

Voter Engagement - A Constant, Active, and Effective Approach: Motivation, Education, Registration, and Facilitation

Steve Daugherty
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The Situation: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2016 Tennessee had the third worst voter participation rate in the nation. Only 67% of Tennesseans eligible to register to vote did, and only 54% voted. In 2018, 64% registered and only 50% voted, earning Tennessee the distinction of having the 12th worst voting rate in the country. Even worse, in both 2016 and 2018, only 31% of 18-24 year old Tennesseans voted. This year, in addition to the presidential race, all nine of Tennessee's seats in the U.S. House of Representatives are up for election as well as one of Tennessee's two U.S. Senate seats, soon to be vacated by Senator Lamar Alexander. The stakes are high and our past performance has been lacking but the opportunity to make meaningful and lasting change is real. Read on and I'll tell you how.

What is effective Voter Engagement?: Voter Engagement is often viewed as personally registering to vote and possibly getting three others to do the same, and voter registration often takes the form of occasional drives characterized by tables and chairs, door knocking, phone calls, or posting on social media. All that is great, and necessary, but truly effective voter engagement is much more involved and much more active.

Consider this. In order for a horse to win a race it must have four strong legs working in unison, and the weakness or absence of any of them guarantees the horse's failure. Voter engagement is no different, and the four legs or components which make it effective are **Motivation, Education, Registration, and Facilitation**. I'll elaborate on each.

Motivation

Prospective voters must be given a reason to register and vote. That comes through your expressed passion, the example you set, thoughtful dialogue, personally relating to each individual encountered, and even inspirational quotes. Here are 20 which can be spoken, made into yard signs for registration drives, or left standing in areas of high foot-traffic through the election cycle.

"We in America do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate."

-Thomas Jefferson

"In reality there is no such thing as not voting: you either vote by voting, or you vote by staying home and tacitly doubling the value of some Diehard's vote."

- David Foster Wallace

"A citizen of America will cross the ocean to fight for democracy, but won't cross the street to vote in a national election."

- Unknown

"Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves, and the only way they could do this is by not voting."

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

"American youth attributes much more importance to arriving at driver's license age than at voting age."

- Marshall McLuhan

"If you don't do politics, politics will do you."

- Unknown

"The vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It's the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a Democratic society and we've got to use it."

- John Lewis

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

- Martin Luther King Jr.

"Every election is determined by the people who show up."

- Larry J. Sabato

"If you think that you're too small to make a difference, spend a night with a mosquito."

- Nelson Mandela

"Not voting is disrespecting the best of what this nation stands for."

- Thomas Hauser

"Politicians are like diapers. They both need changing regularly and for the same reason."

- Unknown

"Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote."

- George Jean Nathan

"The struggle for the Voting Rights Act taught us that people who love this country can change it. Don't give away your power - go vote."

-Barack Obama

"The ballot is stronger than the bullet."

- Abraham Lincoln

"Vote like you understand that someone died for your right to do so."

- Unknown

"You can't fix stupid, but you can vote it out."

- Unknown

"Too many people fought too hard to make sure all citizens of all colors, races, ethnicities, genders, and abilities can vote, to think that not voting somehow sends a message."

- Luiz Gutierrez

"If you don't vote, a few people with lots of money will speak for you."

- Unknown

"According to the U.S. Census, the most common reasons people give for not voting are that they were too busy or had conflicting school schedules. I got it. I was a student once too. Find some time November 3rd and vote, because your life, or someone else's depends on it."

- Steve Daugherty

Education

To effectively educate others you must first become a subject matter expert. On what? Everything related to registering and voting. That includes all of the following:

- Registration deadline, Early Voting, Absentee Voting, and Election dates
- The website to register online
- The website for individuals to check their voter registration
- All forms of identification required at voting locations
- Polling locations or Vote Centers (in the case of Rutherford County), for both early voting and Election Day
- How to obtain non-partisan information on candidates
- How former felons can possibly reinstate voting privileges
- How to request an Absentee Ballot and deadlines for requesting and returning the ballot
- The location, web address, phone number, fax number, and operating hours for the county election commission

Get the above information from your county election commission website and the state election commission website. For Tennessee that's **sos.tn.gov**. Then click on the Elections tab.

Here are six tools you can use to motivate, educate, and register prospective voters often without even opening your mouth or being present. I use them daily.

1. Voting Information Sheet: Make a one-page voter information sheet with the information from the Election Commission listed previously. It will be your most important tool and if you hand it out to everyone you'll be able to indirectly increase your individual efforts exponentially. Here's a copy of the sheet I hand out, tailored to Rutherford County, Tennessee, and which I made into a 4' x 8' sign and hope to emplace on Middle Tennessee State University should classes resume on campus this Fall. My 4' x 8' sign cost \$213. Immediately below this is the sheet in MS Word, which you can print double-sided and hand out.

