Written by Kathleen McCarthy
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Next week, Davenport voters will have the opportunity to vote for their new mayor and city council. A precious few of you bothered to turn out for the primary, so now you have to live with the slate of candidates before you. But whether you like the candidates or not, you have an obligation as an American to get out and vote. You can write in a candidate if you truly object to the choice on the ballot, or you can dig a little to learn if the candidates available have views on certain issues that you prefer or protest, or that you think have specific qualities that you could or could not support. Either way, if you didn't vote in the primary, redeem yourself by voting in the city election Tuesday, November 6. There is no single act more important or noble, or more American for that matter, than voting.

Beyond having a voice in who governs the city and how, by going to the polls you are accounted for in the much larger scheme of things. The more people who actually vote, the more accountable the politicians will be the next time around. They will know that a larger number of voters visited the polls to weigh in civically. Candidates will no longer be able to win elections merely with absentee ballots and by targeting the small group of Davenport citizens who traditionally and consistently vote. They will have to influence a much larger body of citizens with more diversity. Candidates like Bob McGivern will no longer be allowed to mostly represent just a narrow group of special interests. Instead, if candidates want to be re-elected, they will have to be responsive to a broader range of issues and concerns. Accountability will demand that the individual aldermen justify their votes on city business with concrete evidence of the merit or lack thereof. To provide such justification, they will have to demonstrate a working knowledge of the issues, along with the pros and cons, and from this establish and communicate an intelligent rationale that sells.

Currently, in large part because of the lack of voter turnout, elected officials are not compelled to justify themselves to the public. Candidates need only convince the select few voters, who cast ballots in every election, to vote for them on Election Day. It could be argued that some candidates strategize and actually depend on voters staying home and *not* voting.

This lack of concern for the voters on the part of incumbent Aldermen Moritz and Brown, as well as opposing candidates Zarn and Narby, is clearly demonstrated by their refusal to complete the questionnaire featured on pages 6 to10, which I strongly urge all voters to read. Their decision to deliberately not participate in this particular process marginalizes these four candidates, and begs the question: are they avoiding accountability for any campaign platforms, especially Aldermen Moritz and Brown, who reneged on significant portions of their platforms in the last election? It is also possible that the questions are beyond their scope of understanding. The other two candidates who are new to the political arena do a severe disservice to those voters who might consider them, but who cannot in good faith vote for a candidate unwilling to disclose his knowledge or position on the issues.

Every other candidate took the time to answer the questions. They demonstrated a willingness to share their views, doing so in a spirit of cooperation so as to better inform voters about themselves. They should be commended for a sincere effort. As for the four candidates who decided to ignore voters in this instance, it is my fervent hope that this political arrogance is reflected appropriately in November's election results.

By weighing in and voting for their own ward candidates, citizens automatically influence the outcome of the issues they care about by choosing the candidate who best reflects their views and positions. Once elected, if the candidate is not consistent with these views and positions claimed during the campaign, then it should be his/her last term. Reneging on campaign issues that got a candidate elected is the worst kind of public betrayal. An elected official's voting record is his/her bond with the public. Nothing speaks more clearly about a politician's integrity or purpose. Examine the incumbents voting record on issues you care about. It is public information and available to all citizens. As it stands now, not enough voters are turning out to influence the elected officials' political conduct, and the city suffers for it because special interests prevail more often than not.

Also, the collusion of aldermen to use their positions to get a city employee fired, as Aldermen Moritz, Sherwood, and Brown did in the case of 22-year veteran city attorney Mike Meloy, would not go unchallenged or politically unpunished if more citizens were paying attention. While these three aldermen clearly instigated this abuse of power, the rest of the council should also be held accountable for allowing it to happen, as well as the city staff who cooperated. There is no greater political evil than people in power who abuse it by affecting the lives of those who work for them. These three council neophytes had been in office less than two years before they collectively worked to terminate an employee who had served faithfully for 22 years without a single reprimand or disciplinary action against him by his superiors. The termination occurred without a shred of due process for which there is no excuse or political redemption. As a result of this particular conduct, the aldermen involved who are running for re-election are thoroughly unfit to serve. If citizens of Davenport agree that such abuse of power is unworthy of elected officials, then vote for their opponents on November 6.

Also, watch the city's broadcasts on Channel 13. Throughout the week, all the council meetings are televised (call the city's Public Information office for airtimes of the meetings at 326-6151). Residents can see for themselves how the council conducts itself, how it votes, and what rationale is given for the approval or denial of various aspects of city business. By engaging in this simple task, residents learn about their city, and they are privy to the ethics and professionalism of their elected officials. As voters, we have a paramount duty to do so. We must at least be this vigilant on a community level because it is no different locally than nationally. Without this civic participation, we are just a meaningless herd controlled by the special interests that in turn control various elected officials.

The worn-out excuse that there is nothing an individual can do to change things, or that an individual vote doesn't count, no longer suffices. We learned better in the last presidential election. Every solitary vote counts, literally. There is more civic and political power in the individual vote than any other source if voters would just use it. Imagine if every registered voter in this country cast a ballot in every election. If we wielded this political power, politicians would serve the public very differently. As it is, with so few voters participating, many elected officials operate in a virtual vacuum. Their sphere of influence is the lobbyists and special interests that relentlessly pursue them on a daily basis with their specific needs. The common taxpayer becomes more symbolic than a source of actual influence, comparatively. But that scenario would dramatically change if voters exercised their political muscle by voting, *no matter what*. Consider that less than 50% of the entire country's registered voters bothered to vote in the last

presidential election. If the other 50% were participating, the potential for real change becomes monumental. Individual votes equal collective influence. The more votes, the greater the influence. It is what this country was founded on. Eventually we would attract the kind of people to public office who would restore the meaning behind “of the people, by the people, for the people,” a concept that we cherish as Americans. By showing up, voters actually unite, regardless of our countless differences. We become a political voice so strong that we cannot be ignored. So vote next Tuesday. Otherwise, move to another country where your apathy won’t further degrade the greatest nation on Earth.

To learn more about the two mayoral candidates before November 6, watch a televised forum with Denise Hollonbeck and Charlie Brooke, hosted by WQPT’s Susan McPeters and River Cities’ Reader’s Jeff Ignatius. The mayoral forum will be broadcast on Channel 10, October 31 at 7pm. Repeat broadcasts for viewers are scheduled for November 2 at 8pm and November 4 at 9:30am.