



# **New Leaf**

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# One True Vote

Parker Lewin

If you believe in something, shouldn't you support it? In school, I was taught the importance of having the right to vote because it was our way of deciding who would represent us in government. I was shocked to learn that those lessons weren't true at all; that when we vote, it barely matters. To this day I can hardly believe it, but the truth of the matter is, that's the world we live in: your vote means close to nothing. You wait eighteen years of your life to be able to have a voice in a government that's supposed to represent and protect you, but instead, that government houses a system that suppresses you even further. The idea that we all have a fair and equal opportunity in electing our officials is diminished with the Electoral College. That is why we need to get rid of it altogether.

To understand why we should do away with the Electoral College, you have to understand what it is first. By definition, the Electoral College is "a body of people representing the states of the US, who formally cast votes for the election of the president and vice president." It was created in 1787 to act as a buffer between the citizens and government. According to the National Archives, the Electoral College was created as a "compromise between election of the President by a vote in Congress and election of the President by a popular vote of qualified citizens." The government decides the "qualified citizens" that are allowed to vote. These qualified citizens essentially eliminate the vote that every citizen believes that they have.

In other words, imagine you're back in high school voting for your prom king and queen. At the end of the vote, 70% want couple A to win, but 30% want couple B to win. However, couple B still wins. Why? Because there's an incredibly small group of elected officials that voted for couple B, and their vote was worth more than yours. That's exactly how our system works today. Even when 70% of U.S. citizens vote for a certain candidate to become president, 0.0000016%, or one trillionth of a percent, of the population can decide that they'd rather elect the opposition—and it's all perfectly legal. One-trillionth of a percent is not equal; 100% is equal. The Electoral College is outdated and unjust. We have the means and the ability to allow each person the one vote that he or she is entitled to as a citizen of the United States of America: and we can make those votes mean something.

Rutherford B. Hayes was the first President to take office without the popular vote when he was elected as our sixteenth president in 1876. He didn't become President because the majority wanted him there rather, he won because of the Electoral College. Samuel J. Tilden, Hayes's opponent, won the popular vote with more than 200,000 votes than Hayes had: but Hayes still won. This trend only continued throughout history: Presidents Harrison, Bush, and Trump all gained the Presidency

without the popular vote. Though those don't seem like a lot of examples, I have to ask, how many times should the government be allowed to take away our freedom? I believe that once is too much but we are already past that. We need to get rid of the Electoral College.

In the past, certain individuals were oppressed and not fully represented in government: Women, African-Americans, and Native Americans are just a few of the examples. However, despite us believing those times are behind us, the Electoral College takes those concepts and enlarges them—not discriminating against anyone in particular, but oppressing us all on a national scale. The Electoral College overpowers citizens and essentially voids their votes, stripping away the core values that Americans believe they have. Without an Electoral College, every citizen's vote would be guaranteed and equal when compared to everyone else.

Furthermore, the Electoral College pits Americans against each other by making some citizens' votes worth more than others, all depending on where they live. For example, because the number of Electoral seats are based upon the population of a state, a vote from Wyoming is weighted 3.6 times greater than a vote from California. In other words, one person from Wyoming can overpower more than three people in California. Here's how it works: Wyoming has a population of about 570,000 people giving them three Electoral votes. In comparison, California has about 37.5 million people giving them 55 Electoral votes. One of Wyoming's electors represent about 189,000 people each whereas an elector from California represent about 678,000 people each. This makes the ratio between Wyoming and California 3.6 to 1. Just think about that for a second. If we all are supposed to be equal, then why doesn't it seem like it?

I write this posing the idea that the election process we are bound to isn't as equal as you'd like to think; That the Electoral College, a system forged by our founding fathers over 300 years ago to create a buffer between the President and citizens, is an archaic way of electing our officials. This system undermines the idea that every person is equal and deserves the right to be heard. The path in front of us is long, but with a two-thirds vote from both the House and Senate along with a three-fourths vote from the states, we can be well on our way to ensuring that everyone is equally represented.

Thanks to technology, we are closer than ever to ensuring that every person's vote is properly heard. Like hacking, they're always risks with technology, but if everyone can vote for his or her favorite Kardashian online, than why shouldn't we put that same effort into our presidency? As funny as it sounds, we spend more of our time trying to keep up with the Kardashians than we do with modernizing our own election process. If we put more effort into advancing our polls, we can find a way to make every vote equal. If we believe that everyone should be treated equally, then should an Electoral College tear us apart? I guess I'll have to leave that up to you.

## We Should Speak More Than “American.”

Naomi Johnson

“En el mundo, hay mas de sies mil idiomas.” To translate: there are more than 6,000 languages spoken in the world today. It would make sense that we, the greatest country on the planet, would teach our children at least two languages, right?

Most of you would already know that is not true. Sure, some states have a two-year foreign language requirement, but how can you learn something as complex as a different language in just two years? There are even kids who can't pick up proper English, with 13 years of formal English education and having it spoken around them 24/7.

Florida is a state that recommends two years of a foreign language to graduate. The school I graduated from enforced the recommendation. Most of my friends took two or even three years of Spanish. Most passed with A's or B's, and yet, they struggle with simple sentences. One doesn't even remember how to ask to go to the bathroom in Spanish.

