



Yesterday, while walking my cats, a silver saucer swooped into my apple orchard between a Red Fuji and a Golden Delicious. A little green guy stepped out and in perfect English said, "Greetings from Mars, Earth Man. Take me to your leader, King of the Earth."

After recovering from the shock of losing my two best trees, I said, "Well, Mars Man, some say our leader is the most powerful man on Earth, but he's the President of America, not King of the Earth, and America is only one of several hundred countries on Earth."

"Earth Man, a leader with that much power should be chosen carefully. Our King must be wise and very popular with the People. How is your King chosen?"

"In America, the most popular candidate doesn't always win the election. Sometimes the candidate who gets the most Electoral votes becomes the President."

"Earth Man, this is disturbing news. We have monitored your planet for eons and observed many odd things but not this peculiar aspect of your elections."

"Yeah, Mars Man, it disturbs a lot of people here in America, too. There's a movement to force the Electors to cast their vote for the candidate who wins the popular vote, but not enough States have joined the movement to correct the problem."

"Earth Man, you are giving me a headache."

It must be a bad headache, I thought, because the little green man had a very big head.

"On Mars," he continued, "sovereignty is granted to individuals, not to geographical areas."

"Well, here in America the sovereignty of each State is a big deal. So each State pretty much does its own thing. Not totally, of course, or they wouldn't be very united. But the number of Electors a state gets is set by how many people live there, so the People in some States have more influence over who gets elected than people in other states."

Mars Man rubbed his narrow green chin as if in deep thought.

"Our founding fathers," I continued, "rejected a pure democracy in favor of a republic in which the few ruled the many -- an oligarchy where the People are represented by Politicians."

Mars Man's jaw dropped and his eyes, which were already enormous, became even wider. "Why on Earth did they do that?" he asked.

"Because they believed that poor, uneducated people who didn't own land didn't have enough stake in the country or in its government to make decisions that would affect everyone, especially not rich, educated people who did own land."

"Ah!" he replied. "So your Electoral vote is part of the Founding Father's scheme."

"Uh, yeah, I guess so."

Mars Man must have noticed the hesitation in my voice, because he began to explain it in a way I had never heard before. "Of course, letting Electors control who gets elected makes it less likely that the People of your country, who are obviously idiots, could elect an idiot as their President."

Despite being from Mars, this little green guy understood our Presidential elections better than most humans did. And he was right. In our last election the idiot from one party won the popular vote but lost the electoral vote to the idiot from the other party.

"Earth Man, I must warp back to the King of Mars to give him my report and to verify the accuracy of our discussion."

"You could Google—"

"We do not Google. We only Bing."

"Well, okay, but our voting power really does depend on where we live, and population is how it works. You landed in California, where 12 out of every 100 people in America live, so it has 20 times more Electors than a state like Montana, which is mostly wide open spaces."

"This would not be tolerated on Mars!" he hollered.

I was surprised to hear the little guy raise his voice. Until now he had been calm and objective.

"This compromises the will of the people," he continued "and gives small states less voting power than large states!"

"Yeah, and most of us care more about the influence our vote has in the election than our State has."

He walked to his saucer, then stopped at the shimmering doorway. I can't be sure but it looked like a sinister smile slid across his thin little green lips.

"Hey! What about my trees? You burned them to a crisp!"

"You should be more concerned about the incineration of your planet, Earth Man, than the incineration of your trees. My King will not be pleased with my report. We will be watching your next election."