

## GOP State Rep. Bishop Davidson Presents Conservative Perspective to Interns

By Diego Perez Palomino  
*Parkway Central, 2025*



MO State Senator Bishop Davidson [R-Springfield] with Civitas Interns on July 11

State Representative Bishop Davidson brought a Republican perspective to a room often dominated by Democratic voices. Addressing a group of civic-minded teenagers, Davidson shared his political philosophy and experiences, offering insights into the principles that guide his approach to governance.

Davidson, representing parts of Greene County (District 130) in the Missouri House of Representatives, was elected to his first term in November 2020. His background includes growing up in a large family, graduating from Republic  
**continued on Page 4**



Ray Hartmann Challenges Ann Wagner



and



and more ...

## Crystal Quade's Message to Missouri: Vote!

by Robyn Davies  
*Phillips-Exeter, 2026*

Crystal Quade's journey from a rural Missouri upbringing to becoming the Democratic Leader of the Missouri House of Representatives is a testament to resilience and determination. Growing up, Quade helped her mother prepare for long shifts at a local diner. She was the first in her family to graduate from high school and worked her way



Crystal Quade speaks with Civitas interns on Tues., July 16, 2024

through Missouri State University. Today, she is a leading voice in Missouri politics, championing causes such as

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## Interns Conduct In-Depth Interviews with Undecided Missouri Voters

*Using Zoom, students connect with random selection from across state*

by Katie Grierson  
*Metro, 2026*

Political uncertainty seems to plague our democracy as of July 2024, with many voters expressing concerns about extremism and mental capacities. To understand why some Missouri voters remain undecided, 20 Civitas Interns con-

The project was designed in collaboration with [SAGO](#), a national organization that arranges surveying services, including in-depth individual interviews. SAGO selected ten undecided voters and non-voters from across Missouri with



Four interns, with Stephanie, interview a Missouri voter. Each intern used their own laptop with headphones to prevent feedback.

ducted interviews with 10 random Missouri residents. The results were varied but highlighted two major concerns: Donald Trump is perceived as too extreme, and Joe Biden is considered too old.

whom interns could conduct hour-long sessions.

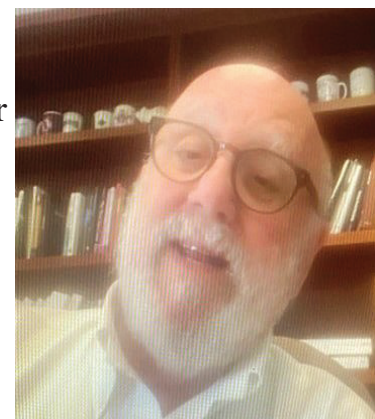
Lavina, a 32-year-old Black woman from Kansas City, simply says, "I have no confidence in either party." She ex-

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## Former IRS Chief Fred Goldberg Laments Demise of His Father's Republican Party

by Elliott Schusky  
*Collinsville HS, 2024; Georgetown U. 2028*

During the Civitas 2024 Campaign '24 summer internship, the Civitas students had the opportunity to interview Fred Goldberg. Goldberg, who is originally from St. Louis, attended Yale University for both undergraduate and law school, and has worked under



Fred Goldberg via Zoom with Civitas interns on Wed., July 10, 2024

several presidents. Goldberg first began to work for the government under Richard Nixon, joining the Office of Economic Opportunity, an agency primarily occupied with the War on Poverty. Goldberg continued working under Republican presidents until George H. W. Bush, under whom he became the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Now, Goldberg lives in Maryland just outside DC and works for Skadden & Arps, a large law firm.

Our interview with Goldberg, which was conducted through Zoom, covered a diverse range of topics and included many enlightening conversations. One of the first topics we covered, and one which Goldberg seemed particularly passionate about, was the contrast between the modern Republican party and what Goldberg referred to as, "your father's Republican". He illustrated this difference with several examples of policies enacted by the Republicans of yesterday which would be unthinkable by those of today. Under Nixon, Republicans supported a negative income tax which

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Civitas Examiner is a newsmagazine largely written by high school students who participate in Civitas programs. This edition includes content from all twenty summer interns in the Campaign 2024 program, based at [Crossroads College Preparatory School](#). It includes both news and opinions. All program photos by staffer Bobbi Kennedy. None of the views are meant to reflect those of Civitas or its staff. The Examiner is available both in printed copy and online, with a direct link on the [Civitas home page](#), which is where the hyperlinks in the printed copy will work.

Civitas is a St. Louis-based not-for-profit organization. Staff organizes Model United Nations programs and activities that promote active citizenship and world awareness for high-school and middle-schools students attending public, private and parochial schools. You can contact us at [info@civitas-stl.com](mailto:info@civitas-stl.com).

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## Lack of Professionalism in Politics

by Mira Rengachary  
Parkway Central, 2025

The day after Roe v Wade was overturned, my freshman history class was thrown into chaos. Once our teacher left the room, my class erupted into a heated, angry argument.

“It’s killing the baby!” one student yelled.

“It’s *not* a baby!” another responded.

Of course, this “discussion” led nowhere productive. No minds were changed that day. But these disrespectful arguments must be limited to immature 15-year-olds. Surely, educated, adult politicians have more decorum?

Wrong. If anything, politicians are even less respectful. For example, in last month’s presidential debate, televised by CNN, Biden called Trump “a loser” and “a sucker.” Later, Trump insulted Biden’s golf skills.

However, the debate’s events barely skim the surface of the recent downward trend in political civility. In November 2023, Senator Markwayne Mullin (R-OK) tried to provoke a fist-fight during a Senate hearing. As NBC reported, he yelled “Stand your butt up then,” to Teamsters Union President Sean O’Brien. Though the Committee Chair, Senator Bernie Sanders, defused the situation, the Oklahoma Senator’s apparent willingness to fight O’Brien was a shocking display of disrespect.

While this lack of civility among politicians is disturbing enough, it may have deeper consequences. Our democracy hinges on collaboration and compromise. For a bill to pass, it needs to achieve a simple majority in both houses. In the House of Representatives, the number is 218 out of 435. In the Senate, it is 51 out of 100. Thus, making concessions is often necessary. But, with the growing contention between the two parties, reaching a middle ground seems unlikely.

The effects of such polarization became apparent in Fall 2023, when lawmakers were faced with a difficult task: agreeing on a federal budget. If they could not compromise, federal agencies would not be able to spend government money: i.e., a government shutdown would occur. And

yet, lawmakers continued to make petty comments and start arguments. In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Representative Matt Gaetz said of Speaker Kevin McCarthy, “People think that they can just lie all the time with impunity and that no one’s ever going to call them on their bull\*\*\*\*.” In turn, McCarthy blamed President Biden for a possible shutdown. To a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, he quoted, “We are putting something on our floor that will continue to



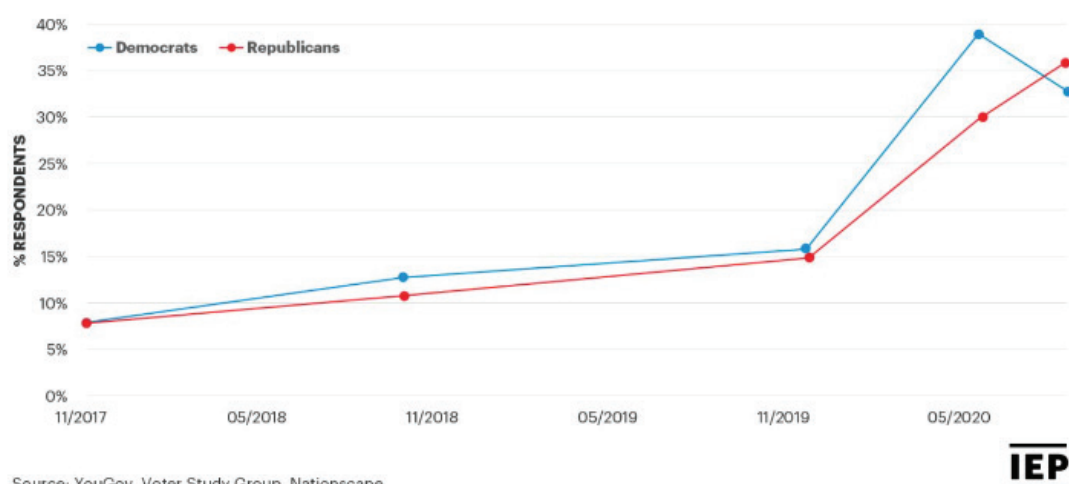
Source: <https://visionsofhumanity.org>

pay our troops. And if he wants to lobby against it...then the shutdown’s on him.”

Gridlock is not the only ramification of political polarization. Political violence and support for it has increased dramatically in recent years. According to a 2023 *Guardian* article, 23% of Americans believe that resorting to political violence may be necessary, an 8% increase from 2021. The graph below depicts a similar survey, differentiating between Democrats and Republicans. Of course, the frightening January 6th riots come to mind, and these reports show that such events may not be anomalies.

However, political decorum is not beyond repair. One organization, [The Civility Project](#), aims to stop polarization and disrespect. Despite opposing political beliefs, founders and journalists Nolan Finley and Stephen Henderson organize public spaces for constructive, healthy conversations among citizens who disagree politically. As Henderson says, “We must step back and learn to talk to people as people.” ↩

### People who feel that violence is justified in advancing political goals, United States, 2017–2020



### Quade, continued from Page 1

restoring abortion rights, opposing corporate special interests, and protecting local farmers from foreign land acquisitions.

Quade’s commitment to civic engagement is evident as she campaigns for governor. As Quade campaigns, her message is clear: voting is essential to safeguard rights and promote equitable policies.

The significance of voting is underscored by some of the closest elections in U.S. history. The 2000 presidential election, where George W. Bush narrowly won Florida by 537 votes, and the 2016 election, where Donald Trump secured the presidency through strategic electoral votes despite losing the popular vote, highlight the power of each vote. In local elections, where voter turnout is typically lower, individual votes can have an even greater impact. A Portland State University study found that fewer than 15 per-

## State Senator Tracy McCreery Reaches out to MO Freedom Caucus

by Benjamin Yates  
Home School Network, 2026



Missouri State Sen. Tracy McCreery Meets with Civitas Interns on Monday, July 8, 2024

Senator Tracy McCreery deals every day with unprofessionalism, disrespect, and recalcitrance from her fellow Senate members.

The problem stems from the imbalance of the Missouri Senate: 10 Democrat Senators, 24 Republican, of whom six belong to the so-called Freedom Caucus. This caucus, founded in January 2015, declines the label itself Republican, and instead self-defines as conservative to denote its extremism. It has branches in eleven states, including Oklahoma, Alabama, Wisconsin, Illinois, Georgia, and Missouri.

While the Freedom Caucus represents a minority of the Missouri Senate, it has power from filibusters, one of which lasted up to forty-one days. The Caucus is just close enough to the Republican Party to occasionally cooperate on legislation. Together, they passed an omnibus bill stating that attacking a K-9 unit is now a felony, as well as removing parole as an option for teenagers who are convicted for murder. One Freedom Caucus member even introduced legislation to add dueling as a means to settle political debates.

To combat these strategies, McCreery emphasizes the importance of maintaining acquaintances with her fellow senators, socializing outside of work with them, and focusing on their positive impacts, even when hard to find. She described how effective these strategies were when working on domestic violence legislation with a Freedom Caucus member who was outspoken against abortion. She makes sure not to hold grudges and to respond to the political opinions of her opponents with respect, consideration, and kindness. ↩



cent of eligible voters participate in local elections, meaning that important decisions are made by a small segment of the population.

If elected, Crystal Quade promises to protect Missouri’s farmland from being purchased by foreign actors and ensure that abortion rights are restored across the state. Although Quade believes strongly in her policies, Republican opposition will prove a significant challenge to her campaign. Quade promises that Democratic victory is very possible. For the sake of a fair and representative election, Quade urges all voters to go to the polls this November 5th for Missouri’s general election. ↩



# District 2 Reimagined: Ray Hartmann's Vision for a Brighter Future

by Charles Giraud

Ray Hartmann, a lifelong resident of Saint Louis's District 2, has long been a familiar figure in both local journalism and the community. Raised in the heart of Saint Louis and a proud graduate of Parkway Central High School, Hartmann's journey took him to the University of Missouri School of Journalism, where he developed his skills and passion for journalism.

the political landscape as a candidate for District 2 Representative in the United States Congress.

District 2, westward from Saint Louis City, encompasses a diverse community, including Arnold, Town and Country, Wildwood, Chesterfield, and Oakville. Over the past 11 years, Representative Ann Wagner has served this district with



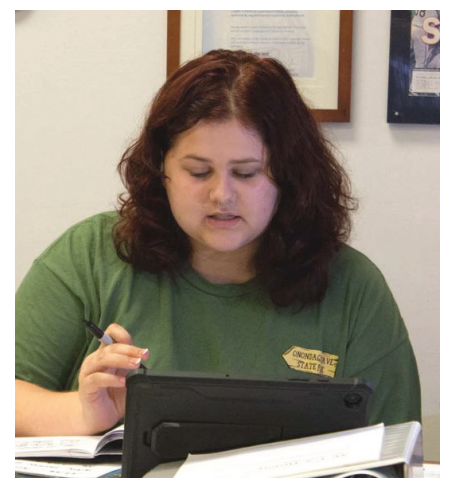
After founding the *Riverfront Times* in his early twenties, Hartmann became a prominent voice on the PBS program *Donnybrook*, where he tackled pressing issues facing the community each episode. His deep commitment to understanding and addressing local concerns paved the way for his decision to enter

dedication. However, as Hartmann suggests, there is a need for fresh perspective and innovative solutions to the challenges facing the area. His extensive background in journalism has given him a comprehensive understanding of the issues that matter most to District 2 residents, from economic development and

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Interviews, continued from Page 1

pressed dissatisfaction with Trump's actions and statements, particularly regarding racial issues, and questioned Biden's age and cognitive health. Her primary concerns include national debt, student loan forgiveness, abortion rights, public safety, and government-provided healthcare.



