

Our Responsibility to the Pursuit of Knowledge

By Maeve Diepenbrock

Franklin D. Roosevelt understood that for the success of our democratic system to continue, we must make education a top priority. As a society, we bear the responsibility of educating our youth and providing everyone with tools to learn effectively throughout their lives. Learning is not simply about becoming an economically productive individual, it is about becoming a well-educated citizen with the capability to participate in our political system. With each class we take, we gain awareness of life's great complexity. Our history classes give us context to our reality, bringing us an understanding of how U.S. foreign policy influenced world affairs, for better or for worse. With this knowledge we may cast a vote that will bring us closer to the future we envision. Lessons in math and science help us gain comfort with data and numbers, aiding us as we navigate the facts and figures that often accompany discussions of important issues. In our literature classes, we analyze text to glean meaning and intent. After honing this skill, we may watch political ads, listen to speeches, and read news articles without overlooking their nuances. With each school year, we come to understand relationships, from an interpersonal to a global level, with greater aptitude. After we graduate, our education becomes our responsibility.

As adults, we must become our own teachers, seeking out information independently. A major component of our self-administered curriculum must be a variety of social and political issues, both domestic and international. We must continually broaden our awareness and use our knowledge to make informed decisions at election time. Without information, we are not wise, and superficial indicators of political adequacy may easily sway us. Our elections have turned into personality contests, largely disregarding concrete qualifications. This is the easy way out, one that allows us to cast our vote based merely on snippets of video or a few inflammatory quotes we happen to see in the headlines. Making a wise, well-educated choice when we vote is not always easy, it takes research and commitment. But in our democratic system, this work is an important civil duty.

Political will shapes our lives, the lives of everyone within our borders, and, in our increasingly interdependent world, the lives of people across the globe. Sufficient knowledge about the candidates and issues on our ballots is essential. The promises and proposed policies of our candidates, their financial backers and associates, are all more pertinent than their party affiliations or most recent social media posts. Awareness of social issues, global politics, and domestic policies is vital. The policies of the politicians we vote for will impact people we may never meet, but whose lives are just as valuable as our own. With the same fervor that we support our democratic system, we must also support the education of our youth and the individual pursuit of knowledge.