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Bill Cirone op ed column

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Voting remains our shared responsibility

As the world situation becomes ever more worrisome, we are reminded once again what sets us apart as one of the greatest powers on earth — our democratic system of governance and our freedoms. Our freedoms have been hard-won, and they come with certain obligations. We all know voting is our right. We sometimes forget, as citizens in a democracy, it is our duty as well.

Throughout history people have sacrificed their lives for the freedom to vote, and people around the world continue to do so in an effort to elect leaders and influence policies.

Yet many in our communities continue to take that right for granted, or relinquish it all together. A June 2016 *U.S. News and World Report* article estimated that over 49% of California’s registered voters turned out for the state’s presidential primary last summer.

That number is higher than the 31.1% primary turnout in 2012, but considerably less than the historic 57.7% turnout in 2008. 50% is nothing to celebrate. It means that 50% of our citizens are giving up the most powerful thing we own — our votes.

What kind of a nation would we become and what kind of government would we have if people no longer participated? As Thomas Jefferson said, “In a democracy, agreement is not essential, but participation is.”

On Tuesday, Nov. 8, or by absentee ballot in the weeks leading up to that date, citizens will once again have the chance to make their choice among candidates for federal, state, and judicial offices, as well as school district, special district, and city offices. The ballot will also contain important state and local measures. Once again, apathy or lack of participation will be the greatest threats to the outcome.

I view elections and initiatives through the lens of what is best for children. Because they can’t vote, it is up to us to determine how best to ensure a strong, healthy, and promising future for this next generation.

Parents and adults who advocate for young people can make sure, by their vote, that government will make children a priority in policy matters. Many of the candidates have very clear-cut positions on children's issues and programs.

Plus, several ballot measures and propositions on the ballot will have direct impact on the children of this state and our community. Several school board seats are also up for election as are important bond measures for school facilities.

Other ballot measures that will certainly have impacts on the world our children inherit include propositions pertaining to gun and ammunition sales and the legalization of marijuana.

I urge all members of our community to learn the positions of various candidates and the details of these and other ballot measures, and to use that knowledge to support our children and their future.

Santa Barbara County Clerk, Recorder and Assessor Joseph Holland maintains an informative voting website at sbcvote.com. The California League of Women Voters also provides current voting guides at votersedge.org.

As we cast our votes for candidates and initiatives, we will be setting priorities for this decade and beyond. The words of Franklin D. Roosevelt provide an apt reminder: "Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves, and the only way they could do this is by not voting."

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