Katie Grierson, Metro, 2026, conducts interview.

Economic anxiety was a common issue among the interviewees. Lynda, a 62-year-old white woman from Hazelwood, and Sandy, a 53-year-old white woman from Arnold, both highlighted the inflated costs of goods. Lynda noted that home upkeep costs have skyrocketed and worried that buying a house in the current economy would become a major concern if that was something she had to worry about. They both shared Lavina's concerns about Trump's extremism and Biden's cognitive well-being.

However, not all interviewees were entirely against Trump. Martha, a 65-year-old woman from Lee's Summit, believed that Trump's business background could address inflation and economic issues, although she was concerned about the "drama" surrounding him. Like others, she also questioned Biden's age and mental health.

These are just four of the ten undecided voters interviewed. The majority agreed that Trump is too extreme, while Biden is too old to be running. There were frequent complaints about inflation and general economic issues, suggesting that politicians should be listening to these undecided voters' concerns.

Missouri voters are tired of being ignored and tired of the constant drama surrounding the political landscape. They feel that their concerns are not being addressed by current politicians, leading to a growing sense of frustration and disillusionment. This feeling of neglect and fatigue was called out by many interviewees, who yearn for a candidate who genuinely listens and responds to their needs.

Interviewing these participants was a revealing experience. I interviewed Lynda and Raquel, a Columbia elementary school teacher and a worker at a medical rehabilitation facility, respectively. Despite their different backgrounds, both women shared consistent beliefs and values. **Voters want to support a candidate they believe in rather than vote against one.** Many currently feel underrepresented and overwhelmed by issues such as healthcare, gun control, and economic challenges. Candidates must lis-

## How well is the U.S. Government doing managing immigration?

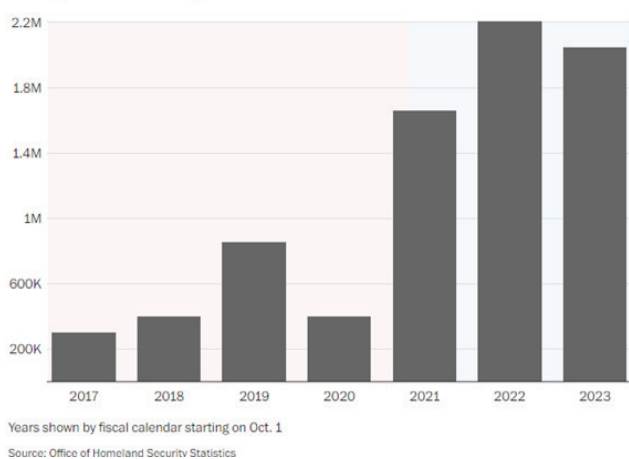
by Augustus Farrell, 2026

To many, President Biden is the "good guy" for immigration policies. In fact, on his first day of office, January 20th, 2021, he reversed many of former President Trump's policies, most notably a travel ban from predominantly Muslim nations and the construction of a border wall. Furthermore, President Biden aimed to fortify Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, temporarily shielding noncitizens who grew up in the United States from deportation.

In a positive light, President Biden raised the refugee admissions target to 125,000 in 2024; however, this goal has yet to be reached in over three decades. It's a step in the right direction, but it doesn't outweigh limiting millions.

One such example is the June 10, 2024, announcement to shut down the South Texas Family Detention Center, frequently called "Dilley." The purpose? To add more than 1,600 beds to other centers. Former ICE field office director John Fabbriatore calls the shutdown "a deliberate act of amnesty through inaction." According

### Illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border



President Biden also signed a pause on deportations in the first 100 days of his administration.

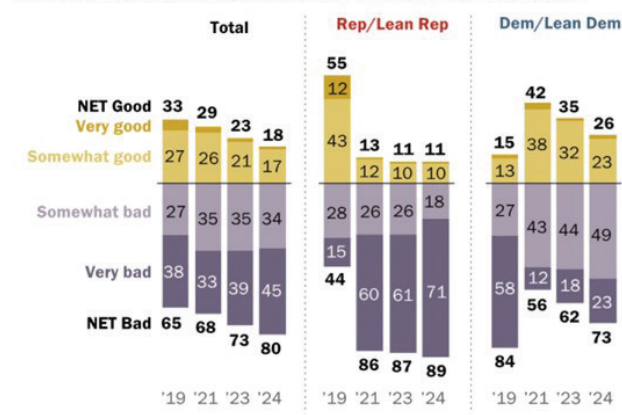
Yet are President Biden's approaches open enough? Is he doing enough for the millions of asylum seekers?

To 26% of Americans, yes. To 71% of Americans, no. Eileen Sullivan, a *New York Times* reporter, notes "Under President Biden, the Border Patrol has arrested more people for illegally crossing the southern border into the country than in any other period."

On May 11, 2023, the American Civil Liberties Union sued President Biden in *East Bay Sanctuary Covenant v. Biden* over a policy remarkably similar to Trump's most restrictive policies, which banned non-Mexicans from asylum to the United States if they did not 1) apply for asylum in at least one pass-through country and 2) get denied asylum. As of writing this, the lawsuit is still in progress.

### Only about a quarter of Democrats and even fewer Republicans say the government has done a good job dealing with large number of migrants at the border

% who say the U.S. government is doing a \_\_\_ job dealing with the large number of migrants seeking to enter the U.S. at the border with Mexico



Note: No answer responses not shown. Surveys conducted in 2023 and prior were worded slightly differently than in 2024. Refer to the Topline for full question wording. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 16-21, 2024.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

to the Pew Research Center, 60% of Americans believe more immigration judges and lawyers would make the situation better. For some reason, increasing the "waitlist" of migrants is seen as a better expenditure of taxpayer dollars compared to enlarging the process.

President Biden's drastic one-eighty mid-term makes the 20th-century Cuban "wet foot, dry foot" policies look progressive. President Biden may be more "pro-immigration" than former President Trump, but that's only significant due to its relativity. President Biden has a much more conservative stance on immigration than commonly perceived.

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ten to these voters and address their concerns to gain their trust and support.



# What is Project 2025 and should we be afraid of it?

by Kirill Kondratyuk

Parkway West, 2027

Over the past couple of months, you might have heard something about Project 2025. Despite its name, it is not a conspiracy theory, but people have been worried about it. Why?

First, we need to understand what Project 2025 is. Project 2025 is a series of policy proposals from conservative and right-wing political groups. It is a policy roadmap if a conservative president, presumably Donald Trump, wins the 2024 election. The project was created by The Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank whose contributors have connections to Donald Trump. The project is mostly made out of four pillars:

1. A policy guide for the next presidential administration.
2. A database of personnel who could serve in the next administration.
3. Training for the possible candidates who may serve in the administration.
4. A playbook of actions taken within the first 180 days in office.

Most criticism is directed towards the first pillar, the policy book, as many policies are questionable at best. One of the central assertions of Project 2025 is that the entire executive is under the president's direct control and proposes replacing workers and political appointees with loyalists to advance the policies of the next Republican president. The project is accused of advocating Christian nationalism. It aims to implement a complete ban on abortions without exceptions, reverse the approval of the abortion pill, end marriage equality, end the recognition of same-sex marriage, ban contraceptives, ban African American and gender studies in all levels of education, and teach Christian beliefs and values in public schools. The project is also skeptical of climate change; it calls for increased Arctic drilling and ending climate protections.

Finally, the project calls for the deregulation of big businesses and the oil industry, cutting Social Security and Medicare, defunding the FBI and Homeland Security, eliminating unions and worker protections, eliminating FDA, EPA, NDAA, and other agencies, and committing mass deportation of immigrants and their mass incarceration in camps.

On July 5th, 2024, Trump wrote, "I know nothing about Project 2025. I have no idea who is behind it. I disagree with some of the things they're saying and some of the things they're saying are absolutely ridiculous and abysmal. Anything they do, I wish them luck, but I have nothing to do with them." However, many still believe Trump to be a part of this since the project's director, Paul Dans, and associate director, Spencer Chretien, were high-ranking officials in his administration.

With all this context in mind, is Project 2025 bad? Yes, yes, it is! It does not only seek to eliminate our democratic principles like separation of church and state as well as separation of powers, but also to eliminate the rights of minorities such as the LGBT community and start unethical deportations and incarcerations of immigrants. As many people who worked on this project used to be high-ranking officials under Trump, and in 2016, The Heritage Foundation published a set of guidelines meant for Trump, from which Trump completed 64%, it is likely Donald Trump is involved in the project.

This project is one scary reminder of America's possible descent into authoritarianism and the undermining of democratic institutions and minority rights posed by extreme right-wingers like Trump and his supporters. ↩

Davidson, continued from Page 1

High School in 2013, and earning a degree in History and Classics from the University of Missouri in 2016. Before entering politics, he worked at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting conservative thought on college campuses.

During his talk, Davidson emphasized the importance of logic over emotion in political decision-making. He argued that votes are a more effective means of change than protests, suggesting that the legislative process offers a more structured and rational approach to addressing societal issues.

One of the key points Davidson made was the need to differentiate causation from correlation, particularly in sensitive topics like abortion. He cautioned the students against drawing hasty conclusions based on superficial associations, urging them to delve deeper into the underlying causes of issues.

Davidson also discussed Project 2025, a comprehensive conservative agenda aimed at shaping the future of the United States. While he expressed disagreement with some aspects of the project, he highlighted his support for initiatives that promote U.S. energy independence, such as drilling for domestic oil. He explained that a self-sufficient energy policy is crucial for national security and economic stability.

Another controversial topic Davidson addressed was the Second Amendment. He argued that the right to bear arms serves as a check on the U.S. military, analogous to how the military checks other international powers. "The people having guns ensures a balance of power within the country," he stated, drawing a parallel between domestic and international checks and balances.

Davidson's visit was notable not only for his political affiliation but also for the content of his message, which contrasted with the predominantly Democratic speakers who had previously addressed the group. His emphasis on logic over emotion, the importance of understanding causation and correlation, and his nuanced views on energy policy and the Second Amendment provided the students with a broader perspective on the political spectrum. ↩



## Top Contributors to:

Rep. Cori Bush (MO-01) 2023-24



From	Total	Individ- uals	PACs
Partnership for Democracy & Education	\$13,200	\$13,200	\$0
BJC Healthcare	\$13,096	\$13,096	\$0
American Postal Workers Union	\$10,027	\$27	\$10,000
Medicare for All PAC	\$10,000	0	\$10,000
Plug	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$0

Source: [OpenSecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org)

## Interns Zoom with Hilary Braseth, Exec. Dir. of Open Secrets.org

by Apurva Ganti Marquette, 2025

[Open Secrets](https://www.opensecrets.org) is a non-profit organization dedicated to government transparency. It analyzes data from the FEC (Federal Election Commission) that pertains to the finance of PACs (Political Action Committees), lobby groups, politicians, and other political entities. It makes this data easy to access for everyone. The only information that they can't provide transparency around is donors to Super PACs. PACs, or organizations that can give money directly to candidates, must disclose all of their donors. Super PACs, on the other hand, cannot directly donate money to a candidate but may support them by doing this such as making campaign commercials for them, and they do not have to disclose donor information. This money is called dark money because no one knows the source of it and leads to less transparency in campaign finance.

According to Hilary Braseth, Executive Director of Open Secrets, transparency is what builds strength in democracy. Financial transparency helps build trust in the government because the public can hold government officials accountable for their finances and can help voters make informed decisions. Braseth, who with the Peace Corps served in Guinea, talked about how lack of transparency in Guinea led to lots of political turmoil and destabi-



Hilary Braseth, Open Secrets

lized the government and the people of the country, prompting her to fight for governmental transparency. Open Secrets is a wonderful tool for many different groups of people with its incredible depth and range of data.