If we began to teach children two languages, at the start of their educational career, they would become smarter individuals. Smarter individual create a smarter society. Additionally, the ability to speak a second language allows for people to expand their personal communities through travel or relationships.

Learning and speaking new languages has proven to stimulate cognitive brain function. A Dana.org article states, “The bilingual language-learning advantage may be rooted in the ability to focus on information about the new language while reducing interference from the languages they already know.” (Marian and Shook). Basically, if you speak two languages, your brain holds them in different areas. The two languages exist without competition. There are numerous other studies that show how being bilingual can improve brain function and quality of life. Every language you learn activates a new part of your brain. The more stimulated your brain is, the smarter you have the potential to be.

On the social side, knowing additional languages can create new relationships. With technology connecting us farther and farther each day, knowing a second language can tear down language barriers and allow for people to communicate, engage with, and learn from people all around the world in that person's native language. Some of my closest friends speak mostly or only Spanish. If I didn't know Spanish, I wouldn't have been able to create those friendships. One of my friends, Marni, moved to Orlando after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico. We have been friends for less than a year and she has taught me millions of new things about the world. Things I wouldn't have known had I not spoken to her. Without my knowledge of Spanish, I wouldn't have been able to befriend her in her time of uncertainty, nor would I have been blessed with the relationship we do have now.

Overall, teaching our children new languages will create a more intelligent and engaged society. Other countries have already been teaching their kids second languages for decades. If we want to remain the best in business, we must keep up with and surpass our competition.

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#### Keeping the Poor, Poor

Laurel Mathias

In America, we pride ourselves on the value of equality, where all men are created equal with equal opportunity to succeed in life. However, because we are a democratic and not a communist country, not everyone will get the same opportunities; some will fall behind. These low income citizens live pay check to pay check, barely having enough money to keep food on their tables. So how is it fair to fine them the same as a millionaire?

Finland and Argentina have been practicing a form of fining for the past 100 years known as the “day fine.” This type of fine scales sanctions based upon one’s income. Smaller offenses may only cost a fraction of one’s work day while larger, more serious crimes may take a whole paycheck. However, in the end the idea is that everyone pays the same proportion of their income. In America we practice what is known as “flat fines,” in which every citizen is forced to pay the same. This type of fining puts the rich at an advantage, as they are able to break the law with no meaningful repercussions. Whereas on the other end of the spectrum, the poor may be left in financial ruin. A woman in Ferguson, MO, who was already struggling with homelessness, received a \$151 parking violation that she wasn’t able to pay. This seemingly small fine sent the woman on a 7-year journey of court appearances, arrest warrants and even jail time, all because she couldn’t afford to pay.

In Milwaukee in 2014, 23-year-old Desiree Seats had her license suspended before even getting it! When she was 16 years old she was involved in a petty theft in which she was forced to pay a fine of \$315. Both her and her mother were unable to pay the fine as their financial situation wouldn’t allow it. Now at 23 Desiree is finding it hard to get around with no car and many places refuse to hire someone without a valid driver’s license. So where does this leave her? This unemployed mother is now forced to pay over \$300 in fines so she is able to obtain a legal license and drive. But she can’t make the payment because she has no job, and she has no job because she doesn’t have a license. This turns into a vicious loop in which a single fine can turn into something much larger.

A retired police officer and now professor at the Naval Post-Graduate School in Monterey, California, named Eger found that 40 percent of people nationwide who get their license suspended are for reasons other than bad driving. Eger found that at least 18 states will suspend a license for failure to pay a non-driving related fine and four states for not paying parking tickets. This becomes problematic as low income individuals and many young adults depend on their cars as their form of transportation, taking them to and from the place they make their money. I know from my own experience. I work two jobs to support myself and that’s about all I can do. If I were given a \$500 fine I’d most likely have to ask my parents for help or I wouldn’t be able to pay it. However, the majority of people’s parents cannot or would not help, leaving them in a tough spot. If my license were to become suspended I would have no way to get to work and in turn, no source of income. This can and will push young adults into poverty and possibly a life of crime as fines pile up and they are unable to pay them.

The problem doesn’t stop with the low level fines, many serious offenders who serve jail time also have a mountain of fines waiting for them on the other side. This hinders criminals successful reentry into society when they are already in debt, forcing them back into a life of crime. After Germany made the switch to income based fines, short term prison visits were greatly reduced, showcasing the effect un-paid fines can have on the prison system and ultimately tax payers. The author of *A Pound of Flesh: Monetary Sanctions for the Poor*, Alexa Hayes talked to an inmate arrested after shooting her abusive husband. She found that this woman was to spend eight years in prison with \$33,000 in LFO’s (legal financial obligations) but after 13 years and making the minimum monthly payments, her debt was now at \$72,000! This is outrageous as inmates make barely anything in prison

yet are expected to pay thousands of dollars in fines then successfully reenter themselves into society without returning to a life of crime.

Enacting a system in which one's annual income would determine the amount to pay would deter the rich from committing crimes, keep the poor from going bankrupt and help with our exorbitant amount of incarcerations.

