OPINION

OUR VIEWS

A simple message before Election Day: Your vote still matters

It's been a head-spinning few years for voters in Louisiana. After the Legislature instituted a closed primary system in 2024, we must navigate party primaries for the first time in a long time on May 16.

It's been a long and winding road to get here. The 148,464 voters registered as Independent were switched to No Party, and registered Republicans and Democrats faced a decision of whether to switch to No Party so they could choose which primary they wanted to vote in.

Alongside that upheaval, the state launched a massive effort to update its voter rolls, resulting in roughly 455,000 voters being placed on the inactive voter list.

Now, after a Supreme Court ruling that struck down Louisiana's 6th Congressional District, the governor has announced that House elections on the May 16 ballot are canceled so that the state can redraw its maps in accordance with the new guidance from the court. Lawsuits have been filed in an effort to have the election go forward as planned, but as of this writing, it's unclear what will happen.

We know some of Louisiana's 2.9 million registered voters may be shaking their heads, wondering what's going on. It could seem that voting is too baffling, too troublesome, too much of a headache. Some may be ready to throw up their hands and forego voting altogether.

To that, we say, stop and remind yourself of our history. In a democracy, voting is not only the responsibility of every eligible citizen; it is a sacred duty. In this, the 250th year since our founding, we recall the brave patriots who established our country, creating a new form of government based on the will of the people. Then came the suffragists, who fought to expand voting rights to women. We also remember those who courageously marched during the civil rights movement, often putting their very lives on the line for equal access to the ballot for all races.

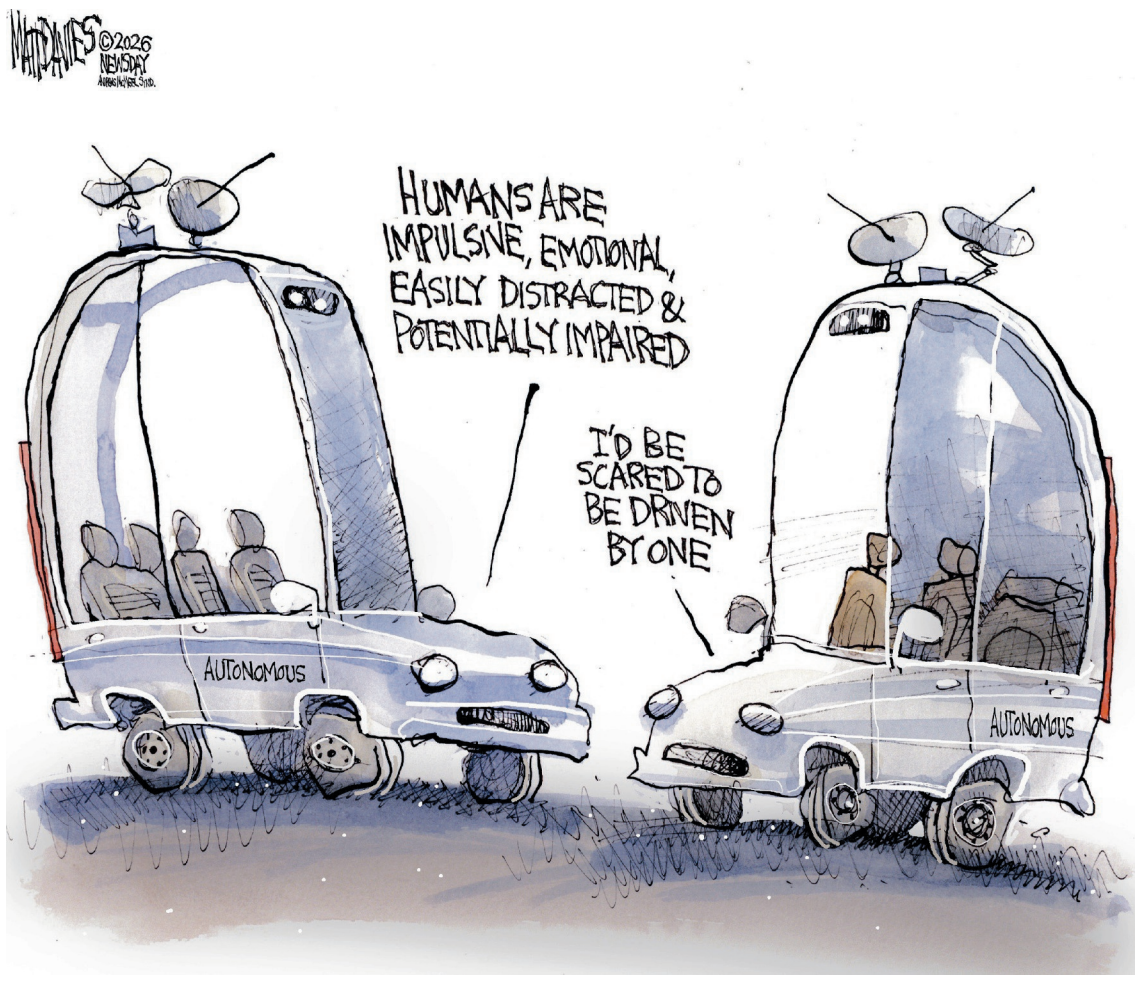
It should be said that the struggles we face today are nothing in comparison. But we understand why some might feel discouraged. Our leaders seem to be doing everything in their power to nullify our voices. In New Orleans, the duly elected Clerk of Criminal Court Calvin Duncan is in the midst of a battle against a Legislature that eliminated his job after he won an election overwhelmingly in November.

