

Miller

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therefore, the grand finale of “election season.”

From the time I was a young girl, I can remember walking to the polls on Election Day with my grandparents, going into the voting booth with one of them, and watching them cast their ballots. Voting was, as my grandfather explained, a civic duty and a responsibility — a duty that, as Americans, we were lucky to have. He’d tell me that one day, when I was old enough, I would start voting.

As I got older and drew closer to voting age, he’d talk of the importance of studying the issues and the candidates because it wasn’t enough to simply be a voter, it was necessary that one be an informed voter. Everyone in my family voted, and I don’t think any of them were ever undecided when they walked into that booth. They knew exactly whom they were voting for, what they were voting for or against, and most importantly, why. They talked about, discussed, and debated all things political during “elec-

tion season.” They instilled that reverence for Election Day and our electoral process in me so that I would be an informed, engaged voter. Today, because of their influence, it would never enter my mind to skip an election or not vote.

It seems to me that there’s a certain tepid nonchalance when it comes to voting now, and voter turnout numbers seem to corroborate my view. Only about half the voting age population of the United States cast ballots in the 2016 presidential election. There is a similar tepid nonchalance when it comes to women running for office.

Recently, thanks to a generous gift from the Studer Family Foundation and the professional polling work of The Political Matrix, the Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida conducted studies of our members and a broader cross-section of women likely to vote in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. In part, we wanted to find out how women voters feel about women candidates and women in office.

Not surprisingly, 100 percent of our members believe there should be more women elected and appointed officials in local, state, and federal of-

fices. That is, after all, the overarching goal of the Institute--to achieve greater representation of women in office and government. However, among the broader sample of women likely to vote, just 56 percent feel there should be more women officeholders.

More than half of the population of the United States is female but women hold less than one quarter of all local, state, and federal offices. Still, 44 percent of the women we surveyed either don’t believe or aren’t sure there should be more women in office.

Apathy? Maybe. Or maybe the two issues, low voter turnout and lack of concern over parity for women in government and politics, are intertwined. Knowledge breeds interest and interest breeds both engagement and action. Maybe it’s time to start talking to our children, both boys and girls, about civic duty, electoral responsibility, representative democracy, and government once again.

Amy Miller is President of the Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida. This Viewpoint is offered on behalf of the IWP Board of Directors. To inquire about membership in the Institute, email contact@iwpflorida.org.