

WHY YOU SHOULD

VOTE

It Makes a Difference

It's Election Day. Do you know where your vote is? If you're keeping it in your back pocket, you may be doing yourself and those around you a civic disservice.

The fact is that your vote could make all the difference in not only swaying an election, but in fulfilling your duty as a proud American citizen.

'BUT, MY VOTE DOESN'T COUNT'

We've all heard the claim from nonvoters that their one vote simply doesn't mean much in the grand scheme of things, especially in the presidential election that is determined by the Electoral College.

Not so fast, say politicians and pro-voting organizations.

Here are some important events in U.S. history that were decided by just a few votes, according to the State of Illinois:

- Richard Nixon, not John F. Kennedy, would have become President of the U.S. in 1960 if one person from each voting place had voted differently.

- If just one U.S. Senator had voted differently, U.S. President Andrew Johnson would have been removed from office in 1867.

- Texas might not have become part of the United States in 1845 if one U.S. Senator had voted differently. The vote in the U.S. Senate was 27-25 to invite Texas to become a state. If it had been a tie, Texas would not have been asked to become part of the Union.

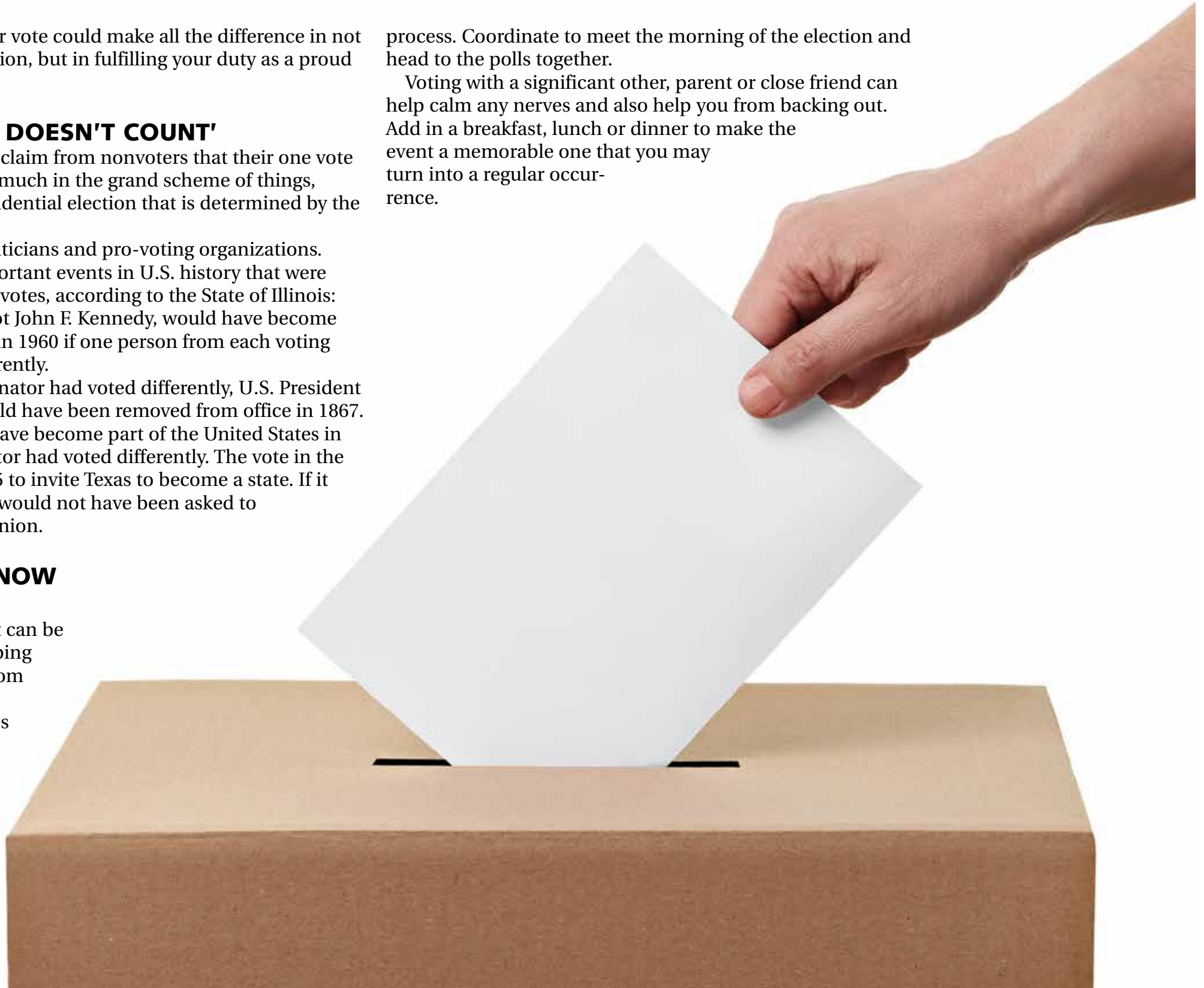
'BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW TO VOTE'

General discomfort can be a major factor in keeping many people away from the voting booth.

