

LWVTC Community Conversation Responses

February 29, 2020

Below is a summary of the responses to each question by the event's participants. **Important note:** This is a compilation and summary of ideas that were expressed by one or multiple community participants, but *do not* necessarily reflect the opinions of the sponsoring organizations, or of all participants at the event or even at each table.

1. How do you decide who to vote for or how to vote on issues?

- *Based on personal values*
- *By taking a long-term view*
- *Issue based decision making:* When an issue is very important to a voter, such as environmental quality, it can be used to guide decision making on issues or candidates.
- *By researching.* When candidates for office are vague about their positions, participants used many different sources to find out more about the candidates or issues, including print sources, online searches, and community forums.

2. What sources of information, if any, do you use to help you decide? Are there channels of information that you think are missing? What resources have you found helpful?

- *Many sources are used.* Participants cited a variety of sources of information including radio, television, online searching, candidate brochures, town hall meetings and forums (especially useful for local issues and candidates), and talking with other people that they know and respect.
- *Caution using social media.* Caution was advised about trusting information on social media.
- *What's missing?* What some felt was missing were meaningful and true debates. One idea was, in political races where there are several candidates for an office, to divide up candidate debates so that only two candidates are debating at one time, perhaps fostering a more meaningful debate. Also mentioned was the desire for more opportunities for smaller informational community gatherings.

3. Do you think your vote makes a difference? Why or why not?

- *Generally, yes!* Responders generally felt that their vote *did* matter. In support, participants cited past instances where votes were won or lost with very slim margins, or in a “swing” district, or when there are many candidates and the votes are spread out among them.
- *Why some feel it doesn't matter.*
 - *Electoral College:* Concerns were expressed about the Electoral College which may lead people to feel that their vote does not count.
 - *Lack of relevance:* Some minority or disenfranchised communities tend to vote at lower rates compared to other groups; reasons include not feeling that the issues are relevant to them, or that they are not listened to about their needs and issues.
 - *Too many people who don't vote:* Concern was expressed about people who are eligible but not registered to vote, and

the idea that if you don't vote you are giving up your decision-making power to others.

4. What obstacles to voting do you perceive?

Participants identified several perceived obstacles:

- *The need to identify your political party on the outside of the ballot envelope in Washington's recent presidential primary.* Comments included the feeling that it was a violation of privacy; that it felt like discrimination; being forced to "lie" by choosing between the two main political parties even if you identify with a smaller, third party.
- *The money involved in politics.* Elections cost billions of dollars. The need for constant fundraising.
- *The Electoral College.* Participants expressed the need for an amendment to eliminate the Electoral College, citing that there is no longer the same historic need for it and it is no longer relevant.
- *Confusing ballots.*
- *Not enough talk about the issues.*
- *The need for structural changes, such as ranked choice voting*
- *Party rules and regulations serve as "gatekeepers" that limit voter's choices*
- *Language, e.g. need for Spanish Voter's Guide*

5. Other than voting, what do you think are the most effective ways for your voice to be heard? Share your stories.

- *Civil discourse.* Many people commented on the importance of being respectful and listening when conversing with others on political matters. When people stop feeling respected, they stop listening. Try to identify a person's "moral compass" or try asking "what's important to you?" Remove political overtones, find commonality and build trust.
- *Speak up.* Talk to neighbors, family and friends. Use social media, attend community forums as well as online forums (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). Tell personal stories that illustrate your way of thinking.

- *Show up.* Attend local government meetings, attend legislative hearings and be in the gallery. Showing up matters. If more people were more involved, officials would pay more attention to what citizens have to say.
- *Work on a campaign.*
- *Work and lobby in groups or coalitions.* Get people together to push for what you want. Coalitions of people with different backgrounds helps.
- *Obstacles to participation.*
 - *Family and job responsibilities* take up our time.
 - *Capitol Campus:* It is difficult getting to and navigating the Capitol Campus, including lack of parking, and an unwelcoming atmosphere.
 - *Tuned out legislators:* Participants cited instances where they have observed legislators not paying attention at meetings, not listening to others on their committee, or rejecting/ignoring information brought to them. These behaviors among elected officials can discourage citizen participation.
 - *Not knowing how to use online tools.* More information is needed on how to track bills, budgets, votes, etc. and how to comment on a bill online.

