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Office of the Mayor
City of Leavenworth

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Community Members,

Today marks a very special day in the history of our nation. One hundred years ago today, the 19th amendment to the constitution was ratified, giving women the right to vote. It is important to remember the struggle that led up to this momentous occasion. It was not easy. It was not without pain, without sacrifice, without abuse by those who had the power and were not interested in change. Make note, because it is not unlike the battles for change in our society taking place today. We were founded on solid principles in this nation. Principles of equality and justice for every single person. But it is also important to note that these values were aspirational values in many ways, an ideal that was not always translated into practice. The real growth of this nation can be traced to the growth that has occurred and is occurring toward the realization of those aspirational values. Our “job”, if you will, as citizens of this nation, is to continue the task of weaving the value of equality and justice into the fabric of our culture. Our challenge is not to settle for being great again, as if it once was in perfect harmony with those constitutional ideals. Rather, we attempt to continue the work of weeding out inequality, racism, sexism, anti-immigrant sentiments. We refuse to settle for anything less than our ideal that “all humans are created equal”.

Yet, despite these American ideals, the struggle to fully realize them continues to be met with resistance, hostility, fear, resentment. Just look at the renewed call today for justice and equality for people of color. Blacks are demanding that equality and justice be given more than lip service. Long after their freedom was made “legal” through the 13th Amendment, we have yet to fully weave that truth into the fabric of our culture. Women have made huge gains, but still face a myriad of glass ceilings waiting to be broken. Likewise, the LGBTQ community has “earned” many rights in our land that were already given to them by God. But not without bloodshed, and not without being driven over and over into the closet. And we still see by far the highest rates of suicide among LGBTQ youth. We are not done weaving our cherished values from aspiration into the fabric of who we are.

And today the celebration is all about obtaining the right to vote for roughly half our nation. And you would think that we would not have to keep fighting that battle. Yet, in many ways, even that simple, foundational value of every adult citizens’ right to vote is not fully realized and still under threat. In many places where in-person voting is the norm, there has been a systematic reduction of polling places in low income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of people of color. States are making it harder to “prove” that you should be able to vote rather than making it simpler. Disenfranchisement is still alive and well in many areas of our society; for those formerly incarcerated, voting is no longer an option. We are not done weaving our cherished values from aspiration into the fabric of who we are.

Given all of this. Given how difficult, costly, and delayed progress toward our ideals has been for so many, those of us who are privileged to be citizens, to have readily available access to the ballot box, should honor how costly that right really is, how fragile it is, and exercise our one foundational, realized ideal, and VOTE. I simply cannot comprehend why we do not have voter turnout of 80-90%. How can we be so cavalier? Are we going to lose it before we realize we should have used it? Stay safe! And honor the suffragists and all the others who have sacrificed – VOTE!



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