2020 ELECTION INFORMATION (Current as of June 1, 2020)

	Last Day to Register	Early Voting	Actual Event
Congressional Primary	Jul 7	Jul 17 - Aug 1	Aug 6
Presidential and Congressional Election	Oct 5	Oct 14 - 29	Nov 3
Absentee (mailed) Ballots	Request ballot no earlier than Aug 5	Request ballot no later than Oct 27	Election Commission must receive ballot by Nov 3

How to Register

- Register online at **ovr.govvote.tn.gov**
- If you're an MTSU student go to **mtsu.edu/amerdem**. Click the red button.

How to Verify Your Registration:

- Google **tnmap.tn.gov/voterlookup** or **invoterlookup** (on a phone)
- Enter your county of residence
- Enter your last name
- Enter your first name
- Enter your year of birth
- Hit Continue
- Enter the last four numbers of your SSN

ID Required to Vote

All voters must present a federal or Tennessee state ID containing the voter's name and photograph unless the voter uses an absentee ballot, is hospitalized, lives in a nursing home, cannot afford a photo ID, or the voter has a religious objection to being photographed.

University ID cards are not acceptable. Any of the following ID is acceptable, EVEN IF EXPIRED:

- Tennessee driver license with photo
- US Passport

- US Military photo ID
- Tennessee handgun carry permit with photo
- Photo ID issued by the federal or Tennessee state government
- Photo ID issued by the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security

Where to Vote

During Early Voting you may vote at any of these eight locations. The Election Commission is open 7am-7pm M-F. Other locations are open 10am-6pm. All locations are open 8am-noon Saturdays.

- Rutherford County Election Commission
- Sports Com
- Rutherford County Election Commission Annex (426 E Vine Street)
- Lane Agri-Park Livestock Pavillion
- Middle TN Association of Realtors
- Smyrna City Hall
- Smyrna First Free Methodist Church
- LaVergne Multi-Purpose Building

2020 Voting Information for Tennessee and Rutherford County

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- Sports Com
- Rutherford County Election Commission Annex (426 E Vine Street)
- Lane Agri-Park Livestock Pavillion
- Middle TN Association of Realtors
- Smyrna City Hall
- Smyrna First Free Methodist Church
- LaVergne Multi-Purpose Building



On Election Day, in Rutherford County, you may vote at any of these 28 locations from 7am-7pm.

- LaVergne Middle School
- Cedar Grove Elementary School
- Rock Springs Elementary School
- Stewarts Creek Elementary School
- Stewartsboro Elementary School
- Smyrna Middle School
- Smyrna Elementary School
- Browns Chapel Elementary School
- Lane Agri-Park Livestock Pavilion
- Blackman United Methodist Church
- Leanna Church of Christ
- Wilson Elementary School
- Siegel Middle School
- Mitchell-Neilson Primary School
- Cason Lane Academy
- Barfield Elementary School
- Middle TN Assoc. of Realtors
- Central Magnet School
- Hobgood Elementary School
- North Blvd. Church of Christ
- Sports Com
- Lascassas Elementary School
- Milton Church of Christ
- Kittrell Elementary School
- Whitworth-Buchanan Middle School
- Christiana Middle School
- Rockvale Middle School
- Eagleville Community Center

MTSU Student Registration and Voting Information

- Students must vote in the county in which they are registered
- Those residing in Rutherford County may register to vote here
- On-campus residents must use his address: 301 Main Street, P.O. Box 7132
- If you are a first-time voter you must vote in person.

How to Get Non-partisan Information on Candidates: Go to these websites in September 2020

- campuselect.org
- vote411.org
- mtsu.edu/amerdem

How to Vote if you have a Felony Conviction

- Go to os.tn.gov/elections
- Click on FAQs
- Click on I have a Felony Conviction Can I vote?
- Download, print, and complete the form with your probation officer
- Take the form to the Election Commission

How to Get an Absentee Ballot

- Download one for Tennessee at os.tn.gov. Click Elections. Click Voter Information. Click Absentee Voting. Click Download Absentee Request Form
- If registered in another state, Google the Election Commission or Secretary of State office for your state

Rutherford County Election Commission 8:00am-3:30pm M-F

- Address: 301 South Public Square, Suite 103, Murfreesboro, TN 37130
- Phone: (615) 898-7743
- Fax: (615) 217-7144
- Web Site: www.rutherfordcountyttn.gov/election/

On Election Day you may vote at any of these 28 locations from 7am - 7pm:

LaVergne Middle School	Cason Lane Academy
Cedar Grove Elementary School	Barfield Elementary School
Rock Springs Elementary School	Middle TN Assoc. of Realtors
Stewarts Creek Elementary School	Central Magnet School
Stewartsboro Elementary School	Hobgood Elementary School
Smyrna Middle School	North Blvd. Church of Christ
Smyrna Elementary School	Sports Com
Browns Chapel Elementary School	Lascassas Elementary School
Lane Agri-Park Livestock Pavilion	Milton Church of Christ
Blackman United Methodist Church	Kittrell Elementary School
Leanna Church of Christ	Whitworth-Buchanan Middle School
Wilson Elementary School	Christiana Middle School
Siegel Middle School	Rockvale Middle School
Mitchell-Neilson Primary School	Eagleville Community Center

MTSU Student Registration and Voting Information

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- Those residing in Rutherford County may register to vote there
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- If you are a first time voter you must vote in person.

