



ONE
VOTE

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BEN CARSON, MD

WITH CANDY CARSON

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One Vote: Make Your Voice Heard

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PREFACE

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, after the usual arduous twelve-to-sixteen-hour day at work as the director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital, I was rushing home to complete my civic duty as a voter in Maryland's gubernatorial race. I lived in Upperco, Maryland, and my polling place was right down the street at a fire station. I arrived five minutes before 8 p.m., which was the closing time for the polls. After waiting in line for a few minutes, I was told the polls were closed and those still waiting in line would not be permitted to vote. I was considerably less than amused and felt deprived of a constitutional right.

It was one of the few times I have missed a voting opportunity since I reached the age of majority while in college. I remember being very excited about my first opportunity to vote for a presidential

candidate while a student at Yale. Like most of the students there at that time, I considered myself a liberal and proudly voted for George McGovern, who lost in a landslide. My political leanings have changed significantly over the years based on my experiences. Although I probably lean more toward the conservative side now, my interest in participating in the selection of our representatives has not diminished. In fact, now that I have children and grandchildren, I have even more interest in trying to protect their future with my *one vote*.

Recent polling has shown that the vast majority of Americans feel our nation is moving in the wrong direction, and many people feel powerless to do anything about it. This is why *we the people* must undergo a radical change in our perception of who we are and how much power we have. We are at the pinnacle of power because our system of governance was set up that way.

There are few things in our lives that compare to the privilege and the responsibility we have as voters. Many people feel that their *one vote* does not count because they are only one among millions, but the sad fact is that in the 2012 presidential election, 93 million eligible voters failed to vote,¹ many of them feeling that their vote simply did not matter. Even a small fraction of that number of votes could dramatically affect the outcome of any election.

In the early days of America's history, only the rich and privileged were allowed to vote. Everyone else's right to vote was won after a hard-fought battle and should not be so easily relinquished. Voting is the only way we can control our government. If we fail to exercise that right, we are in danger of abdicating to our government the one power we all have in common—our *one vote*. What a terrible thing to believe that our *one vote* does not matter. It most certainly does. The next couple of national elections in America will determine what kind of country the future will hold. Each of us who plans on living here should certainly make sure, through our voting, that it is the place where we truly want to live.

After my unpleasant experience at the fire station in Upperco, Maryland, I began voting by absentee ballot and never had another anxious moment due to my unpredictable schedule. As the reader will learn in this publication, there are many avenues we can pursue to take advantage of our voting rights without creating undue turmoil in our lives.

CHAPTER 1

YOU ARE THE PINNACLE OF POWER

All power is originally vested in, and consequently derived from, the people. That government is instituted and ought to be exercised for the benefit of the people; which consists in the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the right of acquiring property, and generally of pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety. That the people have an indubitable, inalienable, and indefeasible right to reform or change their Government, whenever it may be found adverse or inadequate to the purposes of its institution.

JAMES MADISON

THE STATEMENT ON THE PRECEDING PAGE by our fourth president, often hailed as the “Father of the Constitution,” makes it very clear that our founders intended for America to be governed by the will of the people. Too many previously well-intentioned governments had degenerated into monarchies or tyrannical states.

By vesting the power of the vote in the people themselves, the Founding Fathers fervently hoped and prayed the people would remain vigilant enough to recognize when (through their natural tendencies) elected officials began to overstep their boundaries and impose their will on the people. They expected that each man’s *one vote* would be used to peacefully remove those who didn’t deserve their elected offices.

The founders knew that prosperity would bring complacency and pave the way for the gradual erosion of a people-centric government. Our Constitution was designed to give people the option of taking corrective action without the need for the

armed combat that too often happens around the world, even in this century. Our founders did, however, recognize there was a possibility that an overbearing government, drunk with power, might not submit to the will of the people and might, in fact, employ the military to suppress the will of the people. This is one of the reasons why the Second Amendment was added. It reads as follows: "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." They knew that an armed populace would be a powerful deterrent to the imposition of dictatorial powers. As a testimony to their wisdom, a historical analysis informs us that many dictators, such as Hitler, Stalin, Castro, and Chairman Mao, among others, confiscated firearms before their reigns of terror began.

Through the power of the ballot, if *we the people* become unhappy with the direction of our government, we have the ability to make small changes or, through major gains in elections, even massive changes to the balance of power. Unfortunately, in recent years many people who are unhappy with the direction of the country have simply decided to tune out and let everyone else make the decisions. As I mentioned earlier, most people are unaware that in the presidential election of 2012, more people did not vote than voted for either candidate.

Having had an opportunity to meet with many of these disaffected voters, I have learned that large numbers of Americans have simply given up on the concept of a country of, by, and for the people and have decided that the downward spiral of our nation cannot be countered. Thus, they have given up.

This is just the kind of attitude that our founders wished to avoid by placing the real power in the hands of the people. This power gives the people the ability to meet with one another, discuss the direction of their nation, and, through their collective determination and voting, to change that direction. This is a wonderful blessing for every American, regardless of political affiliation.

