

Money Matters

Election Day the time to let your voice be heard

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



As U.S. citizens, we are blessed with the right to vote. In the voting booth, our vote carries just as much weight as any CEO, member of Congress, or any presi-

dent — making voting the great equalizer.

By voting, one can send a clear message of a desire for change, that things are moving in the right direction, or something in between.

On voting, Rick Perry said, “It is a testament to the enduring virtue of our democratic experiment that more than 225 years since the birth of our republic we still decide our destiny as a nation without tanks in the street, or without fear or intimidation, but instead in the sanctity of a voting.”

We are fortunate indeed. In emerg-

ing democracies across the globe, many people stand in line for hours — sometimes even days — to exercise their hard-fought and precious new right to vote. Why, then, are Americans giving up this privilege?

In 1960, 63 percent of the electorate voted. By 1996, that number had dropped to under 40 percent, begging the question: What will it take to remind Americans that voting is not just a precious right, but in Lyndon Johnson’s words, “the first duty of democracy”?

Voter turnout in the State of Hawaii is horridly low. In 2004, the percentage of voter turnout was 40.3 percent. Sadly, Maui County has had the lowest percentage of voter turnout in the state since 1996 and hit an extreme low of 26.9 percent in 2004.

So, what’s hampering voter turnout?

- Many are not registered to vote. The Maui Chamber of Commerce contends that private business employees are Hawaii’s largest voting bloc, or would be if they voted. The chamber encouraged businesses to conduct voter registration campaigns for their em-

ployees to help mobilize this voting bloc by mailing a voter registration piece to over 6,000 businesses on Maui and providing electronic voter registration information to our membership through eNews.

- Apathy or disinterest in the election. Voters need a reason to make the effort to vote and to understand the importance of election results to their own lives. Government, through its elected and appointed officials, sets policies that impact the health of our community, quality of life, businesses and the economy. Ask yourself, for example, “Do I complain the state of our educational system?” If so, “Did I vote for the members of our school board? Do I even know the members of the school board?” Change starts at a grass-roots level and by electing people to implement change, from council members on up to the president. By voting and getting involved, you help affect change and will be better able to voice your concerns to appropriate representatives. After all, you will have helped to elect them and they are here to serve you.

- People wonder whether or not their vote will make a difference. The answer is “Yes, your vote is very important.” In the 2000 election, only 40.5 percent of eligible voters went to the polls, which means that just a little over 20 percent of the eligible voters could decide the election. Since many candidates won by extremely narrow margins, many of the winners — the people in power making decisions for us in the business community — were swept into office by as few as 20.3 percent of eligible voters — about one out of five voters decided what kind of government and laws we would have.

Too many Hawaii people simply didn’t vote. Our voter turnout situation is so extreme that the U.S. Congress considered and might yet pass laws to install federal overseers to ensure that Hawaii elections are properly conducted. So thinking that your vote does not count could not be farther from the truth.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce continues to take the lead for Maui businesses, asserting and reclaiming a

voice for business in the Legislature. We advocate for fairness and balance in laws affecting businesses and our working people.

We are doing what we can to help engage the nearly 70,000 entrepreneurs, business owners and employees on Maui to vote and elect business friendly government officials that will be supportive of laws that are fair to businesses.

Our “pro-business” candidate endorsements for 2006 can be found on the chamber’s Web site at www.mauchamber.com. An easily downloadable and printable version is available. We encourage you to post it at your place of employment, give it to employees, or simply take it with you to the voting booth.

Join us and vote in the general election on Tuesday. It’s our collective duty to help shape the government that’s building our community, our state, and our nation. Change begins with action and making your voice heard; take the time to ensure that yours is.