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### Saving the Next Generation

Sebastian Cardenas

Gangs have plagued our nation for over 200 years. They have promoted and celebrated violence, prostitution, money laundering, forgery. On top of this, organized crime is the primary vessel that Latin cartels use to transport their drugs to America's streets. While gangs originated as a way for people to protect their neighborhoods in the late 18th century, they have evolved into a tool that aids a multi-billion dollar narcotics industry. Now, with the social media age in full effect, gangs have used it to market themselves to their communities and the rest of the world. Gangs glorify their abundance of wealth and drugs as well as their participation in illegal activities all over social media. Children and adults not associated with gangs have become curious of their taboo lifestyle and have admired it from afar. Additionally, the socioeconomic impact that gangs have is significant in areas where they reside. People are forced to join in illegal gang activity—both willingly and unwillingly—because of the lack of resources available to them. These factors have culminated towards a growing positive view of gang culture which has in effect increased recruitment for said gangs. Reducing the amount of new members is essential to lowering the influence of gangs on our communities, and since most gang members are predominantly young adults, it makes most sense to target the youth. Therefore, the most suitable

course of action is to introduce more anti-gang programs and activities in schools all across the country.

With the impact that gangs have on social media there is no efficient way to limit their reach across the web. Their influence has grown large enough that many people have accepted them as just part of regular life, allowing the gangs to continue their affairs. What we as a society have also accepted is the loss of life that comes with gang activity; many people have become desensitized to gang related murder, as it is mostly those who are directly affected that understand the significant issue. A study by the National Gang Center found that of all homicides in the United States from 2007 to 2011, gang related homicides accounted for over 13% annually. Additionally, 67% of gang related homicides took place in cities with populations over 100,000. Gang activity has become evident enough that our nation's attention must turn to decreasing the hold that gangs have on our urban centers. Children and young adults must be taught of all the dangers related to joining gangs in order to prevent them from participating.

Why do so many of our nation's youth and young adults decide to join in gang activity? Recognition, protection, fellowship, intimidation and profiteering are the main factors that gangs promote to their members. The issue at hand is that those who live in gang rich areas are at a socioeconomic disadvantage. It's a problem that this country has been aware of for decades, and a problem that has not been dealt with effectively. Lack of employment and subpar school environments have only increased the perceived benefit of joining gangs. Gangs in neighborhoods where there are a lack of businesses and therefore lack of jobs thrive on taking advantage of the unemployed. School districts that don't receive enough support and funding have little resources to keep children in school.

How do we as a society tackle organized crime? Yes, it is the responsibility of the police to tackle gang's day-to-day operations; but it is also the responsibility for citizens to be aware of the dangers of these gangs. Creating programs for schools that are centered on the dangers of gang activity will deter children from joining. Including gang-related information into our children's curriculum would be an effective way of increasing their knowledge on the subject. Creating an initiative similar to those aimed at stopping illegal drug use could be used in the same fashion to stop gang involvement. Introducing posters and media throughout schools that tell children about the dangers of gangs would be effective. With a decrease in recruitment, gangs will eventually lose their numbers, and police forces around the country will no longer be stretched thin and have to forage for resources. Our children are the future, but it is our responsibility as adults to guide them along the correct path so that all of them can have successful and fulfilling lives.

Gangs have a tight grasp in the communities they reside in because of a lack of resources available to their residents. People fear that because of the lack of opportunities available to them, they



must find another way to thrive. Money is the largest driving force behind organized crime and most of that money comes through the market for illegal drugs. To prevent citizens from getting involved in illegal activities, more businesses must be created in communities that aren't as economically fortunate as others. With an increase in jobs, less people will turn to gangs in order to make money.

In the city of Chicago gang culture is extremely prevalent, as the Chicago Crime Commission estimated that the city has the most gang members of any other city in the country, at more than 150,000 (which roughly equated to 5% of Chicago's population). To put that into perspective, every 20th person you walk past on the street could be in a gang. Gangs have, and will always be dangerous, no matter how they try to portray themselves on the internet. But by educating kids, and increasing employment, this country can ensure that gangs will no longer have such a prevalent reputation in our society.

## The Overlooked Necessity

Xavier Rosado

"The number one problem in today's generation and economy is the lack of financial literacy." This quote is from a 92-year-old economist named Alan Greenspan. The fact that a man at his age even has the energy to point out the complication of our generation means that we have a serious problem. In the modern world, people cry out for help to those that are more fortunate but the majority of the fortunate remain self-indulged. A great divide is present between these two kinds of people. The reason is, that the more fortunate people are all educationally prepared to handle the financial aspect of life, while the poor lack knowledge of financial literacy. These people struggle to find shelter from storms and only get one meal every few days. Have you ever thought, "where they went wrong and if there is anything that they could have done differently?" Struggling with money in life is directly connected to the lack of financial education that is presented to students and adults across not only the United States, but the world. Problems with being homeless and struggling through life can all be combated by improving the knowledge of students throughout high school before they go out into the real world. If this were a major subject in class, there will most definitely be a major decline in homeless people aimlessly wandering the streets, and a major incline in healthier lives all around the world.

Neglecting education is one thing, but when the education is not taught or barely covered, then a dilemma is met. How are people expected to create a good life for themselves once they're on their own? The world of finance is not a topic that should be self-taught. For one, it is not simple. There is more to the topic than just money in your wallet, but also about credit, debit, loans, and so much more. Without education about financial literacy, how would one know what those topics meant. A comparison to the problem is fighting a professional boxer with no training whatsoever: Just one wrong move in a financial situation and you get knocked out. U.S. economics and finance editor for The Guardian, Heidi Moore states, "So they're signing documents, mortgage documents, loan documents, credit card documents, without knowing fully what the implications are or even how to begin to read what they're signing." Financial literacy has never been more important, especially considering that we were just crawling out of an economic crisis that was fueled by the lack of knowledge about mortgage loans.