The Open Secrets website shows the amount of money that candidates have raised, how much they have spent, and how much money they have on hand. The website also lists all the contributors to a candidate and how much of a candidate's money has come from small money donors (donate less than \$200) vs. big mon-

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Goldberg, from Page 1

# Supreme Court Rules on Presidential Immunity

by Apurva Ganti

Marquette, 2025



would directly address poverty by giving poor people more money. This measure was criticized by Democrats as not going far enough, which, as Goldberg pointed out, teaches us all a

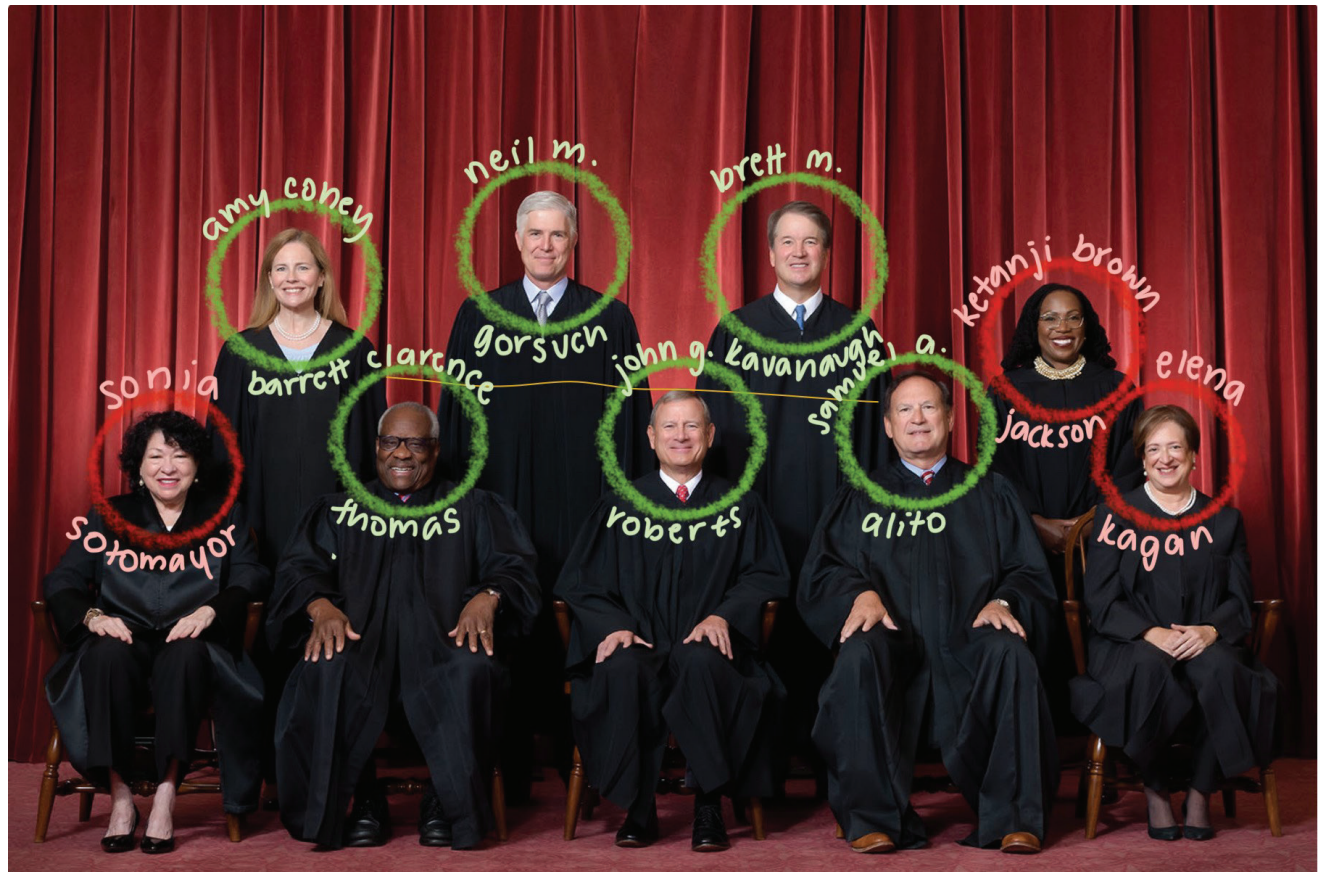
lesson about letting the perfect be the enemy of the good. After Nixon, President Reagan increased the capital gains tax in order to remove an unfair advantage of the rich. Finally, George W. Bush implemented PEPFAR—an ocean away, to aid various African nations. All three of these initiatives wouldn't even be entertained by modern Republicans.

Besides the great changes in the Republican Party recently, Goldberg also described his work as a tax lawyer and his opinions on improving taxation in America. He sees the national debt as a huge problem, which can only be fixed by increasing the tax rate on large companies and billionaires. Goldberg also felt strongly about implementing advanced child tax credits, which could significantly reduce childhood poverty and provide poorer families with increased opportunities for education. When it comes to his current work, Goldberg seems to be loving it. He primarily works on things related to DEI, *pro bono*, and mentoring. All three of these mean that he works almost entirely with young lawyers, which he says is wonderful. His favorite part of his work, however, is how diverse his law firm is. Goldberg informed Civitas interns that, even though it took him seventy years to get there, he now works at his dream job, which serves as a lesson that one should always keep striving for what they want, no matter how long it takes to get there.

Finally, Goldberg praised what he sees as the greatest virtue of American democracy: It is a system which engenders innovation. Voters and politicians can try new ideas all the time, which Goldberg stressed by noting the differences between members of the same party across different states and cities.

From changing parties to tax law to the virtues of democracy itself, our conversation with Goldberg was entertaining, informative, and inspiring. ↩

The Supreme Court (or SCOTUS as I am going to refer to them for the rest of this article) has long been a pillar of justice in this country, but that seems to be changing. In recent years, SCOTUS has increasingly been issuing opinions that have proved to be unfavorable in the court of public opinion. The point of a judge isn't to be popular, it's to best uphold the laws and the Constitution to the best of their abilities. But one recent decision has the public questioning if they are.



■ Voted yes  
■ Voted no

In a landmark 6-3 decision, SCOTUS has ruled that former President Donald Trump has some immunity for crimes he has committed in an executive capacity. This begs the question, how much is some immunity? Well, according to Fred Goldberg, former IRS commissioner and tax attorney, it's now "up to lower courts to decide." Now where cases are tried against Trump, U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan must also decide if the actions he made fell under the "core constitutional powers" of the President, as stated by Chief Justice Roberts in his ruling. If so, Trump may be immune from prosecution. Chief Justice Roberts claimed that some immunity is needed so that the executive will be "energetic" and make "bold" unpopular decisions, if what they believe is best of the nation. Justice Roberts did stipulate that there was no such immunity for unofficial acts.



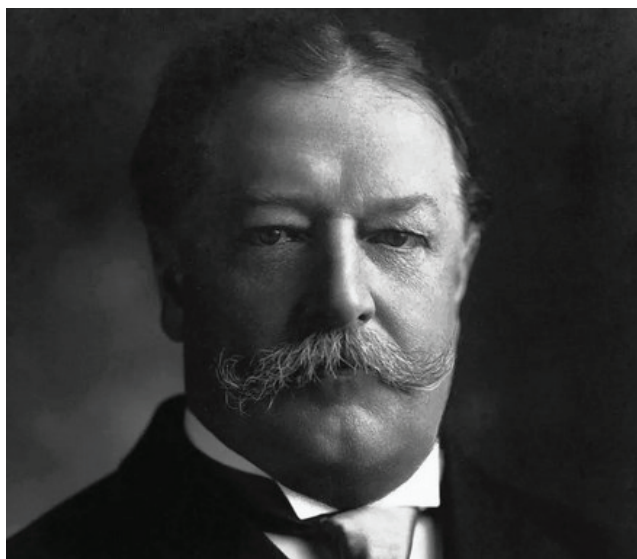
SCOTUS, in recent years, has increasingly been redefining the roles of the government as well as what each branch of government is responsible for, explained Goldberg. In this case, SCOTUS is increasingly trying to strengthen the powers of the executive branch, in line with the Constitution's ideal of a strong unitary executive. The Constitution also stipulates that the executive is beholden to the laws of the land and can be prosecuted for crimes committed while in office. The difficult part, as many are reckoning now, is finding a balance between the two ideals.



This decision isn't without vocal opposition. Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Katanji Jackson Brown made it very clear they disagreed. In her dissenting opinion, Justice Sotomayor wrote, "In every use of official power, the President is now a king above the law". Justice Jackson accused her fellow justices of sowing "the seeds of absolute power" by making the President above the law, effectively a tyrant. President Biden also released a statement, arguing the same thing, and said that this decision set a dangerous precedent for the future of America and its democracy.

The question now is "what is an official act?" Is committing war crimes as Commander in Chief a "core constitutional power?" Is committing bribery but doing so from the Oval Office also a "core constitutional power?" While having the job as President of the United States, does everything a president do fall under their duties as the executive? Those are the key questions that this ruling brings up. Now we wait to hear the answers. ↩

Who is the man below?  
JD Vance is the first major party candidate for president or vice-president in seventy-five years with facial hair. Who was the last one (seen below)?



answer at bottom of page 17





# BULLET

## Through the heart of Missouri



Civitas intern, Charles Giraud holding a "Protect Kids, Not Guns" sign at a shop in Columbia, Missouri.

In recent years, gun violence has increased across the United States, with 2021 marking a milestone. According to the CDC, 48,830 individuals died from gun-related injuries that year. Missouri, unfortunately, ranked fourth among states for the most gun violence, highlighting a severe issue that demands legislative attention.

Despite the alarming statistics, Missouri's gun laws remain lax. The Second Amendment guarantees the right to bear arms, but this constitutional right does not prevent sensible regulations. Missouri has yet to enforce critical measures that could help set back the rise of gun violence.

To address this crisis, key legislative changes are needed:

**Mandatory Background Checks:** Implement background checks for all gun purchases, including private sales. This step is critical to prevent firearms from ending up in the hands of individuals with criminal backgrounds or other disqualifying factors.

**Purchase Permits:** Introduce a per-

mit system for firearm purchases to ensure that buyers are properly vetted and informed about responsible gun ownership.

**Concealed Carry Permits:** Require permits for concealed carry to ensure individuals carrying hidden firearms are trained and qualified, enhancing public safety.

**Secure Storage Requirements:** Enforce laws mandating secure storage of firearms to prevent unauthorized access by children and reduce accidental shootings.

**Mental Health Prohibitors:** Establish regulations that prevent individuals with certain mental health issues from acquiring firearms, addressing one critical aspect of gun violence prevention.

**Minimum Age Requirements:** Set a minimum age for purchasing firearms to ensure individuals have reached an appropriate level of maturity.

Recent incidents, such as the shooting involving former President Donald Trump, have further emphasized the need for effective gun control measures. This incident, along with the increasing

frequency of mass shootings, and the inadequacy of current laws in safeguarding our communities.

As local and national elections approach, Missouri voters face a critical moment, electing representatives who support common-sense firearm regulations. Voters must advocate for legislative changes that include background checks, secure storage requirements, and mental health prohibitors.

Gun violence is a critical issue that goes beyond political boundaries. Sensible regulations are not about infringing on rights but about protecting lives. As we approach the elections, it is essential for Missouri voters to voice their support for legislative reforms. Ensuring our state's safety requires action from both lawmakers and the public.

Missouri stands in the fight against gun violence. By supporting proposed legislation and participating in the election process, Missourians can contribute to a safer future for all. Let's work together to push for meaningful changes that will protect our communities and reduce gun violence. ↩

Hartmann — continued from page 3



healthcare access to education are some of the few. Hartmann's candidacy symbolizes not just a political bid, but a rallying call for change and progress. He believes in transcending partisan divi-

sions to focus on policies that benefit all constituents, regardless of political affiliation. As the upcoming election approaches, the stakes are high. Hartmann advocates for a progressive approach to governance, one that prioritizes the common good. He aims to safeguard and expand the rights and freedoms that define American de-

mocracy, ensuring that every individual in District 2 has a voice in shaping their future. His vision for the future where unity wins over division, where sensible solutions replace political battles, and where every constituent's concerns are heard and addressed.

Ray Hartmann stands as a set of fresh new eyes for change in District 2. With his deep roots in the community, his unwavering dedication to public service, and his vision for a more inclusive future, Hartmann offers a compelling choice for voters seeking a leader who will champion their interests and values in Congress. ↩



# MARK PAMPANIN

By Emily Nguyen  
Liberty, 2026



Mark Pampanin

“He started talking— and he hasn’t stopped since” denotes TEDx Talks about a Mark Pampanin, and boy did the 2024 Civitas Interns feel their comment. Writer, political consultant, law student at UCLA, an ex-journalist who worked in the Civil, Humans Rights and Equity Department of Los Angeles, and currently works in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, Mark Pampanin was not afraid to speak expertly about a wide range of political topics, ranging from the importance of local government, the dynamic of local political corruption and ethics, the connection between conservatism and minorities, and the uselessness of his fun constitutional law class in today’s modern politics, all over Zoom.

Immediately digging into the nitty gritty, Mark detailed the unimportance of the U.S. House and the Senate compared to the county and city government, urging to start at the local level if you want to truly get involved in politics.

“Every city is different, the way they run their government, LA is no exception” Pampanin states, as he in his own personal opinion, believes that the 15 councilmembers of Los Angeles are not enough to cover the 4 million people living in the city. The small number of councilpersons governing over a large number of constituents makes for an interesting job, where strange issues arise among these incredibly powerful and influential local politicians, where Pampanin has dealt with guilty resignations and even served as a witness to an FBI raid.

Throughout the Zoom, Pampanin reiterated how important and vital local government work is, perhaps a perspective taken from his diverse work experiences. During COVID, Pampanin was launched into a world of setting up coronavirus testing sites, working with

local t-shirt businesses to produce masks, while also dealing with the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd where policing and public safety were also at the forefront of the pandemic, all while assuming the role of communications director for his local government.

Later leaving the city, Mark Pampanin wiggled his way out of his previous government work to attend law school, but now has returned back to working with the Feds— this time in the judiciary department for Judge Jacqueline Nguyen in the Ninth Circuit.

