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TOP 5 (PLUS 1) EXAMPLES WHY YOUR VOTE COUNTS

An Election Reminder to All Americans That MATHCOUNTS®
By Craig Peters for The MATHCOUNTS Foundation

Election Day is drawing near and you may be asking yourself, "Does my one vote really matter?"

"History proves to us that one vote absolutely does matter," says Lou DiGioia, Executive Director of MATHCOUNTS, the national math enrichment program for middle school students (www.mathcounts.org). "As people watch the news and read the papers, it's easy to get lost in all the numbers having to do with election polls, predictions, the Electoral College and all the rest. Numbers play as vital a role in politics as they do in science, music or any other subject you can name and the most important number is one – that one vote we all have the privilege to cast."

Here are five examples of how one vote really did make a difference in elections to the U.S. House of Representatives

1. In 1829 in Kentucky, Nicholas Coleman defeated Adam Beatty 2,520 to 2,519.
2. In 1847 in Indiana, George G. Dunn defeated David M. Dobson 7,455 to 7,454.
3. In 1847 in Virginia, Thomas S. Flournoy defeated his opponent 650 to 649.
4. In 1854 in Illinois, James C. Allen defeated William B. Archer 8,452 to 8,451.
5. In 1882 in Virginia, Robert M. Mayo defeated George T. Garrison 10,505 to 10,504.

But what about the U.S. Presidential election? Has one vote ever made a difference in electing someone to our country's highest office?

The greatest upset in American Presidential history is undoubtedly the 1948 election in which Harry S. Truman defeated Thomas Dewey. Here's where the power of one vote comes in.

In 1948 there were 9,247 voting precincts in Ohio. Truman won the state by just 7,107 votes. Had just one Truman voter in each precinct voted for Dewey – or had one Truman voter in each district decided to stay home and not vote -- Dewey would have won the state and its 25 electoral votes.

The situation in California was similar. There were 16,802 voting precincts and Truman won the state by just 17,865 votes. Imagine if just one Truman voter in each precinct had instead voted for Dewey. Subtract 16,802 votes from Truman's total of 1,913,134 and add them to Dewey's total of 1,895,269. The result? California's 25 electoral votes go to Dewey: 1,912,071 to 1,896,332.

To paraphrase a famous quote from Senator Everett Dirksen: A vote here, a vote there, pretty soon it adds up to real electoral power.

As of 2006, the last year for which U.S. Census Bureau figures are available, there were 220,600,000 people of voting age in the United States. This year, the total will probably be closer to 225 million, maybe more. Statistics show that about two-thirds of eligible voters have registered to vote.

If you're one of those two-thirds, good for you – now remember what happened back in 1948 and be sure to get out there and make your vote count on November 4.

About MATHCOUNTS: MATHCOUNTS is a national math enrichment, coaching and competition program that promotes middle school mathematics achievement in every U.S. state & territory. Now in its 26th year, MATHCOUNTS is one of the world's most successful education partnerships involving volunteers, educators, industry sponsors and students. Visit MATHCOUNTS online at www.mathcounts.org.

About the author: Craig Peters is a former Mathlete who has followed the political scene closely ever since writing a weekly column about the 1980 election in The Colgate News, the newspaper of his alma mater, Colgate University.

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