

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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### **Election Day arrives!**

It is finally here. The culmination of a year of campaigning; the day of reckoning; Election Day has arrived. Next week on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November, Americans will elect a president.

Amid the media stories about voter apathy, let me introduce this positive statistic: Those of us who live in Massachusetts take our civic duty seriously. Although news stories forecast a national turnout of fewer than half of the registered voters, 80 percent of our state's voters will go to the polls if they follow the pattern of 1988. In other words, from Provincetown to Boston to Pittsfield, the people are showing up on Election Day to make our wishes known. Longmeadow's turnout of 87 percent even exceeds the state average. Considering the numbers of absent students and inaccuracies on the voter lists, the percentages are pretty impressive.

Why do we do such a good job of voting? Did we vote heavily in 1988 because our governor was a candidate, and will we vote this year because our state is the birthplace of the president? Or is it the ballot questions that draw us to the polls?

Politics has been an important tradition in Massachusetts, and many of us have grown up with campaigning as a biennial or quadrennial activity that we continue as adults. Referendum ballot questions that may affect our daily lives give us another reason to vote. The Massachusetts tradition of a large legislature means that most voters have a personal tie to the State House, and that also draws people out to show approval (or perhaps disapproval). Add to these factors the universal interest in the nation's leader for the coming four years, and you may wonder why participation is not even higher.

Our children are continuing our pattern of voter participation with their school curriculum this fall. Children from elementary to high school age have been calling me for campaign items for their classrooms. Sixth graders at Glenbrook, Williams and St. Mary's Schools invited me to speak as part of their election process. Those middle schools are experiencing the electoral process, developing platforms and organizing primaries and election day. They will cast ballots for the US president, but the primary result of the exercise will be president of the sixth grade. Longmeadow and Cathedral High Schools are also holding mock elections, with the students organizing the community campaigns.

I feel confident that the voters of the future are being created in our schools. Yesterday's voters are recorded by their participation. Now it is up to us to keep our participation at its peak level. See you at the polls.