How to get non-partisan information on candidates: Go to these websites in September 2020

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How to vote if you have a felony conviction

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- Click on FAQs
- Click on "If I have a felony conviction can I vote?"
- Download, print, and complete the form with your probation officer
- Take the form to the Election Commission

How to get an Absentee Ballot

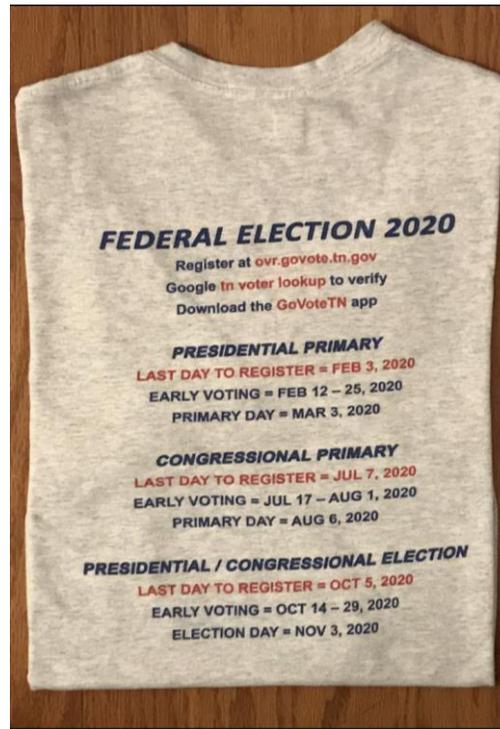
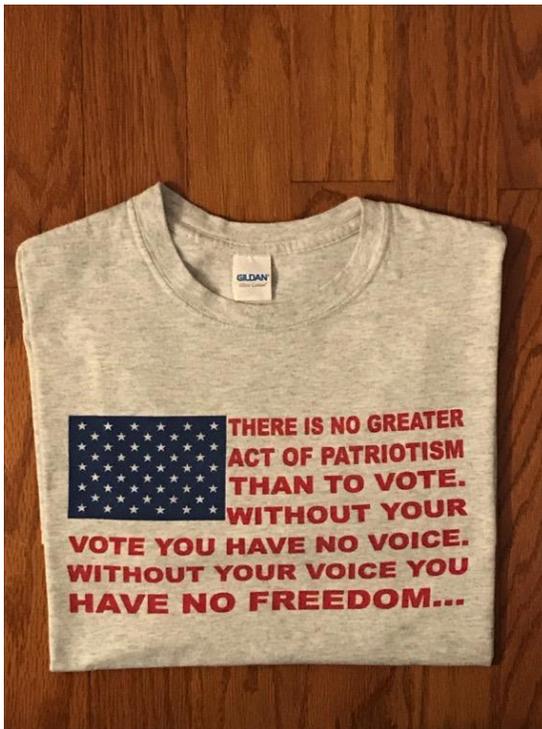
- Download one for Tennessee at sos.tn.gov. Click Elections. Click Voter Information. Click Absentee Voting. Click Download Absentee Request Form
- If registered in another state, Google the election commission or Secretary of State office for your state.

Rutherford County Election Commission (8:00am - 4:30pm M - F)

- Address: 1 South Public Square, suite 103, Murfreesboro, TN 37130
- Phone: (615)898-7743
- Fax: (615)217-7144
- Web Site: www.rutherfordcountyttn.gov/election/

Download the **govotetn** app for more information

2. Voting T-shirt: Because I'm passionate and obsessed with voter engagement I wear only one shirt, every day, everywhere. The front provides motivation, gets attention, and starts conversation, which often leads to registration. The back gives anyone in Tennessee the basic information they need to register, confirm registration, and know when to vote. I've been wearing six of these shirts since May 2019. Each shirt cost me \$15. They really get the message out and I often ask people, especially young voters, to take pictures of the back and share the information on social media. Again, it's all about multiplying my individual effort. I'm not suggesting that my shirt is the best, just that it's an idea that might work for you, as it has for me.

