

# Election 2000: Young Americans turned off by politics

by Lori Lessner  
Knight-Ridder Tribune  
January 19, 2000

WASHINGTON — A generation after 18-year-olds won the right to vote, young people don't find politics particularly germane to their lives. They say they don't bother casting a ballot because voting has little to do with the way public policy decisions are made, and that politicians don't listen to their concerns anyway.

Although they've written off politics, their civic-minded spirit is very much alive. Three-fourths performed some sort of volunteer work in the past two years — far more than the 15 percent who voted in the 1998 election.

That double-edged message, the result of two separate polls that explored what motivates young people leading up to the 2000 Presidential election, suggests that young adults prefer to give back to their communities by performing public service rather than by wading into partisan politics.

More of them have taught, fed the hungry, and cleaned up the environment than have volunteered on a political campaign or seriously considered running for office.

But experts who track voter participation are concerned about young people's reluctance to vote.

Only 32 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds voted in the 1996 Presidential election, while 67 percent of those 65 and older voted, U.S. Census data shows. What's worse, experts say,

*"I have grown old waiting for young people to start voting."*

-Ken Bode,  
Dean of Medill  
News Service,  
Northwestern  
University

is that young people seem unlikely to pick up the voting habit as they get older.

In the Presidential election of 1972, the first one in which 18-year-olds had the vote, 49.6 of 18- to 24-year-olds voted, a percentage that has steadily declined ever since.

Mel Henning, a University of Kansas senior, said she has seen her peers become increasingly committed to volunteering in the four years she has lived on campus. She is part of that trend. She's helped build homes for Habitat for Humanity and is active in a program that matches children with Big Brothers and Big Sisters on campus.

"Sometimes we get tired of everyone thinking our generation is just a bunch of lazy, non-motivated people, so we volunteer for ourselves and to show the older generation that not all of us are doing crazy stuff all the time," said Henning, a Wichita student majoring in elementary education.

Although she said she can see why some people don't think voting matters much, she made sure to vote for the president in 1996. She has paid less attention to local elections.

She expects to continue volunteering and perhaps find work in a non-profit group after graduation.

Like Henning, a significant majority of young adults polled by the Mellman Group for the Panetta Institute expect to spend part of their careers working for non-profits or performing some kind of public service. But only a quarter voiced an interest in pursuing careers in politics to express their civic-mindedness.

College students under age 31 were asked about their career paths and other topics that tie into the public arena as part of the poll.

President Clinton's former chief-of-staff, Leon Panetta, started the institute to encourage public service. His poll results mirror those released Tuesday, January 18, by Campaign Media Group for Northwestern University's Medill News Service, which trains graduate students in political journalism. The Medill poll surveyed people ages 18 to 24.

Ellen Shearer, co-director of the Medill News Service, said the findings are encouraging because they show young people are not cynical about government; they're just getting involved in their own way and steering clear of more traditional paths.

"They're saying, 'If we're being ignored by the politicians, we'll ignore you right back and go volun-

teer somewhere.'" Shearer said. "Right now, they [young people] don't think there is a reason for them to vote."

Educators and politicians have lamented low voter turnout among young people for years. As Ken Bode, Medill's dean, put it Tuesday, Jan. 18: "I have grown old waiting for young people to start voting and paying attention to politics."

To engage more young adults in politics, graduate students in the Medill News Service will cover this year's Presidential campaign from the point of view of their peers. Their stories will reach 500 college newspapers and dozens of daily newspapers and TV stations across the country.

The students also will try to attract young readers by reporting on youth issues for MTV. Both groups will share information on their Web sites. There is also talk of organizing a Presidential debate in which college journalists would lead the discussion, steering each candidate toward issues that concern them.

Others hope young people will realize politics and voting are relevant to their lives as they become more involved in volunteerism.

"We can't count on volunteering by itself, but as young people volunteer they will see that federal housing policy has an impact on services available to the homeless and that environmental policy has something to do with beach clean-ups," said Mark Mellman, president of the Mellman Group, which commissioned one of the polls.

