



## OpEd: We the People —Civic Engagement Feb. 5, 2022

“WE THE PEOPLE of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, ensure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” (Preamble of the Constitution)

“We the People” includes all citizens of the United States, with the power of the government coming from the people. All voices play an important role in the health of our representative democracy. That health depends on involvement in community activities and decision-making, civic engagement. All United States citizens, 18 years of age and older, have the right to vote, a right for which many fought, bled, and died. Luckily, we live in a state with laws that facilitate this freedom of participation in our democracy, but that does not ensure high rates of voter turnout. In the November 2020 election in Dona Ana County 36% of registered voters did not participate. Since not all who are eligible to vote are registered, an even larger percentage of those of voting age did not go to the polls. Potential voters may not be registered, may not know how to access the voting system, or may feel that they don’t know enough about the candidates or issues.

Voting in every possible election is essential for our voices and opinions to count. The voting process provides an opportunity to let candidates know what issues we think are important for them to have in their platform. If only a small percentage of eligible voters cast their ballot, a small group of people make decisions for all of us. Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy and it’s not enough.

There are so many ways to be more civically engaged. The pandemic may have expanded access to them. Virtual meetings provide more opportunities to participate and provide comments from our homes. With some return to in person meetings, hybrid opportunities give flexibility for advocacy while managing responsibilities within busy lives.

Civic engagement may begin with talking to our neighbors about important topics in our communities. We are fortunate that our elected officials make themselves available to discuss relevant issues. Advocating to officials about issues, such as the climate crisis, health care centers in schools, criminal justice changes, and much more, can be accomplished through text messages, email, and in person conversations. (Contact information for elected officials is available at the *League of Women Voters of Southern New Mexico*, a nonpartisan organization, website: <https://www.lwvsnm.org>, *Who’s Who Directory*.)

Here are a few other ways to become more civically engaged:

1. Become an election poll worker
2. Assist with voter registration
3. Engage with local government officials
4. Work with youth or the elderly
5. Assist public health efforts
6. Work with state or national parks
7. Support nonprofit organizations that provide services for public concerns
8. Work with community gardens that provide produce to residents
9. Run for a local or state office

10. Support your local library and literacy programs
11. Treat public employees respectfully
12. Volunteer for local boards or committees

Civic engagement not only benefits our communities, it has a positive effect for us as individuals, reducing isolation and creating connections with people of diverse perspectives. It has the potential to confirm the message of the Preamble of our Constitution. We the people, working for the greater good of others, will strengthen our democracy!

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