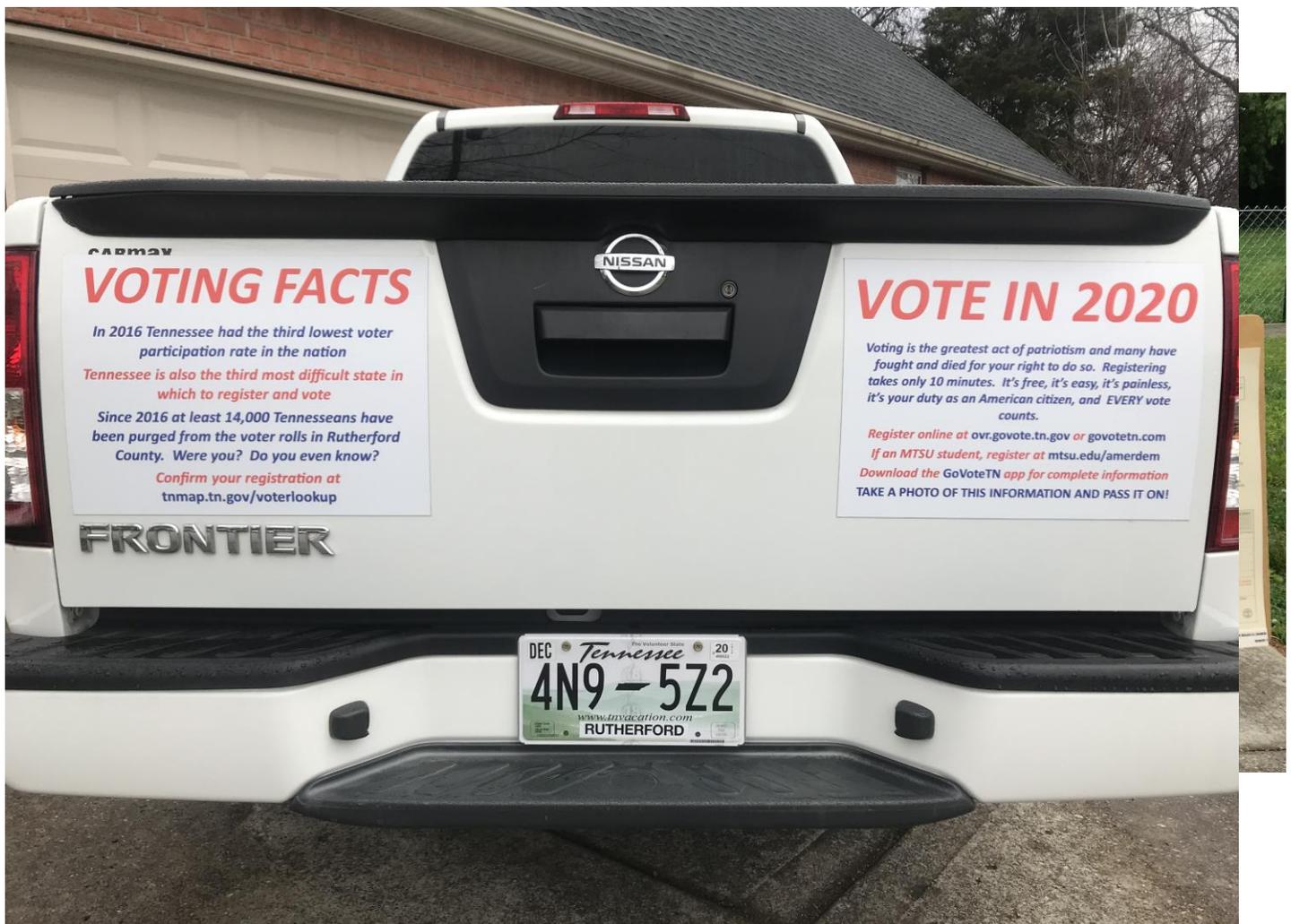


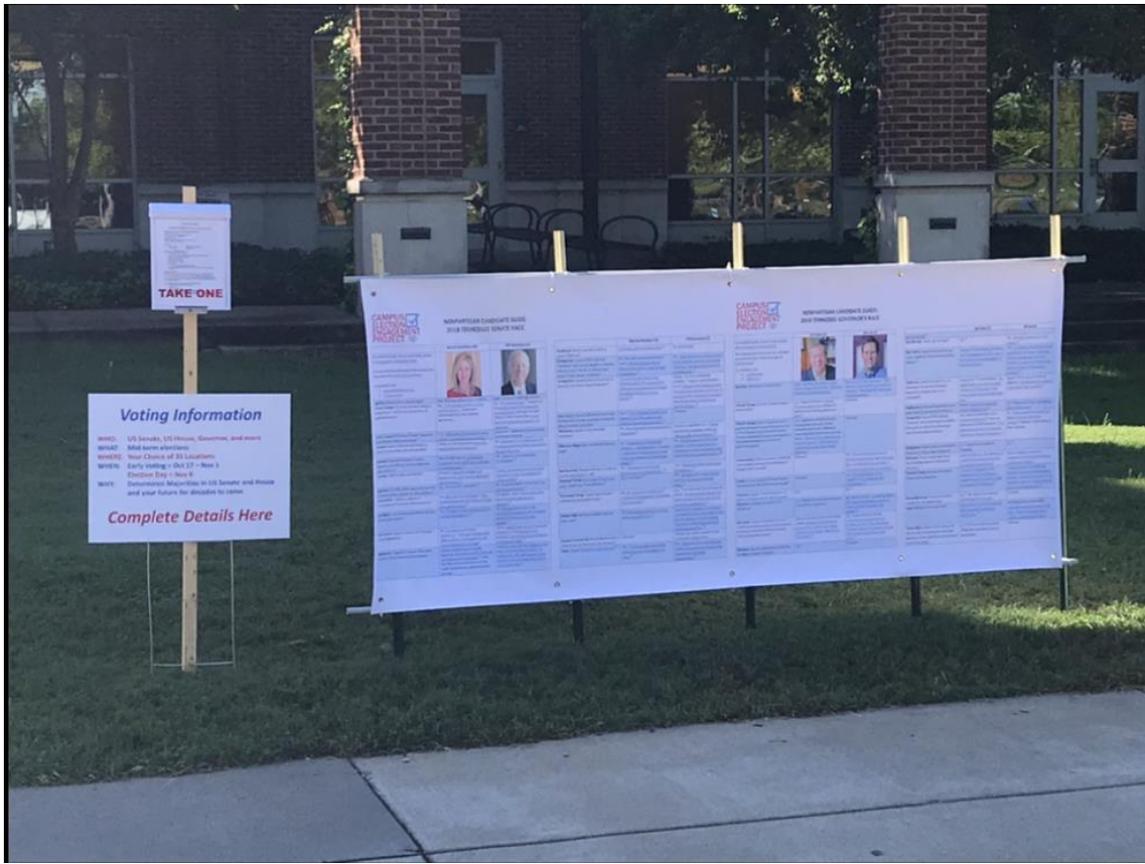
3. Vehicle Magnets: Another way to both motivate and educate voters is to literally "drive the message home". Pictured on the next page are magnets attached to both the sides and back of my truck, which allow me to educate voters while in motion or while stopped. Many people have talked to me while stopped in traffic, while parked, and even in my own driveway, and several have taken photos. It's just another way to multiply my efforts. It works. I believe that I paid \$284 for 10 of these magnets (five sets).



4. Sandwich Boards: Nearly every day, largely due to COVID-19 and “Social Distancing” requirements, I walk along the Murfreesboro Greenway wearing my voter engagement T-shirt, the sandwich boards pictured below, and carrying my voter information sheets and sometimes voter registration forms in a “mobile voter registration drive. Although I look a bit “goofy”, that’s the magic of this approach. People stop. People smile. People give thumbs-ups and compliments. We engage, I educate and motivate, and people often commit to registering and getting others to do the same. They take photos of the sandwich boards and my shirt and walk away better informed, often with a voter information sheet in hand. Again, it’s my way of multiplying effort. If you do sandwich boards, poke holes and connect the two boards at the bottom with small (12”) bungee cords to keep them from flopping and blowing around while walking or when the wind blows.

