

A Message to the Price Community:

*"As soon as any man says of the affairs of the State, "What does it matter to me?" The State may be given up for lost." — Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract*

As a new President and administration take over the leadership of our nation, and at a time when confidence in American institutions is at a record low, it's worth thinking about the role of each citizen in becoming properly informed to engage in our democracy.

As members of a policy community, it is our responsibility to advance education and engagement to create an informed citizenry. There are concerns that Americans do not receive enough education in high school or college about the meaning of citizenship, the structure and operation of our democratic institutions, the role each of us plays in their operation, and the value of protecting them. If citizens don't understand the issues of good governance and the democratic process, or if they succumb to apathy, we risk making mistakes that can threaten the constitutional rights the founding fathers fought tenaciously to win.

It strikes me how knowledgeable and aware the founding fathers were of the importance of political institutions, including checks and balances, how to protect the minority from the majority, federalism, an independent judiciary, and the role of a central bank. The U.S. Constitution established the basic principles for the rights of each citizen to participate in the nation's governance, along with important responsibilities, not the least of which is being informed about the democratic process that enables us to wield those rights.

Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, a champion for education, believed in stoking interest in the democratic process at an early age. As she wrote in 1930, in "The Purpose of Education," "I would have them see how government departments are run and what are their duties, how courts function, what juries are, what a legislative body is and what it does. I would have them learn how we conduct our relationships with the rest of the world and what are our contacts with other nations. The child seeing and understanding these things will begin to envisage the varied pattern of the life of a great nation such as ours and how his own life and environment fit into the pattern and where his own usefulness may lie."

Today, one of the greatest challenges to being educated and informed about the democratic process and public policy is our system of information and the nature of our political narratives. With the deluge of social media, citizens are insulating themselves in fragmented information bubbles and refusing to hear ideas that don't reflect their ideology. Democracy depends on competing ideas, so effective engagement must include citizens with opposing opinions. We will accomplish little unless we step outside of those bubbles. There is also a pervasion of "fake news" in a "post-truth" world, with political narratives unrelated to facts or reality. But without evidence and sound analysis, we cannot have an informed debate about

University of Southern California

650 Childs Way, RGL 312, Los Angeles, California 90089-0626 • Tel: 213 740 0350 • Fax: 213 740 5379



alternative policy issues or truly understand ways of defending and improving our democratic governance institutions and processes.

I was inspired by President Barack Obama's recent farewell speech, when he exhorted Americans to accept the responsibility to participate: "... embrace the joyous task we have been given to continually try to improve this great nation of ours because, for all our outward differences, we in fact all share the same proud title, the most important office in a democracy: citizen... So, you see, that's what our democracy demands ... Not just when there's an election, not just when your own narrow interest is at stake, but over the full span of a lifetime."

I'm extremely proud of all the work Price School students, faculty, staff, and alumni have done and are doing to learn about and engage issues of governance and public policy. We lead by example as we fulfill our mission to improve the lives of people and communities, here and worldwide. It's impossible to know what the coming years will bring, but be assured that the Price School will remain a supporter of social justice and inclusion, innovation, evidence-based analysis, and serve as a guardian of expression of diverse and honest ideas and knowledge about governance and sound and fair public policy.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack H. Knott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jack H. Knott, Dean