

Every Vote Counts

Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina—each of these states brings to mind the long and arduous process that is our presidential election. But should we view it that way? Is it really that challenging to get engaged and educated on who the candidates are for any election? As I write this piece, both the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary have come and gone. I am reminded of the importance of voting in an election but also of being informed and informing others of its importance and the qualifications of the candidates.

We all know the stump speech—every vote counts. And the truth of the matter is every vote *does* count. But those votes are only as good as the information

we as a society provide on the candidates for each of these elected offices, constitutional changes, local ordinance amendments, and the list goes on.

As a profession, we are by our very nature more attuned to the election process, the qualifications of the candidates, or the reasoning for a particular amendment to local, state, or federal laws. But what are we doing to help inform our neighbors, co-workers, and family members on the issues of the day? Are we doing enough to advocate the importance of being informed and voting in every election?

In the 2014 statewide elections, only 33.6 percent of the nearly 14 million registered voters cast their ballot.

That is the lowest in the country. In Bexar County (my home county), the percentage was even smaller, with 31.9 percent of eligible voters actually voting in that same 2014 general election. It gets even worse for special elections. For example, in one recent special election affecting San Antonio's South Side, we saw only 4.1 percent of the nearly 87,000 registered voters of the area vote. Why the disengagement? More to the point, why should we care as a profession about how many of our fellow Texans are voting? The answer is simple—with each election and each vote comes change.

As lawyers we have consistently pushed for change at the ballot box. Whether it is for diversity in elected positions, for increased funding for legal aid to those in need, or even for oppressed classes to have the right to vote—lawyers have been at the front line fighting. It is time we take that effort a step further and advocate for increased voter knowledge.

The Texas Young Lawyers Association has worked hard over the years to educate young people about the importance of voter engagement and voter knowledge with projects like *Vote America* and *They Had a Dream Too*. I encourage all of the 27,000 young lawyers in this state to go to tyla.org/resources/educators-students and take a look at these programs and share them with their friends, families, and community leaders.

Every vote does count. Let us be the change agents in educating our fellow Texans about what it means to be a school board member, a district judge, a state legislator, or the president of the United States. Let us be the voice and the advocates for democracy and the right to vote for that which governs and holds us as a free nation.

Be informed. Be engaged. Be an advocate. Go vote!

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