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Editorial | Island Voices

Do your homework, and then vote

By Ann Sack Shaver

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Like many Americans, I think the 2016 presidential campaign has been ugly, embarrassing and even confusing at times. But don't let that stop you from exercising your right to vote. To the contrary: Merely using this right and waiting for the results can debunk any notion that voting by citizens — the most basic principle of our democracy — is "rigged."

The League of Women Voters of Hawaii (LWVH) is working hard to make voting more convenient and modern. Online voter registration, voting by mail and automatic voter registration are the wave of the future. Registering online, first introduced in Hawaii last year, has already resulted in an uptick in the number of registered voters.

For now, take advantage of reforms such as early voting, available now until Nov. 5. For the first time, it is possible to register to vote at early walk-in locations within your county and vote on the same day. Or vote in person on Election Day, Nov. 8, if you prefer this approach instead of the more popular voting by mail. Absentee ballots, by the way, have already been mailed out.

As for accusations that absentee voting leads to fraud, we acknowledge that occasionally election frauds have occurred in Hawaii, as elsewhere. These incidents have been dealt with promptly by elections officials and the legal penalties are severe. However there's no evidence that fraud is widespread or that there's systematic tampering with election operations, either here or on the mainland. To the contrary,

state and county elections officials should be thanked for doing everything they can to maintain the integrity of our voter registration and voting processes.

Hawaii was spared recent highly partisan battles over voter laws that affected many states, particularly new strict voter-identification laws. LWVH member Janet Mason outlined Hawaii's situation in a recent speech, explaining that a photo ID with a signature may be requested at polling places here but other forms of ID are acceptable. We urge voters to cooperate by going to the polls prepared to demonstrate that they are who they say they are and live where they say they live. (See details on how to vote on the Office of Elections website: elections.hawaii.gov/voters/voting-in-hawaii-guide/.)

The media across the state have provided good coverage of state and county candidate agendas. They've also catalogued the myriad reasons every vote counts, like choosing the candidate who understands the needs of your district and articulates a vision of how to solve statewide problems; rewarding candidates who have run good clean campaigns (maybe even without large, obscure campaign donations); or reenergizing our political life with new faces.

Once again, we're not yet satisfied with official voter education efforts in Hawaii — particularly on Oahu with 20 City Charter amendments in addition to two proposed changes in Hawaii's Constitution.

While the Honolulu City Charter Commission mailed voters a booklet with amendment questions and "plain English" wording for each proposal, this material is extremely brief and often hard to understand. For a fuller picture of the pros and cons for each proposal, Oahu voters might consider the Honolulu League's analysis (see lwv-hawaii.com/procon2016.pdf); for Big Island voters, the Hawaii County League offers its analysis of their charter questions (lwv-hawaii.com/prosandcons.pdf).

Finally, for all voters statewide, there's an analysis of two important proposed state constitutional amendments (lwv-hawaii.com/prosandcons-hon2.pdf).

Don't despair! Remember, you're not a helpless voter, and every vote truly matters. Doing nothing this election is the worst plan of all.

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