



2 of 65 DOCUMENTS

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BODY:

After the health and safety of its residents, the number one priority of Charles County should be its schools. Many are old and crowded. I am not talking about new schools here; I am talking about schools that children in older neighborhoods must attend.

In particular, T.C. Martin Elementary School in Bryantown. It was built in 1967 and has never been renovated. It now has six trailers. Parents were appalled at the beginning of school that the two new trailers were positioned in the middle of the playground. The reasoning behind this is what? Now the groundwork has been laid to more easily add trailers in the years to come.

County and state officials have decided that instead of renovating T.C. Martin for the children of Hughesville, Bryantown and other surrounding villages, we should have a stadium that will cost at least \$12 million in local and state funds. What kind of a message are we sending to our children? This money would go a long way in school renovations. I have been told that the money is in different pots. It is difficult for me to believe that funds cannot be transferred from one pot into another. Move some funding toward education in Charles County. Really, gentlemen, you have the power.

Brenda DeShong

Hughesville

About a month ago, I wrote a letter to the editor about not needing a paper trail with electronic voting machines.

Two or three people responded saying I did not know what I was talking about, and I believe I was called a bureaucrat. At the time I decided not to respond because these people already made up their minds, and nothing, not even facts, would change them. An article in the Washington Times on Oct. 24 changed that.

The main reason I am against the paper trail is the millions of dollars it would cost taxpayers. That means you and me. The article in the Times was headlined, "Touch Screen Voting Put to Test." You had to read to the last three paragraphs to find out that state officials, the League of Women Voters and members of the public randomly selected a voting machine and compared its accuracy against paper ballots. Forty ballots were cast. Those counting the paper ballots made two errors and had to recount the ballots. The printout of the voting machine was correct the first time. They could not count 40 ballots by hand and get it correct. Imagine counting tens of thousands, and in some cases millions.

Are the protesters aware that a subsidiary of Diebold manufactures the bank machines that you trust to give you money that amounts to millions of dollars every day? Do you count your money when you make a withdrawal? Have you ever been given too much or too little cash?

Francis J. Mason

Waldorf

As Americans, we have the right to cast our vote for the people who will represent us. It is a right that most inhabitants of our planet do not have. Throughout history, people have fought and died for the right to have a determining voice in their government.

The good news is that we, as Americans, have voting rights. The bad news is that of those eligible to vote, only 50 percent register to vote. And of that 50 percent, only about half vote in primary elections. Generally, half to three-fourths of that 50 percent vote in general elections.

In Maryland, there are almost 4 million residents over age 18 who are eligible to vote. Of that 4 million, only 2.9 million are registered voters. Statewide in the 2000 presidential election, 75 percent of Maryland's registered voters cast ballots. In Charles County, of the 59,448 registered voters, 44,758 -- or 75 percent -- voted.

When I ask people why they don't register to vote or, if registered, why they do not vote, usually they say, "My one vote isn't going to make a difference." As the last presidential election clearly showed, one vote can make a difference.

History also shows that the greatest, most effective lobbying group has always been, is and will always be the people. As a voting lobby, the people can move mountains.

There's no doubt that it was the people demanding protection of their environment that gave birth to the environmental protection movement. Environmental protection was not an industry criteria, nor was it a government policy until the people demanded it.

The consumer protection movement was borne of public demand, as were right-to-know laws regarding chemicals in the workplace and the community.

Drunken driving laws were pushed to enactment by the families of drunken driving victims, demanding an end to our highway carnage.

We are blessed to live in this country, where we choose our leaders.

Sure, everything's far from perfect. However, in this country we can gripe long, loud and publicly about what we don't like about our government without fear of being jailed or killed. Our nation was founded and thrives on the right to dissent.

During this time of year, I visit the area high schools and talk to students about representative democracy and the importance of their participation in their government. I stress to them that it is or will be their privilege, as well as their duty and obligation, to vote.

Indeed, for all of us, our right to vote is our stake in our future. I urge everyone who is eligible to register and to vote in the all-important 2004 presidential election.

Thomas "Mac" Middleton

Democratic state senator

Waldorf

The 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was proposed on March 24, 1947, and ratified on Feb. 27, 1951. "No person shall be elected to the office of president more than twice, and no person who has held the office of president, or acted as president, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected president shall be elected to the office of president more than once."

This amendment limits any individual to no more than 10 years as president: two four-year terms and up to two years of the previous president's term. President Lyndon B. Johnson, elected in 1964, served less than two years of President John F. Kennedy's term, so he was eligible to run again in 1968, but he chose not to do so.

As I understand it, the 22nd Amendment was largely a result of Congress and the American people wanting term limits after Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president four times.

In passing the 22nd Amendment, Congress, the states and the American people decided that even an ongoing war is not a good enough reason to allow a president to rule for more than two terms, or a maximum of 10 years.

Former president George H.W. Bush and his son, President Bush, have served a total of eight years as president, and now they are asking for 12. While the Bush presidencies were led by two different men, and they were not consecutive terms, the amendment is clear that two terms (up to 10 years) is the limit, consecutive service or not. Bush supporters would argue that the two men legally qualify for up to 10 years each, and that's true, but I would say that the spirit of the 22nd Amendment is to provide new administrations, new Cabinet members and new leadership -- given the power of incumbency, especially during times of war.

While the 22nd Amendment didn't specifically address the father-to-son presidency issue, I have to think that the spirit of the amendment was to try to keep from consolidating too much power in the hands of one president, or one president's family and friends, for too long. The Bush family is pushing the limit.

John Douglas Parran

St. Leonard

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