Question after question, Pampanin answered with a wordy ease and elegance, in a refreshing way that showed that he definitely knew his stuff. An eloquence accompanied his easy to understand and relatable explanations of political corruption and the conundrum that is redefining presidential immunity and the Bruen test.

As much as the interns would have loved to ask more questions and as much as Mark Pampanin would have probably loved to answer, the big bosses of Civitas cut off the Zoom for time, sadly limiting the wrap-up to seven minutes for three more questions.

Similar to a casual conversation with an old friend, Pampanin speaks in a relatable way, even making the fall of conservatism in California in the 90s after Prop 187, one of the most memorable topics ever. In a breath of fresh air, even through Zoom, he brought his impressive and unique political repertoire to answer the hard-hitting questions of curious, and impressionable young people. Mark Pampanin spoke, for a decently long hour, but we loved it. ↩

## Affirmative Action & SCOTUS

by Augustus Farrell, 2026

On June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruled against affirmative action in a 6-3 decision. *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* is one of the ultimatums the conservative supermajority SCOTUS has made in recent years. Affirmative action allowed colleges to take racial and ethnic identity into account. The goal: to empower minorities and accurately sample the world’s diverse populace.

Universities, both public and private, have been affected. The decision primarily affects schools with holistic admissions. However, universities in California were quick to offer their decades of expertise since race-conscious admissions were outlawed in 1996. University of California San Diego (UCSD) found students admitted through affirmative action, on average, had a 0.3 lower GPA than peers and a 16% lower graduation rate. Keep in mind that this is not a traditionally “against” argument, because both sides take this into account. Those in support expected this due to upbringing, opportunities, potential struggles, and socioeconomic status of many accepted as part of affirmative action.

Additionally, affirmative action aimed to support women, who have been historically excluded. Interestingly, affirmative action may have given cause to women now outpacing men in both college admissions and graduation rates. The Pew Research Center estimates 46% of women 25-34 have bachelor’s degrees while 36% of men do. Now, men applicants may be given a slight preference compared to female applicants simply because of the gender inequality.

Affirmative action is colloquially synonymous with hurting certain demographics, such as Caucasian or Asian applicants. Neither supporting nor opposing these claims, racial groups seem to have similar opinions. For instance, many Indian and East Asian applicants agree affirmative action hurts them negatively. Overall, a 2022 study from the Pew Research Center found 74% of Americans do not believe race and ethnicity should play a role in admissions.

## The Dying Republican Party

by Spencer Slavik  
Affion, 2027

The Republican Party has been around for 174 years; it was started in 1850 as an anti-slavery movement. These Republicans that led America, we are talking about Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Regan, Teddy Roosevelt, etc. These people strived to make America united and improve the quality of everyone’s life. These presidents also represent the values of the whole Republican Party from their time.

In our current time, the Party of Red has slipped further to the right becoming close to extremists. Their values have changed, now focused on the beautiful America for some and not all. Many say their “new ideas” are anti-American. This would be because of their exclusion of immigrants, being against abortion, some of them go far enough to agree with Christin nationalism.

Why is this against our country? Well, without immigration, our population will collapse causing the work force to shrink and immigrants also bring new ideas and innovation to America. Being against abortion doesn’t reflect America’s respect for people’s beliefs. The idea that you become a person at contraception is a non-science belief and if it is up to what people believe then they deserve a choice because America shouldn’t infringe on their right to a belief. Christian nationalism is also an infringement on people’s belief because Christianity would be forced upon everyone whether they like it or not. Citizens wouldn’t be able to

have any sort of religious gatherings that aren’t Christian.

Another new problem with their party is their cult-like worship of politicians. Trump is currently the head of the Republican Party, and he is often compared to Jesus, to have a political figure treated as a messiah gives them too much power and influence, he can do whatever he -wants and still be supported by the MAGA of America. The most frightening thing is they have a 900-page strategy book about how to take over America. This is called Project 2025.

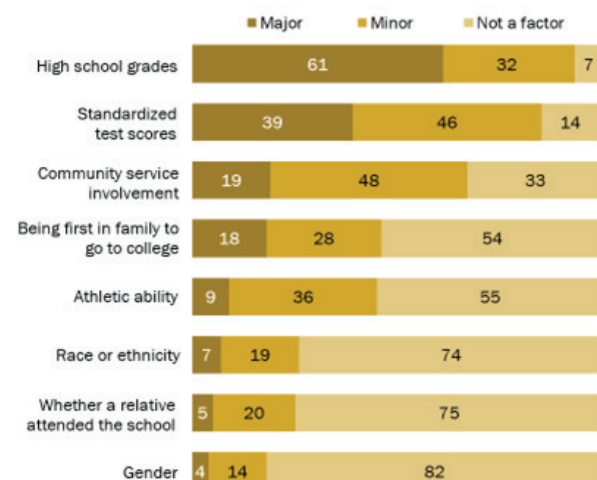


Democrats have stayed closer to the modernist side without changing as much. There are clear disadvantages to their stagnancy. Many Demo-

continued on Page 9

### Americans see grades, standardized test scores as top factors to be considered in college admissions

% who say each of the following should be a \_\_\_ factor in college admissions decisions



Note: No answer responses not shown.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 7-13, 2022.  
PEW RESEARCH CENTER



## Jamaal Bowman's loss, the future of The Squad, Super PACs, and Ice Spice.

by Emily Nguyen  
Liberty, 2026



(Left to right) Student Olivia Hanson, Congressman Jamaal Bowman, and Civitas intern Emily Nguyen in the Healey Family Student Center of Georgetown University.

“She does a lot of twerking, I know that,” shrugged former Congressman Jamaal Bowman of New York’s 16th district, two days after becoming the first member of The Squad to lose their 2024 primary. About two weeks ago, I received an opportunity to listen to the Congressman speak as a guest at the Civic Innovation Academy at Georgetown University, hearing about his dedication to serving students, the Green New Deal for public schools, his primary loss, and yes, even his limited knowledge about Ice Spice and her infamous “twerking”.

Months before the New York primary on December 6th, Jamaal Bowman received his challenge from Democrat George Latimer, whose campaign ad spending cost \$25 million, [proving the most expensive House primary in history](#). Bowman lost by 4,317 votes, where Latimer led polls, with notable endorsements from the United Democracy Project, a super PAC related to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, a pro-Israel lobbying group paving a name for themselves in recent news as large donors for opponents of The Squad.

Alongside Bowman, other members of The Squad include other left-wing and progressive members of The U.S. House of Representatives such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib, Summer Lee, and Cori Bush, the group known for their support of the Green New Deal and criticism of U.S.-Israel relations.

Bowman’s loss marked a time of suspicion and worry that other members of The Squad would soon be ousted by super PACs like the United Democracy Project, specifically for their recent outspokenness against Israel in the height of the Israel-Hamas war, despite AOC and Summer Lee both winning their 2024 primaries.

Cori Bush of Missouri’s first congressional district will be next on her ballot, as her challenger Wesley Bell has been endorsed by AIPAC and the UDP. Bush asserts that AIPAC is trying to “buy” her congressional seat in St. Louis. Bush’s campaign also maintains that [Bell is receiving campaign money from Republican donors](#).

While AIPAC is one of the only American lobbying groups to hold the interests of a foreign entity, they have not shied from endorsing whichever political candidates that uphold their pro-Israeli values. For years, super PACs like the UDP have been questioned for their high potential of corruption, bribery, and ability to hide the identity of individual donors following the [2010 Supreme Court decision for Citizens United v. FEC](#).

Jamaal Bowman’s loss represents a looming question regarding the power and influence of super PACs that have remained a point of criticism in the American political system. As the first member of the Squad to lose his congressional seat, this outcome marks a turning point in politics, where money can beat people. As political candidates find power in money, how long will it be until speaking with voters face-to-face, and building community in a race prove useless? ↩

## How Trump Could Use Impoundment and the Unitary Executive Theory If / When He First Gets into Office

by Charlie Guest

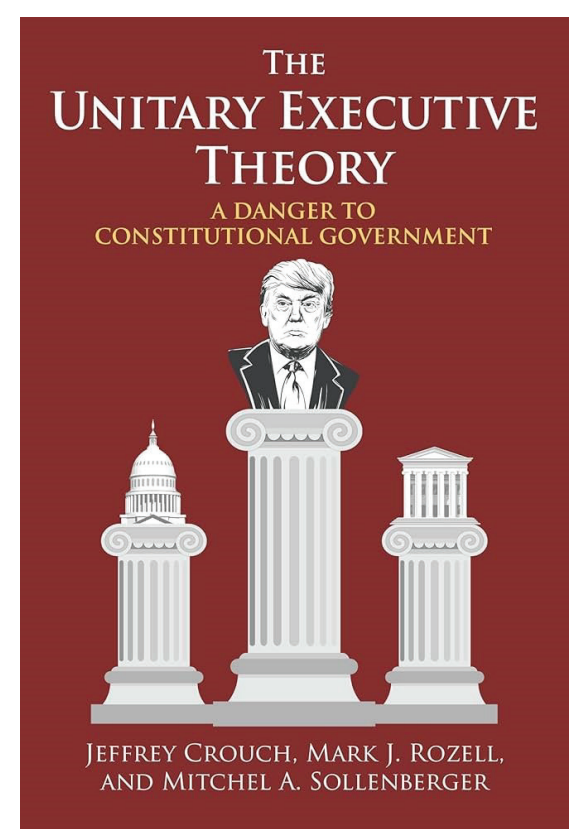
Crossroads College Prep, 2025

President Trump sought to reshape and establish a new image of the executive branch in his last term. Using controversial levers of the constitution, such as the unitary executive theory and impoundment, Trump could actualize the ambition he failed to bring to fruition in his first term. As mentioned earlier, the two levers are perhaps the most problematic in Trump and his advisers’ plan to strengthen the executive.

The unitary executive theory allows the president to control the entire federal executive branch, and impoundment enables the president to stop funds Congress has allocated for something to be delivered there. Now, we must assess the likeliness of Trump invoking these constitutional powers. Trump has consistently stated that

he’s worried about the government spending too much, so it’s likely he could use impoundment, especially one with many concessions given to Democrats.

The likeliness he will use the unitary executive theory is hard to assess. The special powers the executive theory grants to the president allow the president to limit the powers of Congress in controlling the hiring and firing of people in the executive branch and gives the president almost complete control over this, which makes it easy for the president to fire people in the executive branch for purely political reasons. There’s an impoundment control act that could restrict former president Trump’s control over congressional funds. ↩





## Campaigns Often Do Not Focus on Policies

by Spencer Slavik  
Affton, 2027

For politicians, being in office and campaigning are two different games. For voters, knowing who someone is and hearing their name is a good enough reason to vote for them. This is why most politicians use campaign donations to pay for television commercials and billboards to reach the most voters possible.

Campaigns used to be a matter of talking to people firsthand by going door-to-door. Unfortunately, the idea of talking to voters one-on-one has died out, replaced by a widespread advertisement race. This is a negative for us citizens because the idea of reaching out to voters from afar doesn't align with candidates being servants of the people. Rather, it is more like candidates being

With a broad sweeping campaign style, politicians can say whatever they want on television (especially live). If we look at Trump in the CNN presidential debate, "Trump made more than 30 false claims at Thursday's debate" (CNN website). Unfortunately, most people aren't as involved in politics as they should be, so when someone like Trump says stuff like "They will take the life of a child in the eighth month, the ninth month and even after birth" (referring to the Democrats position on abortion), and people believe the poop handed to them without doing their own research.

To stay with Donald Trump as our example, we see our candidate get into office (2016) with very few policies that



servants to their egos since citizens can't give feedback and tell candidates the changes that they would like to see. Democracy is built on people power so the people should be able to influence a candidate's decisions. What we currently have is a way for voters to pick the "best" (which is really the least bad candidate).

actually impacted everyday Americans. He said that he supported limited pay for overtime working as well as loosening the rate at which car companies have to make their vehicles more fuel efficient. Additionally, he supported severing connections with valuable allies and distorting our alliance with NATO. However, every Trump supporter's argument is that he had really good policies. ↩

## The Curious Case of State Sen. Mike Moon

by Benjamin Yates  
Home School Network, 2026

Senator Mike Moon daily proves himself as the most extreme politician currently holding office in the state of Missouri. He posted a (thankfully!) low-resolution video of himself disemboweling a chicken while condemning abortion on Facebook. He alone voted in support of a bill to lower the marriage age to 12, citing the case of a couple who remain happily married after wedding at that same age. The people of Missouri struggle to understand his random acts such as releasing a shark balloon in the House of Representatives. Researching recent legislation found nothing related to the strange publicity stunt, while his corresponding tweet, which quotes Steve Martin, does little to elucidate the matter.

His most bizarre actions, though, are little known and, in some cases, purposefully hidden. For example, he believes that sperm are alive and deserve protection simply because of their physical resemblance to tadpoles. This raises the obvious questions of whether eggs should be given the same status and menstruation therefore made a crime. Are tables alive due to their quadrupedal nature? Does one commit mass murder by ejaculating? ↩



MO State Sen Mike Moon

**Dying Republicans** — continued from page 7  
crats are going as far into controversial topics such as teams-gender rights and the Israel Gaza conflict. What the advantage is for the Right is they can get people riled up on issues without any counter arguments. The Democrat leaning voters also are less likely to vote than MAGA people because they don't feel as strongly about Democrats and their cause.