If voting intimidates you or you need motivation in keeping it on your schedule, involve a family member or acquaintance in your planning

process. Coordinate to meet the morning of the election and head to the polls together.

Voting with a significant other, parent or close friend can help calm any nerves and also help you from backing out. Add in a breakfast, lunch or dinner to make the event a memorable one that you may turn into a regular occurrence.



People Died to Give You the Right

One of the most precious aspects of voting is just how hard people before us have fought to protect it.

Think back to the early American patriots who stood up for the right to vote and literally gave their lives for that freedom.

Those times may seem like they are in the distant past, but there are still many countries in the world where voting is a point of cultural oppression.

You owe it to those who went before you to carry out your civic duty. The founding fathers believed that an informed electorate was necessary to maintain an effective society.

In the initial stages of voting, eligible voters were expected to not only research issues and candidates, but also speak on them at public meetings. Voting was a privilege that citizens took seriously, and it's something that many members of our military have fought hard to protect.

TODAY'S VETERAN CONNECTION

Many states have leveraged the exercise of voting as an opportunity to honor our veterans. North Carolina, for example, successfully launched its program in time for the 2008 general election, and successfully honored more than 2,000 veterans.

The Vote in Honor of a Veteran Program provides North Carolina citizens an opportunity to pay tribute to past, present and future members of the military. Voters can honor a veteran on any Election Day by requesting a PIN or by sharing a story that may be posted on the North Carolina State Board of Elections website.

Other states also use a PIN-focused program that provides voters with a free personal identification number and a chance to personalize it with the name of a veteran you wish to honor. Check in with your local representatives or state office on requesting a personalized PIN. Honoring a veteran you appreciate – now that is a great reason to vote.



It Impacts Your Wallet

Your own personal wealth could be a driving factor in showing up to the voter's booth because those we elect are the ones who decide how much money to invest in public services.

The county commissioners, governor, state officials, legislators, president and members of Congress you vote for also decide how to best share the tax burden. Both of these financial responsibilities should be entrusted only to candidates you have researched and deemed fit to handle them.

IMPACT OF YOUNG VOTERS

Americans ages 18 to 29 have much at stake in all elections, yet only 23 percent will “definitely be voting,” according to a survey by Harvard University’s Institute of Politics.

These young voters may have more at stake than any population in how the political process plays out over the coming decades. A study last year by the Urban Institute noted that the generation currently in and graduating from college have accumulated seven percent less wealth than their parents had at a comparable age.

It estimated that today’s young Americans, the best-educated generation in U.S. history, nonetheless will lose at least 3 percent in earnings over their lifetimes, according to the study.

CHANGING THE APATHY

The low perennial turnout of young voters is especially troubling to non-profit leaders who are focused on building a more invested citizenry of educated voters – both young and old.

Rock the Vote, the 24-year-old get-out-the-vote organization started up by a music industry executive, has a goal this voting season to register 400,000 new voters under age 30 and to encourage youth to make their presence felt at the polls.

If enhancing their personal wealth and setting up their futures for financial success will ever be important to young people, now is the time. Our youth cannot afford to sit out yet another election while letting other people make political decisions for them.



It's an Easy Thing to Do

How often have you voted for your favorite sports team or TV show? Don't you think issues that actually affect your daily life deserve your vote, too?

Depending on your geographic location and the number of people who vote, the process of casting your ballot should take no more than 10 minutes.

That time period is short enough that you could fit it in quickly before work, during lunch or at the end of your work day. Most polling places across the nation stay open until at least 7 p.m. to allow professionals to make their way in, even after longer commutes home.

