

Guest commentary: Federal Glover: A quick take on the 2012 election

By Supervisor Federal Glover Guest commentary San Jose Mercury News

Posted:

ContraCostaTimes.com

Another election cycle has come and gone and the United States has again shown the world that the democratic process as practiced in America continues to work despite its flaws. Since some constituents have asked me what I took away from the elections, for what it is worth, here are a few of my thoughts and observations of Nov. 6:

President Barack Obama: The President had it right in his acceptance speech when he hit on a theme that I have been emphasizing these past few years: Democracy is not a spectator sport. The President reinforced that belief when he said: "The role of citizens in our democracy does not end with your vote. America's never been about what can be done for us. It's about what can be done by us ... together through the hard and frustrating, but necessary work of self-government. That's the principle we were founded on."

Whether your candidate won or lost, Americans must build on our common goals for the good of our country, not for the good of our political affiliations.

Changing America: Our country is changing demographically and California is in the forefront of this change. The GOP learned this lesson the hard way. Ethnic minorities, women and young people overwhelmingly voted for President Obama.

Even though Romney won a majority of white, male voters, the president also won a good chunk of their votes. The old political axiom that you needed to win the white, male and older voters was turned on its head this year.

While that may have been true in the past, that may no longer be true. While Republicans made their appeal to the traditional voter of the past, the Democrats sought out the new voters of the present and future. Political parties have learned you need to widen your appeal to include a wider spectrum of people.

Measure Q: The people of Contra Costa have spoken. Apparently, the voters placed pension reform over safety. The Board of Supervisors will have to make the difficult decisions of which fire stations to close. Firefighters may be laid off.

Unfortunately, lives and property will be endangered and fire insurance premiums will likely rise for homeowners and businesses. In making our decision, the Board of Supervisors will continue to place a high priority on maintaining the safety of our communities as best we can and to the best of available resources.

Proposition 30: The voters may be thrifty in these economic times, but they don't want the government to go bankrupt. California will benefit from the passage of Prop. 30. It was not widely written about, but Prop. 30 will not only help fund the schools which we all support, but the state will also increase public safety by helping fund realignment and the programs and facilities that help inmates reintegrate into the community instead of getting into the cycle of recidivism.

The Initiative Process: Californians want to have a say in making laws. The initiative process was supposed to help them accomplish what politicians were afraid to do because of pressure from special interests. However, special interests have learned to use their money to take the initiative process away from the people to push their own agendas or business interests. The U.S. Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling that allows corporations to donate vast sums anonymously makes the process even more vulnerable to special interests.

On the other side of the coin, if voters are going to exercise their right to make law, they need to overcome the attempts to confuse them with half-truths and outright lies by staying informed and educate themselves on the issues. That means it is incumbent on them, and the impartial media, to clear the fog of confusion. The increasing use of the Internet through social media is a two-edged sword. It can be used to sow further misinformation or it can provide a means to clear the air with immediate clarifications and truth telling.

Citizen engagement: The high voter turnout in Contra Costa -- about 80 percent -- gives me hope in that voters value

the right to vote. They are not as apathetic as cynics would have us believe.

The voters in Florida and other states who had to wait in line eight hours to exercise their right reinforces the strong belief in America's political process. Voters' persistence overcame all the attempts to dissuade them by making the voting process highly uncomfortable, shortened voting hours to outright intimidation.

That said, in the United States of America in this modern age, no one should have to wait that long to vote.

Federal Glover is the Contra Costa County Supervisor, District 5. Reach him at district@bos.cccounty.us