

VOTING

The government--whether it's in Washington, DC, in your state, or in your hometown--affects your life and by voting, you get to say what's important to you, and you say it straight to the elected leaders.

In order to vote, you must register. To be a registered voter in Florida, you have to be a U.S. citizen, a resident of Florida and at least 18 years old.

Elections are one of the few times when adults, 18 years old and older, all have an equal say. Even if the person you vote for loses, your vote matters because it lets winners and losers know who supports their points of view.

Defending the Nation

Almost all males living in the United States are required to register with the Selective Service System within 30 days of their 18th birthday. Selective Service is the system by which men ages 18 through 25 register with the U.S. government for possible military service.

Currently, the military is made up of volunteers. If a crisis occurs and the government decides they need a larger military than the amount of people who have volunteered, Congress can pass legislation to select males from the Selective Service System to become active members of the military.

Petitioning Government

The right to petition is one of the freedoms listed in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In general, the idea of petitioning the government means any nonviolent, legal means of encouraging or disapproving government action, directed to the legislative, executive or judicial branch.

A common way that petitioning the government occurs is through citizens writing a document about an issue and collecting signatures in support of the document. This document is known as a petition and is a formal, written request made to an official person or organized body, usually the government, and usually with a list of signatures to show the government body how many citizens support the request.

Many citizens sign petitions to provide their support for or against an issue.

Jury Duty

The right to a trial by jury is guaranteed to every person in the United States, whether the person is or is not a citizen. This right is guaranteed in the U. S. Constitution. To provide this constitutional right to people put on trial, other citizens must give up their time to serve as jurors. A jury consists of a group of people who are selected to hear the evidence in a civil or a criminal trial. After the jurors hear the evidence presented during the trial, they must try to decide if the defendant is guilty or not guilty.

Jurors' names are selected at random from lists of registered voters and individuals who have a driver's license issued by the Florida Department of Motor Vehicles. People receive a jury summons in the mail and must report to the court on the date and at the time listed on the summons. You can be fined or jailed for not showing up for jury duty.

Attending Civic Meetings

Attending civic meetings, especially in your local community, provides you with a face-to-face opportunity with your government leaders.

By attending a school board or city council meeting you can become informed on the important issues that either group is dealing with. At a school board meeting, you can learn about important changes that might happen at your school and at a city council meeting you can hear about new ordinances and see how your city council chooses to vote.

At both of these types of meetings, you can have your voice heard about what is important to you as a member of the school or city. By learning about the issues facing the school board or city council, you can inform others and learn how to become involved in your community.

OBEYING LAWS

Laws are the rules under which a society or community is governed. Everyone who lives in the United States, regardless if they are citizens or not, must follow federal, state and local laws. Laws are necessary because no society could exist if all people did just as they pleased, without respecting the rights of others. Police officers and courts make sure that laws are obeyed. If a person breaks a law there is a penalty or punishment. The penalty for breaking a law depends on the law.

Running for Office

In the United States, citizens can run for local, state, or federal office. The government affects many aspects of your life--whether it's at the federal level, in Tallahassee, or in your city.

By running for office, you can state what is important to you and how you will be a good representative for your community.

In order to run for office in Florida, you must be a registered voter and complete a variety of forms so that you become an official candidate. Depending on the office you run for, there are requirements for how long you have lived in Florida, the county you live and/or the city you live in.

PAYING TAXES

Taxes are required payments of money to the government. Taxes are necessary because they pay for things that most individuals could not possibly purchase for themselves, such a fire protection, schools, roads and much more.

There are many different types of taxes and each type of tax pays for different public programs and services. For example, federal taxes pay for F.B.I. agents, federal judges, national park rangers, veterans benefits, federal prisons and much more. Some of the things that state taxes pay for include state highways, universities, public schools, state parks and police officers.

You often pay taxes and don't realize it when you are buying things at the store. When you have a job, you have to pay taxes on the money you earn. Each year, you must file your taxes by sending all of your income information to the government so that they can determine if you owe more money for taxes or if you get a return. There are penalties for not filing your taxes each year.

Community Service

Your community impacts your every day life. As a citizen, you often see problems or issues that need to be fixed in your school, city, state, or even the entire country.

As a member of a community and a responsible citizen, you can play a role in seeing these problems or issues get fixed. One way is by completing community service. Citizens at any age can identify issues in their community and seek out opportunities to help fix that issue. The common good of any community benefits when its citizens see issues that need to be fixed and take the extra step of trying to solve them.