

Give the Students a Voice

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Taxation without representation. This was the message our nation was founded on. If Britain would not give the colonies representation in decisions regarding their governance, then their governance was illegitimate. The ensuing rebellion by those thirteen colonies marked the beginning of a new national order: if it affected you, you got to vote about it. At first this was only a right rendered to 21 year-old white men who owned property. Since then, the pioneers of this nation have pushed to expand this mantra into what we now know as our democracy: pluralist at its core and revolving around the idea established by the revolutionaries of the eighteenth century. The rules established in the constitution are simple: If you are a citizen over the age of 18, you get to vote. No matter your race, gender, or religion. It is this principle that I now call into question, regarding whether or not America has truly lived up to this mantra.

The passing of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment advanced this historic precedent in America. This enfranchisement could be expanded to those whom the government truly affects. 18-year-olds suited up for war, so in response they earned a vote in federal elections. This precedent was carried on from its reinforcement by the Twenty-Fourth, Twenty-Third, Nineteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, all of which followed the mantra of the revolution. With this, America became increasingly recognized as an equal and fair democracy, and today we look to carry on this legacy.

Despite these marvelous advances, however, it appears that this march has come to a screeching halt. The government becomes more and more relevant in our lives, yet our mantra is swept under the rug as society becomes more and more complex. By ignoring our mantra, we ignore the people's will, which in itself is a threat to the very fabric of democracy and the republic established to protect not only our liberties, but our livelihoods as well.

This disregard of the people's will, however, is not nearly as infringed upon because of political slander and partisan foul play, but rather because we ignore the warnings and guidelines of the founders. James Madison, the author of the Constitution, warns us in *Federalist 10* about the dangers of factions and infringing on the rights of others. The tyranny of the majority suppressing the voices of the minority. How ironic is it that only two-hundred fifty years later this warning is ignored. The warning that enforces our very mantra, brushed off like dust on a windowsill.

In particular, I turn to the exigence of this testimony: the egregious attacks on education and open and complex thinking by both the right and the left. From the crying wolf over Critical Race Theory and LGBTQ education to the suppression and degrading ideas of differing opinions, schools have become a battleground both internally and externally. Because of this, we enter a positive feedback loop of group polarization leading to the false dichotomy that plagues America today, without turning for alternative solutions. Growth comes from discomfort and challenging one's beliefs, which is what we used to define as education. How can we expect to find a middle ground without cognitive dissonance, or more importantly, understand the true nature of our current situation?

The earliest that one can be elected into Congress is twenty-five years of age. Given that one typically graduates from high school typically at eighteen, that means that members of Congress could have no less than seven years of time from when they last earned a high school

grade. In the last 7 years alone, same-sex marriage has been legalized, the internet has expanded ten-fold, a global pandemic raged, and a new generation now roams the very halls left behind by the members of Congress. Education has shifted dramatically since then too, from the changing of the SAT to the curriculums of science and history and the now dependence on technology to learn. That's of course not to mention the drastic shifts in the social climate we have since seen, from movements such as Black Lives Matter and the Pride Movement to the preferred social media outlets and methods of communication.

With these drastic changes in mind, then in no way is it logical nor acceptable for those unaffected to make decisions without the opinions of those undergoing modern schooling. Why is it that those who do not attend classes make the choices for those who do? Why does our system ignore the social contract John Locke wrote? The same contract our democracy was founded on: the government is permitted to rule by the consent of the governed. The same principle of our constitutional amendments: if the government affects you, you get a say.

In no way can the adults and decision makers of the world truly understand what students need. How can we expect the unaffected populus to understand the student body's needs?

The solution is both obvious and long overdue: Give the students a voice. The attacks on school boards which provide exigence to this testimony occur because of a collective savior complex by those who feel they are reflecting the needs of the student populus rather than collecting the views of the populus as a whole. With that said, giving the students the proper voice to consent to the government selected to represent and protect them must be given to protect not only our schools, but the education received by millions of students across the nation.

We cannot call ourselves a democracy without the doctrines of the social contract and the principles of our Constitution. Without these foundations, the protection of our education and the freedoms of the people are both in jeopardy.