

#HamiltonVotes 2022 High School Essay Contest

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The decline of voter turnout always becomes the crutch of elections like the local news weather forecast. We know what rain feels like and how it impacts our day. However, just like the rain, we still hope for the sun, dream of the changing wind, and are pleasantly surprised by the rainbow after the storm. Unfortunately, voter turnout is the rainbow not always visible.

All levels of government have been challenged with declining voter turnout election over election. This rings true here in Hamilton at the Municipal election. It is important to note compared to surrounding cities, we Hamiltonians “get off the couch” a bit more to cast our ballots. Engagement is often measured by the voter turnout percentage. As a student who has political aspirations, I would challenge everyone to think bigger and collect and analyze the data collected including newcomers, barriers to vote, accessibility to vote and vote from home options.

Low voter turnout impacts and threatens democracy because it does not give a true reflection of the City’s population when it is dismal. My parents’ generation grew up hearing their elders and grandparents saying, “If you don’t exercise your right to vote, then you don’t have the right to complain.” As much as I challenge my parents’ old adages and storytelling with eyerolls and sighs (out of their view), I do see the value of that statement. Most High School students enrolled now will be eligible to vote the next Municipal, and even Provincial election. In addition to the Youth vote, many newcomers will have successfully achieved Canadian Citizenship and too will exercise their rights. I am still amazed when I hear that many countries have mandatory voting. This reminds me of a mandatory Census or filing your taxes. Some people would not comply but I can only surmise the Voter turnout would be at a historic record high across the City, province and the Country.

While many ideas and opinions have been expressed over the years to increase voter turnout, I truly believe we need to be true to the process. Often, media outlets, overarching politics and the “option to only vote in one category” (Mayor, Councillor and School Board Trustee) does not help our democratic process. All three categories should be required for a complete ballot since all are tied to Property taxes and many policies and procedures that impact our communities. Investing in High School students and Middle School students is also another way to engage Voters. Habits take time to form and Elections are no different. The habits of our ancestors are often passed down. I dream and hope that my generation passes down Voter engagement.

I appreciate the generous opportunity to weigh in and if selected to meet the Mayor and Council, I would bring the discussion of “where do we educate from here”.