

A Message to the Price Community:

Today is Election Day!

The right to vote is the most fundamental exercise of our democratic right and the most important way citizens can influence the course of public policy in the country.

While representative democracy had its birth in ancient Athens, historically and globally, the right to fair and free elections in which everyone can vote took centuries to accomplish and still today is limited to only a small percentage of countries worldwide. According to *The Economist* only 20 of 165 countries worldwide are full democracies, representing only 12 percent of countries and 8.9 percent of the world's population.

In most countries, the right to free and fair elections came only after ideological, philosophical, and cultural struggles over religion, the Divine Right of Kings, corrupt dictatorships, and totalitarian regimes. These struggles often involved civil wars, revolution, or conquest in which many people died, families were displaced, and homes and towns destroyed.

In our country, the right to vote for everyone took 150 years to achieve, with only white male property owners allowed this privilege by the Founders. The right to vote by African Americans only succeeded in the nineteenth century after a most horrific Civil War and American women fought for and won the vote only after WWI in 1920. Even after these developments, states discriminated against racial and ethnic groups and it wasn't until 1965 that the Voting Rights Act banned racial discrimination in voting practices. Congress has reauthorized the VRA four times, most recently in 2006.

The appreciation of the right to vote and the political process are front and center in the Price community. Our students, faculty and staff have engaged in many substantive and civil discussions about this year's election. Two examples of this engagement include an informal town hall discussion about the election during Trojan Family Weekend featuring Assistant Professors Pamela McCann and Michael Thom, and "Politics as Theatre," a panel discussion preceding a live viewing of the third Presidential debate, held with the USC School of Dramatic Arts and featuring McCann, Associate Professor William Resh and Professor Richard Green. Both of these thought-provoking events were held in front of standing-room audiences.

This is a critical election shaping the future direction of our country and the State of California in profound ways. It has been an exceptionally acrimonious electoral season with one presidential candidate even questioning the legitimacy of the American electoral system. I'm proud of the Price community's commitment to the cause of democracy, and to defending the hard-won privilege of the fundamental right to vote for the candidates and policies of one's choice.

Thank you,



Jack H. Knott, Dean

