

Opinion: March to the Polls – it matters

Publisher's note: *This is South Lake Tahoe Mayor Wendy David's speech at the Jan. 20 women's march.*



South Lake Tahoe Mayor Wendy David rallies hundreds on Jan. 20 to make sure they vote to make their voices heard. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Wendy David

When I was 16, the 1964 Republican National Convention was held at the Cow Palace near San Francisco. The Republican presidential candidate was Barry Goldwater, running against Lyndon Johnson.

Now I can remember very little about the speeches, the platforms, the protests, but I can remember being on the floor

(I was a floor page, a helper) and the excitement, everyone covered in the pins of their favorite candidate, the signs bopping up and down all over this cavernous, livestock arena, like they were actual human beings, jumping up and down. I can't actually remember why I got to go, but it was an experience never to be forgotten by this 16-year-old girl.

President Kennedy had been assassinated the November before the convention. There were civil rights protests going on. Protesters, civil rights activists, were being ejected from the convention. I had never seen anything like it.

I tell this story because it set in motion for me a life of never, never, ever missing the right and gift of the opportunity to vote. Never!

I had to be 21 to vote. Heck, by then I was already married with one child and three weeks overdue with the next.

In 1972, I got to vote in my first presidential race, which didn't turn out so well for me. Richard Nixon won with 520 electoral votes to George McGovern's 17. Now that I think of it, it ultimately did not turn out well for Nixon either.

But, still I voted.

I ask myself, what is different today, from 44 years ago. Were we more compelled to vote because of the times of radical change? Was it President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy all being assassinated before our eyes? Was it the Vietnam War, the unjustness of our friends being injured or killed for what? Where was the reason? Was it that our parents' generation had just fought in WWII, literally preserving our free world. I know my dad was in Europe for the first four years of my parents' marriage.

Whatever it was, we voted, we voted, we voted. We voted for democracy, equality for all races, equal rights in solidarity with all our heroes that fought much more publicly than us!

Other women encouraged us as women to stand up, to sit in, to burn our bras! Or just not wear these contraptions to begin with! That alone was a freedom.

Seriously, could all of these freedoms voted for, marched for, sacrificed for, be at risk? Unbelievably, yes. Can we change this? With our vote, yes we can!

Voting is the right we were given by our nation's fathers and then mothers for us as men and women, preserved and protected for us by generations that have fought for these rights.

When the precious right to vote is taken for granted, ignored, or forgotten, while knowing it is vital and integral to who will lead us, and determines how we will be taxed and supported through our government, how health care will be delivered and protected for all and how we fund public education and those that seek a higher education to better themselves, support their families and make the United States a better country, it is time act.

When we are complacent, women's rights, equal rights, human rights suffer. We stand together today because we can no longer afford to let others decide, others vote, others change the progress of the last decades.

Just an aside, our last local election, the vote for our roads initiative, a mere 22 percent of registered voters, voted. One minute, one item on the ballot, one check mark, one decision forfeited to others when we do not vote!

I was fortunate to be able to travel to Kenya in 2012. It was presidential election time in Kenya. Kenya has extreme corruption in its leadership, the government misappropriating funds allocated to the public schools, for roads, for infrastructure. As we rode in our bus through the little villages on voting day, we saw hundreds of Kenyans walking along the most desolate dirt roads, miles and miles from their huts, dressed in their best, brightest robes and tunics,

scarves and skirts, in stark contrast to the dry and barren landscape. Heads high with hope for a better future, they were walking to their polls, an all day walk to vote. They have a very high voting percentage in Kenya, much higher than here in the U.S.

Our walk is shorter; our resolve must be even stronger.

One year ago our first women's march joined hundreds of thousands across the nation to march as well. A march has a purpose, to move forward with resolve, to make a difference and to do it publicly, proudly gaining strength from all others that have joined. Last year we marched in solidarity for our democracy, for our country, committing to each other to make a positive difference where we live.

One year later, and oh, what a year it has been, we march again. We walk with purpose. The theme of this year's march is March to the Polls. Our power has always been our vote. We must march to the polls, educate, contribute, speak up and speak out with our vote, encourage women to run for office, elect women to office, ensure that there is not one elected official anywhere, anymore that has ever used their power to sexually abuse women, has bragged about their stature, has attempted to role back almost 50 years of progression. We must vote to ensure that our nation of immigrants, for we are a nation of immigrants, continues to welcome the huddled masses, yearning to be free.

The time really is up. Time is up for being complacent, waiting for others to lead. We cannot be lazy, tired, ignorant or uninformed. We cannot be quiet. The time is up for being quiet!

One year from the first Women's March has been a year nothing short of beyond belief. The Me Too movement exposed and kicked sexual abuse in the workplace, government, entertainment, and professional sports out of the darkness and into the light.

And it has been glaring! We are here to make sure that no woman or girl ever experiences this evil darkness again.

We can do so much. We have amazing, engaged people. Look at the power here today. Let's band together in electing qualified progressive leaders and if there are good women (and there are), support them as they lead locally so that someday, they may lead us nationally.

Time is up for standing by, for keeping mute, for tolerating less in our leadership. We must continue to march to the voting polls, and by doing so, refuse to tolerate racism, sexism, cronyism and ever, ever supporting or tolerating a candidate that does not respect all women, all races, all colors, all religions, all ethnicities, all genders and the equal rights given to all citizens of the United States. The time was up for that when this nation was formed ... we must preserve it.

I am so proud to be here with all of you. Today you are already making 2018 a year of change. Women all over the United States are saying enough! Let us continue to support each other. Time is up, it is a new time, this is our time!