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[Abriendo Caminos](#)

Spring 2003

[White House News](#)

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[Vice President](#)

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[First Lady](#)

[Laura Bush](#)

[Lynne Cheney](#)

[About Our Party](#)

[RNC Leadership](#)

[State Parties](#)

[Counsel's Office](#)

[Redistricting](#)

New Voters are the Key to Victory in 2004

The GOP's Nationwide, Voter Registration Drive Is Its Most Ambitious Effort in 20 Years

By Chairman Marc Racicot

As the son of a basketball coach, the importance of fundamentals was greatly impressed upon me. In fact, my father would often use any sport to create metaphors that would make his point. He would remind me, and my siblings, that the team that blocks and tackles the best is the one that wins. While much may be made of more compelling or showy aspects of a game, his key message was that the team that usually wins is the one that performs the most elementary tasks at the higher level.



The inescapable life lesson that stayed with me was that, in order to enjoy success in any endeavor, be it in sports, life, business or politics, there are basic skills that must be mastered and employed.

Our endeavor, at the Republican National Committee (RNC), is to win elections. To do so, we must be skilled at the basics of campaigning. We must block and tackle, and do it better than the other side. Nothing is more fundamental to winning elections than making sure that the people who support us do so by going to the polls on Election Day. My dad would argue that voter participation should be our most important offensive move on the Republican field, and he's right.

This year, in conjunction with our state parties, the RNC is embarking on a mission to register 3 million new voters before the 2004 elections. We are committing \$1 million to this effort, and we firmly believe that its end result will have a direct impact on the outcome of the 2004 election.

If we fail to engage more of our fellow citizens in the political life of our



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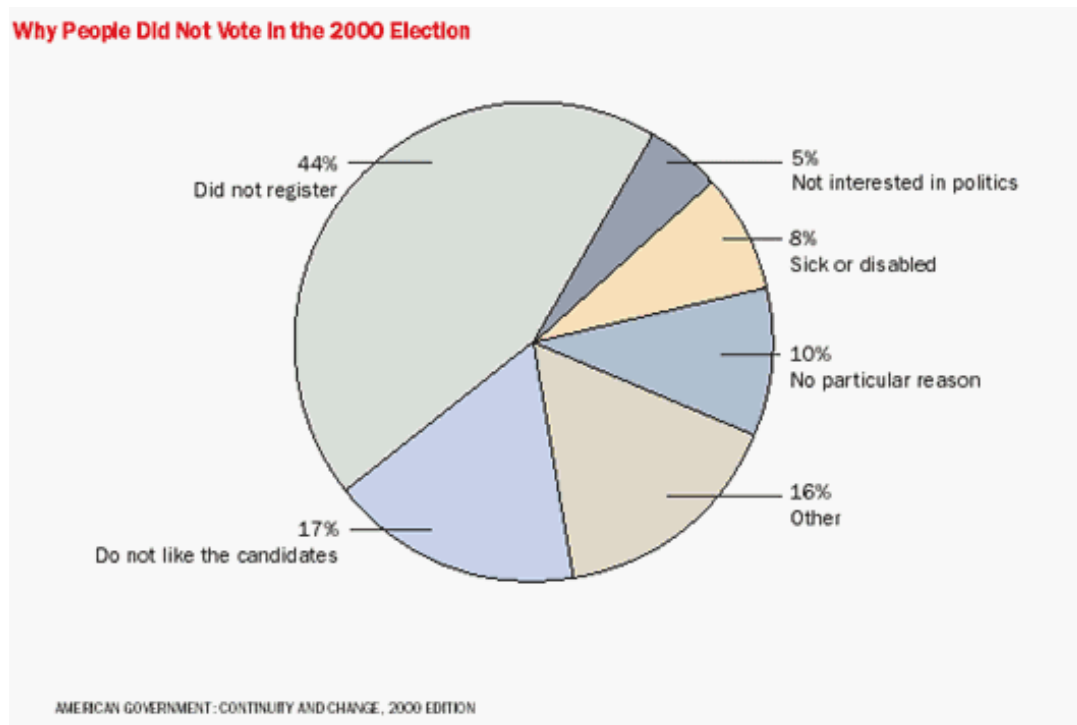
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country, we will undoubtedly lose

ground in our ability to retain the White House and advance towards solidifying our majority party standing, both at the national and state levels. The good news is, however, that we have all the elements to succeed. We have the commitment, the resources, the leadership, and the “players” to put forth an ambitious voter registration drive.



We also have tested the methodology and we know it works. In 2001, an extensive study conducted by the RNC’s 72-Hour Task Force concluded that registering new voters not only is cost-effective, it has a proven, positive impact on our performance on Election Day.

