

OPINION

Your vote matters Election Day is Nov. 2; absentee ballots coming soon

LANSING

Young people must vote to have voices heard



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In American politics, there is a max- im that 70% of 70-year-olds vote while only 20% of 20-year-olds vote. But this is changing. More than half of 18- to 29-year-olds cast a ballot in November – a 10-point increase compared with 2016.

In Michigan, young people voted for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris by a 27-point margin. Their participation netted 190,000 more youth votes for the Democratic ticket, far eclipsing the winning margin of 150,000 ballots. The voting reforms Michiganders adopted in 2018 – specifically online and same-day voter registration, plus no-excuse absentee ballots – facilitated this surge for Democratic and Republican youth alike.

Even though young people have increased their engagement in national contests, their turnout in primary and local elections remains paltry. Typically, less than 20% of 18- to 29-year-olds show up for off-year races, despite the fact that most laws affecting young people are passed at the state or local levels.

Why does it matter whether our youth vote in all elections? Because research shows that young people care about different issues than their elders and the older officials representing them. Gen Z and millennials tend to be more socially and economically liberal. They favor policies that make college more affordable, mitigate climate change, promote racial equity, permit immigration, and decriminalize drug use. They want government to do more, not less. State capitols and localities can address many of these issues.

Elected officials pay attention to who casts ballots. A recent study showed

that increasing the youth vote by 1% resulted in nearly a 1% increase in state higher-education spending.

Thus, when young people fail to vote, their voice is not heard. Their policy preferences do not become a reality. And our youth become more disillusioned with politics. Equally concerning, we know that voting is habit-forming. So, the longer it takes young people to participate, the less likely they will vote in the future, further jeopardizing our democracy.

Some older Michiganders reading this may feel self-righteous. But young people are squeezed more than the youth of prior decades. Gen Z and millennials' prospects for jobs, higher education, financial security and retirement are bleaker compared with every other generation.

So they find it harder to learn about the candidates, register to vote, make time to cast a ballot and get to the polls. They are also more susceptible to political misinformation given their limited experience and the barrage of new information and sources today.

So whether you are an older or younger voter who regularly participates, encourage the youth in your network to cast a ballot in all elections.

Help them get registered. Get them signed up for an absentee ballot or know how to find their polling place. Send them summaries of the candidates and the issues. Offer to take them to the polls. Remind them of the power of their voice, especially for state and local elections.

Where political parties fail to mobilize our youth, family and friends still can. Young people's representation and our democracy depend on it.

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PORT HURON

Get a seat at the table – and stay off the menu



Alphonso Amos
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In our nation, most public offices are decided with elections. Different governors, mayors, judges and presidents are all selected by the general population through the voting system, unless appointed by other elected officials. Which brings me to the question of why voting is important.

I strongly believe that voting is our civic responsibility – it is not just our right, but our duty as well. It is one of the fundamental tools by which our nation has guaranteed our inalienable rights throughout our history – 242 years now.

Today we live in a rich, multicultural society. We have representatives in our government who cross every race, gender, class, sexual orientation and so on. However, it didn't always look like that. For many the right to vote has helped diversify our local, state and federal government. Voting allows for the general population to select individuals with their values to have a seat at the table making policies and laws that affect each one of us on many different levels.

It is my belief that it's important to vote because who you have at the helm of the discussion and decision-making process as it pertains to our rights matters.

It is often said if we don't have a seat at the table, we are probably on the menu. Our votes allow for us to place individuals at the table to ensure we are not on the menu – this is especially true for Black, Indigenous, people of color and women.

We must never forget our past in knowing that women did not secure their right to vote until 1920; Black peo-

ple did not secure the right to vote until the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965. People from different backgrounds fought and died for this inherent right to live equally and as fully vested citizens.

While we look to those moments as signs of progress, the Voting Rights Act is not permanent. As we see in our nation today, our right to vote is under attack.

What that means is that the current rights we have to vote could be taken away, depending on the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, state supreme courts, local judges, Congress and state legislatures. All except the U.S. Supreme Court, whose justices are nominated by presidents, and some state supreme courts are selected by elections. Finally, it's the voters who elect the president, congress, governors, state legislators, mayors and city officials.

The votes of our citizens have determined how Congress acts in our interests, from the Civil Rights act of 1964 to the Affordable Health Care Act of 2010.

In local communities, our votes have impacted how dollars are allocated to road repairs, our schools, health-care and workforce.

