Your Vote Is Vital!

A MESSAGE FROM RICHARD R. KELLEY TO OUR OUTRIGGER ‘OHANA

As I write this article, Election Day in the United States is just over a week away. Polling has actually already started, with more people than ever taking advantage of the mail-in ballots and early walk-in voting options available almost everywhere. Still, candidates at all levels are making a final drive to deliver their message and round up votes. The political mud is flying fast in all directions. This is annoying but, for the United States, that is an acceptable inconvenience tied to our cherished belief in freedom of expression and open elections. Campaigning and secure, honest elections to choose the leaders “of the people, by the people and for the people” are hard-won rights that Americans, unlike the citizens of so many other countries, are privileged to enjoy.

I hope that every eligible member of the Outrigger ‘ohana will vote in this important election.

Regrettably, Hawai‘i is consistently at the bottom of the voter turnout barrel. In 2012 – a presidential election year in which one of the candidates was Hawai‘i-born Punahou School graduate Barack Obama – all the Aloha State could muster was an anemic 44 percent voter turnout.

Hawai‘i’s extremely low voting record is so shameful it has been featured on a CNN news segment. Reporter John D. Sutter talked to many Hawai‘i residents and documented six major reasons for the low turnout here. They included apathy and a feeling by many that because of the dominance of a single party in this state their votes do not count. In addition, the five-hour time difference between Hawai‘i and the U.S. East Coast means that TV commentators and pundits are often calling the outcomes of national races before the polls close in Hawai‘i.

Nationally syndicated newspaper columnist Harvey Mackay feels that even if your favorite candidate loses, your vote is still important. He has written: “I have a theory that a large voter turnout screams out to those who were elected, ‘We all cared enough to vote. We will be watching you to make sure that you don’t let us down.’ But a small turnout sends a message, ‘We the people just don’t care.’ And that is when representatives start to think that no one is watching. Our government is based on majority rule, but passing on voting means the minority wins out.” (emphasis added)

I believe voting in each and every election is one of the most important things we can do for the quality of life in our country. It becomes an even bigger responsibility when one realizes we are voting not only for ourselves but also on behalf of our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and more generations to follow.

In 2012, presidential candidates Obama and Romney outlined drastically different visions of the future of the United States. As I write this article, Election Day in the United States is just over a week away. Polling has actually already started, with more people than ever taking advantage of the mail-in ballots and early walk-in voting options available almost everywhere. Still, candidates at all levels are making a final drive to deliver their message and round up votes. The political mud is flying fast in all directions. This is annoying but, for the United States, that is an acceptable inconvenience tied to our cherished belief in freedom of expression and open elections. Campaigning and secure, honest elections to choose the leaders “of the people, by the people and for the people” are hard-won rights that Americans, unlike the citizens of so many other countries, are privileged to enjoy.

I hope that every eligible member of the Outrigger ‘ohana will vote in this important election.

Unfortunately, in the United States, only a relatively small percentage of our population takes advantage of this priceless opportunity.

• Nationwide, only 60 to 70 percent of eligible citizens even bother to register to vote.
• Only 40 to 70 percent of registered voters actually go to the polls or mail in a ballot.
• As a result, only about 25 to 50 percent of eligible voters and an even smaller percentage of the total population of our country are involved in the critically important process that selects the individuals who will lead our communities, states and nation.
Your Vote Is Vital ...

United States of America. The voters re-elected Obama and since then we have seen a tremendous impact on our nation in health care, job opportunity, tax rates, size of government, international relations, security and freedom of choice, which will affect our lives for decades to come.

Emblematic of the kind of unhappy changes I’ve seen in our country are the horror stories about the deterioration of order, discipline and safety in schools that I recently heard when speaking with two dedicated, experienced public elementary school teachers from different major U.S. cities.

- Vulgar outbursts by students directed at teachers trying to maintain an orderly classroom and learning environment are common.
- Security is marginal. Many schools have a full-time safety supervisor who, however, is limited in what he or she can do. As reported on page 1 of the October 21, 2014, edition of the Wall Street Journal, more and more, school discipline is being turned over to armed police officers who arrest even elementary school students for a variety of disciplinary infractions that in years past would have been handled by a visit to the principal’s office. The arrest record might follow that young student for years.
- Some of that extra security is necessary due to the deterioration of neighborhoods. One of the teachers told me that McDonald’s and other fast food outlets near her school are closed on weekdays between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. to avoid being mobbed by unruly students on their way home from school who have sometimes trashed these establishments, doing drug deals and getting into gang fights in the dining areas.

These are just a few examples of the deterioration of what most people believe has been the “land of the free and the home of the brave.” I believe this trend is related to the apathy of far too much of the voting – or, more accurately, eligible-to-vote – public. Voter apathy appears to be just a symptom of a more general civic apathy. To one who loves this country and the civilizational values it represents, this is very troubling.

Many are comparing the decline of the United States to the decline and ultimate fall of the Roman Empire. Those who have studied that topic note that the factors that led to the destruction of such a powerful, vast and progressive (in some ways, but not all) civilization included:

- Political corruption at the highest levels
- Runaway inflation
- Spending far beyond the resources of the government
- Unemployment
- Weakening of moral values
- Breakdown of the family unit

That sounds frighteningly like what I read in my morning newspaper, watch on television and follow on the Internet.

As Harvey Mackay has pointed out, when the voting turnout is low, politicians tend to owe a large part their allegiance to the special interest groups that helped them amass enough of the limited number of votes cast to win election. The greater good of the community is far too often overlooked while the politicians tend to the needs of their special interest supporters. Our nation’s failing public school system is “Exhibit A” of this phenomenon.

If our nation does not find a way to stimulate much greater civic and political involvement and significantly higher voting participation by our citizens, future history books may indeed document how the United States followed the downward spiral of the Roman Empire.

So, as an easy first step in the right direction that everyone can take, and as Nike co-founder and chairman Phil Knight might say, “Just Do It! VOTE!”

Phil Knight