The seven-year theory and it is self-explanatory. What it means according to Dan Mitchell of Time, is that every seven years there is a financial crisis. The worst part about this theory is that if it is accurate, then the next financial crisis will occur sooner than we know it. You would think that with this information, we would act on it and try to avoid another horrible predicament. Wrong, humans being the beautiful mess that we are, have not learned from the past, because the education about finance is still taken for granted by high schools and many more catastrophes are bound to happen. Not being educated about financial literacy is equivalent to being buried alive considering, there are so many decisions that involve money. Without a helping hand or a prior experience with the subject, you are bound to fail and start becoming buried in loans and debt where a possible answer seems not to exist. The last time a global survey was attempted by the United Nations to find out the population of homeless people, it revealed that 100 million people were homeless. While 1.6 billion people lacked adequate housing. Obviously, there has not been anymore surveys, but those numbers remain staggering. We need to have financial literacy classes throughout high school because this next generation of students is the future of the world and there is no reason this number rises with the knowledge that we possess. Alarming, the direction that we are heading toward is not far from the society that is presented in the movie Idiocracy. Our greatest minds envisioned something much more monumental for the future of the world, and it is our duty to not let them down. We must build on all the knowledge that we have so we can create the utopia that everyone wants to be a part of. We have been blessed with a mental capacity greater than any other species in the world. Why not actually use it to the best of our ability? With the right education, the homeless man that is seen searching for scraps of food on the side of the road could have been the next great mind of our society. What if you were the unfortunate? You would then realize that you missed out on something that could have been taught to you while you were in high school: a tool that could have possibly changed the outcome of your

entire life. Financial literacy is a pillar of life itself and if we can begin having more classes about this topic in our high schools, people will be able to afford houses and be healthier. Even on a wider scale, the world will be in better hands with financially aware people to make the decisions to drive it forward. The future is something that is looked at in awe, but why shouldn't we prepare for what the future holds? Why should we go into the future with the same finance problems as before? We need to make financial literacy a necessity for our youth to learn, so we can go into the future on the right foot. As far as we know, the distant future could be right around the corner.



Who's a Good Boy?

ESA Regulations

Addie Lloyd

Many of us love dogs, and most of us proud pet parents love taking our dogs with us wherever we get the chance. However, not all places are pet friendly. Many public parks and buildings have signs stating "No pets allowed. Service animals welcome." Service dogs, by definition, are dogs specifically trained to perform a task aiding a human under the recommendation of a trusted doctor. Some of the common types of service dogs you may see are therapy dogs, assistance dogs, guide dogs, medical alert dogs, and most recently added, emotional support animals.

An emotional support animal (ESA) is a companion animal that a medical professional has determined provides benefits for an individual with a disability according to the ADA (ADA 2018). If used properly, an ESA can work wonders for a person's emotional and mental health, helping treat issues anywhere from anxiety attacks to PTSD. To be protected under United States federal law, a person must meet the federal definition of disability and have a letter from a medical professional stating that the person has that disability and that the ESA provides a benefit for that individual. (ADA 2018) However, an animal does not need specific training to become an ESA; and that is where the problem resides.

Within the past few years, the number of ESA owners has skyrocketed tremendously. Unfortunately, the number of dog attacks by untrained and unsecured ESAs in public spaces has also risen significantly. Many of these incidents have occurred in places such as restaurants or aboard airplanes, where average pets are not permitted. One of the many examples of this is Marlin Jackson, of Daphne, Alabama. This man was mauled by an emotional support dog on a Delta Airlines flight in Atlanta. The passenger suffered facial wounds requiring 28 stitches, according to attorney J. Ross Massey, of Birmingham law firm Alexander Shunnarah & Associates.

The solution is simple. For the health and safety of others, all registered service dogs, regardless of title, must have documentation of formal obedience training to be allowed into buildings, markets, and airplanes where pets are usually not allowed. Every other type of registered service animal goes through months, if not years, of extensive training to perform its job correctly at home and in public. Just because an ESA doesn't need to perform a specific assistance task doesn't mean it should be allowed into "service animals only" locations without being under complete control of the handler. In order for a dog to be reliably obedient, it must respond each time its handler gives a command. A confused dog is a stressed dog, and a stressed dog is a dangerous dog. Obedience training with its command-driven training approach eliminates dog confusion.

Poorly trained or untrained emotional support animals in public give service animals in general a bad reputation. I cannot count the number of times I have seen ESAs in grocery stores sniffing all the food shelves or dragging their owners down crowded sidewalks. As someone who has devoted over a year of her life to training a therapy dog, I know how disrespectful it is to see these pet owners making a mockery of service animals with their untrained dogs.

The job of an emotional support animal is to provide comfort to their anxious owner, which is an important job for a dog to have. However, anyone considering taking their ESA into a "service dogs only" location should know that it's behavior most certainly will be held to a higher standard. Obedience training should be a must for any animal out in public, service animal or not. Reliable obedience is even more crucial when taking said animal into close quarters, such as airplanes.

