

Weiss: How to vote 365 days per year

By Judy Weiss/Guest columnist

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As a kid, I followed Major League Baseball avidly, but was troubled by the All-Star team voting system. Fans voted multiple times for favorite players to be in the starting lineup. Occasionally, fans stuffed the ballot box causing the best players not to receive starting positions (Willie Mays and Hank Aaron in 1957 when Cincinnati fans elected 7 Reds to the starting line up). Since then the voting system has been modified, but some fans still feel it is unfair.

Already as a kid, I thought our political system was as unbalanced as All-Star voting. It seemed only wealthy corporations and their lobbyists got what they wanted from the government. Once I turned 18, I voted in every election, but my concerns were never addressed by my representatives. I cynically concluded I was allowed to vote once every other year, but monied interests could “vote” for their priorities daily.

Recently I read what one time MLB Commissioner Bart Giamatti said about American politics: “What concerns me most today is the way we have disconnected ideas from power in America, and created for ourselves thoughtful citizens who disdain politics and politicians, when more than ever we need to value politics and what politicians do.” In other words, if enlightened citizens scorn politics, and distrust politicians, they forfeit the chance to harness our powerful governmental system, and to use it for good. Giamatti advised citizens to make the system work to address their concerns.

I came across Giamatti’s statement in a book by Sam Daley-Harris titled *Reclaiming Our Democracy*. The book’s thesis is: if citizens feel the government does not represent them, then they should do something about it. Americans ought to learn how to communicate with their Senators and Representatives. By becoming better educated about issues, writing to and meeting members of Congress, and writing to newspapers, individuals can create the political will that pushes politicians to accomplish change for the greater good.

Daley-Harris provides examples from his experience founding and running the organization, RESULTS, that has advocated for Congressional action on world hunger, childhood illness and poverty since 1980. In honor of his book’s 20th anniversary, it will be reissued this fall with new material on climate change and Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL).

Climate change is a problem Congress hasn’t tackled because the public is largely silent. Lobbyists busily tell Congress climate change isn’t urgent (but it is), and minimize its risks (though they are severe). Unfortunately, few scientists lobby their congressmen. Most citizens who engage in activism prefer to point and click on e-petitions rather than write thoughtful, individualized letters. It takes time to read climate change blogs, articles and books. It takes emotional energy and a support system not to be depressed by full-fledged climate change activism.

CCL members educate themselves via monthly national conference calls featuring lectures by scientists, economists, politicians, psychologists, doctors, or religious leaders. Local chapters hold monthly meetings to review action plans (letter writing, scheduling appointments, encouraging editorials, practicing climate change talks). Members encourage each other to endure work that might otherwise be disheartening thus creating political will to stabilize the climate. As CCL Executive Director Mark Reynolds says, “Politicians don’t create political will, they respond to it.”

In addition to local chapters, a special CCL group is working to enlist the oil industry as an ally to convince Congress to address climate change. We find on oil company websites that they recognize climate change is a serious problem. They acknowledge government policy will have to address climate change, and they recommend a revenue-neutral price on carbon. They say it clearly on their websites, but not in public speaking engagements. It is time for them to encourage government action.

It is also time for MLB to advocate for climate change legislation. The Red Sox and other teams already go green in their ballparks. However, MLB has tremendous public influence, and should use it to encourage the public to request Congressional climate change action, thereby “voting often.”

Making a pitch for climate change legislation is the most patriotic thing Americans can do this year to celebrate the 4th of July and honor our democracy.

Judy Weiss of Brookline is a rabbi and a member of the Citizens Climate Lobby.

http://www.wickedlocal.com/hudson/news/opinions/x853684149/Weiss-How-to-vote-365-days-per-year?zc_p=0#axzz2YKcVvKuY