two years starts with an unstated assumption: that there is a quantifiable undercount. What reporters don't disclose is that their figures are only estimates that the Census Bureau has provided according to their own, sometimes complex, estimating system

In the United States it's mandatory to take a census every ten years. Most people would agree that this also implies that the census be reliably accurate. Instead, the US Census appears to occasionally take the form of guess work and fudged figures.

Don't Count On It - The Census Bureau's Unreliable Numbers

What happens when Census Bureau statistics don't seem to add up? Do the numbers get corrected? Are their methods of counting the public improved to avoid future possible errors? A number of surveys from government, academic and private sources show that the Census Bureau indeed has a problem with accuracy. But they just can't make the numbers correct themselves. Or can they? *The Ernest Voice* discovered that the U.S. Census Bureau frequently runs into complications that severely affect the reliability of their statistics. Worse, the "corrections" are sometimes more unreliable than the original figures.

■ Surveys show that people report ages ending in 0 and 5 more than any other number, suggesting that people are rounding up or down.

■ When the Census Bureau visits homes where census sheets have not been returned, the Census Bureau will

interview neighbors to find out how many people live in that home. If the Census Bureau doesn't get the information from neighbors, they use a statistical procedure known as "imputing"—they make up a number based on the number of people living in the surrounding homes.

■ Surveys have shown that a large undercount is caused by people who want their census report to match other government agency reports in which they may be listed. For example, a single mother on welfare might not list a live-in boyfriend on her census sheet if she thinks the boyfriend is also not listed the same way with the welfare department.

■ In the 1980 census, the Census Bureau listed "Mexican or Mexican-American." They were surprised to find large Mexican populations in areas that weren't known to have anyone of Mexican heritage. Surveys discovered that people read the question as "Mexican" or "American," leading to many non-

Mexicans to checking that box by mistake.

■ Because the census is taken as of April 1, some people make up phony answers because it is April Fool's Day.

■ People routinely fail to report their children on their census reports. One of the biggest errors discovered is that the number of recorded births is always greater than the number of reported children in the census.

■ Surveys show that anywhere from .5 to 1.5% of follow-up interviews are fabricated. (These type of surveys are often done by temporary employees who are paid per each completed interview.) Surveys showed that more fabrication took place in the south and west, during very hot spells in June.

■ Census forms have only five lines to list people in one household. Families with more than five members sometimes just fill out the five lines, one person per line, neglecting to list any additional family members.



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