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The Justice Coalition's

Victims' Advocate

A free newspaper supporting victims' rights published monthly by The Justice Coalition. The opinions of contributing writers are not necessarily those of the Justice Coalition's Victims' Advocate or the Justice Coalition. The Justice Coalition's Victims' Advocate welcomes both editorial and photographic submission, but they cannot be returned. Please allow six weeks for a response to submitted works. Calendar information is welcome but must be submitted one month in advance of the event.

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People have the government...

Continued from front page

to victims when their loved ones are assaulted, raped and murdered, we need to make sure that's changed. And citizens are the only ones who can do that.

Government cannot reform itself, will not reform itself, never has reformed itself. Government only reacts to the will of the voters when they exercise their will strongly enough and let their wishes be known.

I would like to know, just within the 4th Judicial Circuit, how many people have been to a city council meeting, called their city council representative, sent them an email – or if they even know who their city council representative is. Have they written the mayor or legislators in Tallahassee? I would be willing to say it is less than five percent of the population.

Some improvement – but not enough

My biggest disappointment in these past ten years is that I feel I have failed in one of my original goals, which was to get people involved. I saw right off the bat that lack of involvement was MY problem, and so my goal – the whole reason I started the newspaper – was because I believed if I got the information out [about the criminal justice system], it would outrage people and motivate them to action.

And it has to some degree. We've made some headway, but not significantly enough to really make a change. There is no way some politicians, who do some of the things they do, should be put back into office. We can no longer afford to be

apathetic. If we do, our society is going to continue to go downhill like it has the last 20-30 years.

Almost everybody used to be involved in their community. Today you're called an activist if you are involved, and what you do is discounted. When you're outspoken, you're labeled with that term "activist," like you have some personal vendetta, something to gain, some hidden agenda. The media call them political activists, community activists, civil rights activists – most times with a negative connotation – instead of labeling involved people as outstanding citizens, caring for their city.

As we start off 2005, the simple statement I'd like to make is: citizens need to wake up and realize they have a civic responsibility. We shouldn't think we have a choice whether or not to be involved. To live in this great country, in a democracy such as we do, and to have what we have is unprecedented in history. We got here because of committed citizens.

Every time the committed-citizen percentage drops, I believe the moral fiber and how good our communities are also drop a little bit. After awhile, every community is going to be crime-ridden. It used to be just certain sections of town where bad things happen; now it happens in gated communities, in upper echelon, middle income communities, convention centers – crime happens everywhere now. It has come to us because we have allowed it.

We've got a race for

supervisor of elections and two city council seats coming up, and I doubt there will be 18-20 percent turnout – as important as those positions are. We had a great turnout for the presidential election, but just the presidential election is not the answer – it's got to be the same way for every race. Choosing the right people and choosing them for the right reason – from the top to the bottom. If we can't elect and get good city council people, we're not going to elect and get good senators and representatives, state legislators, judges, supreme court justices.

Jury duty is a privilege

We will always have the government we deserve because of our actions. I think the most rewarding thing – and if I had one wish I'd like to see this happen over everything – would be where citizens come back to taking responsibility seriously. When we get a subpoena for jury duty instead of trying to get out of it with every reason in the book, we should be eager to serve. It is a privilege and honor to sit on a jury. We used to pull juries from voter rolls, but so many people don't register to vote, now the jury pool comes from driver's license records and that is a sad commentary, too. Felons could sit on juries, and there is no way they will vote to convict or punish a criminal.

I would love to see, in my lifetime, citizens going back and acting like those who made this great country. I've been told civics is no longer taught in school. I was taught about the flag, how government works, my responsibility as a citizen. This is not taught any more. We have to change this or accept the continuing consequences, which are bad and will get worse.

Things change because citizens make them change. Politicians love their jobs and if they can't get your vote by doing what they do, they will change what they do. It's just that simple – they will bow to the will of the people if the people care enough to let them know their will.

So it's up to us – it's up to the people – every one of us. ONE person can make a difference. ONE vote makes a difference. It's that accumulation of ONES that changes things. I often quote Margaret Meade: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Get involved. Make a difference. Change your world.