By requiring documentation of formal advanced obedience training for all types of service animals in public spaces, the instances of untrained ESA attacks and mishaps will be significantly reduced. This will give the handler of the animal and others peace of mind while cracking down on fake service animals.

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## Political Progress Through Term Limits

Grace M. Highsmith

Seventeen percent. This figure represents the percentage of Americans that approve of the current operation of our congressional system. A mere seventeen percent. Such a low level of public approval is undeniably concerning. Suppose that a President had an incredibly low approval rating. Trump's rating is currently forty-four percent. Not bad, compared to Congress. However, citizens that are unhappy with the President can at least breathe a sigh of relief knowing that his or her tenure will soon be over, as ensured by the 22nd Amendment. The length of service performed by members of the legislative branch, however, is not nearly as finite.

In the 2016 election, over ninety percent of incumbent candidates seeking re-election, both in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, were elected. Why on Earth would Americans continue to re-elect

the same people that they award such low approval ratings? The absence of term limits in Congress has led to the creation of career politicians - people who are almost impossible to unseat. In order to increase overall public satisfaction, and the effectiveness and responsive of our government, we must impose term limits on the men and women serving in Congress and the Senate.

According to a "Gallup" poll in 2013, seventy-five percent of Americans have favored term limits on service lengths performed by members of Congress. Currently, only 15 states enforce term limits. The lack of limitation in the remaining states has allowed members of Congress to develop unfair advantages and an incredible amount of power.

What is it specifically about the legislative branch that has eighty-three percent of Americans unhappy? Why don't we just throw the bums out? Is the overall public dissatisfaction with Congress directly related to the lack of term limits? As the time in Washington spent by lawmakers increases, their understanding of the everyday life of their constituents decreases. Our representatives have become isolated from us, the people that they were elected to serve. The turnover deficiency has resulted in a drought as our government thirsts for the innovation that could be provided by new representatives and fresh ideas.

Opponents of term limits contend that term limits will not have a major impact on Congress since members are indeed replaced during elections. Elections have the potential to limit service lengths; this is undeniable. However, also undeniable is the fact that despite 17% approval ratings, members of Congress are re-elected at a rate of 90%! Although the public does indeed elect lawmakers, career politicians are able to establish long-lasting relationships with other politicians, lobbyists, and special interest groups, all of whom can significantly enhance the likelihood of re-election through campaign contributions, endorsements and other support, giving these incumbent politicians an incredible advantage over their opponents. Disturbingly, in order for politicians to maintain their ties with their campaign contributors to keep raising the money they need to mount election campaigns, they will often favor policies that will benefit said contributors, regardless of how these policies will affect the majority of people, who should be their true constituents. Sadly, it seems as if many of our current politicians are as purchasable as a cup of coffee. Former congressman, Barney Frank, has recalled: "We are the only people in the world required by law to take large amounts of money from strangers and then act as if it has no effect on our behavior."

Running a campaign is expensive. In 2016, the average U.S. Congressional campaign cost \$500,000.00, and the average U.S. Senatorial campaign cost \$1.5 million. Raising funds to finance these campaigns has become paramount. In addition to much more ready access to special interest groups and their campaign contributions, incumbent members of Congress also have an institutionalized insider advantage, the franking privilege. The franking privilege grants incumbent congress members and Senators the right to send out free mailings to the public. Well not free exactly, rather paid for by the U.S. taxpayers. Novice candidates, regardless of how intelligent, qualified or capable they may be, are often overshadowed by the pervasive exposure of incumbents, and unfortunately, their ideas rarely see the light of day.

The low turnover in Congress rates have resulted in an utter lack of progress. Lawmakers spend months debating on a single issue. Political parties are polarized now more than ever. Debates are like a game of tug-of-war. Republicans are on one side of the rope and Democrats are on the other. Back and forth. Back and forth. Senator Ben Sasse, Republican of Nebraska, states that "Congress is weaker than it has been in decades, the Senate isn't tackling our great national problems, and this has little to do with who sits in the Oval Office," he said. "Both parties — Republicans and Democrats — are obsessed with political survival and incumbency."

We need policymakers that offer unique and novel ideas so that we can put a stop to the ideological gridlock that we are trapped in. We need policymakers who are prioritizing the greater good; not ones who are prioritizing their campaign donor's platform. A dynamic body of lawmakers will propagate a higher representation of ideas; a higher representation of ideas will propagate progress.

Limiting service lengths will require members of Congress to live in the real world, and not grow attached to their roles in Washington. In order for representatives to truly represent the majority of people, they must consider themselves as a part of the majority as well. Former senator George McGovern recalls after retiring from the Senate following 18 years of service, "I wish I had known a little more about the problems of the private sector... I have to pay taxes, meet a payroll – I wish I had a better sense of what it took to do that when I was in Washington." (Jindal, Schweitzer, & Anderson 2010)



Eighty-one percent of Congress is white, and seventy-nine percent of Congress is male. Our current representation is not representative of our diverse population. Regardless of socioeconomic identity, all Americans are directly affected by the decisions made by our legislative branch. Our country is going through a very tumultuous time as we have several issues that need to be attended to including but most certainly not limited to: healthcare, immigration, the war on drugs, and mass incarceration. The war on drugs has been taking place since the mid-twentieth century and yet, we still have not seen any major resolutions. Delicate and implosive issues such as the ones mentioned need to be carefully analyzed and rationalized. We cannot afford to put up with a Congress that is not willing to prioritize the people. Taking some power away from Congress will cause members to become more concerned with the types of laws that they are passing, aware that they too will soon be affected by them.