In conclusion, those who don't want a corrupt America need to get educated and spread the word to vote for the best candidates to oppose this distorted Republicanism. ↩

## Ballot Measures

from [OpenSecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org)

Ballot measures place laws or policy changes on the ballot, letting voters vote directly on whether a law or policy change should be passed. Once enough signatures are collected or other qualifications are met, ballot measures go directly on a ballot. Ballot referendums first go through the state legislature and then are put to a popular vote.

A ballot measure committee is a group supporting or opposing one or more measures. These committees may spend to garner support among voters or on messaging to sway their opinions.

We will learn shortly if the Missouri Secretary of State certifies the signatures to put a reproductive choice measure on the state's November ballot. ↩

Money Raised & Spent				
STL Area Congressional Races, through June 30, 2024				
Source: <a href="https://www.opensecrets.org">OpenSecrets.org</a>				
District 1 ( <a href="#">map</a> )				
Candidate	Raised	Spent	Cash on Hand	Last Report
Cori Bush (D) • Incumbent	\$2,642,790	\$2,080,283	\$573,354	06/30/2024
Wesley Bell (D)	\$4,137,890	\$1,733,197	\$2,404,692	06/30/2024
District 2 ( <a href="#">map</a> )				
Candidate	Raised	Spent	Cash on Hand	Last Report
Ann Wagner (R) • Incumbent	\$3,036,737	\$1,411,844	\$3,082,373	06/30/2024
Ray Hartmann (D)	\$221,388	\$79,917	\$141,471	06/30/2024

Open Secrets—continued from Page 4

ey donors (donate more than \$200). They also have even deeper information about donor geography and demographics. All of this information can be invaluable in a political campaign where money often becomes a major factor in who will win. When asked whether politicians or lobby groups resent Open Secrets for releasing all of this information, Braseth remarked that they are often grateful for the information being so easily accessible because they use the information of political adversaries to make their campaigns better and give them fundraising goals.

I encourage everyone to play around with Open Secrets. It has an incredible wealth of information for so many different people and organizations and it can be really enlightening to know where your politicians receive their money from and how that can make them vote certain ways on important issues. Knowing this kind of information can allow you to cast a more informed vote that truly reflects your values and beliefs. ↩



## What Every Good Political Leader Needs

by Cade O'Brien  
Clayton, 2026

In America, it's becoming ever more common to question the stability of our candidates due to their age. While this is a genuine and fair concern, it stems from a deeper issue. When the problem is examined with greater nuance it becomes clear that there have been many amazing leaders who no one dared question their age.

Traveling back in time around 30 years ago and relocating to Africa gives you a clear picture of this. Nelson Mandela was able to take on and end apartheid and start a democratic government when he was over 75 years old. He was able to do so not because of his physical health, but rather because he commanded a pathway of change carved out by his fierce political ideas.

When considering America's 2020 likely two candidates, many people of the current generation wonder why the same doesn't hold with them. I think this all boils down to the one issue of **respect**;

leaders should command respect from their allies and enemies. I believe that in many ways our last two presidents have struggled greatly within this aspect and this is why their age is so often put into question.

Although at first it may seem unrelated, this ties greatly into Ukraine. Since the Ukraine war started, our president has remained quite reserved in helping provide additional security such as soldiers or proper deterrents. This I frankly find deplorable because going back to 1994 when the Budapest memorandum occurred the US had agreed then in exchange for Ukraine getting rid of its nuclear weapons that we would hold up to strong security assurances. Yet in many ways, since the Ukraine war started, we have failed on this promise. When we signed the treaty it was about providing security assurances with a consistent and large supply of weapons and money.

Another reason for our lack of respect since around 2020 is our tendency to play the middle ground. Americans continue to be frightened by the possibility of World War III, due in part to the issues with Taiwan. China repeatedly threatens to invade Taiwan, although our current president, in many ways, is trying to play both sides. He's refusing to have a clear hard stance. In January of 2024, when Taiwan was having an election, Biden was asked whether he recognized Taiwan. He said that he did not but that he would also defend it in the situation of an attack by China. I think that this reflects one of the greatest issues with our current presidency. As the American author Andrew Vasquez would say, "The worst place to be is in the middle. When elephants fight the grass gets trampled". I believe that Trump or Biden's age has nothing to do with their inability to be suitable presidents for most Americans, but rather it comes from a severe lack of bravery in their world stances and inability to do what's hard, but necessary. I want to ask who would respect a leader such as this? ↩

## In Favor of the National Popular Vote

by Charlie Guest

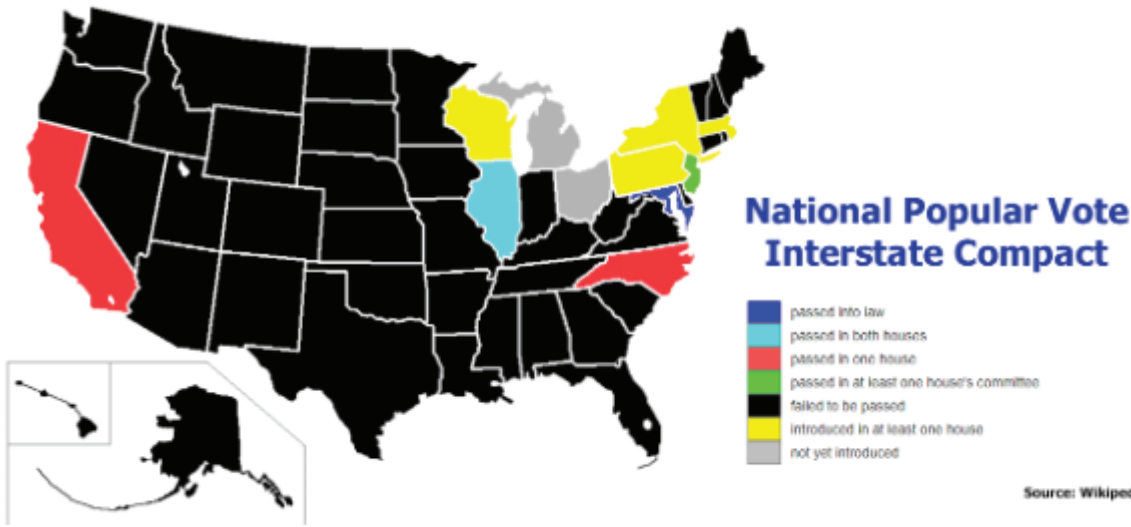
Crossroads College Prep, 2025

In the last 20 years, two Republican candidates have won the presidency without winning the popular vote. Those two presidents, George W. Bush and Donald Trump, are the two beneficiaries of this seemingly unfair election process. However, a new form of voting is taking shape in the country, the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC).

The Constitution grants states the ability to dictate how they execute their own smaller elections. In the more significant presidential election, they must adhere to the rules of the Electoral College.

However, a growing coalition of states promoting the popular vote has caught the eyes of many presidential historians and jurists. Here's how it works: several states with electors amounting to 270 must agree that they will have their electors vote for whomever won the country's popular vote. This would represent a majority of the 538 votes in the Electoral College.

The current number of states that have approved the NPVIC is inching closer and closer to the 270 electoral



votes. Given that Republicans are becoming less popular among younger generations, all they have left are political levers to promote their agenda and politicians. The compact will likely force Republicans to become more mainstream and appealing to America's youth. Robert Reich [has published a great video](#) about this concept. It addresses

why the Founding Fathers gave states the right to determine their own process of facilitating federal elections. The U.S. Constitution specifically allows states to allocate their electoral votes in whichever way they choose. The popular vote doesn't promise to change the strategy of appeal to young voters.

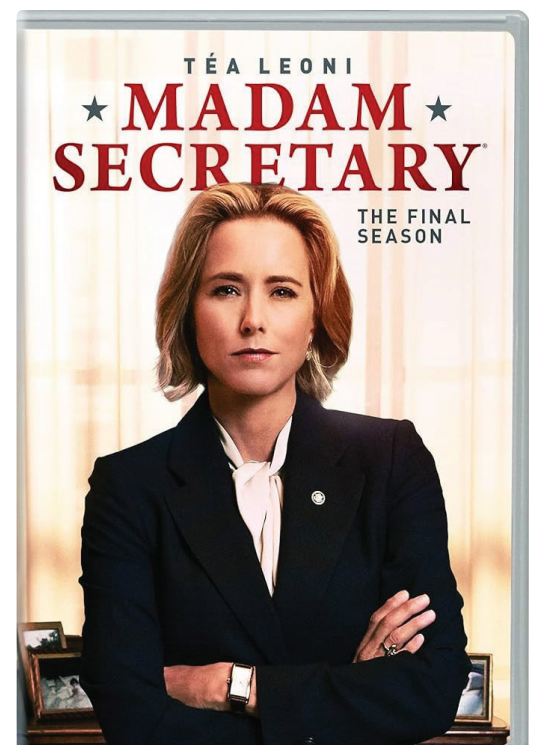
However, my belief is that the Republican platform can't survive in the long-term with its out-of-touch views regardless of if the compact takes effect because they're unpopular among young voters. ↩

## Why I Could Never Be the President

by Apurva Ganti  
Marquette, 2025

I can vividly remember the period in elementary school when everyone wanted to be the president, me included. No one really knew what a president did, just that they were important. They were someone we saw on TV, someone that was respected, someone that had a lot of power, and that was enough to make any eight-year-old feel a sense of overzealous passion to be the president. Of course, as my elementary class grew up, many realized that their passions fell elsewhere; they wanted to be doctors, lawyers, artists, but not president. But my misplaced passion endured. I wanted to be president because that means I would be the star, the most powerful person on Earth, and all eyes would be on me. But I failed to recognize something: the president is no more than a politician.

If there is one thing that I have learned, it's that I love learning about politics, but I don't quite like playing the game. I don't like asking for money. I don't like the absolute vulnerability that the media imposes onto politicians (although it is important). I don't like the hyperpolarization of our nation's political sphere where good natured conversations have been pushed aside to make way for increasingly nasty and cruel treatment of candidates from the other party, like they aren't human too. And I especially don't like the idea of getting onto a stage, or getting in front of a person, and trying to convince them that I am worthy of a position. I've spent a lot of my life convincing myself of my own self-worth, so trying to convince someone else seems unbearable. It takes a special kind of person to be a politician, and I know



continued on Page 11



## Pros and Cons on Incentivized Voting

by Diego Perez Palomino

*Parkway Central, 2025*

In recent years, the concept of incentivized voting has emerged as a potential means to increase voter turnout in the United States. Proponents argue that offering rewards for voting could strengthen democracy by ensuring that more citizens participate in the electoral process. Critics, however, contend that such measures could undermine the integrity of elections and distort the true will of the people. This article delves into the pros and cons of incentivized voting, examining whether it is a viable strategy for enhancing democratic engagement or a problematic policy fraught with unintended consequences.



The Case for Incentivized Voting

Advocates of incentivized voting believe that it could significantly boost voter turnout, particularly among marginalized and disenfranchised communities. In the 2020 U.S. presidential election, voter turnout was approximately 66.8%, one of the highest in recent history. Yet, a substantial portion of the population still abstained from voting. By offering incentives, such as tax credits, lottery entries, or small monetary rewards, supporters argue that the government could motivate more people to exercise their right to vote, thus creating a more representative democracy.

Incentives could also help address socioeconomic barriers to voting. For many low-income individuals, the cost of taking time off work, arranging childcare, or traveling to polling stations can be prohibitive. Financial incentives might offset these costs, making it easier for these citizens to participate. Additionally, incentivized voting could foster a culture of civic engagement by normalizing the act of voting and highlighting its importance in a democratic society.

Some proponents draw comparisons to Australia, where compulsory voting has led to consistently high turnout rates. While the U.S. might not be ready for mandatory voting, incentivizing participation could be a step toward achieving similarly robust engagement. Furthermore, incentivized voting could increase political awareness and knowledge, as individuals may be more likely to research candidates and issues if they have a tangible reason to vote.

### The Case Against Incentivized Voting

Despite its potential benefits, incentivized voting has significant drawbacks that warrant careful consideration. Critics argue that offering rewards for voting could compromise the integrity of elections. If individuals are voting primarily to receive a benefit rather than out of genuine interest or belief in the candidates and issues, the outcomes might not accurately reflect the will of the electorate. This concern is particu-

larly acute if incentives disproportionately attract uninformed or apathetic voters who may cast ballots without adequate knowledge or

There is also the ethical question of whether voting should be incentivized at all. Voting is a civic duty, and some argue that it should not require external rewards. They contend that incentives could cheapen the democratic process, reducing a solemn and significant act to a transactional exchange.

Moreover, the implementation of incentivized voting poses practical challenges. Designing a fair and effective incentive system could be complicated, with risks of fraud, abuse, and increased administrative costs. Ensuring that incentives reach the intended beneficiaries without creating new inequities or logistical hurdles would require careful planning and robust oversight.

Additionally, there is the potential for incentives to be perceived as coercive or manipulative, particularly if they are seen as favoring certain demographic groups or political agendas. This perception could further erode trust in the electoral system, which is already facing scrutiny and skepticism from various quarters.

### Finding a Middle Ground

Given the pros and cons, finding a middle ground on incentivized voting may be the most pragmatic approach. Instead of direct financial incentives, policymakers could explore other ways to reduce barriers to voting and encourage participation. These could include making Election Day a federal holiday, expanding early voting and mail-in options, and investing in voter education and outreach programs.

