

GUEST EDITORIAL

## The Importance of Voting

*By J. David Donahue*

Since its founding, our nation has been guided by democratic principles rooted in a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Our founding fathers conceived a unique concept of a representative democracy whereby, not only every vote counts, but every vote matters. Since the early days of our young nation, these principles have guided our electoral process at all levels of government.

As Americans, our Constitution bestows upon us certain fundamental rights, and among these rights is our right to vote, which is uniquely symbolic of the ability we have as citizens to hold our elected representatives accountable. It is through our right to vote that we are able to not only reinforce our freedoms, but can also express our approval or disapproval on a myriad of policies that impact our daily lives.

From municipal elections that affect decisions directly impacting our neighborhoods, to state and national elections, which can dictate policies affecting all facets of our professional and personal endeavors; our right to vote allows us to have a voice in determining who will represent us when all those important decisions are made.

We have all heard the phrase “every vote counts,” and while for some this may seem like a sheer

slogan used to promote the importance of voting, consider the case of a recent state legislative race in Virginia. Last year, the race for the 94th district seat in the Virginia House of Delegates resulted in a tie, a highly unusual outcome for state

legislative races. Nonetheless, with a tie in the race and control of the Virginia House of Delegates hanging in the balance, the outcome of the election was determined by “lot”; in other words, by drawing the name of the winning candidate from two



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canisters placed inside a bowl.

While a tie in a state legislative race is an extremely rare occurrence, all of us have lived through very close elections including the presidential election in 2000, which was ultimately decided by a mere 537 votes. Regardless of our party affiliation and political beliefs, we are all united by the sacred tradition of our democratic elections, and we all share a fundamental and basic right to hold our representatives accountable and express our views through our vote.

What makes our country even more unique is that beyond our government, private organizations all over our nation have modeled their governance on a system of representative democratic elections. The American Correctional Association has a long-standing and proud tradition of electing leaders from among its members. During every election cycle, correctional professionals engage in a democratic process to select, from among their peers, those who will be tasked with representing and leading our distinguished organization.

As we approach another important election cycle, not only for our organization but for our country, we must all remember the importance of engaging in our representative democracy by exercising our right to vote. As demonstrated by the recent state legislative election in Virginia, every vote counts and every vote matters. Regardless of political affiliation or views, everyone should be encouraged to participate and vote in our democratic process. We must all remember that debate and disagreement need not necessarily

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lead to partisan division; differences of opinion can also lead to consensus building and common ground.

We all have a responsibility to elevate the level and quality of our public discourse and debate even when we wholeheartedly disagree. The fact that we can disagree on issues, while at the same time share in the respect for our civic process, is what makes our nation a beacon of optimism for countries around the world. We are all bound by this unique system of representative democracy, and we must all recognize the importance of upholding its values and traditions. We can do so in great part by exercising our right to vote.



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