

Education for the Wise Voter

By Della Mahoney

My government teacher posed two simple questions: What makes a good candidate? They must have thick skin of course, as well as wit, and money. What makes a good president? Education is necessary, as is energy, and compassion. Each list climbed to about 50 qualities. This gives light to an equally important question: What makes a good voter? Without a good voter, a good candidate is worthless.

A good voter knows the implications of their decision, questioning what they are told. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt stressed, a good voter is educated. Until recently, education to me was going to school. It ended when I finished my homework, or when my mom finally turned off NPR. I was too overwhelmed with chemistry to begin to understand global conflicts. However, as I age and begin to understand famine, civil war, terrorism, and American elections, I see that education isn't just cramming to pass a calculus test. I've learned that education isn't only about grades, it is about being a valuable member of democracy, empathetic towards the plight of others.

My senior year has been sharply different than other years in school; it is colored (not necessarily brightly) by domestic and global events more than it is defined by my grades. Education is a part of my life from Sunday morning to Saturday night. It is reading the New York Times briefing as I eat my bagel on Tuesday morning, or reading a book about global human trafficking at the gym on Thursday night. It is knowing now that my president won't make America great again by tweeting, and that someday the president I get to vote for won't always be right, regardless of her party.

Education is being aware of ubiquitous news outlets, even listening to them, but never, ever accepting them as the Ultimate Truth without questioning them. If all members of democracy questioned news sources that do not offer proof, we would not fear terrorist attacks in Sweden, or believe our former sitting president wiretapped a presidential candidate. An educated voter is not a member of a specific political party. They are a person staying informed for the sake of their whole country's security above their political party. Educated voters stay informed using trustworthy sources on internal and external issues. They know their history, they read. They cease fear-driven discrimination. These voters communicate with their representatives, are independent, and cast their vote demanding someone with the same standard, someone who will do right by their country. In other words, they choose wisely.

For 240 years, America has never had a time in which education hasn't driven individuals to make change, whether it be the Boston Tea Party, the emancipation of slaves, women's suffrage, or the Civil Rights Movement. Anything great that America ever did, from protests against King George's taxes to the Women's Marches of January 2017, was born in the minds of informed and passionate people. No country, no democracy, can be truly great without educated citizens.