

Election Guide for Election Haters

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

I'll admit it right now. My name is David and I hate elections. (HI, DAVID!) I hate choosing the evil of two lessers. I hate attack ads. I hate endless repetitive debates that exclude all the interesting questions. I hate painting one candidate as all bad and the other as infallible even when I have to squint to see a difference between them. I hate that there are only two candidates who have a chance at winning. I hate that most of what we hear is through advertisements funded by unbelievably wealthy people, and most of the non-advertising news consists of reports on the advertisements. I hate that election season lasts for a year or more. I hate that after all this, most people don't vote, not even for third-party candidates or write-ins or none-of-the-above. I hate how people who do vote prefer candidates who promise never to be influenced by public opinion. I hate the "mandate" for fascism that the televisions announce the next day, regardless of what happened. I hate the very premises on which our electoral system rests: corporations are people, money is speech, and computer programmers have never ever cheated on anything.

But I still promote candidates and vote. Why? Because just prior to an election it really should be election season. Because we can still occasionally vote out some incumbents, which is the only way we get a chance of being listened to for the following two years. Because awful as almost all the candidates are, other candidates are even worse. Because subservient as almost all the candidates are to one or the other of the two grotesque parties, one of the parties is even worse than the other. Because following an impeachable blowjob and an unimpeachable aggressive war with an impeachable fictional birthplace would drain all remaining integrity from our Constitutional government — and there are only a few drops left. Because the possibility exists of unseating some of the very worst members of Congress. Because the possibility exists of reelecting and newly electing some of the very best. Because if the Democrats still had a majority in the House and had 60 or more Senate seats, as well as the White House, they'd have to get a lot more creative than "He'll veto it" or "They'll filibuster" or "We need the Republicans to like us" when explaining their abject failure to represent the people of this country. And because electing a gang of undereducated bigoted hatemongers would make things even worse.

Getting involved in elections beyond merely voting should not be limited to your own district. Chances are your district is not the most important one. Most incumbents are protected by gerrymandering, fundraising, favor-bestowing, media kowtowing, and ballot-access-restricting. Most incumbents are not the very worst and their challengers not the very best. Even if your top priority is to keep the better of the two parties in charge, there is absolutely no reason not to do so by backing the best of the struggling Democratic candidates rather than the worst or all of them equally.

So, which races should you be making phone calls for, knocking on doors about, and sending money to?

This is not the same question as “Who is a saint without flaws?” That question won’t get us very far in this political system, if anywhere in the world. The question at hand is this: Which candidates are relatively the best or up against the worst opponents, and which of those races are close?

The easiest way to figure this out is to look at who the [DCCC is funding](#), and start helping everyone else. But the more interesting way to get at the same results is to look at each important issue that matters to you.

One place to start is with wars. There are 115 incumbents who have shown a willingness to oppose funding illegal aggressive wars that are bankrupting us in every way. They are listed here: <http://defundwar.org>. Ninety-nine challengers have signed a pledge not to fund these wars, and they are listed here: <http://caws.us>. However, many of those challengers have already lost primaries, and many of them are libertarians who want to defund wars for roughly the same reason they want to defund schools and healthcare and retirement.

So, we have to look at a range of issues. One resource to use is <http://progressivepunch.org>. But in only a few cases can we draw a useful line between the good and bad candidates. For example, my list of incumbents who will fight for single-payer healthcare is blank. But my list of incumbents and challengers who at least say they want single-payer healthcare is quite long. Who would restore the powers of impeachment, subpoena, and oversight? Nobody that I know of. But some have backed bills to restrict state secrets claims or to set up toothless commissions on torture, etc. We’re left looking for those who have gone the furthest most frequently or who plausibly claim that they will go the furthest most frequently, even if the furthest anyone is thus far willing to go falls dangerously short.

Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who is now introducing a bill to block fraudulent home foreclosures, has been the best defender of peace and justice in the Congress for several years. Supporting him can never be a mistake, but he is likely to win without extra assistance.

Congressman Alan Grayson has emerged as a strong leader for peace and justice. Yes, he talks more than he acts, but talking is useful as well — and Grayson’s talk is so powerful that his challenger refuses to debate him. Yes Grayson’s horrible on Israel. But he actually urged the public to lobby his colleagues to vote No on war funding. Has anyone else done that? And Grayson is in a tough race into which rightwingers are dumping more money than any other. You can go help him out in Orlando, and then celebrate with a vacation. Or make calls and send money from home.