In other words, your vote determines who will affect public policy in all three branches of the federal government: executive, legislative and judicial.

For state and local government, the process is the same. In fact, everything you do in society is determined by public policy where you work, shop, live and go to school – which is why one must understand why voting is important.

Alphonso Amos is a former Port Huron City councilman and a Black Lives Matter Port Huron lead organizer.

LIVINGSTON COUNTY

To be our 'perfect union,' all must have a voice



Nicole Matthews-Creech
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The importance of voting is at the core of everything the Livingston Diversity Council strives for: A fair, equal, non-judgmental voice in policy and decision-making.

Your one vote is private – it's your personal chance to express your opinion without judgment or harm. Your income, your gender, your race, your social standing don't matter to this vote – because all votes are equal.

There are very few "policies" that make people equal, but the vote is one of them. Imagine for a moment what it would feel like to be excluded from this process ... to not have a voice in policy that affects your life every day. As we know, a large part of America did not have the right to vote – minority populations had to fight for their chance to have representation in policy.

To read the accounts of Charlotte Darkey Parkhurst, a woman who dressed as a male to be a stagecoach driver, but got to vote; or of Thomas Mundy Peterson, son of slaves who was the first Black voter; or of Indigenous Americans who couldn't vote until 1924; or of the Asian American voting rights that were not granted until 1952; all this emphasizes the importance people placed on the right to vote.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1965 ensured handicapped citizens could access voting, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed discriminatory voting practices – more current policies assuring that all citizens rights to vote are protected.

It is this council's belief that to be our "more perfect union," all people need to have a voice in policy and decision-making – and all people deserve representation at the table.

Take time to explore the historical journey of the vote through all walks of American life, see the hard work and sacrifice that others have endured for this privilege, before you cast your vote this fall.

In the words of Nelson Mandela, "It is not our diversity which divides us. It is not our ethnicity, or religion, or culture that divides us. Since we have achieved our freedom, there can only be one division among us: Between those who cherish democracy and those who do not."

The Livingston Diversity Council is a nonprofit 501c3 organization that has been serving the Livingston County community since 1987. Our mission is to be a change agent for diversity, equity, inclusion and access that collaborates, educates and empowers to build a thriving community. To learn more about the work of the Livingston Diversity Council, visit livingstondiversity.org.

Nicole Matthews-Creech is president of the Livingston Diversity Council Board of Directors.

BATTLE CREEK

You may not always win, but you shouldn't give up



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To vote is power – it allows you to express how you think or feel about anything that is on the ballot. Your vote may not lead to the issue going as you would have liked, and you may have been disappointed, but you can't get discouraged and decide to not ever vote again.

Keep in mind that there are no guarantees in anything you do. You can be turned down in many instances, but do you give up on trying again? You don't, because that is not human nature. We continue to strive for what we want, especially if we feel it is better for us.

How many times have you heard of a person running for a position, proposal or something on a ballot winning by one vote? Then you can feel good knowing that your vote could have been the one to help them, or it, to win.

How often have you expressed yourself with your voice by giving your opinion to a family member, a friend, or a loved one on what to do? Then you should look at voting in the same way. I have created a quote that I use in my correspondence it says: "To vote is to speak; to speak is to be heard!"

Another quote I created and use is: "Education is learning to let your vote count!" Imagine how much power your vote can bring by starting with educa-

tion; it means taking time to learn about the people who are running for positions. Learning about the issues, the proposals and anything else on the ballot is vital to making good choices on Election Day. To vote on these things because you learned who and what they are can be beneficial and increase your knowledge in the voting process, which means each time you vote in any election, you emit your power.

To vote is an expression of unity. When you express your thoughts to your community, you demonstrate your ability to educate yourself about the people and issues on the ballot. You are then able to express your desire to vote with conviction to make things better in the way that you see them and would like for them to be.

I feel elated to know that I have made a difference because I voted, and that feeling of commitment to myself and community, whether or not the people, the issues, the proposals, or anything on the ballot wins or not. I still have the feeling of power within, because of the ballot that I voted on and the powers I used by casting my vote. Voting is a wonderful, blessed feeling as long as it is used in the right way.

Remember: "Sometimes it takes a "4" letter word: "Vote."

Deborah L. Sallee is president of A. Philip Randolph Institute, Greater Battle Creek chapter. A. Philip Randolph Institute is an African-American trade unionists.