

October 31, 2018

Vote....

My oldest son turned 18 in January of this year and when he went to get his new driver's license, the NJMVC automatically registered him to vote. It was not a monumental event, there was no swearing in or pomp and circumstance, and seemed rather insignificant at the time. However, it struck me as immensely meaningful and important. When I turned 18 and became a legal adult, I also gained an important right – the right to vote. My son now had gained this important right. As the Mayor of Mendham Township, I know the importance of the right to vote and the impact of a vote. What is astonishing to me is that so few people actually exercise their right to vote in the United States. Statistics show that approximately 59.7% of Americans voted in the 2016 Presidential Election. That was actually up from 58.6% in 2012. In fact, in Mendham Township, voting records show that 62% of our residents voted in 2016 and 41% in 2017. To me, that number is disappointing considering the struggles that our fellow Americans endured to win the right to vote.

As Americans, we cherish our freedom and rights. I frequently say that certain rights, like free speech, exercise of religion, due process, etc. are deeply rooted in American Tradition. The right to vote is an important right, but it is not deeply rooted in American Tradition – it is a right that has been challenged and fought for since the birth of our great nation. A look back in history shows us that the founding fathers of our great country rebelled against the most powerful empire in the world for freedom from tyranny; however, the right to vote was generally limited to white men until the conclusion of the Civil War. After the devastating Civil War that almost split our great country, Congress passed the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the US Constitution banning slavery, guaranteeing equal rights and ensuring that the right of all men to vote could not be restricted by race, class or prior servitude. The 15th Amendment fell short of providing all American Citizens with the right to vote. The struggle would continue and through the Women's Suffrage Movement, women obtained the right to vote in 1920. Forces have tried to thwart the right to vote with disenfranchisement laws and restrictions that lasted until 1965 when again our leaders fought to enact the Voting Rights Act to protect and ensure all American Citizens would have the right to vote and that interfering with that right was against the law. Literally, Americans have shed blood, sweat and tears to win and protect the right to vote. The fight continues today as states enact laws to protect the integrity of elections, but which sometimes disenfranchise the poor and less fortunate. We continue to see court challenges to strike down unconstitutional restrictions.

Try to imagine an America where we didn't have the right to vote...I don't think we could tolerate the loss of our right to vote and I feel strongly that we would shed blood, sweat and tears again for this important right. In recent times, we have seen elections won and lost by a single vote... a single vote can make a difference. Make a difference - exercise your right to vote November 6th this year!



Rich Diegnan
Mayor, Township of Mendham