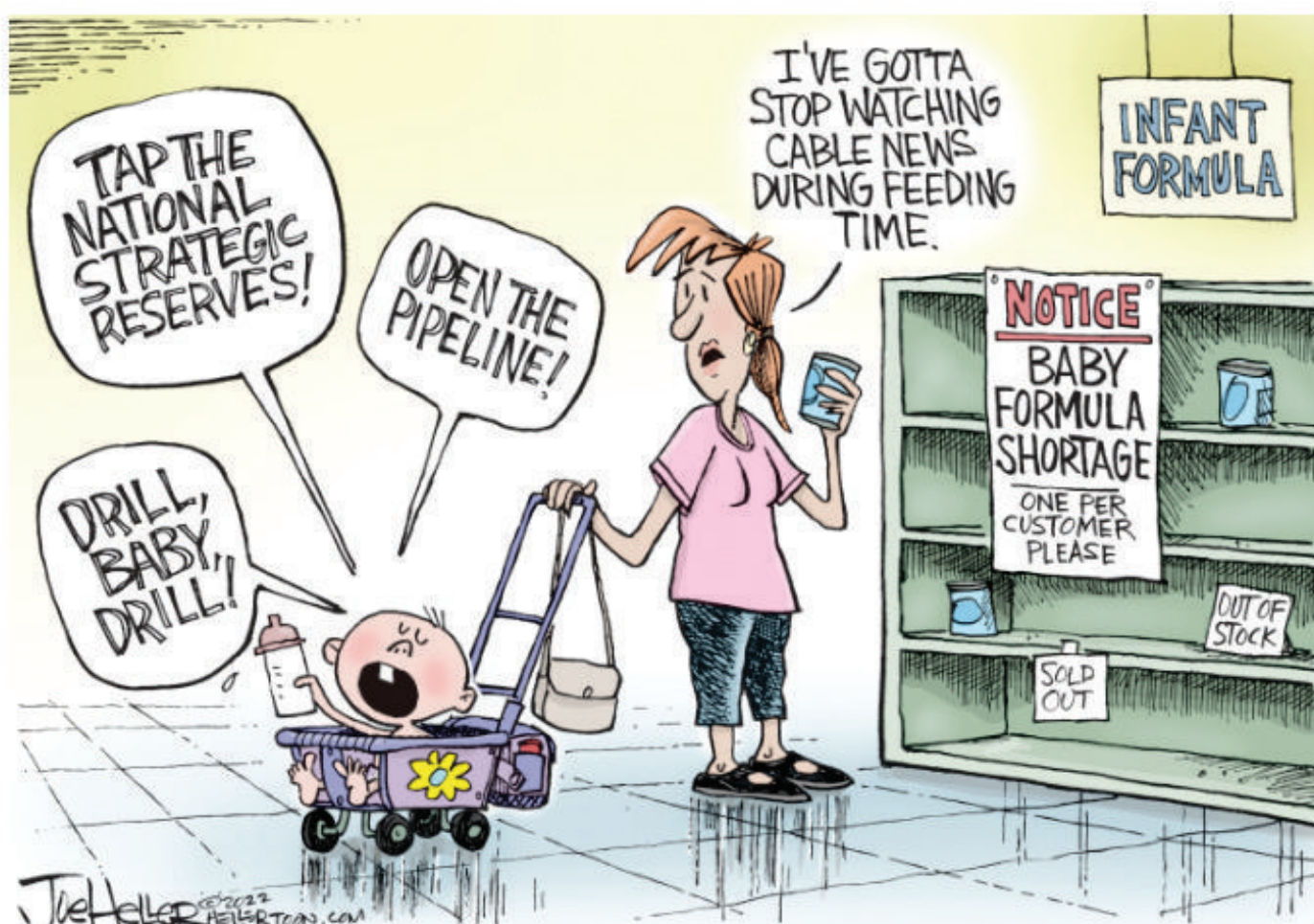


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The Times Journal

# OPINION

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## ASK Dr. Angelia May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Reflecting on mental health wellness this month, we should look to what brings us joy every day. While writing this column, I'm away from home celebrating family birthdays and a graduation. For this trip, my dog, RockZ is staying with family. This is my 3rd day away and I'm really missing her. I am reminded on how much I depend on her for comfort, joy, laughter and companionship. Wow! I mistakenly thought I took care of her. The converse is obviously true; she takes care of me in so many ways.

According to Mental Health America (MHA), Nearly 70% Of U.S. Households (84.6 Million) own a pet. Of those 80% believe their pets bring them happiness and emotional support; 55% believe their pets reduce anxiety and depression; and 66% believe their pets relieve stress. Pets are important to our mental well-being in so many ways. How many times have you looked at an animal and felt incredible joy? We all respond to animals.

