

## My Vision for America

It's a rainy Tuesday morning and I'm sitting in my first class of the day. The announcements sound and my peers and I rise for a half-hearted rendition of the pledge. Shockingly, only three in my class of 30 people make any attempt to echo the iconic words of Francis Bellamy. When my parents were kids, everyone said the pledge. Every morning. Without exception. This illustrates how we as a society have failed to exhort and uphold the tremendous importance of our country and its significance to our nation's children. If we kids do not grasp the importance of being an American citizen, stand and say the pledge, and enjoy the associated liberties, how will we govern a country that we don't care about?

There is a disease making its way through our country. It is compromising values and skewing priorities. It is undermining our social structure and eating away at the American Dream. And I'm sure you've all heard of this disease before, as it goes by a common name, apathy.

The symptoms of this disease include disinterest, indifference, and inaction. These symptoms are omnipresent in today's society. They are clothed in our disregard for government, the absence of gratitude for our veterans, and our failure to inspire the next generation of patriots.

Apathy has hit our government hard. Our citizens have caught a severe case of indifference and I am worried it's spreading. Our current voting turnout stands at a meager 50 percent. A government for the people, by the people, and of the people fails when the people don't show up. The voting arena is not the only area in which

apathy has compromised our government. Our inability to civilly discuss politics has created a paucity of ideas shared and new information learned. By not discussing our opinions and working towards a common good, we eliminate the possibility of enlightening and being enlightened by others. If we don't articulate our views, then we are just as silenced as those who don't vote because the voices of those with whom we disagree cancel our own.

Our veterans are collateral damage to the outbreak of apathy. Our soldiers risk and sometimes lose their lives for us every day. So that we can have the freedom to practice our religions, to express ourselves in any manner we choose, and to live our lives without constant fear. Although organizations like the American Legion, VFW, and Wounded Warrior Project work to support our troops, we need only look at the state of care administered at our veterans hospitals to conclude that we are not doing enough. Through voting participation and an active voice in government, we can ensure that our veterans are better taken care of.

I have a vision, one that supplants crippling apathy with a reawakening of patriotism. A future where kids learn what it is to be an American, what it is to be a critical thinker, a facer of adversity, and an advocate for justice. A time where citizens can civilly discuss politics for the betterment of our government.

Our patriotism shouldn't be confined to Memorial Day, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and Veterans Day. Patriotism needs to become part of our daily lives. We need to encourage and explain the importance of saying the pledge. We should have school visits from veterans so that students can associate stories they've heard with a name, and a face, and a real sacrifice. We need to discuss our values and opinions

with others, not only to encourage voting, but also to ensure that informed decisions are made. For kids my age, its as simple as saying the pledge as an expression of our appreciation for the sacrifices that have made our lives safe, comfortable, and enjoyable. For those who have reached the voting age, you have the ability to make your voices heard in a way that is not possible in many other countries. And for all citizens, regardless of age, take a moment to appreciate the countless sacrifices made on our behalf by our soldiers.