

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL
October 24, 2014

MESSAGE FOR NOVEMBER 4 VOTE By John Huebscher, Executive Director

In Wisconsin, voting is a basic right, enshrined in our state constitution. Voting is also a solemn obligation of all faithful citizens charged with a responsibility for the affairs of the community.

There are several powerful reasons for all of us to take the trouble to vote in the coming election.

For one thing, the vote is a powerful weapon for those who use it and too many of us don't bother to vote. Nationally, voter turnout will hover around fifty percent of eligible voters. At such times, the half of the electorate that votes has in effect two votes because their ballots will stand unchallenged by the fifty percent who don't vote. In other words, those who don't vote cede their influence over the political process to those who do.

Moreover, voting is the best way we can reject and rebuff the efforts of those who seek to discourage voter turnout by financing, producing, and airing negative and destructive campaign advertising. For decades, such advertising has become a staple of campaigns once campaign strategists discovered that throwing enough dirt at a candidate would serve to lower voter enthusiasm and turnout. This is a cynical strategy.

And it is no accident that this negativity has made voters themselves more cynical. The best way to fight back against this odious approach to politics (besides using the mute button) is to vote in spite of such tactics.

As voters, we can also effect change by explaining why we are voting.

Voters can make it clear that we respond to messages that appeal to our hopes not our fears, that foster unity not division, that further the common good, not narrow self-interest. We can tell candidates and special interest groups that we resent appeals to the "lesser angels of our nature." Hopefully, they will get the message and shift tactics, perhaps by airing ads that are informative and positive in tone.

Most important of all, we voters can remember that voting is only one act of citizenship. We have to stay involved between elections. Doing so is critical because the interests that bankroll campaigns will be sure to stay active themselves. Elected officials will be more inclined to stand up to these groups if they sense that average citizens "have their back" when they do so.

Our Catholic teaching tells us that our rights are grounded in our responsibilities. Where politics and policy making are concerned our right to vote is grounded in our responsibility to be active citizens who are informed, thoughtful, and vocal participants in the debates over laws and policies that govern all of us. We can't live up to that responsibility if our involvement consists of "tuning in" to our government just before the election and "tuning out" as soon as the votes are counted.

So be sure to vote on November 4th. And then stay involved.