



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Griffo's Weekly Column #34: Why You Should Vote

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO October 2, 2014

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Oct. 10 is the last day to register to vote and be eligible for this year's election.

In my last column, I encouraged you to register to vote by dispelling some common misconceptions. This week, I'm going to argue why you should make it to the ballot box on Tuesday, Nov. 4.

Naysayers argue that their vote doesn't make a difference.

If you're a statistician, that viewpoint has some merit. In a 2001 study, two economists found that one of every 15,000 votes cast in state legislative elections "mattered in the sense that they were cast for a candidate that officially tied or won by one vote."

But that ignores the reality that votes, even those cast for a losing candidate, do have an impact.

If you feel the person in office isn't representing your viewpoint, a vote sends a clear message about your priority issues.

A candidate who wins comfortably can rightly conclude that voters agree with the positions he's taking. An incumbent who wins re-election narrowly should recognize dissatisfaction with his or her performance – and it may convince the politician to become more engaged with his or her constituency, or moderate their votes to reflect the district's viewpoint.

Now let's consider the "cost" of not voting. It's going to involve a little math, but bear with me.

I represent approximately 300,000 people in the New York State Senate, but just 59,680 are registered voters. Even if there were 100 percent turnout, 20 percent of the district's population would be making decisions for the other 80 percent.

With 100 percent turnout, your vote is worth 0.0016 percentage points. It takes 600 people voting the same way to move the election by 1 percent.

As fewer people vote, an individual vote carries more weight in the outcome. Turnout is usually closer to 30 percent. In this scenario, just 20 people voting in unison can sway the election by 1 percent.

By not voting, you're empowering voters to have greater influence over spending, taxes, health care, the environment, Second Amendment rights, you name it. Why would you willingly give up that power?

If cold, hard facts don't persuade you, allow me to appeal to your emotion.

If you believe our democratic system is the best system – the one we send millions overseas to protect and die for – then you have a moral imperative to participate in democracy.

If you want to look your children in the eye and tell them you did all you could to make their world better, vote.

If you want to complain about our lawmakers and not be considered a hypocrite, vote.

And finally...if you've ever bought a Powerball ticket, the odds of you winning were smaller than the odds of your vote deciding the election for U.S. president. You're a believer in long odds, so vote!

You can find a voter registration form here:

http://www.elections.ny.gov/NYSBOE/download/voting/voteform_enterable.pdf

Don't forget! Oct. 10 is the deadline to return your form to your Board of Elections.