Still, we must make use of our vote even if politicians make it hard — especially when they make it hard.

The weeklong early voting period ended Saturday, but Election Day is May 16. Major offices up for grabs include a U.S. Senate seat, Public Service Commissioners and a member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Five constitutional amendments are also on the ballot. And there are multiple local ballot issues to be decided and offices to be filled. To those who have made it to the polls or voted absentee, we salute you.

If you are heading to the polls on Saturday, a few things to remember. There is still time to educate yourself about the candidates and constitutional amendments so you can make informed choices. Our recommendations are posted online, as well as our extensive coverage of the candidates and campaigns. While it is too late to register or change your registration for this election, you can check your status on GeauxVote.com. All voters are required to bring a valid photo ID to the polls.

And lastly, be kind to your poll workers. They are on the front lines at a challenging time. They deserve our thanks.



Roman stone is rightfully back home



Faimon Roberts

Sextus Congenius Verus finally has made it home. Or rather, his grave marker has.

Last week, the FBI's Art Crime Unit announced that it had sent Verus' inscribed stone to Italian authorities along with some other objects. The return marked the latest in an ongoing arrangement between U.S. and Italian authorities to repatriate artifacts taken from the country under questionable circumstances.

In the case of Verus' memorial slab, how it left Italy is a bit of a mystery. Records show that it was originally located in a cemetery in Civitavecchia, a port city north of Rome. At some point, it made it to that town's museum, which was bombed during World War II. When the museum reopened decades later, Verus' stone and more than 20 similar ones were missing.

It seems that the stone crossed the Atlantic with Charles Paddock Jr., an American soldier who married an Italian wife while stationed there during the war.

The couple's granddaughter, Erin O'Brien, eventually inherited it and put it in her backyard. But when she moved out, she forgot Verus' memorial was there.

Danielle Santoro and Aaron Lorenzo bought the house in 2018. Last year, they found the marker under some vines while doing some yard work. They consulted with a Tulane classicist and a UNO archaeologist who helped uncovered the object's story. That kicked off a lengthy process that culminated last month with the handover to Italian authorities.

All in all, this turns out to be a good story of how returning artifacts should work. It doesn't always, as repatriation can be controversial, especially when the object is unique.

The most famous example, perhaps, is the Parthenon Marbles, which currently occupy a prominent spot in the British Museum after an English nobleman named Lord Elgin had them taken down from the Athenian landmark in the early 19th century. Elgin claimed to have permission from the Ottoman rulers of Greece, but their presence in London is a sore spot for Greeks, who consider them looted. They desperately want them returned.

The same is true for the Rosetta Stone, uncovered by French soldiers in 1799. The inscription on the stone was key to unlocking hieroglyphs. The stone is also in the British Museum, much to the frustration of Egyptian authorities.

In the case of Verus' grave marker, his relative obscurity helped smooth the process.

Nothing is known of him apart from what's in the inscription. That is in no way a comment on his character — he was, after all, a two-decade veteran of the Roman military whose heirs considered him "well deserving" of remembrance. But without a major epic tale or known role in some historical event, interest in his stone is lower.

What also helped is the sensitivity shown by all involved, including those who inherited the stone, those who found it and the scholars who helped track down it origins. That is commendable and refreshing.

Regardless, after its eight-decade holiday in New Orleans, Verus' stone and Verus the man can be reunited in their homeland.

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The quintessential texts of American history



Arnessa Garrett

As we get closer to July 4, celebrations are ramping up for America's 250th birthday.

In the Opinions section, we've been running a series of essays from historians, scholars, politicians and others reflecting on our country's history and the moment we're living through now.

We hope you've been enjoying the series because it's truly been a pleasure bring these perspectives to readers.

We'd also like to hear from you. We are asking readers to reflect on the quintessential texts of American history.

Of course, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are among that number. But we'd like to hear of other documents or words you feel are keys to understanding our country.

There have been many memorable speeches by notable figures from Washington's Farewell Address to the Gettysburg Address to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream." speech. There are some texts that were vital to our founding such as Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" and the "Federalist Papers." There are texts of treaties like The Louisiana Purchase. The list goes on.

Let us know what you think. What texts are most important to understanding American history and why? Send us your thoughts at letters@theadvocate.com. We'll print a selection of the best letters in a later edition.

Many of these texts are ones that schoolchildren are forced to memorize and recite, or at least they were when I was in school.

Reading these texts today from my perch on the Opinion pages, I envy a time when such rhetorical mastery was commonplace in political circles. The Declaration itself isn't just a soaring piece of literary artistry, it is an argument, laying out the reasons the colonies had no choice but to strike out on their own.

It is amazing to think how much the written word helped shape a new world.

Turning to our letters inbox, I can give you our numbers for the week of April 23-30.

We received 58 letters that week, and the topic that generated to most interest involved questions about the letters section. We received four letters on the topic of what letters get published and civility in letters. We received three letters on the birthright citizenship issue and three on the Senate race.

We expect that with the election nearing and the Legislature sprinting to a finish, we'll have high numbers of letters in the coming weeks. As always, we look forward to hearing from you.

Email Arnessa Garrett at arnessa.garrett@theadvocate.com.

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