

The value of serving others

By RICHARD CHAMBERS - Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, May 14, 2016 6:30 pm

LONG BEACH —Karen Freeman-Wilson, mayor of Gary since 2012 and former attorney general of Indiana, described voting, as well as encouraging voter turnout, as a form of service at the annual meeting of the La Porte County League of Women Voters.

In her keynote speech at Long Beach Country Club on Saturday, she began by congratulating La Porte County, where the 35 percent turnout rate in the May primary was slightly ahead of the 34 percent rate in her own Lake County.

She recalled how she grew up with a mother who was devoted to community service. Her mother made sure her daughter was involved in community service too. Freeman-Wilson began in the Girl Scouts as a Brownie and continued through her teenage years, when being a Girl Scout was no longer "cool."

"I was uncool, still selling cookies," she said, describing herself at age 17.

She helped with all the settlement houses in Gary, she said, and all these houses taught the importance of service. She firmly believed in the Christian teaching that "to whom much is given, much is required."

One of these forms of service was voting. She remembered when her mother was secretary of the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. People would talk of the importance of registering people and getting them out to vote.

Understanding voting as a service issue will increase voter turnout, she said. On the other hand, the self-interest proposal has failed, she said.

People are asked to go vote to help the quality of their children's education or the availability of a number of other things, she said.

"Even those appeals can't seem to get us above 35 percent," she lamented.

Many people are content with their personal situation as it relates to anything from government, so these appeals are not enough. What can change turnout rates is the value of serving others, she said.

"If we embrace and understand that value we will vote more; we will volunteer more; we will serve more; and we will participate more," she said.

She may never feel the impact in her personal situation, but the ability of any child to have a good education, for example, should motivate her.



The value of serving others

Photo by Richard Chambers Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson discusses voting as a form of public service in her keynote address at the annual meeting of the La Porte County League of Women Voters at Long Beach Country Club on Saturday.

"Intrinsically, I want everybody to realize their own dreams," she said.

Such service is compelled if people are to live up to the ideals on which the country was founded, she said, with the added ideal of equality of all people that came after the freeing of slaves.

Beyond the ideals of history, people should consider how their opportunities to participate were brought about by the people who felt strongly in the need to vote. No one should let these people down, she said.

Northwest Indiana has many unregistered voters, so registration is the first part. She would like to see same-day registration and a system with people being registered when getting a driver's license, unless they opted out.

However, registration is just the first part. People should urge others to vote, she said. Early voting helps with this, since people can go out and vote soon after they have been exhorted and before they forget.