Encouraging civic engagement through educational initiatives, community events, and public service announcements could also foster a more informed and motivated electorate. By addressing the root causes of low voter turnout and focusing on systemic reforms, it may be possible to enhance democratic participation without resorting to direct incentives.

### Conclusion

The debate over incentivized voting highlights a fundamental tension between increasing voter turnout and maintaining the integrity of the electoral process. While incentives could potentially boost participation and make voting more accessible, they also risk distorting democratic outcomes and raising ethical concerns. Ultimately, the goal should be to create a more inclusive and engaged electorate through thoughtful, well-designed policies that uphold the principles of democracy. As the U.S. continues to grapple with issues of voter engagement and representation, the conversation around incentivized voting will undoubtedly remain a contentious and critical topic. ↩

Never be President, continued from Page 10

better than anyone that it's not me.

And I'm okay with that. Because, through compulsive watching of the best political TV show, *Madam Secretary*, I've learned a really important lesson. In the wise words of a made-up Matthew Mahoney, "...we've all been raised to think that the limelight is the only light worth seeking. But that isn't the case." The President is a star, but not the only star. There are *millions* of people who support the beliefs and causes of the American people by working in government, non-profits, schools, and all the other institutions that make up this community. And while their names remain unknown, their actions are not. While the President may bask in the limelight, they are supported by the millions of people who toil silently and tirelessly to improve the life of others. And I would be proud to be one of these unsung heroes. ↩

### Interns Learn About Election Security at STL County Election Board

by Benjamin Yates

*Home School Network, 2026*

On Monday, July 15, a busload of Civitas interns pulled up to the St. Louis County Board of Elections, along with teachers Bobbi Kennedy, Stephanie Gavin, and Arthur Lieber. After passing through security, they walked through an area where a small group of people were absentee voting. They entered a large office area, where they were greeted by Eric Fey and Rick Stream, the Democratic and Republican Directors of Elections, respectively.

The directors began in an area where students encountered workers performing various tasks, such as analyzing petition signatures and working with GIS (mapping) data. One of them displayed the whimsically titled "spaghetti line map" or the St. Louis County precinct map on a monitor the size of most TV screens.

To reach the tabulation room, the group made its way through a small maze of corridors into a short hallway concluding with a door with two locks, one labeled "DEM" and one labeled "REP". Rick Stream explained that the locks would not disengage unless they were simultaneously unlocked by a Democrat and a Republican, and any reason for entering would have to be bipartisan. For similar reasons, the Election Board hires equal amounts of Democrats and Republicans.

The tabulation room is where votes are counted, consisting of several banks of computers and a wall of TV screens at one side. The computers are not connected to the internet and only contain the required programs. When the software needs an update, every computer is physically sent to Texas, where the new code is hard-wired in.



Eric Fey (D) and Rick Stream (R), Co-Directors of STL County Elections Board, meet with Civ interns on July 15

The final area of the tour was the warehouse, which appeared to store all the required objects to run an average office supply store. Paper, sticker paper, pens, pencils, and ink are just a sampling of the inventory, but there are also more specific voting-related supplies like Hart Intercivic voting machines and yard signs. One area of the warehouse—fenced in with the same simultaneous locks—contains nothing but human-height roller cages. Two of these are sent to each polling place, and together they constitute a sort of "election kit" with all the necessary tools and supplies. ↩



# The Far Right's Problems with Compromise

by Henry Bauer  
Collinsville, 2025

Compromise is the idea of giving up something to get something else that you want. This idea has been practiced for all of human history, especially in politics. There is one problem with compromise though, and that is extremism. Sometimes compromise is impossible because of the people with whom you are compromising. Compromising with the far right will always lead to a loss of rights for people. This is why compromise with the far right is dangerous and something that America should never do.

It does not take a genius to see that we are currently going through a time of great political divide in America. It seems like right now has to be the most separated politically we have ever been in America. We know this is not true. The most divided we have ever been in America is the Civil War. There are many similarities between the Civil War era and now.

One similarity is the rise of far-right figures. The modern far-right figure is Donald Trump. Trump is the leader of the Republican Party, and a former president of the United States. He is known for saying traditional values in a non-traditional way. He is a very theatrical leader. These theatrics have developed a cult of personality around him. The cult of personality is not dissimilar to a far-right figure from the

The cult of personality is not dissimilar to a far right figure from the civil war, Robert E. Lee. Robert E. Lee was a general during the civil war who was borderline worshiped by the people of the Confederacy. Robert E. Lee is still revered in the American south, although being a literal eral traitor to the country.

Another similarity is general xenophobia. One of the main issues in current American politics is immigration. Republicans are terrified of people immigrating into the USA. They also want to "maintain the traditional family", which really means they want to restrict gay and trans people. The Confederacy also was very hostile towards people who were not white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, straight, and male. They did not want to accept Asian, South American, or, God forbid, African people. This shows that fear and loathing of people that are different from you can lead to far-right politics. Right wing figures have many similarities between now and the Civil War.

Something we can learn from the Civil War is to never concede to the far right. In the modern political environment, compromise is frequently valued. Democrats are constantly talking about making compromises with Republicans and the far right. This sets a very dangerous precedent. What would have happened if Lin-

# Should the Electoral College be Abolished?

by George Swayne  
Rockwood Summit, 2024; Missouri State, 2028

While some argue that the Electoral College helps represent the people who live in states with lower populations, the United States should still find an alternative for the Electoral College because it unevenly represents populations. The Electoral College is a system created in the late 1700s that "ensure that individual states, specifically states with smaller populations, receive representation." Now in the modern era, it "stabilizes the nation and prevents big city populations from dominating national elections" ("Electoral College"). These larger voices provided to smaller states, by population not land area, enable them to make a bigger impact on elections so governments don't ignore their needs.

However, this system was created so states had bigger voices and completely grazes over how citizens' voices/votes are represented in the United States presidential election. Voters' influence varies across states. For example "Michigan had 51 times the amount of influence on the 2016 election as someone from a state like Utah. Voters in states like California, or Missouri, mattered very little" (Vox) because their outcomes were predictable.

Another instance of disproportionate representation occurs when comparing the largest state to the smallest states; in Vermont one voter has the same amount of influence on the presidential election as forty-six unique voters in Texas, and a similar pattern exists in California as it takes fifty-one California voters to impact the Electoral College the same amount as a singular voter in Wyoming (CGP Grey). This varied influence across states decreases political efficacy which, in turn, can also decrease voter turnout. The voting system in the United States should encourage all citizens to vote versus making some votes seem pointless.

Many voters also feel unheard because of "winner-take-all, where the candidate who wins a majority of the state's popular vote, also gains all the state's electors" a system formed by the dominant parties in each state to maximize their effect on the election (Keyssar). Also, under

**why do we still have the electoral college?**

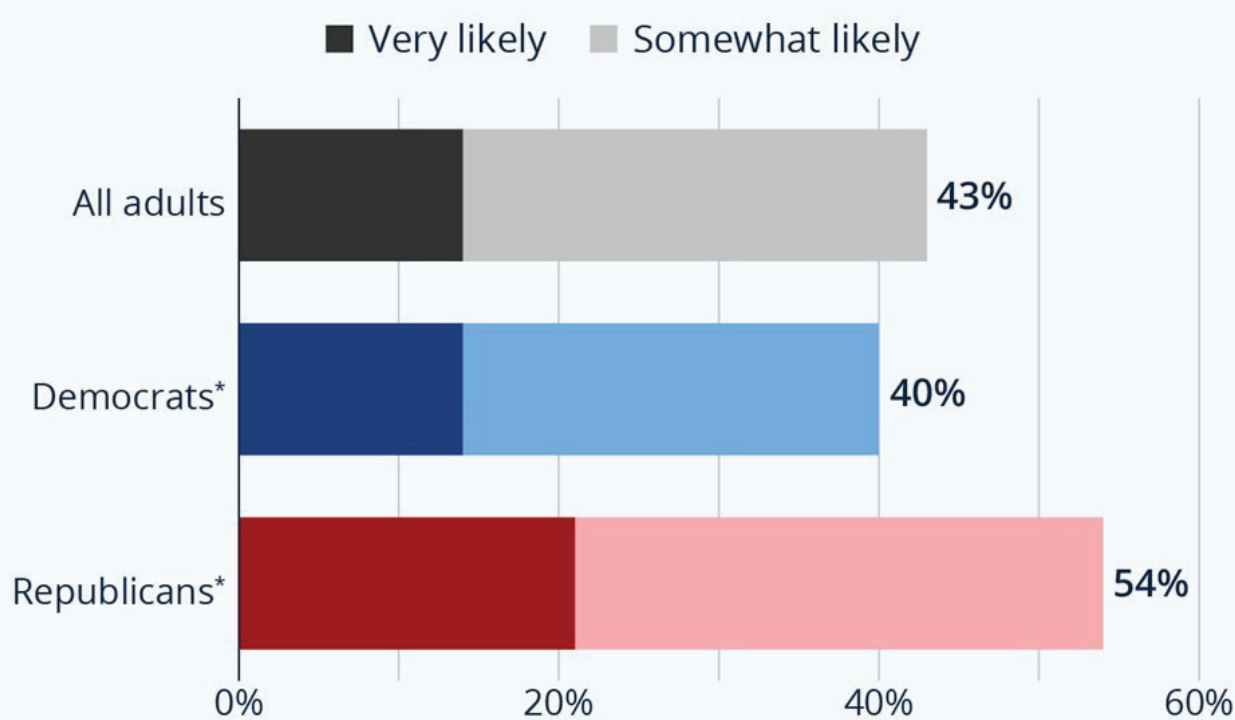
ALEXANDER KEYSAR  
UNABRIDGED | read by Stephen Bowiby

court doctrine from 1964 "people are equally represented, and their votes have an equal opportunity to influence policies in their state" ("What is"). The winner-take-all system makes millions of voters feel ignored every year as their

vote only represents the popular vote versus their states' selected Electoral Votes. Also, one man one vote which is required for the House of Representatives elections should be the mentality in every election as all voters should be represented equally in the US's major elections. In total, the US should find an alternative to the Electoral College that represents all citizens equally. ↩

## Is a U.S. Civil War on the Horizon?

Share of U.S. adults that say a civil war is likely in the next ten years, by political alignment



\* Respondents identifying as 'strong' Democrats/Republicans  
Based on a survey of 1,500 U.S. adult citizens. Conducted Aug 20-23, 2022.  
Source: YouGov



Civil War, Robert E. Lee. Lee was a general during the Civil War who was borderline worshiped by the people of the Confederacy. Robert E. Lee is still revered in the American South, although being a litOne similarity is the rise of far right figures. The modern far right figure is Donald Trump. Donald Trump is the leader of the republican party and a former president of the USA. He is known for saying traditional values in a non-traditional way. He is a very theatrical leader. These theatrics have developed a cult of personality around him.

coln gave way to the far right during the 1860s? The far right would keep much of their ground. There is a possibility slavery could still be legal. This is an example of why Americans need to stop normalizing the far right. We need to crack down on these people. The January 6th insurrectionists need to be punished. The Unite the Right fascists at Charlottesville need to be put in prison. If we do not do these things, who knows what rights we will have to give away for a "compromise?" ↩

As of July 23, 2024, money raised by party for 2024 presidential election

Source: [OpenSecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org)

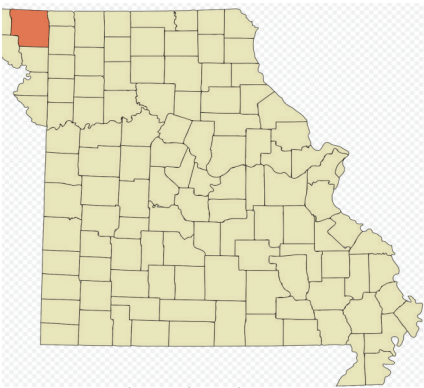
Party	No. of Cands	Total Raised	Total Spent	Total Cash on Hand	Total From PACs	Total From Individuals
All	14	\$748,742,671	\$433,147,091	\$252,522,842	\$991,026	\$693,483,134
Dems	3	\$306,506,741	\$154,991,099	\$96,187,683	\$78,123	\$299,073,607
Repubs	9	\$390,016,272	\$244,122,965	\$150,734,816	\$899,703	\$342,243,746

■ Democrats ■ Republicans



## Jess Piper Offers Hope to Rural Democrats

by **Mira Rengachary**  
*Parkway Central, 2025*



Jess Piper lives in Maryville in the NW corner of MO

Jess Piper is no stranger to rural America. She was born in Louisiana and has lived on a farm in Oklahoma.

After graduating high school and college in Arkansas, she moved to Maryville, Missouri, where she taught high school English for 16 years. In 2016, she saw firsthand the rise of MAGA Trump supporters, which she describes as cult-like. This has affected her directly- she writes on [her Substack blog](#) about being harassed and even doxxed on the internet.

The rise of political polarization and extremism has affected her family, too. In her article “Daddy died a MAGA”, she writes about her father’s descent into conspiracy theories and bigotry, ruining their relationship. Even as her father became sick with a chronic illness, he continued to be prejudiced and hateful. Jess writes, “his skewed worldview at the end of his life tragically confused his legacy and his loved

ones.” She also adds that her father’s story is not an anomaly- many people who were formerly caring and respectful became radicalized during Trump’s presidency. After these events, Jess decided to take action.