5. Banners: In about September 2018, the College Election Engagement Project, after considerable non-partisan, un-biased research, and using information from candidate websites, advertisements, and debates, created side-by-side comparisons of candidates running in statewide elections, namely gubernatorial and senatorial races, with respect to major election issues and candidate positions on each. I made a 4' x 8' banner and erected it on the MTSU campus, where it stayed for about 45 days until the mid-term election on November 6th. Students passed it daily enroute to classes and often stopped to read the banner or take photos. This was another effort on my part to enable voters to make informed decisions while voting and allowed students to compare Marsha Blackburn, Phil Bredesen, Karl Dean, and Bill Lee. I think the banner cost roughly \$180. Next to the banner I erected a flyer box similar to those used by realtors and put voter information sheets inside, refilling it when empty. This allowed prospective voters to be educated even in my absence.





6. Yard Signs: This is a 24" x 18" double-sided yard sign made of my voter information sheet and erected on the MTSU campus. I have since made the same sign into a 4' x 8' version as previously discussed.

a registration drive, at school, the post office, DMV, or the Election Commission, they'll only need their Social Security Number. Registering on paper takes less time but requires getting a form, completing it, then delivering it or having it delivered to the Election Commission, or putting a stamp on it and mailing it to the Commission. Voter registration cards should arrive within two weeks. I got mine in three days.

