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I know many Americans don't believe this. Some feel that what happens in Washington doesn't affect them. And anyway, they're too busy: They have kids to raise, meals to fix, bills to pay and grass to cut. Others crow that there's no difference between the parties, so why bother to vote?

But fortunately, some Americans do understand that elections have consequences.

Does anyone really believe that with a President John McCain in the White House, Congress would have passed an economic stimulus bill that saved or created 3.6 millions jobs? Or that Congress would have passed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, overturning a Supreme Court decision that restricted the rights of workers to file wage discrimination cases? Or the Dodd-Frank Act, the most comprehensive reform of the financial sector since the 1930s, which puts into place critically needed regulation of the nation's banks and other financial institutions to minimize the possibility of a repeat of the financial crisis of 2008?

Anyone believe that a President McCain would have put his presidency on the line in an effort to save the domestic auto industry and millions of American jobs? Or that he would have overhauled the food safety system, ended "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in the military, restored the necessary balance to the National Labor Relations Board to give a fair chance to workers who want to organize, or appointed to agencies charged with protecting the lives and livelihoods of workers competent individuals committed to aggressively enforcing the law?

Oh, I forgot to mention the Affordable Care Act that puts the country on the path toward quality, affordable health care for all Americans by stopping insurance companies from denying care due to pre-existing conditions and dropping coverage for people who get sick, requiring that insurance companies allow dependent coverage to age 26, eliminating annual and lifetime coverage caps, and dramatically reducing the number of uninsured Americans. Think that the Affordable Care Act or anything close to it was on a President McCain's agenda?

And just imagine what President Obama *might* have accomplished if he weren't faced with constant conservative obstructionism. Probably a stimulus bill big enough to put millions more Americans to work and keep the recovery going. An Employee Free Choice Act that would remove current barriers that prevent workers from forming unions to bargain collectively.

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But elections not only can determine the legislation that's passed or not passed, the regulations that are issued or not issued, or the kinds of men and women appointed or not appointed to lead cabinet-level department and administration agencies. Elections also can shape the composition of the nation's highest court and thus determine what laws stand or don't stand, and whether the Constitution is interpreted to benefit all Americans instead of just the well-connected few.

We don't know whom a President Al Gore would have nominated for the Supreme Court, but we can be confident that neither John Roberts nor Samuel Alito would be on the bench today. It is highly unlikely that a court with two Gore appointees would have decided that political spending is protected speech and allowed corporations to spend without limit to influence elections. Or would have decided an issue not before it in limiting a union's ability to spend money in politics. Or would have broken with decades of precedent and restricted the scope of the commerce clause even while upholding the Affordable Care Act on another constitutional provision.

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It's also very possible that this fall's election could shape the composition of the Supreme Court in the decades ahead. With four of the nine justices in their 70s, the court is one of the oldest in decades, making at least one vacancy in the next four years likely. Whether President Obama or a President Mitt Romney appoints the next justice could well determine what cases are heard and how they are decided.

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In the more immediate and broader sense, Americans will, come November, be choosing between two very different versions of this nation.

One is a nation ruled by the most fortunate among us—the "1 percenters"—and committed to policies that will ensure that the nation's wealth remains concentrated in their hands. It also is a nation with little or no interest in preserving, let alone expanding, the social safety net that has kept millions of working-class Americans from falling into abject poverty and homelessness.

The other is an America of shared sacrifice, an America of an expanding and vibrant middle class, an America where self-interest doesn't rule, but rather a commitment to community and assisting each other is our national ethos.

And incidentally, this is an America with a strong, effective trade union movement.

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