In 2022, Jess ran for the Missouri State House of Representatives. She ran in Missouri District 1 against GOP candidate Jeff Farnan. She lost the race, winning only 25% of the vote. However, Jess does not believe that her efforts were a waste of time. As she writes in her article “Uncontested Races are Undemocratic”, District 1 was previously uncontested— meaning, no Democratic candidate ran in the 2020 election. Republican Allen Andrews won 100% of the vote. Because of this, Farnan and his GOP campaign donors were forced to spend money on campaigning. According to Ballotpedia, \$404,409 was spent in total on the election, compared to a mere \$10,433 in 2020. Jess argues that when Republican candidates are forced to spend money on elections like hers, then “They can’t spend it chipping away at mostly Democratic voting districts.” Though Jess Piper may not have won her election, she may have helped another Democrat win theirs.

Running in uncontested districts has another benefit— pressuring the candi-

dates to care. When a candidate knows that they will win the election, they don’t need to make an effort to help their constituents. As Jess argues, they don’t need to fix roads, fund schools, or keep hospitals open. An uncontested candidate’s policies can be as selfish as they want, because they have no competition. Jess aims to change that.

Jess Piper is not the only Democrat running in previously uncontested races. She works with an organization called Blue Missouri, which funds Democratic candidates running in majority Republican districts. They have funded politicians such as JoJo Stewart in District 154, Amy Thompson in District 119, Rebecca Jensen in District 160, and Eleanor Maynard in District 109. These people have hope for a better Missouri— and so should you. ↩



## I have been unrepresented in the MO State House for Over a Year

by **Hank Fosdick**  
*Home School Network, 2026*

In 2023, the City of St. Louis’s state representation was greatly diminished after Rasheen Aldridge resigned from the position of state representative. Aldridge stepped down to run for alderman in the 14th ward of St. Louis. Since then, Governor Mike Parson has refused to hold a special election for state representative, leaving the 78th district without representation. This amounts to roughly 7.5% of the city’s population without a vote in Jefferson City.

Rasheen Aldridge Jr. was first elected in 2019 in the special election held after the previous state representative Bruce Franks Jr. resigned citing mental health as the reason. Rasheen Aldridge Jr. would be elected in 2020 and again 2022 after which he left to run for alderman. Rasheen left because as an alderman he thought he could potentially enact more change than as a state rep.

The term length of a congressperson in the Missouri House is 2 years in office and there is a limit of four terms. The job of a House member is to write and pass legislation. The fundamental principle of Representative Democracy is actually having representation and in our system that means at the local, state and federal levels. These actions of postponing a special election has disenfranchised this region, which has consistently voted Democratic, keeping 3,700 residents from having a voice in the lower house of Missouri’s General Assembly. Mike Parsons had the opportunity to use the city’s normal April of 2024 and even the November of 2023 elections to include a special election alongside the normal voting cycle. This is not the first time the state has been without state reps for an extended period. Parson has a history of denying representation to citizens across Missouri.

There are several candidates currently running in the mandated primary and general elections of 2024 for state rep in the 78th district.

**Jim Povolish** is the Republican candidate for the 78th House district in Missouri and is a lifelong Saint Louis resident. Povolish wants to abolish cashless ball, get rid of the personal property tax and earnings tax and reduce real estate taxes. He wants to return control of the Saint Louis Police Force to the state level.



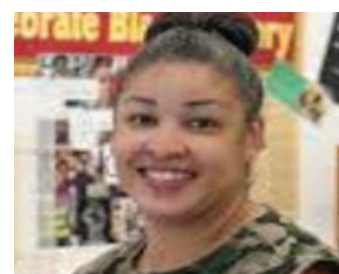
**Jami Cox Antwi** is a Democratic candidate running for the 78th ward of Missouri on a platform of decreasing the cost of child and senior care, protecting bodily autonomy, and creating jobs.



**Marty (Joe) Murry** is a Democratic candidate running for the 78th ward of Missouri. Murry is running on a pro-choice pro-union platform around improving our education system.



**Jessica Pachak** is a Democratic candidate running for the 78th ward of Missouri. There is not much information available on Pachak. However, it does appear she was recently accused of falsifying attendance records at KIPP elementary where she had been employed as principal. ↩





## What 2024 Could Mean

by Emily Nguyen  
*Liberty, 2026*

“History is repeating itself today,” A snippet from one of Malcolm X’s numerous speeches tells a story of an accepted truth that has transcended time. Malcolm X didn’t live to see 2024, or to see the tumultuous year that would be 1968. Neither did his historical “foil”, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose assassination in 1968 marked the year as one that would change American politics forever.

Uncertainty surrounding the election regarding an incumbent, collegiate students arrested for anti-War protests, assassinations of public figures, and a new Planet of the Apes movie? Maybe not so surprisingly, the described events connect the two years. Is history repeating itself before our eyes, but more importantly, have we learned enough from the past to stop 1968 from repeating?

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1968, the Tet Offensive was launched against Saigon and Hue, a major turning point in the Vietnam War. While the military campaign failed, public opinion turned against President Lyndon B. Johnson, as only 26 percent of Americans approved of his handling of the conflict.

At the end of his [address to the American people](#) on March 31<sup>st</sup>, President Johnson announced “I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President,” ensuing an uproar during the 1968 Democratic National Convention, as Johnson’s political party scrambled to pick another nominee.

President Joe Biden is causing a very similar stir, as he had previously solidified his determination to stay in the presidential race, but on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024, he eventually withdrew from and opted to endorse his vice president Kamala Harris as the candidate to beat Donald Trump. Democrats were split on supporting Biden, largely due



President Lyndon B. Johnson, expressing his mood through most of 1968.

to his old age, with big names like Nancy Pelosi speaking to Biden about dropping out of the candidacy, but as Bernie Sanders and AOC continued to endorse Biden as their nominee.

As of now and according to Vogue political correspondent, Jack Schlossberg, [Democrats will hold a “virtual role call” to choose a nominee](#), due to the ballot access filing deadline of many swing states being before or during the 2024 DNC. Even more uncertainty trails the Democratic party, as new candidates may fight to go up against Donald Trump.

A 1968 series of protests at Columbia University, and the historical occupation of their Hamilton Hall remains relevant today, as pro-Palestinian student protestors, 56 years into the future, take and rename Hamilton Hall as “Hind’s Hall” for Hind Rajab, a six-year-old Palestinian girl who was killed in Gaza by Israeli military on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The protests at Columbia bring a glare of irony, where the university held pride for their history of student activism, as they repeat their past actions of calling on the NYPD to arrest present-day student protestors

The 1968 DNC witnessed violence in a confused cathartic police riot following the assassinations of Dr. King in April, and Sen. Robert Kennedy in June. The deaths of these political heroes marred any hope for progressive change in the country. Maybe shockingly, events sprouting similar outcomes have occurred in 2024.

On July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024, former President Donald Trump was wounded in his right ear after an assassination attempt at a Pennsylvania rally. Trump, who pumped his fists in the air after gunshots rang out, has since enabled his supporters to regard him as some semblance of a hero.

Both Donald Trump and Joe Biden have caused a stir, as Trump stands tall after an attempt on his life, contrasted with the frailness of Biden, especially with his new Covid-19 diagnosis. In an era of division, Americans remain united in their confusion and fear for what the outcome of this election year will produce. History probably hasn’t repeated itself. But, it’s only July and that new Planet of the Apes movie certainly did not live up to the hype. ↩

## MO Teenagers, Be Aware of Workplace Rules

by Katie Grierson  
*Metro, 2026*

Missouri’s youth are stepping into the workforce, eager to learn and grow. Yet, without a clear understanding of their rights, they are vulnerable to exploitation and unfair practices. As a youth, I regrettably didn’t look into my rights as a new 15-year-old entering the workforce. I aim to inform others about the protections for young workers that are currently in place, highlight advocates for these rights, and give opinions on steps needed to improve work environments for people under 16.

Currently in Missouri, people under 16 must have a work permit or certificate. A work permit is necessary for any youth working in the entertainment industry, while a certificate is required for other types of work. They are permitted to work only between the hours of 7 am and 7 pm, with exceptions allowing no more than 3 hours on school days and no more than 6 days per week (MO gov). Understanding these regulations is crucial for safeguarding young workers from exploitation. Work permits and certificates ensure that employers comply with labor laws designed to protect minors. These laws not only limit the hours and days minors can work but also establish minimum age requirements for certain types

of work, ensuring that young people are not placed in hazardous or inappropriate working conditions.

Advocates such as the Missouri Department of Labor and youth advocacy groups like Youth Empowerment Services (YES) play pivotal roles in educating both youth and employers about these rights. Their efforts not only raise awareness but also empower young workers to assert their rights in the workplace.

To improve work environments for people under 16, several steps should be taken. First, increasing awareness through school programs and community outreach can ensure that all youth are educated about their rights before entering the workforce. Second, strengthening enforcement mechanisms and penalties for violations can deter employers from exploiting young workers. Finally, advocating for more



flexible work hours that accommodate school schedules and extracurricular activities can promote a healthier work-life balance for young employees.

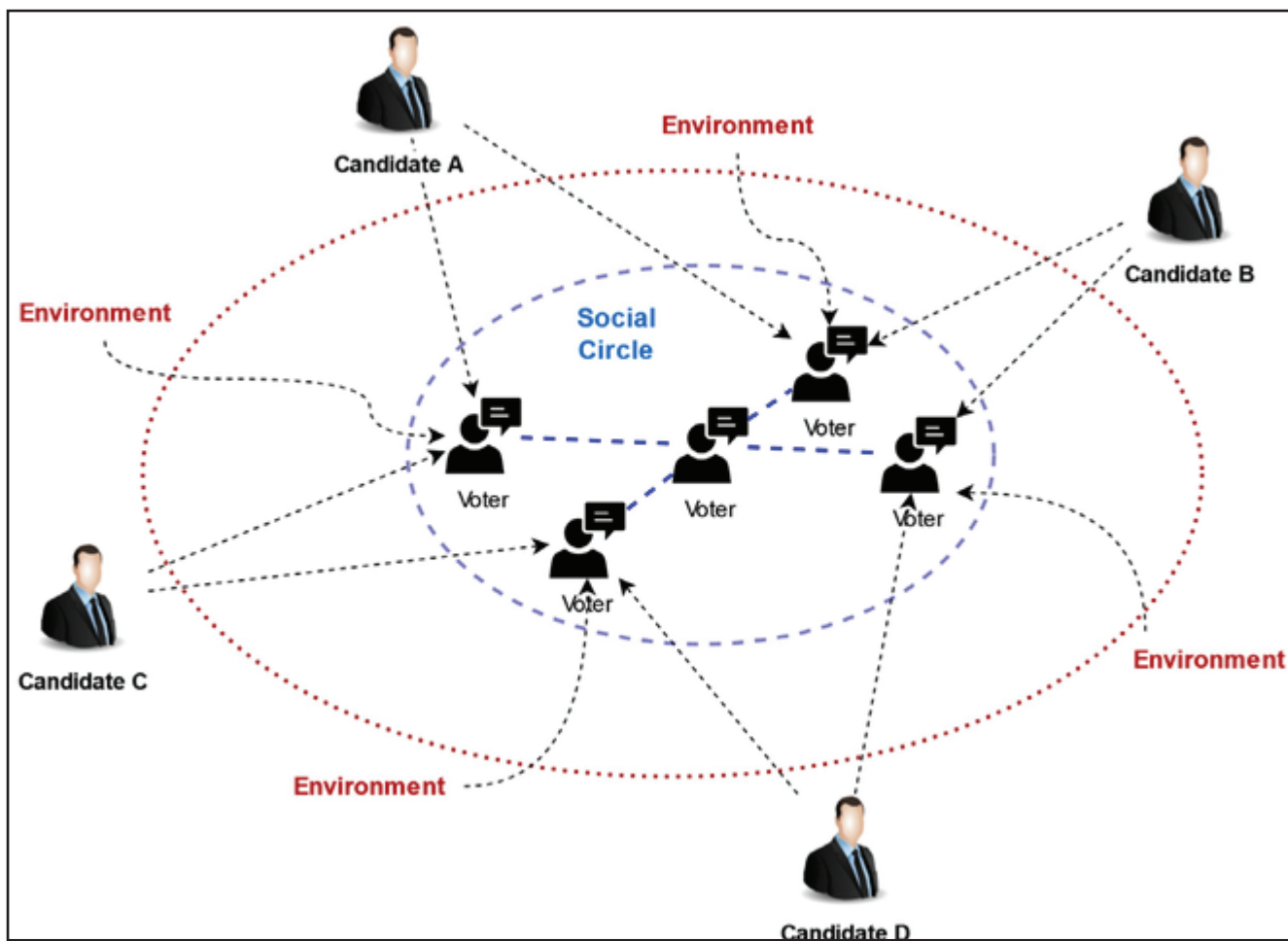
In conclusion, while Missouri has regulations in place to protect young workers, there is still work to be done to ensure these protections are fully enforced. By educating ourselves and others, supporting advocacy efforts, and advocating for improvements in work conditions, we can create a safer and more supportive environment for Missouri’s young workforce. ↩



## Can Artificial Intelligence Predict Election Results?

by Robyn Davies  
Phillips-Exeter, 2026

The challenge of predicting elections is one that political scientists, economists, professors and historians have grappled with since the beginning of our nation. Traditional polling methods have commonly failed to reflect the election at large, a consequence of limitations including misrepresentation of the population, unprecedented changes in public opinion, and social-desirability bias. In recent years, however, artificial intelligence has emerged as a powerful tool for election analysis, offering solutions to several of these challenges.