Since 2016, thousands of people in Tennessee have had their registrations purged, including at least 14,000 in Rutherford County. Do not assume that your registration is valid unless you voted in the Presidential Primary on March 3rd, 2020. Check it and have everyone you know also check their registration by typing **tnvoterlookup** in a search engine on a phone, and answering five questions.

Voter Registration Drives: Keep in mind that a voter registration drive is not a political campaign or a spectator sport. It is not passive and involves constant outreach and interaction. It's also best to remain non-partisan. The purpose of a registration drive is to maximize voter turnout. It's the politician's job to convince people to vote for him or her. Registration drives can be static as with a tent, tables and chairs, or phone banks, or mobile and impromptu, as when one person interacts with others at the drug store, grocery store, gas station, while jogging, or walking a dog. We still need to do those things, and COVID-19 is not an excuse for not registering people every day. I do, wearing a mask and standing six feet away. Here are some keys to executing an effective voter registration drive.

- STAND, don't sit. Be in front of the table. It shows that you're interested.
- ENGAGE. Don't wait to be approached or accept "No" without dialogue.
- WEAR the message (T-shirt)
- ANTICIPATE reactions and REHEARSE responses. More on most common reasons for not registering and some effective responses later.
- GIVE every person something (more than a sticker or a button), like a Voter Information Sheet.
- MULTIPLY effort by getting others to contribute, whether by taking an information sheet and sharing it, or by taking pictures of the back of the T-shirt and sharing it on social media.

Dialogue: Other than a good Voter Information Sheet and personal passion, dialogue will determine the success of Voter Engagement. At a registration drive it will go something like this.

"Ma'am, sir, ladies, gentlemen, are you registered to vote?" This prompts one of four initial responses.

1. "I'm already registered."

You can respond by simply saying "Awesome. Thank you. Please vote." That's not enough though because you must enlist that person's help to register more people.

Another response could be "Awesome. What about everyone in your family who is eligible? What about your friends, classmates, co-workers, and contacts on social media?" At some point the person will say "I don't know", to which I would respond with "Do you have a cell phone? Please take a photo of the back of my shirt. It has all the information needed to register and vote here in Tennessee. Share it on social media with everyone and you can have a much greater impact than I can talking to you one-on-one. Also, if you have a minute, you can check to see if you're still registered. At least 14,000 people in this county think they are but have been purged from the voter rolls."

2. "I think I'm registered."

To this you can say "OK. Outstanding. Please vote."

Or you could say "Great. If you have a cell phone and one minute you can confirm it now. Many people have been purged from the voter rolls and aren't even aware. Just type **nvoterlookup** into a search engine on your phone, answer five questions and you'll know for sure."

3. "I can't."

Here you might say "Sorry to hear that. If you know others who can vote, please encourage them to register." These three questions might also be appropriate:

- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- Will you be 18 by November 3rd, 2020?
- Are you a convicted felon?

If the person is not a citizen don't simply let them leave. Instead, encourage them to get citizens they know to vote, for themselves and all non-citizens who still have to live by the laws of this land.

If the person will be 18 on Election Day they can register now. It's the law. If the person will not be 18 on November 3rd, encourage them to get everyone over 18 they know to register, and to vote for themselves and those too young to do so.

If the person is a former felon refer them to the Voter Information Sheet and tell them that while there is no guarantee, there is a process and a chance to have their voting privilege re-instated. As with the two prior cases, also encourage the person

to get non-felons to register and vote, for themselves and for anyone who lost that privilege.

4. "I'm not registered", or "I'm not interested."

This is where it gets interesting and where we need to be creative and able to relate. My reaction to this person would be "Why not? It's free. It's easy. It only takes 10 minutes, and you'll feel good about doing the right thing and making a difference." The 10 most common reasons for not being registered or not being interested, in my experience, are listed below, along with effective responses. A common and entirely ineffective response is "If you don't register and vote you don't have the right to complain." While I did say that once or twice long ago, I've found that most people will dismiss you and leave immediately if told not to complain. They must be given a reason to change their mind, not a scolding.

Reasons for Not Registering or Voting, and Responses

REASON: "I don't have time."

RESPONSE: "No problem, I'll be here until (time), but there's no need to come back. Take this information sheet. You can register online on your own computer and your own time. Here's the website. It only takes 10 minutes and you'll only need to do it once. Do it soon though. The deadline is October 5th."

REASON: "What's the point. I'm only one person."

RESPONSE: "Your vote isn't pointless. It's priceless. Maybe I'm a racist. Maybe I hate immigrants or anyone LGBT. Maybe I believe that my right to "bear arms" is more important than your right to attend school or church safely. Maybe I feel that women should be paid only 80% of a man's salary, or that they should have no choice when it comes to their own bodies. Well I'm going to vote, and I'll vote for someone who supports my values not necessarily yours. If you oppose my values you need to vote to cancel mine out. Nelson Mandela was only one person. He opposed racial injustice in South Africa, went to prison there for 27 years, and was the first democratically elected leader of South Africa. He said "If you think you're too small to make a difference, spend a night with a mosquito". You're bigger than a mosquito. You have a voice and a choice. Make it count. VOTE."

