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More Than Just A Vote for President and Congress
by Senator Larry Craig

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to cast the deciding vote in a high-profile case in the nation's highest court? Can you imagine the feeling if the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court asked for your opinion? Well, we all soon will – albeit in an indirect way.

On Election Day voters will go to the polls and decide who will take control of the executive and legislative branches of the national government. Since that process is active, it is very easy to recognize the role each vote plays. But sometimes we fail to recognize the effect our choices in the voting booth have on the third branch of government: the federal judicial branch. One need only look back to the 2004 presidential election for such an example.

During that campaign, voters repeatedly heard how important it was to consider their options because the winner could potentially appoint one to three Supreme Court justices. That scenario played out over the next two years when Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Alito were appointed by President Bush and confirmed by the Senate following the death and retirement of Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justice O'Connor.

The upcoming election is no different, with three more appointments on the horizon. There is speculation that Justices Stevens, Ginsburg and Souter could all be replaced in the next four years, leaving a huge hole in what most consider the court's liberal wing.

Whether you view the court as neutral, too liberal or too conservative, the chance to shape the future balance of power is a tremendous responsibility and deserves careful consideration. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell referenced this recently on the Sunday morning news circuit.

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Whoever the next president is, he will come from the halls of the Senate and for the first time in decades bring with him actual experience in the judicial confirmation process. Furthermore, both major party candidates have participated in key Senate debates highlighting the impact of the Supreme Court's decisions and the significant issues that could be decided in the years ahead. Having taken part in the confirmations of more than half of those currently serving on the high court and dozens more on the federal circuit and district court levels, I know first hand what a heated process it can be and how important it is to make the right selection. That experience will, no doubt, weigh heavily on whoever is elected to the Oval Office when it comes time to make judicial appointments.

So when you head to the polls on November 4th, remember that your vote carries extraordinary potential consequences: not only deciding who controls the executive and legislative powers that will shape our Nation's destiny, but also helping to determine who interprets the laws of the land that influence the lives and livelihoods of all Americans.