6. How do you discern between fact, fiction and opinion?

- *Let your common sense be your guide.*
- *Ask clarifying questions.*
- *Consider the source.* Consider the source of information, the author, the organization behind it. Facebook organizations can be identified by scrolling down the page. Participants tended to rely on news sources they have come to trust; many tended to trust public stations more (e.g. PBS, NPR). Our own cultural identification factors into our beliefs and our decision making.
- *Fact check.* Don't be fooled. Some felt it was hard to get unbiased news, and felt the news television stations of the past were more objective than they are now. Beware of information coming from a

reporter who is outraged or hysterical. SNOPE is an online fact check site.

7. What do you think would motivate more people to vote?

- *Make voting day a holiday or a day off.*
- *Make voting mandatory, with a penalty or consequence for not voting.*
- *Faith that the voting equipment is reliable*
- *Faith in the government.* Feeling that the government is good vs. corrupt. Revising campaign financing laws.
- *Civics education uniformly given in schools.* This would help to promote understanding that voting is a responsibility, understand the history of voting battles from the past, and how everyone's vote makes a difference.
- *Being registered to vote.*
- *More knowledge.* Being more knowledgeable regarding issues and candidates, especially issues that people tend to care about strongly. More candidate information nights. More Information on how to vote for judges. More election information on social media.
- *Candidates that look like the community they represent.*
- *More and better information in the Voter's Pamphlets.* Participants had different opinions on the "For" and "Against" information in the pamphlet; some thought it felt like a trick, but others found it helpful.
- *Knowing others who vote.* Let people know that you vote, and engage in more personal discussions with people about the importance of voting. More opportunities for small group interactions with other people regarding issues and candidates.
- *Issues people care about.* Remove advisory votes.
- *Lower the voting age*
- *Enacting the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact*

8. Which is more important to you, issues or candidates?

- *Issues.* Some participants felt the “issues” were most important. Doubts about the true positions of political parties make voters focus on issues that are important to them and then see how the various candidates align with their feelings on those issues.
- *Candidates.* Some participants consider “candidates” first. The civility of candidates is a big determinant. Your preferred candidate might not totally align with your stances on all issues. Consider the pros and cons of each candidate. Endorsements are key.

9. What changes to our current system of voting would make voting easier?

- *Nothing.* Washington is ahead of the curve.
- *Uniformity across the country.* Every state should have the same process, a standard age for registering (17) and standard age for voting (18). Census rules should be the same for every state. A uniform, non-partisan redistricting process should be the same across states. Have a state or national system to oversee all elections.
- *Ranked choice voting*
- *More options for online voting*
- *Ability to turn in your ballot the day of the election, perhaps at a local school.*
- *Every system has vulnerabilities*

10. What issues are important to you in the next few years in your county? In Washington State? In the nation?

As might be imagined, responses to this question covered a wide range of issues. Participants were asked to respond in a “lightening round”, with just a word or a phrase. Two tables separated their responses by level of government (i.e. county, State, national) but most tables did not.

Below are the issues mentioned *the most often and by multiple tables* of participants (not in any particular order):

- Homelessness
- Water and air quality
- Affordable housing
- Abortion rights
- Gun responsibility
- Social justice
- Education
- Preserving our democracy
- Immigration rights
- Health care
- Income inequity
- Climate crisis

Other issues that were important to people were:

- Zoning and land use
- Taxation
- War and foreign policy
- International and global economy
- Pandemics
- Climate justice
- Elections

- Working wages
- Daylight savings time
- Teaching children how to find accurate information
- Civics that keeps up with technological changes
- Lack of discipline
- Journalism
- Hunger
- Violence
- Thurston County Courthouse
- Poverty
- Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Racism
- Human trafficking
- Refugee rights
- #MeToo and violence against women