

from our viewpoint...

## Debates are over; name calling begins

There was no knockout punch in the presidential debates, and neither George Bush or John Kerry was able to get a real advantage out of the post-debate polls.

There are two weeks left in the campaign, and it appears the thrust of the arguments we will listen to is Bush calling Kerry an “out-of-the-mainstream liberal,” and Kerry is labeling Bush an “out-of-the-mainstream conservative.” Both are using the labels as though they were somehow dirty words.

Bush began the “liberal” charge in the final debate, saying Kerry was even more liberal than Ted Kennedy, the other senator from Massachusetts. In another answer, Bush was saying how he had asked the Congress to pass the Medicare reform, and that even Kennedy had supported him.

Kerry said the Bush idea to privatize Social Security is a conservative move that will cut pension benefits, and raise the retirement age for those who are getting close to retirement.

The labels of Liberal and Conservative have been used in different ways over the more than 200 years of American politics. In the elections since the beginning of the 20th century, the effort has been to paint all Democrats as liberal and all Republicans as conservative.

Reality is much different; there are liberals and conservatives in both parties, and people can be liberal on one issue and conservative on another.

The WordNet Dictionary defines a Liberal as: 1. [n] a person who favors a political philosophy of progress and reform and the protection of civil liberties. 2.[n] a person who favors an economic theory of laissez-faire and self-regulating markets. 3.[adj] tolerant of change; not bound by authoritarianism, orthodoxy, or tradition. 4.[adj] showing or characterized by broad-mindedness; “a broad political stance”; “generous and broad sympathies”; “a liberal newspaper”; “tolerant of his opponent’s opinions.”

WordNet defines a Conservative as: 1. [n] a person who has conservative ideas or opinions. 2.[adj] resistant to change. 3.[adj] conforming to the standards and conventions of the middle class; “a bourgeois mentality.” 4.[adj] unimaginatively conventional; “a colorful character in the buttoned-down, dull-gray world of business”-Newsweek. 5.[adj] avoiding excess; “a conservative estimate.” 6.[adj] opposed to liberal reforms.

There are good things on both sides of the political spectrum, and it is important to the success of the democratic government we have that there are people willing to be labeled as one or the other.

In the battle of ideas, most people will not make a decision based on one statement or how a person is labeled, but that does not stop either Bush or Kerry from trying to make the label be a negative for their opponent.

Another argument is to say that the liberal is a person more likely to think the glass is half full and believe it will get fuller. The conservative is a person who thinks the glass is half empty, and is afraid it will always get worse.

Those are as broad and over sweeping as the idea that all Democrats are liberal and all Republicans are conservative.

These labeling arguments are good for the political scientists who try to explain why things happen and the forces of the society that come together to make the changes. Day-to-day, though, the labels are less clear, and have less to do with what is or may happen.

They serve as ideological battering rams, and are being used that way today, substituting name calling for substance.

In Sherman County, early voting began today, and no matter whether you consider yourself a liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, this is an important election for you to vote in — for the man of your choice. — *Tom Betz*

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## Gas prices are out of control

Gas prices today are out of control. The price of crude oil is steadily rising and had reached a high of \$54.93 per gallon by Friday.

This price is, of course, not absorbed by the large oil companies as they pocket huge profits, but it is passed on to me directly.

I understand fuel is expensive, and I’m willing to pay for it in my 30-ish-miles-per-gallon-car, but why do people in different parts of the county pay different prices for fuel?

Recently, I drove seven hours to visit my family in Oklahoma City. As I got closer, I noticed that gas prices dipped steadily.

By the time I reached I-40 and Morgan Road, a popular truck stop on the west side of Oklahoma City, gas cost only \$1.70 per gallon!

In Goodland, we would be lined up at the station to get such a deal. The price here was \$1.99 though.

After a weekend down south, I was shocked when I pulled into the gas station at Hays and saw the \$2.09 per gallon they expected me to shell out. I asked the lady behind the counter why, and she said, “gas is always more expensive here.”



### kathryn gurfinkel

• commentary

So why does 500 miles make such a difference? Who is pocketing those extra 39 cents per gallon and why? I know it can’t cost that much to deliver the gas to Goodland, so what’s up?

We’ve all heard on the news that gas is higher in California, but why? Who sets these prices?

I did some research and found out Kansas has a gas tax of 25 cents per gallon, that’s topped off by the 18.4 cents per gallon in federal taxes. Compare that number to the 14 cents per gallon Oklahoma charges consumers, and you wonder why we don’t all move south. The highest state for gas tax is Wisconsin, at 27.75 cents tax per gallon. Colorado ranks pretty high, with 22 cents per gallon, while Nebraska wants a full 25.5 cents per gallon.

