P.S. to the NEWS
by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002
Phone: 618-462-5415

RELEASE: OCTOBER 28, 1980

## GETTING NONVOTERS TO THE POLLS

As America approaches what may be the most important national election of our times, more than 50 million Americans may decide not to vote. In the United States, the smallest percentage of potential voters goes to the polls of any nation in the world.

Does that mean that most Americans are happy with their government? On the contrary, it is probable that most Americans are unhappy with politics and politicians. Why, then, don't they exercise their right of self government and throw the rascals out on election day?

Some feel voting is useless, that we have the same policies no matter who is elected. Some feel that one vote doesn't matter. Some feel alienated by the political process. In the last election, I saw some bumper strips that read, "Don't vote; it only encourages them."

A large number of people are so proud of their status as independents that they refuse to vote in primaries which require the voter to declare his party affiliation. Those independents have opted out of more than half of the process of self government and have reduced themselves to choosing only between the few names on the November ballot.

Another large number of Americans abstain from voting because they think that politics is "dirty." They are proud and even self-righteous about their non-participation. Surveys show that, among the class of people who go to church twice a week, at least half of them do not vote.

Many Republicans have a defeatist attitude about the possibility of returning our government to fiscal sanity and our economy to free enterprise. They seem to believe that, as the welfare state grows, and a larger and larger percentage of citizens become recipients of federal largess, we face a future of a diminishing percentage of citizens who will vote against their own handouts.

Election figures do not support this conclusion. It is not true that increasing numbers of citizens are voting for more and more handouts. What is true is that in-

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creasing numbers of citizens are failing or refusing to vote at all.

A recent public opinion survey on nonvoting and the reasons therefor, conducted by V. Lance Tarrance Associates of Houston, showed that 60 percent of nonvoters are chronic nonvoters. However, about 15 percent of nonvoters can be motivated to return to the polls if they are given sufficient reason to do so.

Generally, the issues which are most likely to be a source of such motivation are abortion and defense. "The nation's economic problems are not the real polarizing issues at this point," Tarrance noted.

Tarrance's survey found that 21 percent of all nonvoters are "born-again" Christians. The two issues which motivate them most are prayer in schools and legislation restricting abortions.

When asked if they agree with the statement "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on," 48 percent strongly agree and another 15 percent agree. When asked if they agree with the statement "I don't think that public officials care much what people like me think," 37 percent strongly agree and 15 percent agree.

When asked whether they "care a good deal" which candidate wins the election for Congress from their district, 52 percent say they "don't care very much."

The people who run most political campaigns live in a very cloistered world in which everybody votes. They tend to think that people will choose between Carter, Reagan, and Anderson. In the real world, the American people will choose between Carter, Reagan, Anderson, and none of the above.

It's not that millions of Americans have any bias against voting. It's just that they feel nobody pays any attention to them, and that voting doesn't matter. Yet, if one candidate is able to tap this hidden resource, the shape of American politics could be changed forever.

Fifteen percent may appear to be a small percentage, but that means 7.5 million voters in a presidential election, and an average of 20,000 voters per congressional district. That is plenty of voters to swing many congressional elections and to decide who will be our next President.

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