From the Mayor…   June 7, 2019

 Several observations from the recent primary election will provide this month's topics for discussion. With a front row seat, in this my sixth municipal primary election, these observations are strictly opinions about the changes I have seen since I first ran for common council in 1999.

This years municipal election attracted 21% of eligible voters in the city of Warsaw. That is actually higher than the city vote totals (19%) from last year's primary races involving the county sheriff and US Senate races. While the percentages were relatively high for this years 'off-year' local election, the fact that 79% of those eligible did not vote is disappointing.

The privilege of voting has been defended on the battlefield, in the halls of government, and courtrooms throughout history. It is probably the most fundamental freedom at our disposal to affect the course of change in our country. I'm sure we all have our own ideas as to why people don't vote. We need to do better.

One way to improve voter participation is to consider how, in the near future, advances in information technology will change how we register to vote and the way we all cast our ballots.

This year, our county clerk and the election board moved a step closer to implementing voting centers in our community. This creates better access by allowing any registered voter the opportunity to vote at any of several voting centers.

Advances in technology will continue to impact the voting process. It could someday allow voting to be done online. Look at how cell phones have changed the way we communicate over the past twenty years. I don't think online voting is too far off. That could certainly improve voter participation!

The most noticeable change, however, seems to be the evolution and growth of social media as a campaign tool. It has also created very significant challenges. Traditional and digital media news sources, with editorial oversight, are widely considered as reliable sources of information. Unfortunately, social media and fake news sites provide a platform for anyone to disseminate information with or without any factual basis. For citizens trying to make educated election decisions, separating fact from fiction is now even more difficult and confusing

Negative campaigning has unfortunately become pervasive at all levels. Misinformation, distortions, and deception are tools designed to create uncertainty and doubt. I think it is simply cheating.

There are many consequences of negative campaigning and the deceptive practices of such. Unfortunately, it turns many voters off and contributes to voter apathy and the low turnouts previously mentioned. Fake news also tends to water down the truth and leave many questioning the reliability of news from any source. Fear of these social media attacks also discourages

many citizens from getting involved in the public arena. The consequences are harmful to a community.

Addressing issues positively, offering alternate solutions, and articulating future vision should be the expected behavior of any candidate. Digital mudslinging will never replace good old-fashioned door-to-door campaigning or a face-to-face spirited debate. That's my opinion.