

I do not “blog.” However, an anecdote I posted on an e-mail list captures some of my beliefs about democratic government. I reproduce it here for any who may be interested.

Reflections on Election Day

I rarely pay much attention to election day. I do not support democratic government and I don't vote, so the day holds little interest for me. But my opposition to democracy is chiefly abstract and intellectual in nature, based on the belief that having enough people on one's side does not entitle one to restrict the liberty of others, the knowledge that politics is a zero-sum game and of the institutional incentives built into the political structure, and my reading Hayek's explanation of why the worst inevitably get on top. As well-reasoned as I believe my position to be, it usually generates very little in the way of emotional affect.

Recently, however, I experienced one of those rare events that makes one's abstract commitments feel real and immediate. The community in which I live, Lake Barcroft, has an annual Halloween parade the Sunday before Halloween so that children can dress up in their costumes during the day and walk with their friends for about a mile. A high school marching band leads them and there are goody bags and an opportunity to play at the end. It is a very friendly and heart-warming little event.

This year, as I walked up to the back of the line for the parade with my five-year-old in her devil costume and her three month-old-sister in her stroller wearing a little leopard suit, a man rushed over to hand my five-year-old a tootsie roll lollipop. As I was instructing her to say thank you, the man stuck out his hand to me, said “Tom Davis,” shook hands, and ran off after other five-year-olds to give tootsie roll pops to.

Tom Davis is the Republican member of the House of Representatives for our district. He had come to our parade with two campaign workers, one dressed in a friendly-looking elephant costume and one in plain clothes. Their job was to follow Davis around carrying baskets of tootsie roll pops, constantly replenishing his supply so that he had four or five in his hands at all times.

As the parade began, I watched Davis as he *literally* ran after three-, four-, and five-year-olds thrusting tootsie roll pops into their hands. He did this for several minutes until, looking around for any munchkin he may have missed, he declared, “Did everyone who needs a sucker get one?”

Say what you will about politicians, they do not spend their time chasing children in Halloween parades unless there is some evidence that doing so produces votes. Academics can argue about the legitimate scope of government, the proper interpretation of the Constitution, or the effects of tax reductions or increases in the minimum wage. There is no harm in this as long as they do not start believing that these questions determine who wields power in Congress. I am grateful to Tom Davis for coming to our Halloween parade. For now, if my intellectual opposition to democracy should ever begin to waver, I have a visceral, visual image of the essence of representative government that I can call upon to strengthen my resolve; the image of a member of the House of Representatives attempting to buy votes with tootsie roll pops.