Pet-friendly workplaces are good for business. Workplaces that adopt pet-friendly policies can experience benefits like: Attracting more job candidates; Keeping their employees longer; Better employee health; and Increased productivity among workers. When you walk into a business who honors their pet by bringing them to work, it is always a great experience; a special vibe of friendliness is experienced. Since I do counseling in my home, RockZ believes that all my clients come to visit with her. She has an intuitive gift when my clients need her, she will get next to them and sometimes they don't even realize the comfort she gives them as they pet her and talk to me.

The science supports the fact that pet ownership can help: Improve cardiovascular health and physical activity; Decrease stress and lower blood pressure; and Reduce loneliness, which increases risk of many chronic health conditions. For people receiving treatment, animal-assisted interventions reduce anger, anxiety, depression, and general distress, while improving the ability to socialize.

Finally, animals can and will improve your life experience. I have my human commitments to fulfill and then, I will be happy to return home to my best friend, my 6-pound Shih tzu/Poodle - RockZ.

Remember my friends and readers, embrace 2 Samuel 12:3, "but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him". Love God and All People, Amen.

# Will new election law improve primary turnout?

By Jim Waters



Tuesday's primary election will be the first test of new state election laws.

Will they help increase turnout?

Let's hope so.

Turnout in the 2020 presidential primary election - moved from May to several weeks in June after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic - was 1.1 million, or 29%, up from 20% in the 2016 primary. More than 848,000 used absentee ballots.

Over 2 million voted in the 2020 General Election after Republican Secretary of State Michael Adams reached agreement with Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear to allow three weeks of voting.

But that was a presidential election, when turnout's usually stronger - with or without a pandemic or expanded schedule.

The coronavirus makes conducting elections - a monumental undertaking for counties, even in good times - even more challenging for counties.

Jefferson County voters in the 2020 primary only had one location - the 1.3 million square feet of space at the Kentucky Exposition Center - something for which Jefferson County Clerk Bobbie Holsclaw was roundly criticized.

"We've got to deal with the cards that have been dealt to us," Holsclaw responded at the time.

While House Bill 574, sponsored by Rep. Jennifer Decker, R-Shelbyville, allowing three days of early in-person voting - including the Saturday before Election Day - beginning this year passed with overwhelming bipartisan support during the General Assembly in 2021, it remains to be seen how voters in an off-year nonpresidential election will respond.

Only 24% of eligible voters cast ballots in the last pre-Covid nonpresidential primary in 2018.

It may help that Jefferson County - Kentucky's largest - has six polling locations for this year's three early days of voting.

Jefferson Countians who want to vote in person on Election Day can - like pre-Covid - go to their precincts' normal polling sites.

Other counties offer different options.

Warren County made five

locations available for both early and Election Day voting and is adding three additional locations for Tuesday.

Warren County Clerk Lynette Yates told WKYU-FM that changes brought on by the pandemic - including no-excuse early voting - helped turnout.

While Yates wouldn't commit to the same approach "forever," she said "everything we heard in 2020 was so positive and that's why we're continuing with that plan."

Holsclaw told me in an interview on Louisville's WBNA TV 21 and 970 AM WGTK that low primary turnouts for all political parties mean winners need fewer votes to prevail yet - if they win in the fall - will make decisions directly impacting many citizens.

"It affects your life every day," she said. "Whether you want to believe that - that's very true."

Or, as Thomas Jefferson is credited for observing: "We in America do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority of people who participate."

Turnout can be influenced by whether voters believe in the election's integrity.

Holsclaw said she's addressing this by insisting upon paper ballots kept by her office for 22 months and around-the-clock security

where votes are housed after being cast "to make sure that no one can tamper with or get to those ballots and no one can get to the machines."

Machines, she's quick to add, which have "no modems inside," making it impossible for them to be connected to the internet.

"We've worked very hard to make sure everything goes right and that people can trust that their vote does count," she added.

Will it be enough to reassure skeptical voters?

Hopefully, since getting good policies implemented - my focus - requires capable policymakers and competent leaders.

And we're more likely to get better leaders when more voters of all political persuasions engage.

"My hope is that more people want to get involved now," Holsclaw said. "I think they've seen a lot of things go on, particularly in Jefferson County, and it is my hope that they want to go to the polls and state their feelings."

Mine, too - whatever those "feelings" might be.

Jim Waters is president and CEO of the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Read previous columns at www.bipps.org. He can be reached at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com and @bipps on Twitter.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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