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## Practicing Good Citizenship

*“As this column is being written, ARRL Headquarters is receiving the usual flurry of requests for Board of Directors nominations for 2016. It makes me think about how the process works overall, and it’s timely to remind ourselves how the American Radio Relay League is governed, and how you, as members of the League, participate in its governance.”*

The Board of Directors of ARRL (listed on the [arri.org](http://arri.org) website and on page 15 of our flagship publication, *QST*) set all policy for the League. Staff, including the CEO, are charged with executing that policy. For example, in January, the board approved the League’s long-term strategic plan. However, devising and executing the details of the plan — the specific action steps necessary to achieve the longer-term goals of the organization — is left to staff, subject to the board’s oversight.

You, as members of ARRL, can meaningfully influence the long-term direction of our organization by electing directors to the board, each in your own respective divisions. In my short tenure here, I have learned that your board listens carefully to what members are telling them about ARRL. (Believe me, they are candid when sharing your thoughts directly with me!) When you cast your vote for a board member, you are helping to make ARRL policy.

But unfortunately, so few members actually cast a vote. Overall, the voting turnout is roughly 25% of all members. This means that three times as many of you do not vote, compared with those who do. Regrettably, our experience seems to follow voter trends in national, state, and municipal elections. By not turning in a ballot, three-quarters of our membership are abrogating, to a small minority, the policy-setting function of their organization. History would show that the small, 25% minority has exercised sound judgement over the years as results confirm; but still it seems inexplicable that overall participation by our community would be so low, especially a community so otherwise vocal in expressing its views on any number of topics.

But there’s another aspect of participating in elections that’s worth noting. As you are probably aware, all of our board members and board officers serve entirely as volunteers. You will meet them almost anywhere: at hamfests, regional conventions, and national gatherings; you’ll find them traveling regularly to Capitol Hill, meeting with members of

Congress and congressional staff, and with a myriad of regulatory agencies around the world — always advancing the interest of ARRL and the art, science, and enjoyment of Amateur Radio. They also serve on various board committees, designing programs and services for our membership, and overseeing the activities of more than 100 ARRL staffers who manage the day-to-day operations of the League. From my experience, the tasks performed by the board and officers are demanding and time-consuming, especially for those who also happen to have a day job. The same applies to Section officials. So when you cast a vote in an election, whether for a board member or a Section Manager, you are also expressing your confidence in, and appreciation for, the significant personal contribution that each one makes to ARRL’s future. And they notice. They appreciate it. And it represents a gesture of respect.

I urge you to give consideration to these forthcoming, and also to future, opportunities to participate in governing our organization. Be thoughtful, be rigorous, but most of all, be vigorous in your support for our volunteer officials. Without them, there would be no ARRL, nor effective representation at home or abroad. Good citizenship, as reflected in your participation, will ensure that ARRL is always able to attract and retain the best men and women for its various leadership positions in the coming century. But good citizenship, whether in government or organizational governance, always demands engagement from its constituents. Please don’t leave the ballot lying on your desk. Be engaged. The American Radio Relay League is the most influential Amateur Radio organization in the world: consider how you may individually and meaningfully influence the influencer.