REASON: "They're all crooks."

RESPONSE: "They might be, but one of them will be elected whether you vote or not, so vote for the lesser of two evils. If you refuse to vote you're making a statement but not a difference, and you're just handing away your power, possibly allowing a bigger crook to get elected and make the laws you have to live by."

REASON: "Why should I vote? It won't make a difference."

RESPONSE: "Are you happy with the way things are in Washington, the country, and Tennessee? If you are, vote to keep them that way. If you're not, vote to change them."

"You can choose not to vote, but if you don't vote you're giving your vote to me or someone else who will vote. Then we'll decide your future. If you vote for a different candidate than me you can cancel my vote. If you vote for the same candidate as me they get twice as many votes and have a greater chance of winning. If you don't vote my candidate wins and you have to live with the consequences."

"If you want to have any chance of controlling or impacting your own life and the lives of those you care about then at least register. If you then choose not to vote that's certainly your right, but if you're not registered by October 5th you can't vote."

REASON: "I'm not voting because the person I like isn't running."

RESPONSE: "Mine isn't running either. It doesn't matter if I want Nancy Pelosi, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Oprah Winfrey, Tom Hanks, James Mattis, or Greta Thunberg to be president. They're not on the ballot. We still need to vote though because not voting out of principle only makes a statement not a difference, and it's possible that someone you really oppose will be elected. In 2016, 15% of those who supported Bernie Sanders didn't vote at all and that margin could have won Donald Trump the popular vote, or Hillary Clinton the Electoral College vote."

REASON: "I don't know anything about any of them."

RESPONSE: "I'm glad you said that because it's clear that you want to be an informed voter and won't simply vote by party. Closer to the election, probably by September, several organizations will post non-partisan, side-by-side comparisons of candidate positions on the issues. Go to **campuselect.org**, **vote411.org**, or **mtsu.edu/amerdem**.

REASON: "I don't know who to vote for."

RESPONSE: "I'll tell you who to vote for. Vote for the person who will do the best job for the country or.....the least damage to it. Vote for the person who is selfless and will put the nation first regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, socio-economic background, or political affiliation."

REASON: "I don't do politics. It doesn't affect me."

RESPONSE: "Politicians make the rules and laws that we live by every day. Do you care about property, sales, gas, and income taxes, college tuition and student loans? Do you care about your healthcare, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and

prescription drug prices? Do you care about the minimum wage, a living wage, unemployment benefits, or equal pay for equal work? Are you pro-life or pro-choice? Do you have a “tough on crime” mindset or are you concerned about police over-reach? Are you for common-sense gun control or for gun rights? Do you care about clean air and water, terrible traffic and the potholes in your street? What about Selective Service and the draft? If you care about any of these issues you need to vote because if you don’t do politics, politics will do you.”

REASON: “It doesn’t matter. Nothing will change.”

RESPONSE: “Nothing will change if we do nothing. Politicians only listen to those who vote. They have no motivation to listen to those who don’t.”

REASON: “I already voted.” (said before October 14th, the first day of early voting for the General Election)

RESPONSE: “Yes you did, but only in the primaries. Those were to determine the Republican, Democrat, and Independent candidates who will run against each other. You still need to vote in the General Election on November 3rd, 2020, or during Early Voting October 14 - 29.

Facilitation

Facilitation is ensuring that prospective voters actually follow through and vote. It includes capturing names and phone numbers or email addresses, and possibly home addresses, so you can contact and remind all those who are registered when to vote, where to vote, and ID required to vote. It also involves driving people to polls or vote centers if necessary, and in the era of COVID-19, providing them with a mask if they don’t have one, or informing them of the health protections that will be in place at polling locations or vote centers.

Suggestion for Some Ways to Engage Voters

COVID-19 need not be an impediment to voter engagement and registration. Here are some suggestions, besides social media, for how or where to reach out to the most people and have the greatest impact, thereby increasing turnout and ensuring a more representative democracy. Remember that engagement can be live and personal, as in dialogue and handing information to an individual or group, or the effort can be indirect and unattended, which frees us to do the hard sells in person.

In-person, Individual engagement: Despite COVID-19 most of us will leave our homes from time to time and interact with someone, even at six feet and while wearing a mask. Those opportunities might be at the grocery store, drug store, gas

station, restaurant drive-through, or at the front door when the pizza man arrives. Opportunities will present themselves when you're out jogging or walking your dog in the neighborhood, or on your local greenway. I do this on weekends, wearing my Voter Information T-shirt and sandwich boards, and carrying my Voter Information Sheets. I may look goofy, but I always engage, and I always succeed.

