

Americans' secure, inviolate right to vote

I recently made a date with my computer. Not shopping, nor Facebook, not even the daily dismal national news.

I rendezvoused with the local Board of Elections website and printed my ballot. Then I studied it for the March 3 primary. I invite you to do the same. After all, our solemn, revered right to vote is mentioned five times in the Constitution.

Looking at the details of the ballot, I realized I needed accurate information. In my lifetime, I do not recall this many candidates running for office. After exhausting the BOE (and noting the early voting dates and hours), I moved on to two more voter/candidate education websites. One is by Common Core, a nonpartisan organization upholding core values of democracy at ncvoterguide.org/about/.

Next research tool: Vote411.org has it all, in one handy little spot. Once your address is entered and ballot selected, it conveniently lists all the candidates in each race. It includes their contact information, links to websites and answers to questions submitted by the candidates themselves.

The nonpartisan League of Women Voters Education Fund began this project in 2006 as a "one-stop shop" for election information. The League of Women Voters was founded in 1920 by leaders of the women's suffrage movement. This was a mere few months before women got the right to vote with the ratification of the 19th amendment. (To be upfront, I do contribute to both Common Cause and LWV.) Our local league chapter began in 1963 with Francee Sherman as the first president. Over the years, the LWV-HC has done a stellar job of hosting voter forums, question-and-answer sessions and meet-the-candidate events.

In more recent times, they are working on Students Voting for Democracy (SVFD) to interest the upcoming generation in voting. The voter service committee holds student voter registration and information sessions/opportunities. Hats off to the committee, as well as to the local parties who held recent candidate information sessions. The more education for voters, the better.

We get bent out of shape in this country about the right to speak freely, to worship as we please, to own a gun and more. Why is it that we have such a poor showing of this same passion when it comes to the number of people voting?

This is a solemn right, to be respected and honored with our loyal participation as fortunate citizens of a democracy. Much was said about the fact that in 2018 there was a 50% increase in

national voter turnout compared to 2014 midterm elections. Locally, Henderson County did even better with 56%.

What is disgraceful is the 44% who did not care enough to bother. This is just shameful. People around the world are persecuted for expressing their opinions, and they yearn for the right to vote. Here, we so carelessly take this defended right for granted.

Our forefathers sacrificed their lives rather than accept life under King George's "taxation without representation." (Revolutionary War: 6,800 deaths, 6,100 wounded and 20,000 prisoners, thousands of whom died.) Our democracy is in the midst of a dangerous period when the justice system is being threatened by leaders with personal agendas, and our right to vote is compromised with gerrymandering, redistricting, restrictive voter ID laws and electronic interference from foreign countries — all threatening this crucial right.

Voting is a vital lifeblood and binding ingredient in our nation. Too many of us are complacent in our daily routines and weary from life's daily demands. Complacency can grow to the point that our rights slowly erode.

True, the U.S. is one of the oldest, widely respected democracies in the world. Along with the ancient Greeks, Switzerland, San Marino, Iceland, the Isle of Man, the Native American Six Nations Confederacy (Iroquois) — all of which have been around a very long time.

It takes effort and commitment on the part of citizens to keep a country thriving. Consider the fate of countries once democracies: Turkey, Venezuela, Hungary, North Korea, Iraq and Nazi Germany. It is a sad truth that democracies do sometimes fail if checks and balances are not respected and used.

Let each of us do our part to keep our democracy thriving and vital. We citizens need to find ways to rekindle the spark that makes our country so highly regarded around the world. As one author phrased it, to fall in love with our American ideals once again.

The place to start is by doing candidates the courtesy of reading about all of them, and making good choices. Each of us honors our country and our fellow citizens when we show up at the polls. *A note to readers: After 36 years of column-writing, Mary Garrison will be on hiatus the next few months. This column will return later this year.*

Mary Garrison