

Voting where it truly counts

• By HAIM BIBAS

A unique feature of Israel is the degree to which people are involved with the country's affairs. Every Israeli watched mesmerized in 2004 as windsurfer Gal Fridman won a gold medal at the Athens Olympics. The nation grieved over the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Residents stand shoulder-to-shoulder

in solidarity to support food collection campaigns, on Good Deeds Day, in community volunteer activities, in youth movements, and recently also in DNA mass enlistment campaigns to find a donor to save a single soul. This is our greatness, and it is in our blood.

Although we eagerly consume news on coalition

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crises and Knesset she-nanigans, most Israelis are unaware of what truly affects our quality of life – local government.

While Israel continues to develop in the face of many threats, it is the heads of the local authorities who are in the vanguard today – dealing with security issues that affect daily routine. Local politicians who respond to complex emergencies, keep residents informed of the developments, work with the national security services, and utilize information systems as required, are at the forefront.

Local authority heads are responsible for neighborhood parks, parking, the community center, after-school activities for children, cultural festivals, and construction. While national and international news garner the headlines, at the end of the day residents are concerned whether they have a good education system for their children, easy access to register their children in kindergarten and municipal programs, and well-maintained parks.

These are some of the responsibilities of the representatives being elected today – those who are running for head of the local authority, and those running for a seat on the local council, and no one else.

Local government is arguably the most democratic of Israel's public bodies. Here there is no right or left. The residents are at the center, and local public servants aspire to become more efficient on their behalf.

In recent years, many outstanding Israelis from the world of business or the IDF have run for election in local councils. They are motivated not by the salary or benefits, but by their desire to impact the person on the street. They know municipal governance is a 24/6 round-the-clock job. These candidates, as well as others who are more experienced, need your trust and need you to go out and vote for them, so that they can work day and night to improve your lives.

In the local authority, every citizen has an opportunity to influence and take part in community activities, parents' committees and neighborhood committees. We live in an age in which requests are put up at every possible turn, and receive a quick and professional answer at a click. All this is due to there being someone accountable in the local authority. It is a stable five-year tenure, and a significant period in which to generate process and change.

I still remember the first time I voted as a young man, feeling very privileged to do so. Since then, I have never missed the opportunity to influence matters whenever possible. It starts with the votes that the residents will be casting today, one for the head of the local authority and one for the council lists, and continues with our involvement in community activities and the empathy we show one another.

Do not relinquish your opportunity to shape the situation, go vote today. It's the least we can do for our home.

The author is the chairman of the Federation of Local Authorities in Israel and mayor of Modi'in.