



# CCIS *Communiqué* **NOTES**

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**Thursday, November 1, 2018**

*I've taken a somewhat divergent path with this issue of NOTES. Rarely do political decisions get reported by CCIS. It is even prohibited by our Constitution to take sides on an issue or candidate. Yet, with all the turmoil of our unsettled political body, I think it relevant to comment on American elections and our democracy. Hopefully you can forgive me. I am, after all, a retired high school government teacher who feels that we do have a responsibility and an opportunity to explain, not defend, America to our partners.*

*Anyway, next month I'll get back to reporting on CCIS activities. I'm interested in seeing how our English classes are fairing in the new school year, as well as Friday Morning Coffee (FMC), and the movies of Windows on the West (WOW), and the Spouse Education Fund (SEF) are doing.*

*John Heron, Editor*

## **THE BOOKENDS OF NOVEMBER**

November seems like a quiet month. It starts with a big bang on the last day of October: Halloween. Few recall exactly what started the celebration but all recognize it as the holiday when people, adults as well children, dress up in shocking costumes in order to imagine that they are someone, or something, else. At the other end of the month is one of the ten national holidays—not one dedicated to political leaders, religious memorials, or State holidays. Instead, it is one that does not involve the exchanging of gifts or rely on high expectations. We simply get together with family and friends over a traditional meal to share our appreciation of each other.

Overheard in the back of the room, “Thank you, John, for the reminder, but you have overlooked the big elephant in the room: November 6.

Well, of course, Election Day—the first Tuesday after the first Monday. It is the one day we find time before or after work to carry out a patriotic duty. Election day is not a work free holiday. At our polling place there aren't extravagant displays of flags or bands playing patriotic songs to distinguish it from any other day. We leave all that up to Google. It is, however, the one, most significant opportunity for all of us to participate as citizens making decisions. There are other occasions when we can acknowledge our commitment—such as serving on a jury, for example. And some of us

make a more significant commitment by serving in the military. We may occasionally march for a cause. But marches, either civilian or military, are public not private, and we are supported and encouraged in our effort by many, many others.

Walking into a voting precinct, however, identifying yourself, and taking a ballot into a private booth you do by yourself. No band plays, no crowds cheer. And, there is also little else you need to do to vote. No tax. No pledge. Our only oath is witnessed by signing our name that you are who you say you are.

The ballot, called the Australian ballot because it was invented and designed by our brothers, the Australians, to protect the privacy of the vote at a time when votes were often bought and sold. Our ballot, with the exception of our votes, is indistinguishable from that of everyone else, and we handle our marked ballot with care between the booth and the ballot box. Our parties and interest groups may provide us with suggestions, but they cannot, as they once did, provide us with the ballot itself. Nor can they circle the voting precinct itself chanting, singing, or encouraging. Voting is private, and that is sacred.

And it hasn't been that easy. Getting here from 1789, when voting was limited to free, white, male, 21 year olds, who owned property. They could vote for governor and their member of Congress but not their Senator or president. In some states belonging to the established religion was a qualifier. Changing all that has involved political, legal issues, and, public opinion.

Most people are satisfied with the current franchise. Some others are not. Perhaps the next group that is enfranchised may be those convicted of a crime. A convicted felon might say, "Yes, I did wrong and, yes, I am paying a price, but I am a citizen, and it matters to me what people make the laws." Many others obviously disagree. Currently it is estimated that 6.1 million Americans had been barred from voting because of felony disenfranchisement laws. Who can vote is a state decision, and each state has different laws. California in 2016, allowed prisoners in county jails, convicted of minor crime to vote but not those in state penitentiaries or federal prisons. Perhaps on the cutting edge, Vermont and Maine, allow convicted felons to vote—even in cases of murder.

Voting is one more thing that we can think about at Thanksgiving. If you share the holiday with your international partner...whether EIA, Hospitality, Homestay or whatever, you might want to share your personal experience, show them your sample ballot. They may be surprised at how many candidates and propositions you vote for or against.

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