

Guest commentary: Together, let's pull primary voter turnout up this election year

Lydia Galton / President, League of Women Voters of Collier County
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Did you know that Collier County has had historically low turnouts in the primaries in off-year elections — as low as 12 percent?

I challenge all of the other civic, religious and media organizations in the county to join the League of Women Voters in urging the electorate to register and to vote in both the primary and the general election.

There really is no excuse for failing to vote. Anyone can request an absentee ballot by contacting the Supervisor of Elections Office at www.CollierVotes.com or calling 252-8450. Because Florida is a closed primary state, anyone wishing to vote for a Democrat or a Republican or another political party in the Aug. 24 primary must be registered in that party by July 26.

A registration form also can be downloaded at www.CollierVotes.com.

The reason I hope to enlist the assistance of all of the churches, Rotary clubs, chambers of commerce, radio and television hosts, political parties and newspapers is because it will require the efforts of all of Collier County's leaders to motivate the electorate. Wouldn't it be amazing if, together, we could inspire at least 50 percent of the voters to participate in the primary on Aug. 24, especially since Collier County Commission and School Board contests will be included and perhaps decided then?

Currently there are three candidates running for each School Board seat up for election — districts 1, 3 and 5. All registered voters in the county may vote for all School Board seats whether they live in the district or not. A candidate has to receive more than 50 percent of the votes to be declared a winner. If no candidate receives more than 50 percent, the two top vote-getters for each seat will face off in the general election on Nov. 2.

As for Collier County Commission races, if you fail to vote in the primary and live in District 4, you will allow a very small minority to select your new commissioner. Only two Republicans have thus far entered the race and the winner will be determined in the primary since there is no opposition from a candidate of a different party. If only Republicans are in this race, then it will be treated like a general election and every registered voter in District 4 will be able to vote on Aug. 24.

To date, three Republicans and a member of the Constitution Party of Florida have entered the race for county commissioner in District 2. Only registered voters who live in a district elect the county commissioner from that district. If you want to select the Republican candidate who will face the Constitution Party candidate in November, you must be registered as a Republican by July 26.

To obtain more information on the commissioner races, please attend the League of Women Voters' forums on July 20 and 21, for School Board and County Commission candidates, respectively, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the County Commission Chambers or watch on Comcast Channel 97 or via the Internet at www.CollierGov.net (click on "Collier TV").

Statewide, November will be the first time in more than 100 years that there will be five open statewide seats in the general election in Florida — governor, attorney general, chief financial officer, commissioner of agriculture and U.S. Senate.

Also eligible for the ballot are all state and federal representatives.

Last, but hardly least, there will be many important issues on the November ballot including Amendments 5 and 6 on legislative redistricting. Amendments 5 and 6, if passed, would make it much harder to manipulate redistricting to serve any special interest. Districts would be compact, contiguous and ensure fair representation for minorities and communities.

If you need more information about the upcoming primary and election, please visit the League of Women Voters of Collier County website at www.lwvcolliercounty.org and watch for announcements of our forums.

Galton is a past president and currently a board member of the Naples Garden Club. She volunteers at Naples Botanical Garden, participates in Great Decisions at the National Council on World Affairs and is a graduate of Greater Naples Leadership. She was the president of Desmond Elliott Books and worked at Little Brown, McGraw Hill Book Co. and T.Y. Crowell. She was an editor at the Encyclopedia Americana and Encyclopedia of World Art (McGraw Hill).



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