

Who really cares about voter apathy?

By Rick Maier

It's not easy to be a responsible voter – registering in advance, studying the issues and taking time out of a busy Tuesday to go to the polls. For most Georgians the load is too great, so they let others determine their fate.

In many ways, it's okay that people don't vote. Better not to cast a ballot than make an uninformed decision, plus people who don't care give a greater voice to those who do.

Nonetheless, our nation's low voter turnout is disturbing, and the trend is worsening. The United States has the lowest voter turnout rate among mature democracies of the world, and Georgia ranked 48th among states in the 2000 presidential election. Less than 10 percent of eligible voters showed up for the local runoff elections on September 10th.

Voter apathy could be a sign of contentment, but I don't really think that's the case. People seem as upset as ever about issues ranging from rising property taxes and embarrassing behavior by local officials to national priorities and wasteful government spending.

Perhaps the variety of candidates and complexity of issues overwhelms many voters. I try to do my homework, but must admit to taking the Telegraph endorsements with me to vote on the less familiar offices and more bewildering referendums.

Lots of people forget to register in advance, others are just too darn busy to vote. What an insult to the many Americans who gave their lives to protect our freedoms.

The redrawn state and federal districts certainly destroy any sense of fair representation. Hopefully the citizens who don't vote because they're confused or frustrated over redistricting are those who would have voted for the legislators who approved the mess.

Many non-voters complain that there's little difference between the candidates, that no one champions their causes. But surely one of the candidates is better than the other. Not voting because you don't think things will change is a great way to keep things the same.

Other citizens don't think their vote matters, and yet, if someone told them that they couldn't vote, they'd pitch a fit.

Well, does it matter or not? While one vote might seem to get lost in the volumes needed to choose a candidate, every ballot helps shape the issues and keeps elected officials accountable.

Many people are disillusioned by the mudslinging, and huge sums of money spent on ads and yard signs. Instead of voting to “throw the bums out” they stay home. Boy, that’ll show ‘em!

And finally, the worst whine, the one that makes your old civics teacher shudder: not voting to avoid being called for jury duty.

Now that we’ve covered the excuses, let me share my most compelling reason for voting. Over the past 20 years, fewer and fewer voters have been contributing to the rising costs of government entitlement programs. Out of 200 million eligible voters, only 130 million file a tax return, and the bottom 50 percent of taxpayers pay only 4 percent of the tax.

While I believe that every adult should vote, I fear that the system is in danger when most eligible voters pay little or no tax. So I make sure to vote for candidates who want to shrink federal spending and spread the tax burden in a way that encourages the creation of more jobs.

Please take a few minutes to cast your ballot on November 5th. It’s a great example for your kids and a solid investment in our nation’s future.

If you don’t vote, you have no right to complain, period.