

Mosaic of Voices

Bipartisanship is *the* way we the People of the United States of America will succeed in unification. Politicians must uphold their duties as being the voice for citizens by cooperating with opposing parties and agendas to ensure democracy is sustained in the Constitution because only then is civic participation impactful. Without bipartisanship, those who engage in politics and use their First Amendment right to voice their opinion may feel unheard and alienated. Although the rise of polarization is increasing every day, there is still hope for change in our government and we must uphold our constitutional promise: liberty, justice, equality, democracy, and security. It is essential that we engage and become the source of change that our country needs to see in order to thrive; we are *the* source of power.

Polarization decreases civic engagement necessary for us to make changes in our country and is an issue *we* need to resolve. When a political issue is polarized and we must choose the “right” or “left” side of the issue it causes more harm than good; politicians focus on their agenda rather than concentrating on the people’s opinion. This can lead to disengagement in civics which is never the outcome we want, especially when we want to better our country. Disengagement is not the only predicament that arises with polarization as hostility is another issue we face. Political division nurtures an environment of hostility that does not benefit our society in any way because we must trust our representatives as they are our voice. Despite all the negatives of polarization, it is needed as a reminder as to how we can always improve our government. This is William Blake’s notion that opposing forces and conflict are necessary for growth and development, that “without contraries [there] is no progression.” We see polarization on a national level and it is an issue that occurs state-wide, such as in states like Oklahoma.

July 1, 2024, Oklahoma State Senate Bill 290 took into effect. This bill, authored by Sen. Warren Hamilton and co-authored by Sen. Mary Boren increased the pay for election day poll workers; this bill was applauded for its bipartisan effort. Although it may seem as something as simple as doubling the pay for poll workers, this bill was an effort from both parties which is not always seen in our state. A majority of the time in politics, specifically in Oklahoma there is always polarization but the conjoined effort of these senators proved that it is possible to meet in the middle. Both of these senators, despite their opposing views on issues, listened and showed that our voices are more important than the “red” or “blue” side. It built a bridge connecting the workers who toil daily to ensure every vote is counted and heard. Cooperation and compromise played impactful roles in this bill making our government more balanced and effective, and ultimately addressing our needs more effectively. Increased civic participation can arise from cooperation.

Civic participation strengthens democracy and assists to preserve the constitution. Actively engaging in civics by holding representatives accountable, advocating for our rights, and participating in civic conversations upholds the promises of our constitution. By engaging in civic duties such as voting, we can show our loyalty to our country and the desire for it to thrive. Voting is not a choice but rather a responsibility. Cooperation is key for politicians during elections because they are the ones speaking for the people that support them. Jury duty is another great example as to how citizens with different backgrounds engage together to uphold our justice system. We have a say in shaping our country and protecting the key principles of liberty, justice, and equality. Engaging in civics has no age limit as there are always ways to learn to improve compromising with others whose beliefs do not align with yours. Our involvement can make a difference.

Democracy ensures the voices of the people are heard. The United States Constitution was hand crafted to prioritize fundamental rights and freedoms; voting for what we believe in upholds our rights. By addressing concerns with representatives we get closer to building a country that focuses on “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Participating holds elected officials accountable and promotes social justice which can always improve in a world that progressively becomes increasingly onerous to have a civil conversation with someone who does not believe in what you believe in. Communities who are civically engaged prosper along with developing a sense of unity and those same communities help build the young civic leaders who will one day be the future of America. Civic participation does not only uphold our constitution's promise but also helps build unity and develop the leaders of tomorrow.

The educational development one can have solely by being in the presence of bipartisanship is underestimated. The future of America lies in the hands of Generation Z, as we can be the change we long to see. Each generation brings in their own perspectives and experiences that are essential for shaping the future. I am anticipating the opportunity to become a future leader of America by expanding my knowledge on civics and how to attend to others. The numerous opportunities that I have been so fortunate to experience have ultimately sparked an interest in politics. There is not a lot I can do to influence democracy right now but one of the things I have done is attend a “Better Conversations” discussion through the Oklahoma City National Memorial. The bombing was a tragedy, but as a state we ultimately set a standard as to how Oklahomans and Americans from all over came to help no matter what political party, race, or gender. These are the same standards that should be set when determining policies and electing officials.

It is our responsibility as citizens to be the change we wish to see by engaging in civics. We can not afford to be polarized when we are the people in power and the voice of our country. Bipartisanship is willing to compromise and understand others' points of views on politics as a necessity to build a better community, a better country, a better world for future generations. The United States of America will be the benchmark of how willing people are to work with one another and therefore influence other countries to follow the standard we set. We as Americans have the chance to set the standard. There are endless opportunities as to how we can shape the future, one example is participating in Law Day; opportunities like this help the future leaders understand the risks of being polarized and urges them to strive for unity. Life in itself is difficult enough and the least we can do is cooperate with one another and not become ignorant towards political issues. It is important to remember that not every official can meet all the standards one may have and it is necessary to be compassionate and communicate the changes one may wish to see. We have survived every storm and we cannot allow a single raindrop to disunify us. Together we can ensure more policies and bills like Senate Bill 290 are passed. John F. Kerry argues that the "American spirit wears no political label. In service to others and yes, in sacrifice for our country, there are no Republicans; there are no Democrats; there are only Americans." Bipartisanship is cooperation, not opposition; it is the unification of America for Americans.

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