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REMARKS FOR ELECTION ADDRESS TO 4TH GRADERS

"AMERICA: THE ELECTION EXPERIENCE"

THE WORD "ELECTION" MEANS TO SELECT, TO PICK, TO CHOOSE OR TO DESIGNATE. SINCE THE FOUNDING OF AMERICA, AND THROUGH ITS MORE THAN 210 YEARS AS A NATION, THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE SETTLED AND LIVED HERE HAVE BEEN PICKING, CHOOSING, SELECTING AND DESIGNATING.

INDEED, AMERICA IS ALL ABOUT ELECTIONS. AND AMERICA'S PEOPLE--YOU AND ME--ARE GIVEN THE FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE IN ELECTIONS.

(PAUSE)

DO YOU REALIZE THAT THERE ISN'T ONE YEAR THAT GOES BY WITHOUT AN ELECTION? AMERICANS ARE CONSTANTLY ELECTING OTHER AMERICANS TO SERVE IN GOVERNMENT.

CAN ANYONE TELL ME WHAT OFFICE IS OPEN FOR ELECTION IN THE UPCOMING NOV. 8

GENERAL ELECTION DAY?

IN ADDITION TO ELECTING A PRESIDENT, VOTERS WILL CHOOSE AMONG CANDIDATES TO FILL VARIOUS LOCAL OFFICES. PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATORS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ARE RUNNING FOR ELECTION, AS IS ONE-THIRD OF THE STATE SENATE. IN ADDITION, VARIOUS STATEWIDE OFFICES ARE UP FOR ELECTION. THESE INCLUDE ATTORNEY GENERAL; STATE TREASURER AND AUDITOR GENERAL.

TODAY, I'D LIKE TO TALK A FEW MOMENTS WITH YOU ABOUT THE UNIQUE NATURE OF ELECTIONS IN OUR COUNTRY.

(PAUSE)

LET'S HAVE OUR OWN VOTE RIGHT NOW. HOW MANY HERE BELIEVE THAT OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD HAVE ELECTIONS? RAISE YOUR HAND....

OKAY, HOW MANY BELIEVE THAT COMMUNIST NATIONS SUCH AS RUSSIA (OR THE SOVIET UNION) HAVE ELECTIONS?

WELL, RUSSIA INDEED DOES HAVE AN ELECTION PROCESS, AND RUSSIAN CITIZENS CAN GO TO THE VOTING POLLS TO VOTE FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. HOWEVER, THE CHOICES ARE VERY LIMITED. USUALLY THERE IS ONLY ONE PERSON ON THE BALLOT FOR ANY ONE POSITION, AND CERTAINLY THERE IS NEVER ANYONE ON THE BALLOT WHO MIGHT DISAGREE WITH THE COMMUNIST FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

CAN YOU IMAGINE HAVING THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN AMERICA WITH ONLY GEORGE BUSH, OR ONLY MICHAEL DUKAKIS ON THE BALLOT?

THAT'S NOT A "TRUE" ELECTION PROCESS, IS IT? THE PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY HAD THEIR CHOICES MADE FOR THEM, AND THE ELECTION IS REALLY ONLY A SHOW.

WELL, IN MANY COUNTRIES, THIS IS THE CASE. THEN THERE ARE NATIONS THAT LIE IN BETWEEN THIS EXTREME AND THE FREEDOM IN ELECTIONS THAT WE HAVE IN AMERICA.

FOR EXAMPLE, HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW ABOUT OR HAVE HEARD ABOUT A NATION CALLED THE PHILIPPINES? (PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE TO LOCATE IT ON THE MAP). SEVERAL YEARS AGO, THE PHILIPPINE PEOPLE PROTESTED LONG ENOUGH AND LOUDLY ENOUGH AGAINST THEN DICTATOR PRESIDENT MARCOS, AND MARCOS PERMITTED ELECTIONS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SEVERAL YEARS.

BELIEVE ME, YOU HAD TO BE A BRAVE PERSON TO GO TO THE POLLING PLACES DURING THAT ELECTION. THOSE PEOPLE WHO WANTED TO ELECT A NEW PRESIDENT (CORY AQUINO) WERE THREATENED AND HARASSED ON MANY OCCASIONS. SOME PEOPLE WERE KILLED. PRESIDENT MARCOS' ARMY SOLDIERS OFTEN STOOD VERY CLOSE TO WHERE YOU CAST YOUR VOTES. WOULDN'T THAT BE INTIMIDATING AND SCARY?

AS IT TURNED OUT, MARCOS DECLARED HIMSELF THE WINNER, BUT THERE WERE MANY INSTANCES OF VOTE FRAUD IN WHICH BALLOTS WERE CHANGED OR DESTROYED. EVENTUALLY, MARCOS WAS FORCED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY AND CORY AQUINO BECAME PRESIDENT. THIS WAS ONE INSTANCE IN WHICH VOTERS HAD TO REALLY WORK FOR THEIR RIGHTS.