# Senior kicked out of school for "threatening" artwork

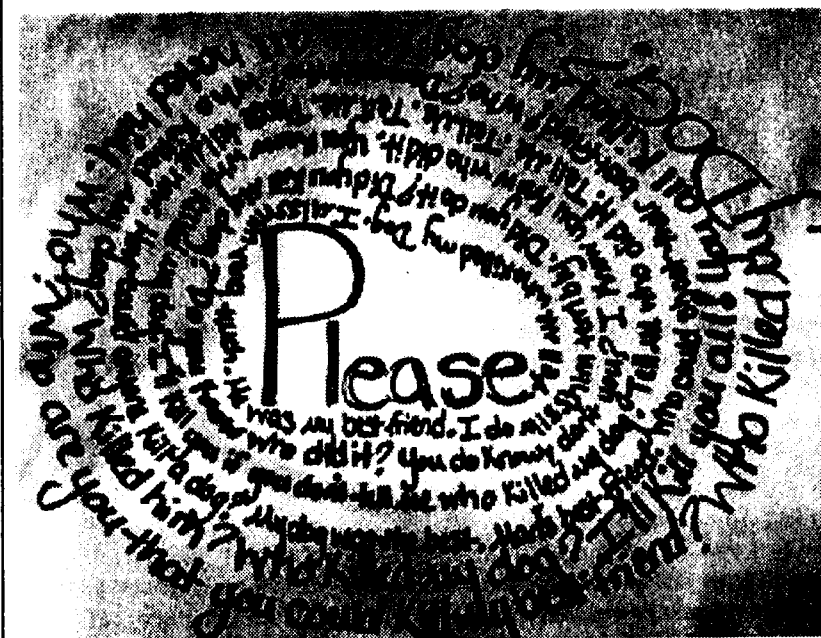
by Alex Branch  
Knight-Ridder Tribune  
January 19, 2000

LEON, Kan. — Sarah Boman says she was aiming for conceptual art: art that emphasizes an idea, rather than an object. So she admits her drawing representing the delusions of an "obsessive, compulsive, paranoid" madman might have gone a

Sarah and her parents, Jerry and Julie Boman, have filed an appeal to the Bluestem school board, which can overturn the panel's decision or reduce the punishment.

Jerry Boman said he understood the school's concern but argued that school officials were taking this too far.

"My daughter has never even had detention," he said. "My wife and



KRT PHOTO BY JAIME OPPENHEIMER

Sarah Boman, a 17-year-old senior at Bluestem High School, created this piece of artwork that school officials consider a threat. Bowman was suspended for the rest of the school year.

little against the grain.

But when the 17-year-old senior at Bluestem High School tacked it up on a school door last week, she was expecting artistic criticism from classmates and teachers. Instead, she found herself suspended for the rest of the school year.

Classmates and neighbors are circulating petitions for her reinstatement so that she can graduate with her class this spring. And an art gallery has invited her to exhibit so people can make up their own minds whether the art is threatening, said the gallery owner.

Principal Dale Harper said school officials were immediately concerned when they read the poster, which was placed on a classroom door and was unsigned. In the center of the drawing is the word "please" written in big, red letters. Sentences spiral out from the middle to show the madman's spinning, paranoid thoughts, Sarah said.

"Please, tell me who killed my dog," it reads. "I miss my dog very much." Later it reads: "I'll kill you all! You all killed my dog because you all hated him."

Sarah sees her punishment as a gross overreaction to what was intended to be thought-provoking art. "It was entirely fictional," Sarah said. "It was just a different kind of art I wanted to try. It was supposed to be a look into the head of a madman. I never expected this."

Harper, when asked if he thought the artwork constituted a threat, said, "I think the words speak for themselves." He then said he wouldn't get into specifics of the incident because it was under appeal.

