

The Hartford Courant
Op Ed: A Proposal To Sweeten The Ballot Box
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Published: October 19, 2007

Just a few weeks ago I dedicated Connecticut's Register and Manual to the soldiers from this state who died last year in Afghanistan and Iraq. I felt it was important, as the Secretary of the State and the state's chief elections official, to recognize their sacrifice and acknowledge that they died to protect our freedom – which includes the right to vote.

It is a tragedy that so many people – not just in Connecticut - squander that right. The persistence of low turnout has led some to suggest that the government should entice people to vote by offering them special rewards, or as proposed in Arizona, access to a voters-only lottery with a chance to win \$1 million.

While ideas such as these are creative – if not downright gimmicky – they also strike me as being inappropriate and ill advised.

There was a time when President John F. Kennedy inspired a nation by saying, "...my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Kennedy made that plea during his 1961 Inaugural Address as the nation was embattled in the Cold War.

Nearly 50 years later Kennedy's call to service has been turned on its head. Our nation is embroiled in an expensive war, but President Bush has cut taxes and put billions of dollars on our children's charge card. Global

warming and our nation's dependence on foreign oil are clear and present dangers but the President tells us Americans no sacrifices are needed. In today's climate – in which the new motto could be, *'ask not what you can do for your country, but what your country can do for you'* – perhaps paying people to vote is the next step.

Of course, there is a better way to increase turnout, one that appeals to our sense of duty – not greed. We must do a better job educating our children. (The most important socio-economic factors in determining who votes are education and age).

That's why, as Secretary of the State, I have made civics education a major priority in my office. This year alone we have visited dozens of high schools and registered more than 1,000 students to vote. My office also sponsors essay and poster contests for grade school students and a debate for high school students.

More must be done; schools should increase civics requirements, candidates can do a better job engaging their younger constituents. Ultimately, nothing will have as big an impact on turnout as finally closing the achievement gap that exists among minority students and ensuring that all students graduate with the ability to read a newspaper, understand the issues, and truly have a stake in society. In the process, we'd get better citizens and higher turnout.

Paying people to vote is a lot easier, but it doesn't make it right.

