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# OPINION

## Let cities vote with national races

Last week voters stayed away from the polls in Fort Myers and Cape Coral in droves.

Only about 14 percent of the electorate felt the issues — two city council races in Fort Myers and a bond issue in the Cape — were worthy of their time and vote.

Why the apathy?

Maybe it's not dispassion at all. Maybe there are just not enough headlines in the local papers or sound bites on television to get our political juices flowing.

The media does a good job covering city election issues, but how much can you report and how interesting can you make a bond issue or city council race?

That's why we think April elections are a terrible idea.

Election time is November — it's in

our DNA.

We need the high-profile races — sexy battles like Bush-Kerry, or Nelson-Harris — to get and keep our attention. After all, they're the only ones with the intrigue to stay on the front pages and the cash to bombard us with reasons to vote.

So let's go back to citywide elections on even-numbered years in the fall and get the turnout up two, three or four times what it was last week.

Sure, the percentage of votes falls off as you go down the ballot.

but isn't 50 percent better for democracy than 14?

Lee County Supervisor of Elections Sharon Harrington has long said that all-inclusive ballots would be too big to handle. After all, state law says she has to run all of the county's 40 special dis-

tricts — like fire, mosquito control, et al — in the fall of even-numbered years.

But only a couple of those show up on individual ballots. So add a couple races in Fort Myers, a couple in the Cape and a few in Bonita Springs. With today's computer voting machines it should be a snap.

Harrington and her crew are some of the best in the state at running an election. We don't have issues like Florida's east-coast counties or the totals like Sarasota is trying to explain. Elections in Lee are smooth. Results are posted online with lightning speed. So she has the people to manage a few extra races.

If we need the ballot space, let's vote in April whether to retain Supreme Court Justices. They always keep their jobs anyway. ■

Send letters to the editor to [jcull@florida-weekly.com](mailto:jcull@florida-weekly.com), mail them to 4300 Ford Street, Suite 106, Fort Myers, FL 33916 or call 333-2135

Election time is November — it's in our DNA.

## Democrats vs. the secret ballot

BY RICH LOWRY

Behold, the self-styled friends of American labor. They are now trying to relieve the American worker of what they consider the unreasonable burden of the secret ballot, which is only one of the cardinal principles of free and fair elections.

The ballots in question are those in elections to determine whether or not a work force will unionize. Unions tend to win these elections when they occur (more than 60 percent of the time in 2005), but that's not good enough to stanch the bleeding in union membership. So the unions want to dispense with the elections in favor of a "card check" process. Or as a union official put it in an organizing dispute a few years ago, "There's no reason to subject the workers to an election."

House Democrats, who behave as if they hold their jobs only at the sufferance of AFL-CIO President John Sweeney (and some of them probably do), have duly obliged by passing legislation to do away with these pesky secret elections, which have been enshrined in the workplace since the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. Instead, workers would become unionized when a majority of them signed an authorization card presented to them by union organizers.

The supporters of this card-check approach argue that it is freer from the taint of intimidation than the secret ballot. Perhaps through the looking glass. But a public process in which workers will feel peer and other pressures to sign up is obviously less likely to reflect their true sentiments than a secret ballot. Nonetheless, the Democrats call their legislation the Employee Free Choice Act, which is hilariously perverse.

The House vote is a vindication for Sweeney, who, against the advice of union leaders who want to spend more on organizing, has insisted on continuing to bankroll the Democrats. His insight is that trying to unionize workers basically is hopeless without more Democrats in office to tip the playing field in the unions' favor.

Union membership has shrunk to a husk of itself. In 2006, it was just 12 per-

cent of workers, down from 12.5 percent only a year before and down from 20.1 percent in 1983. Almost half of those union members are government employees, and almost half live in just six states.

Unionization has declined along with the manufacturing sector, and stepped-up competition has made it harder for companies to bear the increased labor costs and workplace rigidities that come with unionization. Union organizers might as well show up at places of employment and say, "Hi, we're from the union, and we want to help make your company less agile and profitable."

Union advocates are missing the dynamic nature of the 21st-century American economy and misdiagnosing its ills. It has grown wealthier (the median income of households with married couples in their working prime is more than \$72,000). Americans aren't drowning in debt. They are taking on mortgages that represent investments in housing, and their assets are rising faster than their debts (real net worth for middle-income families has increased 35 percent over the past two decades).

So, American workers seem to be doing OK, except for the terrible stresses of elections, of course. ■

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review. (c) 2007 King Features Synd., Inc.

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