

Lydia Galton, Guest commentary: Become a participant in community

By Lydia Galton Naples President, League of Women Voters of Collier County

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What kind of citizen are you?

A “just too busy” citizen? You have a job, two kids, a sick aunt and you are too busy to vote, too busy to go to town hall meetings; too busy to get involved in politics or local government; too busy to notice when things are going wrong on the local, state or national level.

A “model” citizen? You pick up litter, give blood, recycle, pay taxes, obey laws, vote after researching the issues and candidates, attend forums and help those in need during crises such as hurricanes or floods.

A “participatory” citizen? You actively take part in the civic affairs of the community. Whereas the model citizen contributes to a food bank, you organize it. You view community as a place where, as Alexis de Tocqueville observed in “Democracy in America,” “Citizens with competing but overlapping interests can contrive to live together communally.”

If you describe yourself as a just too busy or a model citizen, we want to make you a participatory citizen by attending Campaign for Leadership Nov. 4 and 5 at the Kapnick Center at Naples Botanical Garden.

And if you are a participatory citizen, we want you to become a more effective one at Campaign for Leadership — an uber participant.

Why should you want to become a participatory citizen? Because those who do take the time to participate wind up having proportionately greater political influence.

When people vote, campaign, attend town hall meetings, financially support candidates, write letters or make phone calls, and serve on advisory boards, their voices are heard. The decisions made by elected officeholders and other participants in the political process are not made in a vacuum. When citizens participate, they influence the decisions that are made.

While political leaders often speak of following the “voice of the people,” the reality is that they are influenced by the voices of the few people around them.

At Campaign for Leadership — presented by the Leadership Foundation of the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Naples Daily News, the League of Women Voters of Collier County, Greater Naples Better Government Committee and

the Presidents Council — local government officials and area civic experts will present an overview of how local government works; how to register to run for office; how to run a successful campaign for elected office; how to effectively participate as a member of a government board or commission; give an overview of the Sunshine Laws; and what to do once elected. U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson and U.S. Rep. David Rivera will participate.

In his new book, “The Price of Civilization,” distinguished macroeconomist Jeffrey Sachs laments the loss of civic responsibility in America where we are “too deeply distracted by our media-drenched consumerism to maintain the habits of effective citizenship.”

He exhorts us to “be ready to pay the price of civilization through multiple acts of good citizenship: bearing our fair share of taxes, educating ourselves deeply about society’s needs, acting as vigilant stewards for future generations.”

Sachs is not alone. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin also viewed informed participation in civic life as the fundamental support of democracy.

Register for Campaign for Leadership by calling the Chamber of Commerce at 403-2904 or going to their website at <http://tinyurl.com/campaignforleadership2011>.



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