A three-person school district suspension committee heard Sarah's case and found that the artwork constituted a "threat of violence" against the school and warranted a suspension for the rest of the school year.

I aren't even really big fans of this piece. But we're intelligent enough to know that it is art, not a threat against anybody."

The Acme Gallery wants the public to be able to judge the quality of Sarah's art. To that end, the gallery and artists' conclave will stage an exhibition later this month of several works by the aspiring artist.

"Individually, the members have various and sundry reasons" for inviting Sarah, said Mark Dwyer, an Acme artist. "Some feel she needs support from other artists; others hate the notion of censorship at any level, and feel we should do a show for anyone being censored. Others are unimpressed with the whole deal and will go about their work as they usually do, and will ignore having this minor celebrity in the show."

Among those hoping that the exhibition will be a show of support for Boman is David Murano, a curator for the Wichita Center for the Arts and an Acme artist. "I wanted to offer the space to her," Murano said, "... so people can see what she does and that she's not some raving lunatic."

Since her suspension, Sarah has taken her portfolio to an assistant professor of art at Wichita State University. She has a letter from the professor saying the "madman" piece indeed falls into the classification of conceptual art.

She said she is surprised that she hasn't been able to work something out with school officials. Just recently they selected her to represent the student body in interviewing potential candidates for a teaching opening.

"If they just would have told me not to do it, I never would have put anything up again," she said. "I can understand their concern, but they know me, and they know who I am. I would never hurt anyone." *Bud Norman of The Eagle contributed to this report.*

# High court considers free speech rights of abortion protesters at clinics

by Jan Crawford Greenburg  
Chicago Tribune  
January 20, 2000

WASHINGTON — In a case pitting the free speech rights of abortion protesters against a patient's right to seek medical care, the Supreme Court grappled Wednesday, January 19, with a state law that limits the protesters' ability to talk to people entering clinics.

Several justices suggested that the Colorado law was too broad and violated the protesters' free speech rights under the 1st Amendment. The law prohibits so-called "sidewalk counselors" from getting within eight feet of people entering medical clinics, and it applies within 100 feet of clinic entrances.

"It seems to me to be whimsical and imprecise and inconsistent with our precedents," Justice Anthony Kennedy said of the law, noting it could broadly apply to everyone who entered a high-rise office building that contained a doctor's office.

But other justices noted that the law didn't stop the protesters from speaking. Even from eight feet away, a person can carry on a conversation in a normal tone, they said.

"What speech is it difficult for anyone to make when they're eight feet away?" Justice Stephen Breyer asked a lawyer for the protesters. "What is it that I can't tell her?"

Emphasizing that eight feet isn't

that far, Breyer twice noted he could easily "talk to Justice Kennedy" from that distance. Kennedy sits two chairs away from Breyer on the bench.

Added Justice Sandra Day O'Connor: "You certainly can convey anything you want to convey orally at eight feet... speak in normal conversational tone and be heard fully."

But Jay Sekulow, an attorney representing the protesters, said the law affects the kind of speech protesters can engage in. They can't talk confidentially to patients, and they cannot share leaflets or Bible passages unless the person consents, he said.

What's more, he said, it could apply to reporters seeking to interview people outside clinics or, even, to people in front of hospitals who simply are passing out discount coupons for pizza.

"The Colorado statute at issue here converts protected speech into a crime," Sekulow told the court.

Specifically, the law prohibits people from approaching others on sidewalks or in public areas near clinics

to pass out handbills or leaflets or engage in "oral protest, education or counseling" unless the targeted individual consents. The prohibition covers an area within 100 feet of the entrance to a health-care facility.

The battle over the law has been raging since 1993, shortly after the state legislature passed it. Several protesters immediately challenged it, but they lost in the Colorado courts. However, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the Colorado Supreme Court to rethink the issue in light of its 1997 ruling that some of a judge's restrictions on New York protesters were unconstitutional.

