

The Journal Inquirer
Op-Ed: Affiliate and Participate
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Published January 25, 2008

The 2008 presidential election may prove to be the most important election of our lifetime. The war on terror, health care, the environment and the economy are all critical issues that our next Commander in Chief will face. In a time of great uncertainty and change don't we owe it to ourselves to make our voices heard at every opportunity?

On February 5th – “Super Tuesday” - voters in Connecticut will have the chance to make a direct impact on the race for the White House when they cast their ballots in Connecticut's Presidential Preference Primary. We have already seen record numbers of voters turn out in the early states of Iowa and New Hampshire and we hope voters in Connecticut will do the same. In both parties, the race is far from over, and Connecticut voters will have a real role in choosing candidates for both parties.

Unfortunately, our state's largest block of voters – nearly 900,000 registered voters who are unaffiliated – will not be able to vote in the primary. Party rules prohibit unaffiliated voters from voting in Democratic or Republican primaries, meaning forty-four percent of our nearly two million active voters are left out of a critical part of the electoral process. The good news is these voters still have a chance to decide who will represent them.

To be eligible to vote on February 5th, unaffiliated and new voters have until Monday, February 4th, at 12(noon), to change their party affiliation or register as a Democrat or Republican. Those voters must go in-person to their town hall and register with their local Registrar of Voters.

New voters who wish to register by mail may send their application in to the Registrar or other voter registration agency as long as it is postmarked by January 31st. Unaffiliated voters registering by mail must ensure that their application is received by the Registrar and not just postmarked by January 31st.

As part of our “Affiliate and Participate” campaign, we will encourage anyone not yet registered to vote to do so and to register with a party so that they can take part in the February primary election.

Democracy begins in the voting booth. In a society based on the will of the people, no right is as fundamental or precious as choosing who our leaders will be and who will best address the issues most important to our future.

We owe it to the 300,000 military veterans living in Connecticut - the ones who have put their lives on the line to defend freedom at home and abroad - to take our elections seriously and to vote. We owe it to the more than 300 Connecticut men and women serving overseas right now. We owe to the memory of the 4,000 men and women across

our country who sacrificed their lives fighting in the war on terror, including 41 heroes from Connecticut.

Whatever your political leanings, the fact remains that when more people become involved in the democratic process, we all win. The results really do impact our everyday lives. America is best served when all eligible voters cast their ballots. It's our right, our duty and our future: affiliate and participate!