(PAUSE)

THERE ARE SOME NATIONS IN WHICH IT ISN'T UNCOMMON FOR ELECTIONS TO BE HELD ONE DAY AND THE LOSER--WHO JUST HAPPENS TO BE THE PRESIDENT--DECLARES MARTIAL OR MILITARY CONTROL THE NEXT DAY. CAN YOU IMAGINE PRESIDENT REAGAN SAYING, ON THE DAY AFTER EITHER BUSH OR DUKAKIS WINS THE ELECTION, THAT HE WILL NOT LEAVE AND THAT THE ARMY WILL FIGHT ANYONE WHO OPPOSES HIM?

WE CAN BE THANKFUL THAT THIS DOES NO OCCUR HERE IN AMERICA. BUT IN REALITY, IT DOES OCCUR IN OTHER COUNTRIES.

THIS BRINGS ME TO A VERY IMPORTANT POINT. YOU DON'T NEED TO RAISE YOUR HANDS, BUT HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW IF YOUR PARENTS VOTE? AND IF YOU KNOW, DO THEY VOTE REGULARLY AND DO THEY PAY ATTENTION TO THE ELECTION PROCESS?

THESE ARE QUESTIONS THAT I BELIEVE ALL AMERICANS MUST ASK THEMSELVES. HOW MANY OF YOU IN THIS ROOM, WHEN YOU REACH AGE 18, PLAN TO VOTE?

OKAY, HOW MANY OF YOU BELIEVE THAT YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO RISK GETTING HURT OR BEING THREATENED IN ORDER TO VOTE?

TOO MANY AMERICANS SAY THEY DON'T VOTE BECAUSE ALL POLITICIANS ARE THE SAME, OR BECAUSE THEIR VOTE DOESN'T COUNTY. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT???

THESE ARE THE AMERICANS WHO SHOULD PAY CLOSER ATTENTION TO THE MEN AND WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES WHO RISKED INJURY IN ORDER TO HAVE MORE FREEDOM AND A VOICE IN THEIR GOVERNMENT. LIKEWISE, THESE ARE THE AMERICANS WHO SHOULD PAY ATTENTION WHEN THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE GO TO THE POLLS TO VOTE---FOR ONE PARTY AND ONE PERSON!!!

AMERICANS ENJOY A VERY SCARCE PRIVILEGE ON THIS EARTH. WE ARE PERMITTED TO HAVE A SAY IN THE MAKE-UP OF OUR GOVERNMENT. YOUR VOTE CAN HELP DECIDE IF AMERICA GOES TO WAR. YOUR VOTE CAN HELP DECIDE IF TAXES GO UP, OR IF MORE EMPHASIS IS PLACED ON EDUCATION, OR WHETHER OR NOT DRUG PUSHERS ARE JAILED.

THESE ARE PRETTY IMPORTANT ISSUES. DO YOU AGREE? YET, LESS THAN ONE HALF OF ALL ELIGIBLE VOTERS GO TO THE POLLS ON ELECTION DAY AND VOTE. WE TAKE THIS RIGHT FOR GRANTED, AND I'D LIKE TO ASK THAT EACH OF YOU THINK ABOUT THIS. YOU ARE THE VOTERS OF TOMORROW, BUT YOU ALSO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO WILL BE AFFECTED BY WHAT THE VOTERS OF TODAY DECIDE. IF YOUR PARENTS DON'T VOTE, MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO TALK TO THEM ABOUT ELECTIONS AND THE SPECIAL GIFT OF VOTING THAT AMERICANS HAVE. MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO BECOME INVOLVED IN A MOCK ELECTION PROGRAM HERE IN SCHOOL. THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO UNDERSTAND AND TO APPRECIATE THE VOTE. IF TOO MANY AMERICANS CONTINUE TO TAKE THE VOTE FOR GRANTED, THAT RIGHT MAY SOMEDAY SLIP AWAY.

IN CLOSING, I'D LIKE TO REEMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF EVERY PERSON'S VOTE.  
ONE VOTE DOES COUNT! IN 1649, ENGLAND'S KING CHARLES THE FIRST WAS EXECUTED BY A VOTE MARGIN OF 1.

IN 1845, TEXAS WAS BROUGHT INTO THE UNITED STATES BY ONE VOTE. IN 1868, PRESIDENT ANDREW JOHNSON WAS SAVED FROM IMPEACHMENT BY ONE VOTE. IN 1876, RUTHERFORD B. HAYES WAS ELECTED TO THE PRESIDENCY BY ONE ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTE.

IN 1923, ONE VOTE GAVE ADOLF HITLER LEADERSHIP IN THE NAZI PARTY. AND IN 1960, JOHN F. KENNEDY WON THE PRESIDENCY BY A MARGIN OF ONLY ONE VOTE PER ELECTION PRECINCT IN THE NATION. HAD ONE LESS KENNEDY SUPPORTER IN EACH PRECINCT DECIDED THAT HIS OR HER VOTE DIDN'T MATTER AND STAYED HOME, KENNEDY MAY NOT HAVE WON.

THE MARGIN OF ONE OR TWO VOTES MORE FREQUENTLY DECIDES WHO WILL BE A SCHOOL BOARD DIRECTOR OR A TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR. SO DON'T LISTEN TO ANYONE WHO TELLS YOU THAT THEIR VOTE--OR YOUR VOTE--DOESN'T COUNT. IT DOES, BUT YOU MUST CAST IT TO MAKE IT COUNT!

THANK YOU.