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South Florida Law Firms Embrace Litigator's Program to Increase Voter Turnout

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*By Michael A. Mora
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Javier Lopez. Courtesy Photo

Not having Election Day as a federal holiday in the U.S. is a challenge for the American people who want to make their voices heard in the voting booth.

And a West Palm Beach litigator is organizing several South Florida firms to join his new initiative, "A Day Off to Vote," in order to change that.

Adam T. Rabin, a shareholder at McCabe Rabin in West Palm Beach, was inspired to start the new program from his strong desire to increase voter turnout and encourage Florida attorneys to embrace their civic duty.

Among the law firms that joined the program so far are Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton in Miami. The managing partner at the firm, Javier A. Lopez, said it was an easy decision for his firm to join, especially considering what his parents faced in the Fidel Castro regime.

"My parents came from a country where they didn't have the right to vote, and people get out of office with a gun," Lopez said, referring to how political change occurs in Cuba. "Adam has a great idea, and all the partners thought it would be an absolute no-brainer."

Lopez said one of the main reasons people do not vote is the uncertainty of how long they will have to stand in line to cast a ballot at their voting precinct.

And for McCabe Rabin, and the more than 60 other law firms in the Sunshine State that are participating in this program, they are encouraging their employees to vote by permitting them to take a couple of hours or the entire day off to exercise their constitutional right to cast a ballot in the presidential election. They predict that greater voter turnout will result in candidates who will be more representative of their constituency.

Now, Rabin is working to have more law firms in Florida participate in his program before the election on Nov. 3.

Rabin said that having the program in Florida is especially important, considering the history of the state. Since 1924, there has only been one presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, who has won the election without winning the Sunshine State.

"That's how critical Florida is in the process," Rabin said. "As Florida goes, so goes the presidency."

Rabin said part of the inspiration for starting the "A Day Off to Vote" program was West Palm Beach law firms, such as Searcy Denney Scarola Barnhart & Shipley. Joan Williams, its director of marketing, said Searcy Denney has allowed its employees to have the option to take the day off to vote for over 30

years.

This year because of the coronavirus pandemic, its attorneys aren't going "door-to-door and handing out materials at election precincts," Williams said. "They are making phone calls for people who are not being shown as having voted. It's a simple phone call: 'If you have not voted yet, we want to remind you that today is the last day to vote and you must be in line at 7 p.m. to vote.'"

Like Williams, Gary Rosen, managing shareholder at Becker & Poliakoff in Fort Lauderdale, said his firm joined the "A Day Off to Vote" program to raise attention to the importance of voting within the legal community.

Although the firm already had a similar initiative in place, joining the program raised the profile of the firm's commitment to ensure that its employees voted, by providing them with time off for an entire day to vote.

"Law firms have a particular responsibility in our society," Rosen said. "And to take leadership of this kind of activity is emblematic of what the best of the legal profession can do in our country."