What can we do? How can we ensure that our government is truly serving us, the people? We need lawmakers who are concerned with policy, as opposed to politics. We must do everything that we can to petition and advocate for the implementation of term limits across every state. We must stop the venal politicians from dominating our legislature. We must end the corrupt puppet system by preventing lobbyists and interest groups from latching onto politicians. We must cut the strings by placing a cap on how many terms each member of Congress may serve. We must provide new candidates with a fair chance so that they may bring new perspectives to a government that is in desperate need of reformation. We as Americans must take back the power of the people.

## Student Survival and Mental Health Education

Shelby King

Have you ever felt that nobody would miss you if you died? Have you ever felt the only way to get help would be by taking your own life or the lives of those around you? Our society has a false representation of mental health that is taking thousands of lives each year. School shootings are being normalized resulting in the shock factor to disappear. Since Americans are ignoring mental health, the real problem school shooters and them committing suicide is not being addressed, which is why mental health education should be incorporated into mandatory weekly groups for students.

One aspect that has been addressed as a factor of school shootings, is the easy access to weapon. The problem that has been ignored, due to a mental health being a taboo subject, is the mental health issues people are dealing with while committing these acts. The correlation between school shootings and mental health issues in the United States is 59% out of the 185 public mass shootings that have occurred from late 1900's to 2017 (Duwe). Nikolas Cruz, the Parkland school shooter, has received mental health support in the past, Dr. J. Lipman, a professor at George Washington Medical Center, stated in an article to CNBC after the Parkland shooting, "had Cruz continued treatment, 'it's more than likely this would never have happened.'"(Kraft). By incorporating weekly groups for students to meet, they can discuss what is going on in with thier lives, and develop bonds with other students and the trained professional/ teacher running the group. These groups would help develop a sense of community in teens and can help identify those who may need more serious help.

School shooters often commit suicide by cop or with their own gun. In society, we view suicide as a taboo subject, one that should not be discussed at length. Policies have not been created to have easy access to mental health care; even though suicide is the second leading cause of death of people ages 10 to 34. Depression is a mental health issue that can lead to the action of someone committing suicide. The weekly group meetings should incorporate the education of different mental illnesses; focusing on the common mental health illnesses that are found in teens like depression and anxiety, but also focusing on ones like schizophrenia and bi-polar disorders found in some school shooters.

Students are supposed to be the future, and with rising death tolls from school shootings and suicide, there is something fundamentally wrong with our mental health education within the school's system. If the weekly group meetings were implemented as a requirement for students to participate in, this could help show potential school shooters and students, with mental health issues, that they have support around them while educating them to create a society that has a true representation of mental health illnesses.

In our everyday lives we live in a bubble of our own issues, our own thoughts, and our own actions. Mental health is not a priority in society, so naturally it is not a part of our bubble. When anything is outside the bubble, it's like a tack and that goes unnoticed until it pops the bubble. My bubble popped twice revealing issues currently in place with the misrepresentation of mental health issues within our society. The first time was on February 6, 2016, when my best friend committed suicide and the second

time was on April 20, 2018, when a shooting took place at my high school. Both tragedies could have been avoided if proper mental health care policies were in place. The weekly group meetings in schools would just be the beginning of the necessary reform needed to help prevent these events from happening on a regular basis. In theory, the weekly group meetings could reduce suicide and school shootings rates. The education on mental health could save thousands of lives each year.

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## Mass Incarceration: The Business of Imprisonment

Jules Bassett

In today's society, it can seem as though there is an endless list of vague, dire, and complicated issues in need of resolution. The overpopulation of prisons, for example, is a serious and growing concern that affects almost every aspect of society. Overcrowded prisons are an epidemic that has plagued America specifically since the inception of the prison system. America has the highest number of persons incarcerated per capita in the world. Currently, there are 2.3 million people imprisoned across the country. The prison system preys on nonviolent drug offenders, the likes of which make up 48% of the population among incarcerated individuals. These individuals are not a danger to society. These numbers are especially troubling when one takes a look at the circular system that is the business of incarceration. Overcrowding prisons in America is an unnecessary evil that is not only damaging to the inmates themselves, but also to the average American taxpayer. Minimizing the

incarceration of nonviolent drug offenders would not only allow more room for the mandatory jailing of violent criminals, but it would improve general living conditions, prevent recidivism, and save the average taxpayer a plethora of money.

Not surprisingly, living conditions in jail are less than ideal; however, depriving such prisoners of necessities like toilet paper, pads and tampons, shoes, blankets, and toothpaste due to overcrowding is common. These are only some of the overlooked essentials that prisoners must fight to obtain. A lack of essential items used in daily life provokes the exact behavior jail is supposed to correct. Lying, manipulating, and stealing becomes common practices among inmates to obtain these necessities. Inmates resort to trading sexual favors with each other and guards to receive required objects. It is also not shocking that once these inmates master this art, it can be used to obtain much more severe and dangerous contraband: Knives, cell phones, drugs, and ingredients to make alcohol can easily be smuggled in by corrupt guards and underpaid staff. Smuggling such as this contribute to worse living conditions in prison, and to further sentencing, perpetuating the amount of time of the inmates must already serve. These practices are alive and dangerous, making it that much more difficult for released prisoners to reenter society, leading to incredibly high rates of recidivism.