Never miss an opportunity to engage. Never hesitate to ask someone or everyone you meet if they're registered and plan to vote, regardless of how unusual your question may seem to the recipient. Know your stuff though. Have ready answers for their questions and impactful responses to their reluctance to either register or vote.

Carry voter information sheets and give them to anyone who will take one. Lay one down and step back if necessary or ask the person to take a photo of the sheet if they're reluctant to touch it.

If you're wearing an informative T-shirt, encourage those you encounter to take a photograph so they'll have key dates and websites and can share the information on social media.

Businesses: Google or go to the local Chamber of Commerce and identify the top 10 employers in your county. Email them and encourage the company or its HR department to stress civic duty, voter registration, and voting to all employees. Attach a voter information sheet to your email, or at least include the online link to register, and both registration deadlines and election dates.

Talk to the managers of businesses you often frequent about voter registration and voting, be it the coffee shop you go to or the grocery store you frequent. Ask the manager to post a voter information sheet in the break room and to make an occasional announcement at meetings.

Teachers, principals, and school systems: High School students are not fully educated about the importance of voting and how to register and vote. They might be given bits of information, but they are generally not told how to register online, how to check their registration, all key dates, where they can vote, ID required to vote, and where to get non-partisan candidate information.

I have yet to meet a 17 year-old whether in high school or college, who knew that they could register before turning 18, if they will be 18 on Election Day. Let's say one of those teenagers will turn 18 between October 6th and November 3rd and plans to register to vote on their birthday. That young voter will not be able to vote in Tennessee's General Election because the registration deadline is October 5th.

Tell that person to register now. In 2018 I met two teenagers in that exact situation and registered them to vote. How many others did I/we miss?

So get with your child's teacher, the Civics or U.S. Government teacher, the principal or the superintendent of your county school system. All of them have platforms that we don't. Email them a Voter Information Sheet. Encourage them to stress voter registration on occasion during the school's morning announcements, and for teachers to at least hand out voter registration forms and the online link in class.

Places of worship: Get with pastors. They too have platforms that we do not. Encourage them to speak to their congregations about the civic responsibility and importance of voting. There's no politicization or conflict of interest if you and the pastor remain non-partisan. Give voter information sheets and T-shirts to pastors so they can assist you in maximizing voter turnout. Speak to the congregation if the pastor will allow it.

Events: Event opportunities may seem limited, but farmer's markets may still be open. Protests are certainly happening now and there may be small music fests or Pride Fests as well. Hover around, not with a protest sign, but with sandwich boards, a T-shirt, Voter Information Sheets, a mask, and six feet of space, and you'll make an impact.

Leaving information: Political candidates and lawn care businesses leave literature in your mailbox or on your door right? Put a Voter Information Sheet in every mailbox in your neighborhood, or on a table at the apartment complex. Get one of those clear plastic boxes on a stick that realtors put outside homes for sale. Put it outside somewhere and refill when it's empty.

TV and radio stations: Contact all your local or area TV, radio, and print media companies and encourage them to run voting public service announcements. Give them a script or the information to present. If you feel comfortable, ask if they'll interview you.

Billboards: Lamar and Outfront are the two major outdoor advertising (billboard) companies in Middle Tennessee. If you or your organization have the money, rent a billboard on the interstate to motivate, educate, and remind voters as they drive to and from work. Digital billboards cost less, but your message will only run for eight seconds every 64. Renting a board for one week from September 29 - October 5 (the week prior to the registration deadline), or October 7 - 13 (the week prior to General Election early voting) might help get out the vote.

The Bottom Line

- ❖ Voter Engagement is a matter of life and death for someone whether you're personally pro-life or choice, pro-gun or gun control, for aggressive policing or concerned about police over-reach, whether you believe in climate change or not, and whether you're healthy or deathly ill. View it as such.
- ❖ Voter Engagement is a mindset and voter **Motivation, Education, Registration, and Facilitation** should be daily activities.
- ❖ "Think outside the box" and constantly consider new approaches and opportunities to reach as many people as possible. Think beyond a table or a phone bank.
- ❖ **Wear, drive, talk, and hand out** the message and let signage, handouts, billboards, and your vehicle educate and motivate people, even in your absence.
- ❖ Always, without fail, multiply your individual efforts by enlisting the help of those you engage with even if that person is too young to vote, isn't a U.S. citizen, or is a former felon. Give them information. Give them motivation. Give them purpose. Empower them and give them hope.

In Summation

"Those of us who have served believe the greatness of our military -- and the greatness of our nation -- depends upon the calls for change in the streets today becoming votes for change in November."

- 55 current and former military leaders