After restudying the issue, the state court concluded last year that the Colorado law was different and could survive constitutional challenge. It said the legislature fairly accommodated the two fundamental rights at issue, because the law did not prohibit a type of speech and was narrowly drawn to address the government's important interest in ensuring people get medical care. What's more, it noted that the law

*"What speech is it difficult for anyone to make when they're eight feet away?"*

-Justice Stephen  
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U.S. Supreme Court

# 300 flight attendants to sue tobacco makers over second-hand smoke

by Jay Weaver  
Knight-Ridder Tribune  
January 20, 2000

Three hundred flight attendants — who say they never smoked cigarettes — plan to file 300 individual lawsuits in Miami on Thursday, January 27, against U.S. tobacco makers. These flight attendants claim that their respiratory illnesses were caused by second-hand smoke aboard jetliners.

They are seeking millions of dollars in damages.

Thousands of other lawsuits are expected to be filed by September — the deadline under a class-action settlement reached between the airline attendants and Big Tobacco in Miami-Dade Circuit Court in 1997. As part of that agreement, flight at-

tendants won the right to sue the tobacco industry on an individual basis.

Among the alleged victims is Cindy Williams, 45, of West Palm Beach, Fla., who worked as a flight attendant for U.S. Air from 1973 to 1998. She is now out on disability.

Williams said she was cooped up in commercial jetliners daily and forced to inhale passenger cigarette smoke for years until smoking was banned by the airline in 1989.

"I cough more than a hundred times a day," said Williams, a mother of two who is married to the chairman of the Port of Palm Beach County. "I see a pulmonary specialist and ENT every month, and they fear I have inflamed bronchial tubes. They [the tubes] are highly irritated, and that causes me to cough."

"I have that wheezing feeling in my chest, and I've never smoked a cigarette in my life," added Williams. "I look fit, I just don't feel fit."

The flight attendants — once thought to face impossible odds against the industry — may have an advantage in their individual suits. The burden of proof rests with the cigarette makers to show jurors that something other than second-hand smoke caused the respiratory sicknesses.

The suits are being filed at a critical time for the tobacco industry, which is fighting countless lawsuits by sick smokers and paying billion-dollar settlements to states across the nation.

In Miami-Dade Circuit Court, attorneys for a class of 500,000 sick

Florida smokers are arguing their landmark case against Big Tobacco — a trial that could cripple the industry with astronomical compensatory and punitive damages.

Jurors already found that tobacco makers such as Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds deceived the public about the addictive nature and deadly effects of smoking cigarettes.

The husband-and-wife legal team heading that case, Stanley and Susan Rosenblatt, are the same attorneys who won the original class-action settlement for flight attendants in 1997, which was upheld by a Florida appellate court last year. Under that 1997 agreement, the tobacco companies agreed to pay \$300 million to a new research foundation to find a cure for respi-

ratory illnesses suffered from second-hand smoke.

A spokeswoman for R.J. Reynolds said, as policy, the tobacco company would not comment on the expected lawsuits because the suits have not been filed yet. But the spokeswoman, Jan Smith, said: "We would vigorously defend ourselves in court." The Rosenblatts, who face a court gag order in their current tobacco trial, picked six Miami law firms to represent the flight attendants. Each of the six law firms will file 50 suits for the 300 flight attendants.

Miami attorney Steven Hunter believes the attendants have strong cases because of victories in the previous flight attendants' class case.

"Once you establish that the second-hand smoke is causing their

diseases, you're almost home," Hunter said, adding that each attendant will be able to show how cigarette smoke affected their health, medical costs, livelihood and lifestyle.

"It has to be terrifying to have a disease that affects your ability to breathe," Hunter said. "More than half are still working, but all of them have seen their lives go downhill. You can't put a dollar amount on damages yet because each flight attendant has a different case."

Williams, of West Palm Beach, said she doubts she will ever be able to return to work. "I'm fearful about the future, because as I get older I'm not going to have the ability to withstand what I withstand every day," said Williams. "I'm hoping for a miracle cure."