Why Was Voter Turnout So Low?

by Phyllis Schlafly November 21, 1996

Less than half of eligible voters cast their ballots on November 5. Voter turnout hasn't been that low since 1924. Should we blame the American people for not doing their civic duty, or the media for not giving adequate coverage to stimulate us to vote?

It's more likely that the low-turnout problem should be blamed on the candidates. The voters resigned themselves to enduring more years of a man they admittedly don't trust, and saw no reason to replace him with a man who is not significantly different.

The media praised the nationally televised debates, two presidential and one vice presidential, for their civility. All the candidates were so courteous and even deferential to each other.

But those very attributes conveyed a very different impression to the voters. To the public, it appeared that there wasn't any particular difference between the candidates.

In fact, Clinton and Dole did agree on most major issues. They agree on all the foreign policy and national defense issues, including NAFTA, GATT, the Mexican bailout, and troops to Bosnia and to any place else that the New World Order or the United Nations wants to send them.

The Clinton-Dole differences on the balanced budget and cutting taxes appeared to the voters to be a matter for the number-crunchers to compromise. They weren't anything for the voters to get excited about.

On the tremendous issue of health care, Dole bragged about supporting the Kennedy-Kassebaum health care bill, which Ted Kennedy boasted is a large first step toward national health care. Why bother to elect a Republican President if he is going to pass a bill sponsored by Ted Kennedy on the most important domestic issue?

Both Bob Dole and Jack Kemp believe that the money and tax issues are preeminent. Indeed, they are important; but when Republican candidates talk only about economic issues, they reinforce the

stereotype, unfortunately believed by so many people, that Republicans care only about money, while the Democrats care about people.

Dole has never fought for the cultural issues that Middle Americans care about: abortion, gay rights, immigration, affirmative action, or education. Dole confirmed almost all Clinton's liberal, pro-abortion judges, including the radical feminist, Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

For four years, the liberal media propagated the falsehood that the 1992 Republican National Convention in Houston was a disaster because some speakers spoke bluntly about the cultural and moral issues. That is false memory syndrome.

In 1996, the liberal media worked a "don't throw me into the briarpatch" tactic by warning the Republican Convention managers of dire consequences if they dared to allow speakers to address the cultural and moral issues. The media's tactic worked.

The Convention speeches were all sanitized to make sure that they didn't address the cultural or social issues. The delegates were treated like mere stage props in a TV show who were programmed to chant "Dole-Kemp, Dole-Kemp" on cue.

None of the other presidential candidates -- Gramm, Buchanan, Dornan, Keyes, Forbes, or Alexander -- was allowed to speak. No one was allowed to speak about pro-life or the other cultural issues (although Colin Powell was allowed to say his is pro- choice).

The Dole people issued orders that Pat Buchanan's name was not to be mentioned over the Convention microphones, and then went to outrageous lengths to carry out that order. This caused about 100 of Buchanan's 144 delegate votes, that he had won in the primaries, to disappear during the roll-call.

After the Convention was over, the liberal media then attacked the 1996 Convention in San Diego because it was so boring and ratings were the lowest in 30 years. Nevertheless, Bob Dole continued to ignore the cultural and moral issues all during the fall campaign.

Even the media couldn't understand why Bob Dole never addressed the social issues during his campaign or TV debates. The New York Times ran a front-page news story on October 9 headlined "Dole

Still Silent On Major Issues."

The Times expressed bewilderment that Dole failed to use the social issues: abortion, the partial-birth abortion veto, homosexuals in the military, affirmative action, immigration, and welfare. The Times conceded that these issues would "drive President Clinton to the left and ultimately off the edge of the electoral map."

Both Dole and Jack Kemp let great opportunities pass during the TV debates without bringing up these moral issues. Most striking was the failure to talk about Clinton's veto of the ban on partial-birth abortions, an issue on which Dole clearly stood with the majority and could paint Clinton as "extremist."

But it's not all Bob Dole's fault; we should blame Bill Clinton's reelection on all the people who gave us Bob Dole as our nominee. How could anyone expect Dole to define himself as different from Bill Clinton when Dole agreed with Clinton on most issues, and wouldn't talk about the issues on which he might have disagreed?