

Your vote is your voice

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Even if you have grown numb to hearing that the 2020 presidential election is “the most important election of our lifetime” (and I believe it is), we can agree that this election will have life-changing consequences. Voters will choose between President Donald Trump, who has trafficked in chaos, fear, lies and division, and former Vice President Joe Biden, who seeks to reverse Trump’s failures on COVID-19 and the economy, and to unite and uplift the American people.

America is in the midst of four daunting crises—a pandemic, an economic crisis, racism and a climate emergency. And we could face a constitutional crisis if Trump continues to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the election if he loses, especially since his new Supreme Court nominee did not commit to recuse herself if Trump gets his wish that the Supreme Court, not voters, decides this election. American democracy itself is on the ballot.

A third wave of COVID-19 infections is surging, yet Trump still is failing to fight the pandemic and refusing to help Americans suffering its consequences—the elderly; small businesses and the unemployed; healthcare providers; and teachers, students and parents. Yet he has been aggressive in other ways—seeking foreign intervention into elections on his behalf, attacking the free press, threatening to jail his political rivals and imprisoning children of refugees. He refused to condemn the domestic terrorists who allegedly plotted to kidnap the governors of Michigan and Virginia. And he told the white nationalist group the Proud Boys to “stand back and stand by,” a chilling signal to be ready to wage political violence.

Trump, trailing in the polls, has cast doubt on the integrity of the elections and baselessly claimed that the only way he could lose is if the election is “rigged.” But let’s be clear who is trying to rig. Trump’s allies in places where they have the political power to do so have purged voter rolls, closed polling places and reversed policies to enfranchise people of color and low-income voters. In Georgia, which closed 214 polling sites after voter protections were struck down, voters in heavily minority communities have had to wait as long as 12 hours to vote. They’re all blatant efforts by officials to choose who votes, and to deny voters the right to choose who represents them.

But I am hopeful. Across the country, we are seeing historic levels of civic engage-

ment—from protesting to voting. More than 17 million voters already have cast ballots in the 2020 general election, including 1.8 million Americans who didn’t vote in 2016. Americans have been willing to wait in unacceptably long lines to vote, even during this pandemic. And many military leaders, former Trump administration officials and Republicans who do not support Trump have taken the principled and unusual step of denouncing a sitting president, warning that a second Trump term poses grave threats to the American people and our democracy.

If we all vote, and all votes are counted, we the people will have the last word.

I am spending the month leading up to Election Day on a bus, getting out to the vote. Our AFT Votes bus is going coast to coast to engage our members and communities and underscore what’s at stake in these elections. Why would I spend a month on a bus, during a pandemic (while taking all health and safety precautions)? Because the outcome of this election will profoundly affect every person in America.

As we have traversed the country, I have met with people who have felt the ramifications of COVID-19—people who have lost loved ones to the disease, or had it themselves; families suffering financially; kids struggling with distance learning. So many people are rightly scared. And everyone has suffered from isolation—kids unable to go to school, grandparents and grandchildren who can’t visit each other, and people who haven’t shared a hug since the pandemic began.

I have been struck by the resilience and hopefulness of the people I have seen. Americans yearn for leaders who will address the concerns that keep us up at night. Voters in red, blue and purple states have told me they are voting for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris because they will confront the multiple crises we face and help build a fairer and more just America—they’ll fight COVID-19, combat the climate crisis, expand affordable healthcare and maintain coverage for preexisting conditions, invest in public education, address student loan debt and rebuild the economy. And they will fight for what is right and heal our nation.

Your vote is your voice. Make a plan to vote. Vote early if you can, in person or by mail, and track your vote online if you vote by mail. The same is true for your friends and family. While we may not know the results on Nov. 3, see through the chaos Trump is fomenting about the legitimacy of the election. If we all vote, and all votes are counted, Donald Trump will not have the last word. You will. And we the people will.



Weingarten, left, with AFT officers Fedrick C. Ingram and Evelyn DeJesus at a stop on the AFT Votes bus tour in Denver, Colo., Oct. 3.

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