OPINION

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OUR VIEWS

Turnout data show we all lose when voters are confused

We wish we could say that Louisiana voters defied the odds on Saturday and turned out in record numbers to make their voices heard despite all the confusion that accompanied the state's first party primaries in decades.

But as the votes were tallied, one thing became abundantly clear: Hundreds of thousands of voters who once would have been expected to show up for an important U.S. Senate race were simply missing. No one can say for sure whether it was the closed primary or the massive voter purge or the late cancellation of House races by Gov. Jeff Landry or some other cause that led so many to skip going to the polls. There were stories about voters and some poll workers not understanding the rules surrounding the party primaries.

But whatever the reason, large numbers of voters just didn't participate.

Especially in the hotly contested race for the U.S. Senate seat currently held by Sen. Bill Cassidy, the data is stark.

Complete but unofficial results from the Secretary of State's office show that 401,118 votes were cast in the Republican primary, where Cassidy finished third to U.S. Rep. Julia Letlow and state Treasurer John Fleming, who are headed to a runoff. Meanwhile, 344,751 votes were cast in the Democratic senatorial primary, where Jamie Davis, a farmer, and Gary Crockett, a New Orleans businessman, are headed to a runoff.

All told, that's less than 750,000 of Louisiana's 2.9 million registered voters who decided to take part in this consequential election, one that effectively ended the career of a long-tenured public servant.

By contrast, in the last election for U.S. Senate, where incumbent John Kennedy was seeking reelection in 2022, the number of ballots cast in a so-called jungle primary, where voters do not have to choose a party, was 1,383,290. The effect of nearly 640,000 fewer ballots is too serious to deny.

That effect could be felt up and down the ballot. Louisiana voters, perhaps registering anger at state leaders for recent efforts to change voting rules and nullify elections, soundly rejected the five constitutional amendments on the ballot, including one to raise teacher pay. And sadly, important local initiatives, like a library tax renewal in Lafayette and a measure to fund school employees in St. Landry, also suffered from voters' ire.

That's why we argue that the effort to confuse voters is ultimately a losing one for politicians and for our state as a whole. Voters are too wise and too weary to reward efforts to trick them. So they turn against the system as a whole and reject anything put in front of them.

That's a lose-lose proposition for all of us.

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YOUR VIEWS

Keep LA GATOR funding in state's public schools

Gov. Jeff Landry is pushing the state Legislature to double funding for the LA GATOR fund from $44 million to $88 million. State School Superintendent Cade Brumley, who also supports school vouchers, says the program (euphemistically called "school choice") is becoming more popular throughout the country.

However, other states that have tried voucher programs have found that many of the voucher recipients were already attending private schools. In Arizona, for example, 71% of voucher recipients had not previously attended a public school.

The voucher system has proven harmful to public schools that lose students to private schools. Public schools do not have a decline in fixed costs (building maintenance, heating, electricity, bus drivers, staff) even though their revenue decreases. They are therefore unable to deliver the same quality of instruction to the remaining public school students. Furthermore, state Sen. Katrina Jackson-Andrews, D-Monroe, points out that the state pays about $5,500 per student for public schools while LA GATOR averages more than $7,000 per student.

Last year, Senate President Cameron Henry was able to stop the expansion of LA GATOR. Let's hope that he is successful again this year. Our state has many other areas where the money can be used, rather than subsidizing parents who are already paying for private school tuition. We should be giving more money, not less, to support our public schools.

In fact, The New York Times reported in February of this year that Louisiana public schools rank No. 1 in the country in recovery from pandemic losses in reading. Why not spend the $88 million Landry wants to give to LA GATOR on Louisiana's public schools?

MERRY TOUPS
New Orleans

Fading bike lane designations create a hazard

The city of New Orleans recently received City Council approval of its Safe Streets for All Action Plan, which aims to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2041, with a 50% reduction by 2031. Yet on the very morning the plan was presented to the Transportation Committee, a woman was killed in a hit-and-run crash in New Orleans East. Just days later, another woman lost her life while biking near the Lafitte Greenway.

These tragedies are not isolated — they reflect long-standing, unaddressed safety issues across our city. Bike lanes that were once clearly marked have faded to near invisibility, undermining their purpose and putting people at risk. At the same time, basic traffic infrastructure continues to fail. It is deeply frustrating that fatal crashes occur at intersections with known problems, including signals that have been broken for extended periods despite repeated requests for repair. These are preventable conditions and failing to address them has real consequences.

At Bike Easy, we remain committed to both advocacy and education. We work with local leaders to push for safer streets while also equipping residents with the knowledge to navigate them.

From our Biking After Dark workshops to our multi-part Smart Biking classes, youth bike rodeos and community trainings, we are building a culture of safety across New Orleans.

But education alone is not enough. Safe, functional infrastructure must be maintained and prioritized with urgency and accountability.

As more people take to biking this spring, we urge everyone to stay safe — and we call on the city to match its vision with action. Lives depend on it.

ALLENE LA SPINA
executive director, Bike Easy

Column highlighting plight of immigrant brothers appreciated

Thanks to Stephanie Grace for her column May 3 about how a clarification of confusing immigration rules might prevent others from suffering the injustice and humiliation inflicted recently on teenage brothers from the Republic of Congo with student visas as they aspired to enlighten themselves with an American education in a Mississippi classroom.

LANNY THOMAS
New Orleans

Maybe it's time to update constitutional amendments

Birthright citizenship is outdated, I hear?

Hearing the U.S. Solicitor General John Sauer argue the administration's points on birthright citizenship was eye-opening for me.

As a lifelong Democrat, though a "thinking" Democrat, I was enlightened by the argument of Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, indicating that in 1868, when the 14th Amendment was added to the Constitution, there were few federal laws regulating migration. Unlike today, when a complex series of federal immigration laws impose stringent restrictions on migrants and prospective migrants. "We really didn't have laws like that" in 1868.

My personal eye-opener was: Should we change the 14th Amendment to maybe reflect 2026, not 1868??

Further, my thoughts veered over to the much-argued Second Amendment. Written in 1791 and reflecting, probably accurately, the time of 1791.

"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

Definition of militia: A military force that operates only some of the time and whose members are not soldiers in a permanent army.

Are 1791 and the times then, when this amendment was no doubt necessary to protect person and property relevant? Absolutely!

But, in 2026, does it play out exactly as originally written and intended?

So, does the 14th Amendment need some contemporary updates and rewrites? And, with the same thought, should the Second Amendment be once again revisited to reflect the current times of 2026 with all its larger-than-life changes, usages and alternative weaponry out here now and not 1791?

I mean, times have changed. In 1791, individual protective devices included rifles and pistols. In 2026, individual protective devices include the AK-47, Ruger, Glock, 45mm, M16, Steyr AUG and SIG Sauer.

PATRICK DUFFY
New Orleans

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