I haven’t surveyed all 435 races and can’t rank them all in order of priority, but there are federal, state, and local elections worth paying attention to all over the country. Congressman Raul Grijalva is in a tight race. He is a progressive vote that can be relied upon whenever his vote’s not really needed and lots of other progressives are also voting the right way. But, aside from a handful of people like Kucinich, that’s the best we can find. And Grijalva is a co-chair of the Progressive Caucus, meaning that if he loses other progressives will not realize he did too little but conclude that he did too much. Keith Ellison will certainly be reelected and hopes also to be elected chair of the Progressive Caucus. He says he would “work to strengthen [the CPC’s] internal cohesion and discipline as a voting bloc within the Congress. . . . particularly by expanding CPC communication and policy efforts” and “more actively engage the broader progressive community outside the halls of

Congress.” I have no reason to think Ellison would follow through on this without a tremendous force of organized pressure from that broader community, but he couldn’t possibly do less than Grijalva and Lynn Woolsey have done. Whether Grijalva is reelected or not, we should push for a single CPC chair and someone new; and Ellison seems as likely to move in a useful direction as anyone else.

One place to look for candidates worth backing is those endorsed by local chapters of good organizations that you also find worthy of support. By backing those candidates you can also build those organizations. But check the candidates out on your own. They all have websites and a public record of statements. One good organization that backs candidates through local chapters and then pressures them in between elections is Progressive Democrats of America. “We believe the strategic approach to this election is to support the very best Democratic candidates in close races,” said PDA National Director Tim Carpenter. “This differs from those backing the most progressive candidates whom our electoral system is stacked against, and it differs from those working to maintain a Democratic majority by backing the least progressive Democrats. We want not only a majority that’s not Republican, but also a caucus within that majority that strives to represent the American people.”

I think that’s usually the right approach. I won’t back my local Democrat, Tom Perriello, even though the Republican is worse, because I promised Perriello I’d oppose him if he kept voting for war funding, and he kept voting for war funding. But I’ll back anti-war Democrats in other districts. One such candidate is incumbent congressman Jim McGovern of Massachusetts. He’s been a leader in advancing the tentative steps Congress has taken against wars. We’re better off not losing him, and he’s in a tight race. A challenger whom PDA has backed who has a decent shot is Bill Hedrick in Orange County, California, who is up against a horribly corrupt Republican incumbent named Ken Calvert. It’s always nice to put in a progressive who might be a real leader while taking out one of the worst of the bunch.

Other good PDA-backed candidates include David Gill in Illinois and Rick Waugh here in Virginia, who is taking on Republican Whip Eric Cantor and sending someone in a chicken costume everywhere Cantor goes until he agrees to a debate. Clint Curtis in California’s Fourth District would be a stand-out leader in Washington and unseat a Republican. Justin Coussoule would be an ordinary militaristic Democrat but take out the horrible Minority Leader John Boehner. For that matter, Republican John Dennis would work to end the wars and unseat pro-war Democratic Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Over in the Senate, the Democrats have probably the worst majority leader they could have chosen in Harry Reid, but it’s not clear that replacing him with a teapartier would help. The best of the Democrats in the Senate — and I know that’s saying very little — is Russ Feingold, and he’s in a very close reelection struggle now in Wisconsin. Elaine Marshall of North Carolina could easily be the best Senator we have if she manages to unseat Republican Richard Burr, and she just might do it if enough people help her out.

I’m writing for a national audience here, but that does not mean your time wouldn’t in some cases be better spent electing state-level representatives. In North Carolina, Marcus Brandon is campaigning on a promise to bring state single payer healthcare to the Tarheel state. That’s worthy of support from around the country. Brandon defeated the incumbent Democrat in a primary and just needs to pull out the general election against a teapartier. Charlotte Dennett is running for attorney general of Vermont on a platform of finally prosecuting Bush for his crimes. That’s worthy of international support, now that money can

come from anywhere!

Let's do this election season right, and then get back to the important work of organizing, educating, and applying public pressure.

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