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**A Guide to Election Night for the Non-Political Junkie**

**By Terry Mitchell**

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Even if you are not a political junkie like I am, you will still probably find yourself glued to your TV set on election night. Obviously, you'll be waiting to find out whether President George W. Bush will be elected or if Senator John F. Kerry of Massachusetts will become our 44th President. Will everything you see and hear that night be interesting? Will it even make sense to you? Well, if all you are interested in is finding out who wins, you may be in for a long and boring night. Volumes of information will be presented that night before a final winner is declared. However, if you know a few things to look for, all of that stuff might make a lot more sense and actually be interesting as well.

For one thing, you need to be aware that there's only going to be a passive emphasis on the national popular vote, i.e., the total amount of votes cast nationally for each candidate. That's because it doesn't determine who wins – the electoral votes do. In every state except Maine, Nebraska, and perhaps Colorado (more on that later), the winner of that state receives all of its electoral votes. Maine awards them by congressional district, with the other two going to that state's overall winner. Nebraska awards its electoral votes proportionally, based on the percentage of the popular vote each candidate receives in that state.

The number of electoral votes each state has is calculated by adding the number of its congressional districts to the number of its senators. The number of congressional districts each state has is based on its population. The more populous states like California and Texas have a lot more congressional districts than more sparsely populated states like Wyoming or Vermont. However, every state has at least one congressional district, no matter how small its population. Every state has exactly two senators. Therefore, every state has at least three electoral votes. In addition to all the states, the District of Columbia is allotted three electoral votes, even though it has no voting members in Congress.

Many people believe the electoral college, the system of casting electoral votes to determine the outcome of the presidential election, is inherently unfair and should be abolished in favor of a system in which the winner is determined purely by the national popular vote. Of course, it would take a Constitutional amendment for that to happen. Therefore, the electoral college is here to stay. Even if

such amendment could get the required two-thirds margin in the House and Senate, it would never be able to get the required three-quarters of the state legislatures. There are too many small states that would be staunchly opposed to it, as they feel that the electoral college allows them to be "players" in the presidential election campaign that they would not be in a purely popular vote system. These small states fear that they would be completely ignored by presidential candidates, without the electoral college. I fear that they are right.

Many states will be "called", i.e., a projected winner of that state will be announced, by news organizations as soon as the polls close in those states. This can be done fairly accurately with the use of exit polls, a process by which voters are asked about their decision as they are exiting their polling places. If the exit polling sample alone from a given state shows a clear victory for one candidate, they will call that state as soon as its polls close. If the exit polls show that a given state is too close to call,

they will wait until enough of the actual vote count comes in before calling that state. Exit polls are sometimes wrong, though. The most infamous example was Florida in 2000, when it was called for Gore based on exit polling data and some of the actual results. After more of the actual results started coming in, however, the news organizations soon started to realize things might not go in Florida the way they had projected, so they soon retracted their call and the state ultimately went to Bush.

By the way, people who say they never believe exit polls (or political polls in general) will offer two main criticisms of them. The first is: "They've never asked me." In actuality, very few voters are ever contacted by pollsters. Only a very small sample of voters is needed to get a reasonably accurate result, provided it is random enough and varied enough among all demographic groups, geographic areas, etc. To use an analogy that I've often heard, you don't need to drink the whole glass of tea to find out whether or not it's sweet. Just a taste will do, assuming the glass has been stirred properly. The other criticism is: "They ask intentionally misleading and confusing questions." This is quite true of many political polls. However, the main question asked during exit polling is: "For whom did you vote?". I wonder which part of that question people wouldn't understand.

As states are called, their electoral votes are placed into one candidate's column. Also, look for each news organization to utilize a map of the United States, which starts out with each state depicted as white. As a state is called for Bush, its color is changed to red; as a state is called for Kerry, its color is changed to blue; hence, the red states and blue states. Look for Kentucky to be the first state called. That state closes its polls at 6:00 Eastern Time and will almost certainly fall into Bush's column. Once a candidate reaches 270 or more electoral votes, he will be declared the winner of the election, regardless of the total popular votes or how many red or blue states he has earned.