THERE ARE PEOPLE THERE TO HELP

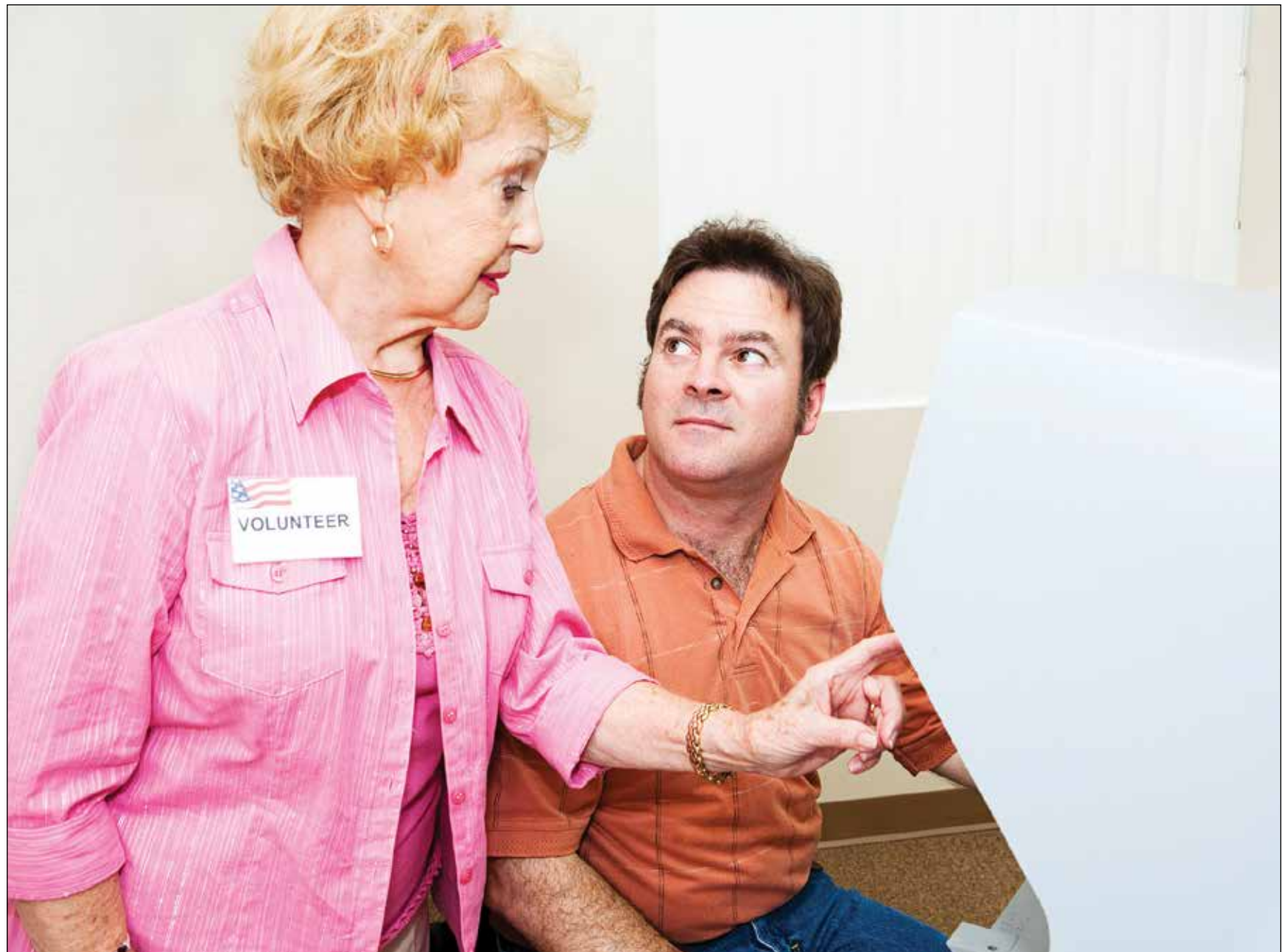
Are you scared of the overall prospect of voting? Are you worried you will make a mistake or look uncomfortable walking into a polling place?

Don't be. Voting is a straightforward process, one that will be explained at the actual location on voting day. If you have any questions on the process, ask one of the on-site voting representatives. They are trained to make voting as seamless as possible and will be able to handle any technical issues that may come up.

VOTE BY MAIL?

Many states – like the all-important “swing state” of Ohio – allow their citizens to vote without ever leaving the comfort of their own homes. Registered voters are mailed an application, which they can conveniently fill out and send back in the provided security envelope.

Obviously, not every state offers this type of voting process. Check in with



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your local voting organizations to find out if it is on the horizon for your state.

VOTING ACCESSIBILITY

A nationwide effort has been in

place for many years to make voting accessible for voters with disabilities. Both federal law and state requirements mandate that voting systems allow such voters to have the same opportunity for access and participation as non-disabled voters have.

It is required that every precinct must have at least one accessible voting machine available for use by voters with special needs, according to the American Civil Liberties Union. This includes all one-stop absentee (early voting) sites.

