

An Election Message from 1924 for 2018

Republican Women are well aware of the importance of voting, and of the particular importance of *informed* voting. Unfortunately, too many citizens in our nation, even some Republicans, fail to make the effort at election time, and give up what should be a cherished opportunity to be a voice in America's "government of the people, by the people, for the people".

Republican President Calvin Coolidge had little patience with voter apathy, especially in a critical election that could determine whether the country would continue on Coolidge's conservative course to greater prosperity, lower taxes, and more limited government; or revert to the socialist-leaning policies of the Progressives. Despite the overall improved economic conditions, there was dissatisfaction among some special interest groups. A Republican victory in the 1924 presidential election was far from certain. Every vote counted, so President Coolidge took to the airwaves on November 3rd, the day before the election, for a radio address from the White House on "The Duties of Citizenship". His speech included the following important reminders for the citizens of that time, and for Americans in 2018:

"The immediate and pressing obligation for tomorrow is that each one of us who is qualified shall vote. ...If the individual fails to discharge that obligation, the whole nation will suffer a loss from that neglect. America, more thoroughly than any other country, has adopted a system of self government. Sometimes we refer to it as the rule of the people. ...Ours has been described as a government of public opinion. ...But all the influence of public opinion, all the opportunity for self government through rule of the people depends on one single factor. That is the ballot box. If the time comes when our citizens fail to respond to their right and duty...I do not know what form of government will be substituted for that which we at present have the opportunity to enjoy, but I do know it will no longer be rule of the people. ...The people of our country are sovereign. If they do not vote they abdicate that sovereignty. ...The choice is always before them, whether they will be slaves or...be free. The only way to be free is to exercise actively and energetically the privileges, and discharge faithfully the duties which make freedom. ...It requires intelligent action. It is necessary to secure information.

"We are always confronted with the question of whether ...we wish our elections to be dominated by those who have been misled, through the presentation of half truths, into the formation of hasty, illogical and unsound conclusions; or whether we wish those to determine the course of our Government who have through due deliberation and careful consideration...reached a sound and mature conclusion. We shall always have with us an element of discontent, inspired with more zeal than knowledge. They will always be active and energetic, and they seldom fail to vote. ...They are greatly in the minority. But their number is large enough to be a decisive factor. ...Our institutions never contemplated that the conduct of this country, the direction of its affairs, the adoption of its policies, the maintenance of its principles, should be decided by a minority moved in part by self-interest and prejudice. They were framed on the theory that decisions would be made by the great body of voters inspired by patriotic motives.

"...Persons who have the right to vote are trustees for the benefit of their country and their countrymen. They have no right to say they do not care. They must care! They have no right to say that whatever the result of the election they can get along. ...They are charged with a great trust, one of the most important and most solemn which can be given into the keeping of an American citizen. It should be discharged thoughtfully and seriously, in accordance with its vast importance."

Calvin Coolidge emphasized the importance of intelligent, informed voting by *American* citizens, motivated by a sense of *patriotic* duty, which he knew was necessary for the preservation of this free republic under the Constitution. It should be a priority of concerned Republicans to not only inform and encourage voters, but also to restore the integrity of the voting process, so that every patriotic American citizen can know that their vote *does* count, especially in a critical election like the one on November 6.

Priscilla Poese, Americanism Chair