An astounding  $\frac{2}{3}$  of released prisoners find themselves rearrested within three years of their release. Especially in the case of a drug offense, rearrests runs rampant. This phenomenon is primarily due to the fact that inmates who go to jail for drug use, are not treated and rehabilitated. Their addictions are ignored and overlooked. They must either suffer or appease their addictions through other means previously discussed. Incarcerated addicts maintain their addictions throughout the time they serve their sentence, finding themselves released in the same condition they found themselves arrested. Entering jail an addict, and subsequently leaving prison as an addict, almost always guarantees rearrests for the same drug offense. A simple solution to this problem: Stop imprisoning nonviolent drug offenders.

Rehabilitating these individuals would serve society so much better, with the goal of becoming productive and contributing members of their communities. Annual mass incarceration of inmates alone in the United States costs 81 billion dollars every year according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, however when one takes into account the cost of paying staff and maintenance of the facilities themselves, an additional 100 billion dollars of spending occurs. Merely reintegrating nonviolent drug offenders into society instead of jailing them would save an unbelievable amount of money for the average taxpayer. Money that could go to informing the public and preventing addiction in the first place, as well as helping those with addictions get clean. After a fine that would cover the cost,

mandatory rehabilitation could enable the reintegration of these individuals allowing them to contribute to the nation's GDP- not to mention the fact that it could save taxpayers billions.

Spending time and effort on a rehabilitation center for nonviolent drug offenders might not wholly solve the effects of overcrowded prisons, but it is a massive step towards improvement. Drug addicts would get the help they need, and the chance to regain footing in their lives without a devastating record of imprisonment. Other drug-related offenders will get the information they need to prevent rearrests. Billions of dollars could be saved and put to better use. It's not an easy task; however, the long-term effect of reshaping the prison system will ultimately ensure a more stable and resilient society. Although it only solves a few of the overwhelming issues facing this nation, a step like this today is a step towards a better America tomorrow.



## An American News Network

Jody Fenlon

In America, time is money. For the news this is no different. Due to the onset of the internet and streaming services, TV networks – especially the news – have been forced to adapt. This has led to a level of sensationalism unseen since the early 1900s, and fear-mongering is a part of the daily report. News networks have always had their problems, be it celebrity worship or political biases; it wouldn't be strange to assume this is simply how things must be. But that isn't true. In many nations around the world, the state is the main financier for the media, from Britain to Uzbekistan to South Korea. This has had varying results, many of which resulting in abuses of power. However, these problems must be improved on and prevented. By establishing a state-run media network, we can prevent the rampant corruption and constant scandals that we see in modern media, all the while preventing false news and giving people factual, objective information.

A state-run news source would be, of course, no easy task to make properly. But we would not be the first to attempt such a thing. Throughout its lifetime, the British Broadcasting Company has been a mix of a state and corporate outlet. It was given a royal charter as the only televised broadcasting

company on the news until 1954, and on the radio until the 70s . Of course, such a system had multiple flaws, and was changed to allow more freedom on television. However, it was proven that during the Second World War, BBC was an instrumental tool for spreading information throughout the nation. Should we adopt a state-run network similar to the BBC, accurate information could be spread to the populous without getting bogged down in politics. This system can be strengthened as well by the advent of the internet, by leaving internet journalism as it is now corruption and propaganda would be far harder to establish – internet journalists would expose these wrongdoings quickly. To ensure that internet journalism is never silenced by the state, anti-censorship laws must be established. In addition to this, a board of supervisors will be chosen by the supreme court, to oversee the administration, spending, and all the doings of this new network to avoid injustice even further. Today, information is a business, perhaps the most important one in the world. It shouldn't have to be, though – let information be established as a human right, something to be spread without hinderance rather than guarded or hoarded.

To understand why our news system must be changed, you need only turn your television on. Certain figures are given vast amounts of media coverage for little to no reason – from the Kardashians to Donald Trump. President Trump in particular has received an inordinate amount of media coverage, during the election year he was the topic of 41% of all news reports – three times the average . This makes plenty of sense – the more views a show gets or copies a paper gets sold the more money is made. But does this not reveal an underlying problem in our system of journalism? Rather than reporting whenever a celebrity decides to fart, should we not focus on real news? Yet even here, the current system is broken. Whenever a disaster is covered, it is obsessed over for months. Ebola, Zika, ISIS, all these events were obsessed over for months and then dropped like they never existed – yet they all remain as massive problems in this world. Meanwhile, the destruction of Puerto Rico and the genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar get little to no attention. Opinions have run rampant throughout the institution of the news – nearly every anchor gets to say their opinion on something, to the point where entire networks are based around political ideology. Not only this, but absurd personalities like Bill O'Riley and Don Lemon are given not only the time of day but are actually focused on. Opinion pieces receive a large amount of traffic, especially when it's on absurd topics. For example, the Washington Post's article "Did Lesbians cause Hurricane Harvey? God knows. " If it brings in money, then it is doing its job.