It Makes You Smart

How deep is your knowledge of the hot national topics? How about the ones right in your own backyard?

Good? Great! An informed citizenry is one of the most critical elements to a democracy. Without it, our country could suffer social and financial injustices. As Americans, we decide who is guiding the federal, state and local agenda – a monumental responsibility.

You can help strengthen the voice of America by first finding out which candidates are running in races that could impact you the greatest. After you register to vote, look in your sample ballot mailed to you from your county elections office. Newspapers, local news and internet searches are other sources of information that can help build a baseline of knowledge to guide your voting decisions.

EVALUATE YOUR CANDIDATES

As you read candidate materials you collect, try to figure out what you make of your prospective vote-getter on both a personal and political level. What can you draw about the candidates' stance on specific issues?

To help keep your notes and opinions straight, you can make your own candidate report card to help match up your personal feelings on how he or she matches up with items that are important to you.

CONSIDER OTHERS

Seek the opinions of others in your community who have vested stakes in political campaigns. The League of Women Voters recommends that you interview three people (not family members) such as shopkeeper, neigh-



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bor, or politically active volunteer, to find out which candidate they support and why.

Learn what has shaped their politi-

cal opinions. It may be a certain policy that has helped them grow their business or organization. It could be a long-standing loyalty to a certain

party. Whatever it is, use the information as yet another source that could help you in understanding key issues around you.

It Changes Communities

The presidential election isn't the only one you should be fired up to influence at the ballot box. In fact, your local representatives, mayors and council members have more day-to-day impact on your life than the president.

Local elected officials make decisions on policies that directly affect your taxes, home value and professional life.

THE KIDS

Children cannot vote, but our community's laws and policies still impact them, especially when it comes to education. Our children are depending on us to represent their voices at the voting booth, and we must work to make sure we don't let them down.

And speaking of children, one of the best ways to ensure a bright horizon for our democracy is instilling a voter's mindset at an early age. Talk to your children or students about why voting is so important to America and how it can impact things that are important to them – like school, playgrounds and public parks.

THE IMPACT

Your local representatives fight hard for your personal rights at the highest levels. Wages, pay equity, fairness in hiring, pension security, taxes and health insurance issues are a few of the most important aspects of your life that can be influenced by your local officials.

When you vote you are telling elected officials how you feel about these issues. Your vote can influence decisions on funding for schools or roads that you or family members may use every day.



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LOCAL CREDIBILITY

Citizens who vote hold more credibility over their non-voting counterparts when talking about issues in their communities. Around the water

cooler at work or in the bleachers at the high school football game, politics are likely to pop into the conversation.

When you place your vote, your voice becomes more powerful and

justified to publicly convey your feelings on specific issues. Whether you agree or disagree with a certain policy or legislative item, your thoughts will be considered more vital in the political arena if you vote.

We Can Do Better

Voter turnout in the United States fluctuates in national elections but has never been as strong as other well-established democracies.

Only 60 percent of the voting eligible population heads to the polls during presidential election years, according to the Center for Voting and Democracy. This number drops to 40 percent during midterm elections.

So where do we rank as Americans?

Some other countries are much further ahead when it comes to attracting and retaining voters.

- **More than 90 percent:** Australia, Belgium and Chile
- **More than 80 percent:** Austria, Sweden, Italy

WHY SO LOW?

The California Voter Foundation recently released its state-wide survey on the attitudes of infrequent voters. The numbers are indicative of the nation's feelings toward voting, according to the CVF.

Here's what they found:

- **Too Busy:** 28 percent of infrequent voters and 23 percent of those unregistered to vote said their schedules and time allowances get in the way of them voting
- **Contradiction?** Even with busy schedules, 93 percent of infrequent voters agreed that voting is an important part of being a good citizen. Eighty-one percent of nonvoters agreed.

WHO ARE THEY NONVOTERS?

The CVF survey also found that nonvoters are disproportionately young, single, less educated and more likely to be of an ethnic minority than infrequent and frequent voters.

Forty percent of nonvoters are under 30 years old, compared to 29 percent of infrequent voters and 14 percent of frequent voters.

OTHER NUMBERS FROM THE STUDY:

- Infrequent voters are much more likely to be married than nonvoters, with 50 percent of infrequent voters married compared to only 34 percent of nonvoters
- About 76 percent of nonvoters have less than a college degree, compared to 61 percent of infrequent voters and 50 percent of frequent voters
- Among nonvoters, 54 percent are white or Caucasian compared to 60 percent of infrequent voters and 70 percent of frequent voters