If Bush wins all the states he won in 2000 and no more, he will win by a larger margin (277-261) in the electoral college than he won by last time (271-267). Actually, he could lose one of his smaller states like New Hampshire, without picking up one that Gore won, and still win the election. This is because, based on the 2000 census, the population has shifted a bit and six congressional seats (and therefore the same amount of electoral votes) have shifted from "Gore" states to "Bush" states.

The key states to watch throughout the evening will be the so-called "battleground" states. The candidate who wins the majority of those states will likely win the election. By most estimates, these

states include New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Florida, West Virginia, Ohio, Iowa, Wisconsin, Colorado, and New Mexico. Most of the other states are considered to already be in the column of one candidate or the other. As a general rule, Bush is expected to be strong in the south, southwest, and mountain and prairie west. Kerry looks to be strong in the northeast, upper Midwest, and along the Pacific coast. I don't see any state further west than New Mexico or Colorado being a major decisive factor. It is already assumed that California, Oregon, Washington, and Hawaii will all go for Kerry, while Alaska will go for Bush.

Colorado could prove to be the most controversial this time, but only if everything falls right. There is an initiative on the Colorado ballot to award its electoral votes proportionally, instead of awarding all nine of them to the winner, as it does now. If passed, this would go into effect immediately with this election. Since the race in Colorado is expected to be close, the results of this measure would effectively take four electoral votes away from the winner of the state and give them to the loser. Therefore, if the measure passes and the candidate who wins Colorado loses the election by less than nine electoral votes, the measure will have cost that candidate the election. Obviously, a major legal battle would ensue if that happened.

One final item to watch for on election night is the battle for control of the House and the Senate. The Republicans currently hold a slim margin in both houses. Several key wins, or "pick-ups," by the Democrats could turn things around in their favor in one house or possibly both. Conversely, some pick-ups by the Republicans could increase their margin in one or both house. Key races that could go either way will be monitored closely throughout the evening.

Terry Mitchell is a software engineer from Hopewell, VA. He operates a website, <http://www.commenterry.com>, on which he posts commentaries on various subjects such as politics, technology, religion, health and well-being, personal finance, and sports. His commentaries offer a unique point of view that is not often found in mainstream media. Mr. Mitchell is also a trivia buff.

## **Marriage and the Election**

**By Rusty Ford**

Dear Friends of Marriage,

There is a lot of talk on both sides in this election that this is the most important election this century. Most of this is exaggeration to try and motivate people to vote for one candidate or the other. But in one area this is true.

Depending on who wins this election, marriage as we know it may never be the same. In the last debate President Bush said he was for a marriage amendment because you cannot trust activist judges on the court. We have already begun to see this happen. On October 5 a Louisiana judge voided the constitutional amendment that was passed this past spring by the State Legislature and passed the public vote by 78%.

After Novembers election over one third of the states will have a constitutional amendment or law defining marriage as being between one man and one woman. Senator Kerry when ask the same question about a marriage amendment sighted the number of states with laws or amendments as reason to not have a constitutional amendment. This argument sound great but now we see that the courts could over rule all these laws and amendments.

While it is uncertain that we will get a constitutional amendment it is very important that we have the right judges appointed. Senator Kerry stated in the debate that he would only appoint judges who supported abortion. As we have all seen in the past pro abortion judges are almost always extremely liberal and are the types of judges that do not support marriage.

If you support marriage as being between one man and one woman it is imperative that you vote in this election and encourage as many people who believe in families to also vote. It looks as if this is going to be a close election and voter turn out will most likely make a difference.

Please do not let the homosexual community and their undying support for the Democrats steal this election and destroy family as we have know it for over 6000 years.

Rusty Ford

Rusty Ford the a senior researcher at Initiative Watch.

Any one can use this article as long as it is used in tact.

Marriage and the Election

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