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Guest commentary: Let the politicians know what matters to you most: Vote

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Why vote?

That's a very good question. As you know, lots of people don't even bother to vote. In fact, only 17 percent of registered Collier County voters voted in the recent primary election.

The truth is you are missing out on the greatest privilege of U.S. citizenship if you don't vote. Government at all levels has a big effect on our lives. The federal government steers the economy and that affects jobs. The result is good times or hard times. If you're a college student, government loan programs can make a difference in whether you're able to afford school.

If you are concerned with clean air and water or global warming, government at all levels makes the rules that control pollution.

Voting is one way of saying what's important to you. Voting is a way of influencing how issues that matter to you are decided. When you vote, you are talking directly to the politicians.

Let's consider the role of government close to home. For many in Collier County, school taxes represent almost 50 percent of their property taxes. That's a lot of money. When you vote for members of the School Board, you are choosing the men and women who will decide how your school tax dollars will be spent.

Should intelligent design be taught in public school science classes? Should comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education that includes information about birth control and sexually transmitted disease prevention be taught in the schools? What class schedule should our schools follow? How much should our teachers be paid? Should the School Board be involved in helping teachers find affordable housing?

Do you have an opinion? Your vote for candidates for the School Board can influence who is chosen to make those decisions.

There is also one seat on the Collier County Commission on the ballot in this election. Only residents in District 2 (North Naples) can vote in this race, but if you live in that district your vote is important. Members of the County Commission vote on matters that affect your district, as well as the rest of Collier County. Are you satisfied with the roads, traffic lights, hurricane precautions and cleanup in your community? How about the pace of growth countywide? Do you have an opinion about how the affordable housing shortage should be addressed? How about the trade-off between development and protection of environmentally sensitive areas? And zoning matters, such as whether or not another Wal-Mart or Target or newspaper headquarters and printing plant is built in your community?

Each Collier County voter can only vote for one commissioner, even though five commissioners decide

what happens in our community. During presidential election years, the commissioners in districts 1, 3 and 5 are elected, and in the midterm elections, the commissioners in districts 2 and 4 are elected. This year, since no one challenged the incumbent in District 4, only the District 2 commission seat is on the ballot. If you live in District 2, don't you want to have a say in choosing your representative?

Voters will also elect a governor and Cabinet, justices of the Florida Supreme Court, appeals court judges, two local circuit judges, one of Florida's two U.S. senators, members of the U.S. House of Representatives, and local fire district and mosquito control district commissioners, and decide ballot questions on statewide and local issues.

With so much of our lives depending on government, doesn't it make sense to let your elected officials know what you want them to do? Election time is the best time to do that, because all the politicians are listening.

For more information about voting on Tuesday, visit www.lwvcolliercounty.org or www.colliervotes.com

Voting is not a right. It is a privilege. And your one vote does make a difference!

Please vote.

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