

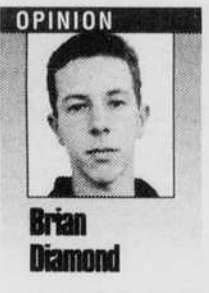
THIS WEEK
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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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Voting is a duty, not powerful privilege



Your vote next week may not make a difference, but it's still an important part of living in a democracy

It's been said over and over. Your vote makes a difference. No other slogan has been used as frequently to inspire people to go out and vote as this one. It just wouldn't feel like election time without hearing someone tell you your vote can make a difference. "Rock" the vote, make a difference, change the world and vote. The entire rationale for voting today hinges on the assumption that your vote really can make a difference. If that is the reason we do vote, it is sad to note that the statement is an absolute lie.

Your vote won't make a difference, no matter how badly you want it to. This may be hard to believe after being told it does for so long, but deep down inside we all know it's true. Your vote won't change the future of our country; it won't even have an effect on it. In fact, if you were to stay home and not vote in this election, the outcome would be the same as if you had voted. If you find that hard to accept, think about it for a while. Even at the most lo-

cal level, there are thousands of people voting, and the odds of an election coming down to your one vote are so small they aren't even worth mentioning. In fact, if you were not to vote in the next 100 elections, there would be no change in the course of events. That's not just an opinion. It's a mathematical fact. No election is decided by one vote. If your vote has no effect on the outcome of an election, how can we say with a straight face that your vote can make a difference? In reality, anyone who tells you your vote can make a difference is either ignorant or lying.

Of course there is a common response to this kind of thinking: what if everyone thought that way? If everyone did think that way and decided not to vote, sure, your vote would make a difference. That point is only valid, however, in theory, because in reality everyone doesn't think that way. You have to be pretty naive to really expect nobody to show up and vote in the next election. Even if only 50 percent of Americans vote in the upcoming election, that will surely be enough to ensure your vote will have no impact on the election's outcome. People are going to vote on election day — enough people so that your vote

won't have an impact — and that's the bottom line.

If your vote really doesn't make a difference, you might as well stay home come election time, right? Wrong. There's a very important reason why you should vote, and it has nothing to do with making a difference. It has nothing to do with changing the world, rocking the vote or any of those things. It has everything to do with responsibility. The reason you should vote is because it is your responsibility as a member of a democracy to do so.

Living in a democratic government is not a free privilege. In return for the freedoms we enjoy, we are required to give something back, and that something is voting. The one real responsibility democracy demands of us is that we involve ourselves in the political process, even if only by casting our vote once a year. When you think about it, the only real difference between a democracy and a dictatorship is that once a year we have to vote for our leaders. It is wrong to think of voting as a privilege; it's a duty. Those who choose not to vote are failing to fulfill their duty. They are soaking up the rights and freedoms democracy

provides without paying the costs.

By voting every year, you fulfill your end of the bargain. You reaffirm that you accept the democratic process and the responsibilities that come with it. If there is a danger in people not voting, it is not toward the outcome of a particular election, it is toward the future of our government. By failing to cast your vote, you are basically saying you would be just as happy living under a dictatorship as a democracy. By failing to fulfill your duty to vote, you are giving up any right to the freedoms you now enjoy.

In the upcoming election, millions of Americans will no doubt choose not to vote because they don't think they can make a difference. While they are correct in their reasoning, they are not excused. Voting is important, not because it makes a difference, but because it is our obligation. If we really believe in a democratic government, we have no excuse for staying away from the ballot box.

Brian Diamond, a sophomore majoring in journalism, is a columnist for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

CORRECTION

The photo of Peter Bartel, a candidate for Lane County Commissioner, printed in the Oct. 29 issue of the *Emerald* was incorrect. The photo was actually Peter Sorenson. The *Emerald* regrets the error.



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LETTERS

Nader independent

Many people do not know Ralph Nader. He's been a consumer advocate for the last 30 years, and now he's running for president. He's honest and persistent, and if he gets elected, it will be by the people — not the corporations.

Both the Republican and Democratic parties are equally as guilty for allowing corporations to gain too much power by permitting them to make huge private donations for public campaigns. U.S. citizens have very little control over the quality and management of the public resources we all have rights to: land, air and

water. These days, if someone wants to elect a politician who will give them a break on environmental regulations as well as taxes, they can do it with enough money.

Nader and his running mate, Winona LaDuke, may not win this election. However, this is a campaign that builds on the future. People must choose if they will vote with their hearts and conscience or with their fear. If we believe there is a problem with our arrangement of government, then we must choose an alternative solution to the "repubocrat" duopoly that exists now. As Nader says, "if you work at the root of the tree, it's more likely

that the fruits will come." If you support Nader but plan to vote for Clinton anyway, you are consenting to the corporate influence of government which is growing and must be ended.

Robin Retherford
Eugene

Clinton vs. Dole

All can agree that President Clinton and Bob Dole have their differences. Unfortunately, many can't see beyond the age. Some people even say that one is a better speaker than the other. But those are shallow, narrow-minded reasons to vote for the next U.S. president.

Instead, a vote should be determined by what kind of person you are and which candidate represents you best.

Clinton has said during the campaign that he believes that "as the president, I am responsible for taking care of you" and "we, as a nation, can be led under my leadership toward a future and no one will be left behind."

Dole, on the other hand, says he wants to "cut taxes and make government pinch pennies so that Americans can keep more of their earned money and build their own futures."

So despite character or past scandals both candidates may have been involved in, the vote

comes down to whether you are a follower or a leader. I challenge anyone to dispute this. After deciding what you are, then you should choose who you want to roll the dice on.

John Eccleston
Eugene

LETTERS POLICY

The *Oregon Daily Emerald* will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community.

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted. The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.