

The book, *50 Simple Things You Can Do To Fight The Right*, from Earth Works Action and John Javna, is the field guide for progressive activists. The following is adapted from the chapters “*Sign Them Up*,” and “*Play To Win*.”

“Adopt-a-Voter”

We all know how important it is to vote in every election—for every office and on every ballot measure. We recognize that individual votes become blocs of votes, and that voting is not only our right, but our duty. Environmental issues are front and center in the 2008 elections, and if we want to make sure they’re taken seriously, we have to be dedicated to making sure every vote is cast, and every vote is counted.

One way to make that happen is not only to vote yourself, but to “**Adopt-a-Voter**” for upcoming elections.

Did You Know:

- more than 30 million Americans over the age of 18 aren’t registered to vote—and according to many studies, a majority of them would vote for progressive candidates, if they were registered.
- in six states—Minnesota, New Hampshire, Idaho, Maine, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—eligible citizens can register to vote on Election Day.
- registering to vote these days is easy—you can even do it by mail or online.

Simple Things You Can Do:

Check out these excellent websites for up to date information on everything you need to know about registering and voting in upcoming elections, including local contacts and information about candidates, as well as forms and procedures for your individual state. Each state has its own registration rules and deadlines, which you can find at one of these sites, or from your local County Clerk (link to them online, or look in the “blue” pages of your local telephone directory for their phone number and address).

1. <http://www.smartvoter.org/voter/regvote.html> SMART VOTER is a project of the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund.
2. http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Register_To_Vote is the national League Of Women Voters Register To Vote Project

3. United States Federal Election Assistance [Part Of Federal Elections Commission (FEC)] has instructions and forms:

<http://www.eac.gov/voter/Register%20to%20Vote> (instructions) You can also get State voter registration deadlines at this site.

http://www.eac.gov/voter/Register%20to%20Vote/voter_form_en (forms) You can download or print registration forms at this site.

4. www.yourvotematters.org from Working Assets. An easy website, organized by state.

Who should you “Adopt?”

Find a person who’s not registered but really wants to vote. It could be a neighbor, coworker, family friend, a parent of one of your child’s friends, or someone who just turned 18.

Try to find out why they haven’t registered, so you can work with them. Some people, for example, assume registering will be too difficult. Some just can’t find the time. Some don’t feel “qualified” to vote—they don’t know all the candidates and think they’re required to vote for every person or measure on the ballot, or if not “required,” they feel they should, and guilt leads to inactivity, etc.; others just don’t believe their vote means anything. They’ve given up.

Don’t just hand them a form and tell them to fill it out and mail it in. Help them fill it out, then mail it for them (or complete it online). Offer encouragement—make it personal. This matters to them, and to you. Follow-up with them and make sure they got their voter ID card and polling place site from the election office. Congratulate them on being a citizen with full rights and responsibilities!

GOTV

Remember, your adoption doesn’t end with registration. The same reasons that make someone reluctant to register to vote, make them reluctant to cast their vote. So organize your own, individual Get Out The Vote campaign.

As the election nears, make a date to review the issues and candidates with your adoptee over coffee or on the phone. Get a sample ballot and demonstrate how to mark it. You can get them from the elections office, or from individual parties. What about those ballot measures that are hard to understand? Or those candidates for obscure offices?

They are important. "Vote for everything. No election is too small," says Carol Keyes, of People For The American Way. "People who are elected at lower levels today will move up to other offices and will be the ones who decide things like redistricting tomorrow."

This means learning about every race on the ticket—which takes some work. But two of you together make it so much easier. Check out alternative weeklies for comprehensive information on all the races in your area, as well as local newspapers, debates on local broadcast and public access TV, and online. These days, almost every issue and race is well represented on the web, from candidate websites to local blogs. You do the research, and then share it with your adoptee.

Remember two basic principles:

—if a ballot measure is unclear or confusing—even if it seems to be something you're for, vote against it. The subject will certainly come up again, and you do no harm by *not* enacting it until its really what you want.

—use your intuition. If you like a candidate, if you like what they have to say, vote for them. The opposite applies as well, if a candidate does not appeal to you, if you don't like what they have to say, or are unsure, vote against them. Sure there are some "lesser than two evils" situations, but most people know what they believe. You and your adoptee are no different. Vote your heart and your conscience and you'll be fine.

And Vote!

Finally, as Election Day arrives, make sure your adoptee has his or her sample ballot, knows where the polling place is, and has a way to get there. You can offer a ride, or go together (especially if you have the same polling place). Talk afterwards, and thank your friend (because by now you are friends) for letting you do this. Pat yourselves on the back...and get ready for the next election.