News networks have become one of the most profitable forms of media ever seen. As of the moment, 21st Century Fox is the most profitable traditional news broadcaster there is, with \$18.67 billion in revenue. This is fourth in the world for media owner profits, behind Comcast, the Walt Disney Company, and Alphabet . It has always been a central fear of our society that a corporation become too

powerful, seen through Science Fiction novels like Brave New World. Yet this isn't constrained to fiction. The banks in particular were a central fear of Thomas Jefferson, who is quoted saying:

"I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies," Jefferson wrote. " If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks and corporations that will grow up around(these banks) will deprive the people of all property until their children wake up homeless on the continent their fathers conquered. "

Now, of course, news corporations and banks are very different. Yet the same central idea applies – where there is money, there is power. Today, six corporations control 90% of all news sources in America . This is a greater threat to our liberty than the Cold War ever was. With money, one doesn't even need an army to control a nation.

With a state-run news source, this can all be changed. By establishing this new network as the only source of news on TV, and having an organized website for it, biases, fake news, and sensationalism can all be avoided. This can be funded through various ways – from increased taxes to less spending in certain areas like the military – but no profit is to be made off of this network. That means no advertisements, no opinion pieces. Only information, unbiased and factual. Steps must of course be taken to avoid the pitfalls that other countries have fallen into with state-run media – for example, in nations such as Uzbekistan and South Korea, free speech violations are common . To prevent this, perhaps the best solution is also a simple one – extremely strict no-censorship laws must be established, so that not only the media but also the common man may speak – and criticize – as he sees fit. Long gone are the days of the Alien & Sedition Acts. In addition to all of this, no internet media shall be changed – corporations such as Fox News and CNN may write unhindered there. For the entire point of this is not to restrict the people's freedom to see what they want, but to help them form their own opinions – without someone telling them what is right and wrong. Innovation must be strived for, and it is our duty to improve our nation. "We must be the change we wish to see in this world."





## Consistency in Federal Laws

Isabelle Barnett

Although we are known as the United States, we are divided. State laws that should be non-negotiable, such as gun laws, are differentiated throughout the states. Even with state laws we still see that federal laws override any state legislation. An example of this is medical marijuana. While in California it is legal to sell medical marijuana, under federal laws the distribution is prohibited, and with the amount of marijuana being distributed it can lead to a life sentence. Due to federal laws our say is not often heard as much as it should be. I believe we should have more of a say in our federal laws allowing for basic human rights, meaning we are all allowed the same rights. I believe the state and the federal government should not be able to take away these rights. Our input should be heard especially in the case of our federal government. The United States is a democracy and our laws need to reflect this.

As a democracy we are challenged to seek the majority. An important law that has transcended throughout the states is gay marriage. Sadly this is not the case for many important issues that need to be equalized. If we allow for a united front we can see more important laws such as this one all throughout the states. In the current state of our government we do not have enough input. If we allow for the people to be heard then everyone truly has a platform. We can create a country where the majority genuinely matters, and where our beliefs are heard. While I still want our elected state officials to have a role in our government, there are

some laws that just cannot be negotiated, and need to be equal across the board to allow for states to unite as a whole.

Some examples of a majority of what people want that truly matters are gun laws. In different states not only do we have different open carry laws, but you can purchase machine guns in certain states. In our current situation it is important to look at every gun law regarding safety and equalize it across the board. Americans are scared and tired of fighting, we need to take action to prevent more mass shootings from happening. By creating equal laws we can make it illegal to purchase a deadly weapon such as a machine gun and also outlaw open carrying without a permit.

Abortion, as we know, is legal in all 50 states, but some states still try to make it hard for women to have an abortion. By doing so they are blocking our federal right. Specifically for teenagers many states have made laws to prevent easy access to abortions. They do so by asking for consent from a parent or notifying the parent. Most teens who do not want their parents' involvement in their abortions are not doing it due to embarrassment; they have a reason. Some teenagers cannot simply safely tell their parents that they are pregnant. Due to this some states block the teen from receiving any treatment at all. While federal laws prohibit this action, the state is still able to do this under their power in the allotted time that it simply takes to get them access.

Today many states have banned the death penalty. At the rate that the death penalty is going down it is going to be a long time, if ever that all 50 states would eradicate the death penalty. Since we do see the death penalty lowering in states we see more and more people among those against this practice. If we make it into a federal law we can have every state without the death penalty. Another shocking fact about the death penalty is that four percent of death row inmates are possibly innocent. The death penalty simply an ineffective practice that leads to more death, and no resolution.

Medical marijuana is legal in 30 states, meaning we already have the majority to push this into all 50 states. Not only is it a safe substance that has never resulted in an overdose, but it saves lives. It can take years to find the appropriate medicine for you. Marijuana is a drug that assists with chronic pain for illnesses such as cancer, where there aren't a lot of options other than opioids. This means marijuana is reducing the want for opioids. This is a medicine that has worked on such a large scale that everyone is constantly talking about it, and we can make that push into all of the states and reduce the opioid crisis which kills around 115 people each day.

The federal laws and state laws joining together could give the people more of what they want. We will have more input into our system and less confusion as to who is leading us and what is allowed to be done. We can also be given more of a say regarding our federal laws rather than just state run laws. By bringing these two so separate pieces of our country together we can really get rid of the undermining of laws such as abortion and marijuana among others. We can be the change that our country so desperately needs in this era.

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