The taxes help to make the price difference

## Top 10 (bad) excuses for not voting

By Diana J. Wynne

*The Christian Science Monitor*

What do the Maltese, the Uzbeks, and the Cambodians have in common?

In the 1990s, they voted at nearly twice the rate of Americans. In a survey of voter turnout in 163 countries, the United States came in 140th.

According to the Federal Election Commission, out of 205 million eligible voters in 2000, 156 million were registered but only 105 million actually cast a ballot. If the same holds true this year, 100 million Americans might not get to the polls — unless they overcome whatever is holding them back. Since people of all political stripes agree this is a crucial election, why don’t more Americans vote?

• They’re intimidated by long ballots. Many people don’t realize they don’t have to answer every question. They can vote for a single candidate and leave the rest blank.

• They’re busy. No one likes to wait in line. But perhaps they don’t know that many states allow early voting, including on weekends. In Iowa and Arizona, polls are already open. Some Florida counties open Oct. 18.

• They don’t realize they can vote absentee, which allows more time to read the ballot at home.

• They don’t come from a voting family.



### from other pens

• commentary

Susan Clark of the Easy Voter Guide in California cites this as a predictor of whether adults vote. If your parents didn’t vote, you probably don’t think it’s important either. (So take your kids to the polls with you!)

• They’re afraid of being called for jury duty if they register. This is based on a myth. Jury lists in most states are taken from driver’s license records, not voter lists.

• They don’t realize they can ask for a ballot in a their language. In most states, voters can bring a friend or family member along to translate.

• They’re afraid of discrimination. The legacy of Jim Crow runs deep for African-American voters, especially in the South. No one is allowed to ask a voter to pass a test at the polling place. This right was hard-earned. We all need to take responsibility to ensure access for all eligible voters on Election Day.

• They come from a country where voting against an incumbent had negative consequences. In Latin American countries run by

make more sense, but look at Wichita or Kansas City: they have the same tax, but gas costs less. Gas in Kansas City on Friday was as low as \$1.99 per gallon.

Maybe it’s just the timing that doesn’t make us outraged at gas prices. We all expect to pay more over holiday weekends, but is there really less gas? Couldn’t the gas stations get bigger supplies to prepare for the rush and charge us the same price?

The increase also has been spread out over several months. When the numbers are compared, however, one year ago we were paying an average of \$1.46 cents per gallon across Kansas.

If it’s war, Nigerian rebel attacks or hurricane Ivan in Mexico, we can’t do much about it. But I suspect the trend is bigger than those things and we need long-term solutions.

We should all just give up on gasoline and go to hybrid cars, half gas half electric. Or better yet, we can each buy a shiny new hydrogen car ... weren’t we promised one of those a few years ago ... or hasn’t that come out yet?

*Kansas City gas prices and Kansas tax figures from [www.KCgasprices.com](http://www.KCgasprices.com).*

military juntas, voting for an opposition candidate might have brought danger to the family. Many new citizens don’t believe their ballots are secret. They’re fearful, so they stay home. (Paradoxically, in the 1990s, citizens of Paraguay and El Salvador still voted in higher percentages than Americans.)

• They come from a country where voting had no consequences. Friends from China remind me that they vote for mayors and local officials. They just don’t have a lot of choices. This same complaint is voiced by many Americans — “I’d vote, but I don’t like the candidates.” Unfortunately, the time to resolve this is not November.

After 2000, no one can claim that a single vote can’t change the outcome. Less than 600 votes in Florida sent George W. Bush to the White House. Everything indicates this election is going to be close, and once again, may be decided in Florida.

• Maybe they just don’t like being pressured. And who can blame them? When was the last time anyone cared this much about hurricane victims in Tampa or freshmen at Ohio State? So don’t lecture. Listen to what people say, and let them know their opinions matter.

If you want friends and neighbors to vote, just ask them. Offer to discuss the ballot pamphlet together or go with them to the polling place.

Most states have registration deadlines in early October, but some — such as Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wyoming, and parts of Wisconsin — allow registration up to Election Day.

This year, every vote counts. Make sure yours does, too.

*Diana J. Wynne is a writer and producer of multimedia content for The Christian Science Monitor. She wrote and produced “Joyce to the World,” a documentary celebrating Bloomsday and the passionate readers of James Joyce’s “Ulysses.”*

### garfield