Our system was designed to prevent anyone in any position from escaping the will of the people. Even the president, vice president, and Supreme Court justices (who hold lifetime positions) can be impeached through established parliamentary procedures if they have committed high crimes or treasonous acts. There are few places in the world that provide the people with so much power, and we must not only learn how to use it but understand our responsibility to use it correctly. Furthermore, we must vigilantly guard our rights as voters. There is no question that from time to time the people will be led astray by disingenuous politicians who are more interested in their party or their ideology

than they are in the welfare of the nation. Knowing this to be the case, Thomas Jefferson famously said, “The good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army. They may be led astray for a moment, but will soon correct themselves.”¹

How do *we the people* know when the government is overstepping its boundaries and infringing on our rights? The first step in this realization is to understand that the government works for us and not vice versa. Whenever we see governmental policies that impose laws and regulations the majority of people oppose, we should question whether it is time to replace the leaders who would advocate for such a situation. Furthermore, when any of our basic rights—such as freedom of expression, freedom of religion, the right to our earned property, and so on—are compromised by executive decree or legislative processes, the alarm must be sounded, and we must rigorously resist the imposition of such measures on our lives. Heavy-handed tactics that are coercive and oppositional to the will of the people should not and cannot be tolerated, or they will only get worse and freedom will not be maintained. It is easy to fall into the trap of only acknowledging government overreaches when the party to which we do not belong is in charge. This is one of the reasons why Jesus once said (and Abraham Lincoln famously quoted), “A house

divided against itself cannot stand.”² When we can only recognize wrongdoing in a party other than our own, we are putting politics ahead of patriotism. When the majority of people are doing that, the viability of the nation is threatened.

I mentioned earlier that some people have simply tuned out of the political process and have refused to participate because they are discouraged. There are others, however, who have developed attitudes more characteristic of spoiled children who, upon failing to get their way, simply say, “I’m taking my marbles and going home.” This is different from those who simply tune out of the game of marbles in the first place. These people need to realize that in the world of representative government, which is what we have, it is actually smart to use your resources to pick the lesser of two evils. It is fallacious reasoning to conclude that all people who are not your chosen candidate are equally bad. No one who fails to vote has any right to complain about the government that is put in place.

In the case that I mentioned in the preface, where I was denied the right to vote because I was tardy according to the election officials, the whole problem could have been avoided with some forethought. In order to avoid such situations, it is important to plan ahead as you would with any important event in your life. That might mean

arranging for someone to watch your children, or even planning to take the children with you to the voting booth. Sometimes it involves making arrangements with an employer ahead of time. Also, everyone should be aware that most states allow you to vote by absentee ballot in any election so long as arrangements are made in advance. And it is important to note that in many cases you do not have to be away from home on election day to be eligible to vote by absentee ballot. It is helpful to know you can mail in your absentee ballot at any time after you receive it in the mail until the day of the election. The point is, performing your civic duty as a voter is considerably more important than watching your favorite television program or sporting event. Even though it doesn't cost you anything to vote, it could cost you a great deal of unhappiness not to.

I wish I did not have to include the next few sentences, but unfortunately, I must. There are many people who go to the polls and vote for people about whom they know very little. In many cases, they are only looking for the political designation and sometimes vote a straight Republican ticket or a straight Democrat ticket without paying any attention whatsoever to who these people are or what the issues are. If, in fact, they were to study some of the candidates they were voting for, they would be horrified. They would find that these

people have little in common with them, and in many cases, they actually vote in ways contrary to the well-being of their constituency. Later in this book, we will discuss some of the mechanisms that can be easily employed by anyone to garner a great deal of information about candidates for public office.

It is very important for voters to beware of groups trying to buy their votes with material goods or special privileges. Voters should be particularly wary of those who only show up around election time, contributing nothing worthwhile throughout the remainder of the year. If these are good and decent people, those characteristics should be manifested 24/7, 365 days a year. When that is the case, it is very unlikely they will find it necessary to try to buy votes. It is also critical for all voters to use their analytical skills and not wait for someone else to tell them how they should vote. It is a simple matter to ask yourself whether the policies that various candidates are advocating have been helpful or harmful to you and your community. If the community is not improving and the same political figures have been around for quite some time, common sense would dictate the necessity for a change. Until they awaken, people who cannot make that simple calculation are destined to continue with their less-than-optimal lifestyles.

We have all been admonished to vote responsibly, but what does that really mean? I believe it simply means we should be familiar with the choices offered on the ballot and employ our cognitive skills to make choices in our best interests. Always voting for one party or as someone else instructed you shows you are not taking your responsibility as a voter seriously, and it also makes you the kind of voter candidates do not take seriously, because they conclude you are easily manipulated. If you want candidates to engage in responsibly courting your vote, you must demand they explain in an intelligible way what they have done to deserve it.

Many years ago, it was common for high schools to offer courses in civics. In these courses, students learned, among other things, about the structure of government and about their responsibilities as voters. Many, if not most, schools have now eliminated such courses, perhaps assuming this kind of material will be learned by osmosis. As part of that osmotic process, parents, guardians, and relatives should begin to explain civic responsibilities and the democratic process to young people as soon as they are able to comprehend them. If you look at some of the exit exams people had to take to get a certificate for completion of the eighth grade in the early to mid-1800s, you will see the students were expected to have

a broad base of knowledge in civics. When students have this kind of information, they generally become much more interested in the local, national, and international news and are much more likely to become informed citizens.

Few privileges or responsibilities are more important than that of voting. *We the people* have the ability to control the destiny of our nation. We should never be in the position of giving up in despair. The founders of this nation put in place a structure to preserve life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is up to us to use it.