

Register. Plan. Protect. It's YOUR Vote!, by Dr. Chris Jones

This column is for all Arkansans, but particularly for those who recently turned 18 this year (or who will turn 18 by November 5th)!

First, congratulations! You have just acquired the greatest freedom and privilege available to Americans: **the right to vote**. Your vote can determine your future, everything from if you will be drafted into the military, to whether you can use TikTok, to what taxes you'll pay. YOU will elect your nation's and state's leaders, and YOU have the right to instruct them about how to govern. So, I encourage all Arkansas's citizens, but especially you first-time voters: **vote in the elections held this Nov. 5**.

To vote, you need to take these three important actions:

1. Register to Vote

YOU MUST BE REGISTERED to vote. The deadline for registering IN PERSON is right around the corner: **Monday, Oct. 7**.

If you REGISTER BY MAIL, your registration must be **POSTMARKED** by **Oct. 7**.

You should check your voter registration information, and the polling place location where you will vote, with the Arkansas Secretary of State's office at this link:

<https://www.voterview.ar-nova.org/voterview>

2. Plan Your Vote

You can vote at the poll on election day, or vote early, or vote by mail. It's your choice.

If you're not going to be in the state during the voting period, you can vote by *absentee ballot*. That information is here:

<https://www.sos.arkansas.gov/elections/voter-information/absentee-voting>

Voter ID: Each Arkansas voter must verify his or her registration when voting by presenting a document or identification card. You'll find what documents are acceptable here, under *Identification Requirements*:

<https://www.sos.arkansas.gov/elections/voter-information/voter-registration-information/>

Find out what's on your ballot: Do your homework. See who all the candidates are for each office on your ballot. Ask people you trust for their recommendations on how to vote. That way you can cast a knowledgeable vote.

Also, at the ballot's bottom, will be two state constitutional amendment issues for you to vote on: one regarding state lottery proceeds, the second concerning casinos. You'll need to do your homework here too.

This link provides information on every candidate on ballots throughout the state:

<https://www.ballotready.org/us/arkansas>

Your ballot will only have candidates for president, vice president, and your congressional and state legislative districts: both state senators and representatives. You'll have to know what congressional and state legislative districts you live in. You'll vote for only one state office this election: Arkansas Treasurer.

3. Protect Your Vote

Sadly, nationwide, Republicans have initiated efforts to make voting more difficult both before you vote and while you're at the polls.

Here are important facts to know about ***your rights*** when you're at the polls:

- If the polls close while you're still in line, **stay in line – you have the right to vote.**
- If you make a mistake on your ballot, **ask for a new one.**
- If the machines are down at your polling place, ask for a paper ballot.
- If you run into any problems or have questions on Election Day, you can call the ACLU Election Protection Hotline:
 - English: 1-866-OUR-VOTE / 1-866-687-8683
 - Spanish: 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA / 1-888-839-8682
 - Arabic: 1-844-YALLA-US / 1-844-925-5287
 - For Bengali, Cantonese, Hindi, Urdu, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog, or Vietnamese: 1-888-274-8683

The ACLU is the American Civil Liberties Union, a **non-partisan nationwide organization of attorneys working to protect Americans' constitutional rights**, including your right to vote.

Arkansas and America Need Your Vote!

Who you vote for in this election will determine the outcome on many important issues to you and those you care about. These issues include climate change and the economy, including student debt and housing costs; foreign policy that will affect everything from jobs here to our fighting wars; immigration, gun control, abortion rights, and always voting rights.

Nationally Arkansas has been LAST in voter turnout. Yes, LAST. We've basically been a NON-VOTING state. We have 3 million residents and over 2 million eligible voters. But only 900,000 of our citizens voted in the last election.

You can help change that. And help assure that your state government and federal government serve YOU and your loved ones.

VOTE this November! And get your family and friends to vote. Your state and country need you!

Share your thoughts and comments at chrisjoneslistens@gmail.com.