There are 57 million voting-age citizens who are not registered to vote. Approximately 23 million of them are Republicans. Depending upon your place of residence, it is probable that between 25 and 35 percent of the adults in your community are not registered to vote. This means that at least four out of every 10 people do not go out to the polls on Election Day. When those who do not vote were asked why, the majority of respondents admitted to not being registered.

Studies show that the unregistered public holds political views that are similar to those held by registered voters. When we break down the demographics of registered voters and apply them to unregistered voters, we find a pool of 22.8 million potential Republicans who are not registered to vote. If we take that a step further and apply the turnout percentages of registered voters to the number of Republicans who are not registered to vote, we can calculate that approximately 18 million Republican voters are simply sitting out a game and waiting to be invited to play.

By focusing on registering new voters who are likely to vote Republican, we can create the winning margin of victory in what is now a very evenly divided electorate. A presidential candidate has not received 50 percent of the popular vote since 1988.

Republicans made history in the November 2002 midterm elections. Never before had this country witnessed a president's party increase its margin of U.S. House seats in a midterm election. We did. Never before, since the direct election of senators began, had a president's party regained the majority in the U.S. Senate in a midterm election. We did. Our success in 2002 is a tremendous achievement, but we should never lose sight of the narrow margin of our victory.

In some key races, the difference between triumph and defeat was minimal—less than 3,200 votes. Consider the circumstances surrounding a few of our 2002 candidates. Perhaps no other race was more painful to Republicans on election night than that of John Thune in the South Dakota Senate contest, where the undeniably best candidate lost by 524 votes. The Republican challenger was successful in the Alabama governor's race where Bob Riley beat the incumbent Democrat by less than 3,200 votes. And Republican Bob Beauprez's margin of victory in Colorado's 7th Congressional District could not have been much slimmer—only 122 votes.

We cannot afford to have millions of potential Republican players sitting on the bench with no participation in the game. We must engage them if we are going to build on our successes. Voter registration not only must be a top priority at the national level, but in the states. It should be an integral part of every state's 72-Hour Program, which is credited with re-energizing grassroots politics and prompting the historic Republican voter turnout in the last midterm election.

The analysis conducted by our 72-Hour Task Force in 2002 shows positive results in states where voter registration was a priority for party officials. In California, for example, the Republican Party registered nearly 400,000 new voters. As a result, we were able to hold all the Democratic statewide candidates to within a five-point margin, a marked improvement over recent years.

In New York, Republicans registered 50,000 new voters and Gov. George Pataki was re-elected with a strong margin. And, in Texas, where the Democrats focused a great deal of effort against President Bush, all of the statewide offices remained in Republican hands after 430,000 new Republicans were registered to vote.

The time has come to put into practice what we have learned. The truth is that there is no single registration plan or program that can be implemented in its entirety across the country. However, there are proven methods that can provide a foundation for voter registration in any community. Each state party should take a decisive first step towards registering new voters by:

- Targeting Republican and Republican-leaning potential voters.

- Locating these voters where they live, work, worship and socialize.
- Contacting these voters through volunteers and paid programs that reach out to the non-registered, voting-age population, and making registration simple and available.
- Registering these voters and engaging them in the political process.
- Communicating with these voters so they turnout for our candidates on Election Day.

A successful voter registration drive takes a great deal of time and resources. It takes people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and seek out potential voters. Far from being the sole responsibility of the national party or GOP organizations, every individual can get involved with voter registration efforts. As Republicans, we all carry on our shoulders the responsibility of building the strongest party possible.

This past January, at the RNC's Winter Meeting, I issued a call to all of the party faithful. I asked that each Republican make a pledge to register at least five new Republican voters before the 2004 elections. I have no doubt that if we all work together, we can achieve dramatic results. It is my hope that you too, as a member of our Grand Old Party, will join us in that effort.

I urge you to call your state party and volunteer. I urge you to call your state's election office and learn about the voter registration rules in your state. I challenge you to take an active role in helping someone to register to vote. Together, we can change the face of American politics.

This particular "play" is long overdue. Our party has not engaged in a broad national effort to register more Republicans in almost 20 years. We have been called to get back to the fundamentals, and there is no better time than the present to shape our political future. Our most trusted advisers tell us, with confidence, that we will not win future elections if we are not aggressive about growing our party.

Another college basketball coach, a bit better known than my father, spoke great words of wisdom when he said, "failing to prepare is preparing to fail." The philosophy of UCLA's John Wooden (perhaps the greatest college basketball coach alive) is true for all, whether on or off the court.

The stakes are simply too high. The Republican Party will be prepared, and we will do so by building the strongest pool of Republican voters in history. And, together, we will lead the party to victory in 2004.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

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