A diagram of a proposed way in which A.I. could be used to predict voter behavior.

Finally, traditional polls have often faced struggles combating social-desirability bias, a phenomenon in which individuals may choose not to disclose their true voting intentions in favor of publicly conforming to perceived social norms. Unlike traditional polls, artificial intelligence models are not bound to a single data point to represent each voter. Instead, AI employs wide-range sentiment analysis, evaluating the emotional tone of text data – positive or negative – to gauge general public opinion on each candidate. This approach has been used effectively in analyzing prior elections –

AI models address the misrepresentation of the population by leveraging vast amounts of data from social media and other online platforms. Unlike traditional polls that rely on a small, often non-representative sample, AI can analyze millions of data points from diverse sources, providing a more accurate picture of the electorate. This ability to track mentions of candidates and issues across different demographic groups, regions, and languages minimizes sampling bias and ensures that the voices of underrepresented groups are heard.

Furthermore, AI models can update predictions in real-time, allowing for adjustments as new data comes in. In the case of unprecedented events with the power to dramatically skew an election – the assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump, for instance, – natural language processing AI models are able to immediately respond and reflect changing public opinion in updated prediction. This dynamic approach to analyzing voter behavior helps to mitigate the uncertainty of traditional polling.

including the Italian election in 2011 and the French election in 2012 – to gauge the true popularity of political candidates. By capturing a more well-rounded expression of voter preferences, AI helps to counteract the distortions caused by social-desirability bias.

Despite the advantages, AI-based election analysis is not without its challenges. Sentiment analysis on platforms like X must account for misinformation, propaganda, and the non-representative nature of X users compared to the general voting population. Moreover, while national predictions are useful, elections often hinge on results at the county level, necessitating a more granular analysis.

While challenges remain, the integration of AI with traditional political science models proves it to be a promising tool for the future of electoral analysis. As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, its ability to predict electoral outcomes via natural language processing will only grow, offering more precise insights into the hands in which the future of the United States lies. ↩

## America’s Newest Political Battleground: The Fight for School Board Seats

by Tabitha Musangali  
Liberty, 2026

In the past few years, there has been a noticeable change in the money poured into school board elections. Local races across the country have seen a considerable increase in donations a school board candidate receives since the COVID-19 pandemic. Many school board candidates are now finding endorsements from their state politicians. This new phenomenon has been attributed to school board races becoming highly politicized as a reaction to national policy debates and a desire by people to combat the other political parties' attempts to indoctrinate their children in school.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, we started to see increased unhappiness with schools and their policies because many parents were unhappy with their school's mask mandates. Debates over masks in school are when we started to see school board meetings get heated and an interest in a part of local government that usually goes unnoticed. As COVID-19 restrictions eased up and mask mandates no longer were an issue, the conversation shifted to other topics more relevant to people’s community values and beliefs. Soon, the new issues on the table became critical race theory (CRT), bathroom policies, books read in school, and how gender and sexuality are taught in schools.

At the heart of these debates is the so-called Parents Rights Movement that is sweeping the nation. A faction of conservative parents believe that they deserve input over what their children learn in schools and have moved to

get state legislation passed that would allow them more control over what is learned in schools. Some political candidates have even run on the basis that they will give parents more control to appeal to that voter base. Organizations, like Take Back Our Schools, Moms for Liberty, and No Left Turn in Education, are some of those that are spearheading

crisis” spreading through our schools. The 1776 Project is a Super PAC whose goal is to stop “progressive activists” from “using their positions to indoctrinate children” in the education system. This PAC alone has donated more than \$2.6 million to school board candidates across the country to turn school board seats red. The support from these PACs has



Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis speaks at rally in opposition to open dialogue in schools.

the movement to prevent “wokeness” in our schools.

The major backers and financiers of these organizations and candidates are conservative political action committees (PACs) that donate millions of dollars to different candidates across the country to combat the “wokeness

enabled their candidates to make policies based on what they believe is proper without looking to see how it impacts the schools in their district. With this shift towards serving political parties rather than school communities, our children's futures are threatened as politicians use our education as talking points. ↩



## J.D Vance? More like J.D Bad!

by Elliott Schusky; *Collinsville, 2024; Georgetown, 2028*  
Henry Bauer, *Collinsville, 2025*

We are Elliott Schusky and Henry Bauer, and we have been interns in Civitas' "Campaign 2024" summer program. Throughout this program we had the opportunity to discuss politics and current events with numerous other interns, Civitas staff, and guest speakers. It was during our visit to the St. Louis County Board of Elections that Donald Trump announced Ohio Senator J.D. Vance as his vice-presidential candidate.

This decision is deeply disappointing to the two of us. We have both read J.D. Vance's memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy* and watched the movie adaptation, and nearly every single fact we learn about Vance only serves to strengthen our belief that this man should not be the Vice-President of the United States of America.

Vance claims to be a hero of the working class. He describes how he grew up poor in Ohio, raising himself up by the bootstraps to reach where he is today. This is true and is, we must admit, impressive. However, this background in no way makes him a hero of the working class. Throughout *Hillbilly Elegy*, instead of suggesting ways to help the poor and prevent children from growing up in the situation he did, Vance only belittles and spits on them. He uses his escape from poverty to attack people stuck in poverty. Vance believes that because he escaped without any government programs many liberals are in favor of implementing, there is no reason why others like him cannot also escape their poverty. He treats the poor like they are stupid for not following his path, a path that could not possibly work for every single impoverished person in the US. Far from being a hero of the working class, Vance sees poor Americans as idiots and failures, who are stuck being poor only because of their own faults, when in reality there are many institutional systems that make it exceedingly difficult for the poor in our society to escape from poverty.

J.D. Vance's wife, Usha, is of Indian descent and a practicing Hindu. You might think this would make Vance more progressive and accepting of immigration. You would be dead wrong. Usha Vance gave a speech at the Re-

publican National Convention on Thursday, July 18. She talked about many things such as her love for J.D, her law career, and her upbringing. It is her childhood that is the most interesting part of the speech. Usha talked about being the child of two immigrants, while signs reading "Mass Deportation" flew in the crowd. Her husband's party would not even support her coming to her country. A faction of her husband's party wants Usha, an American citizen, deported from the country based on her heritage. J.D Vance supports the false claim that Mexican people are flooding fentanyl into the United States of America.



He claims Mexican immigrants are the reason that his mother got hooked on drugs. This point is racist and lazy. The only reason J.D Vance's mother is hooked on drugs is J.D Vance's mother. J.D Vance introduced a bill that would make English the official language of the USA. This is a direct attempt to block multiculturalism. This law will make it harder for people who do not speak English to assimilate into the States. J.D Vance claimed that Joe Biden was committing genocide on the people of Ohio by funneling illegal drugs into the state. That point is so ridiculous we refuse to discuss it.

The movie adaptation of *Hillbilly Elegy* is even worse than the book. It continues to perpetuate Vance's belief that the poor are poor only because of their own failures, while also including some outright lies, which Vance

avoids in the book by being more ambiguous. In classic Hollywood fashion, the movie attempts to make the watcher like the protagonist. This is understandable, as many people would not continue watching a movie where they did not like even the main character. However, the tricky part of this movie is that J. D. Vance is *not* a likable figure. Because of this, the movie must employ direct lies in order for the audience to feel sympathetic towards him. The most egregious of these lies is the implication that Vance rushed home to Ohio after hearing that his mom was in the hospital recovering from a heroin overdose. In the film, Vance stays in Ohio for so long that he nearly misses an important interview with the law firm he wants to work for. In reality, however, Vance did not return to Ohio to see his mother when she overdosed. He waited until he had finished law school, graduated, and accepted a job offer before making his return. Waiting until he was in a secure place to return is not something

we fault him for, but the false depiction of this the movie provides does reveal the unlikable and self-ish character that Vance is.

Finally, Vance is an opportunistic weasel. In 2016, he wrote that he worried Trump might be as bad as "America's Hitler". Now he's the former president's biggest fan. He focuses on being a

Yale graduate when he's with elites and downplays his past, but when he's pandering to the working class for votes, he claims to hate elitist institutions and focuses instead on his Appalachian roots. The man has no morals or convictions other than his love of power and his hatred for the poor whom he blames for their situation.

We are saddened and disgusted by this man and by Donald Trump for choosing him to be his running mate. Donald Trump has already come within a quarter of an inch of death—therefore a Vance presidency is not unlikely, and it is vitally important that the American public understand what that means. This is a dark time for the United States of America, and we sincerely hope the American people do not vote this awful ticket into the presidential office. ↩

## U.S. Involvement in the Conflict Between Israel and Hamas

by Tabitha Musangali  
*Liberty, 2026*

Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the US has always expressed its staunch support for the country and was even the first nation to acknowledge Israel's sovereignty. Due to the country's strategic positioning in the Middle East, the United States' relationship with Israel has been one of its most beneficial alliances. The U.S. keeps a key military base in Israel which makes it easier for them to keep an eye on their operations in the Middle East, and gives the country the ability to keep a close eye on Iran and their nuclear weapons. Despite ranking 28th among countries with the highest GDP and having one of the most advanced militaries in the world, Israel has received \$158 billion ([\\$310 billion if adjusted for inflation](#)) since the establishment of the nation just a short 76 years ago. Since the attack by Hamas on October 7th, the country has received an additional \$12.5 billion instead of its average annual \$3.3 billion.

Immediately after the events of October 7th, President Biden announced his support for Isra-

el and drew comparisons to the Holocaust and 9/11 before rallying domestic and international support for Israel's imminent counterattack. Since the day of the awful massacre of 1,200 civilians in Israel, the country has committed its own massacre against the Palestinian people, killing an estimated [186,000 people](#) (that number does not include the unknown number of Palestinians buried underneath rubble). For months, Biden expressed his support for Israel's "war" on Hamas, which has ended up being a genocide against innocent Palestinian civilians.

Countless resolutions in favor of a ceasefire proposed by other members of the UN were voted against by the U.S. During a United Nations Security Council meeting, the United States used its veto power against a resolution supporting Palestine becoming a member of the UN, despite 12 out of 15 members voting in support of the resolution and 2 abstaining.



When the ICC released their warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defense minister Yoav Gallant, Biden denounced their decision and criticized the implication that Hamas and Israeli leaders had any similarities.

Only in recent months as pro-Palestine protests became highly televised and more politicians, domestic and international, have started to question Biden's unwavering support for Israel as the death toll in Palestine increases, has Biden rethought his blind support for Netanyahu. Recently, he has expressed his desire for a ceasefire immediately, although he recently just gave the go-ahead for a shipment of bombs that he had paused two months ago. Despite Biden's recent calls for an end to this genocide, his actions seem to contradict his statements. As the Race for the White House blazes on and Biden continues to alienate a younger demographic based on his policies regarding Israel-Palestine, the world watches with bated breath to see his next step. ↩



# Opioid Crisis in Missouri

by Augustus Farrell, 2026

In the past decade, the overuse and abuse of opioids has skyrocketed. In 2017, the Opioid crisis was declared a public health emergency under the Public Health Service Act. This crisis takes over 187 lives per day and is the leading cause of death among adults aged 18 to 44 in Missouri. Upwards of 1 million adults have been reported to have a drug addiction in Missouri alone. This drug has been correlated to substance use disorders, showing the amplitude of this crisis. Unlike many drugs related to substance use disorders, opioids are legally open to the public, increasing the likelihood of a user getting addicted to their prescribed dosage when out of a controlled facility leading to long term effects often ending in overdose or death.

Generally, Opioid policy is heavily overlooked in the conservative agenda. In Missouri, however, US Senator Josh Hawley has campaigned with focused on the opioid crisis, making policy reform closer than ever before. That said, policy focusing on prescription restrictions and prioritizing prison rehabilitation programs will help solve the issue.

The source of the Opioid crisis is the availability of opioids through prescriptions. 19% of people who take prescription pain medications develop an addiction to them and 80 percent of heroin users reported using prescription opioids prior to heroin. Resolving this crisis means preventing people from getting addicted to their opioid prescriptions from the start. Our pharmaceutical programs distribute prescription opioids periodically through means of delivery services from pharmacies. The surge in opioid overuse was caused by the access of opioids through prescriptions so this program

will actively combat this by giving consumers a limited number of doses. For this to be implemented, policy must be passed to restrict the number of doses provided to a at a single time.

These pharmaceutical programs prevent the number of people with substance use disorders from increasing but likely don't have an effect on those who are already addicted. For this reason, our second solution is focused on decreasing the current number of drug addicts, and public prison rehabilitation programs. Implementing rehabilitation programs modeled after successful approaches in Norway and California's San Quentin could significantly reduce addiction rates and enhance public awareness. Instead of focusing solely on punitive measures, our efforts must prioritize rehabilitation and support systems. Doing so will allow repeat addicts as well as other criminals to break out of the prison cycle and instead lead a prosperous life. While Missouri's current legislative efforts claim functionality, the reality on the ground tells a different story.

For decades now, we have seen the consequences of turning a blind eye to the misuse of Opioids. The crisis we see today is only growing. Each Missourian has a stake in this fight against opioid addiction. Together, through advocacy, education, and unwavering community support, we can forge a path towards a healthier future for all. Let this be

## Missouri Resident Overdose Deaths

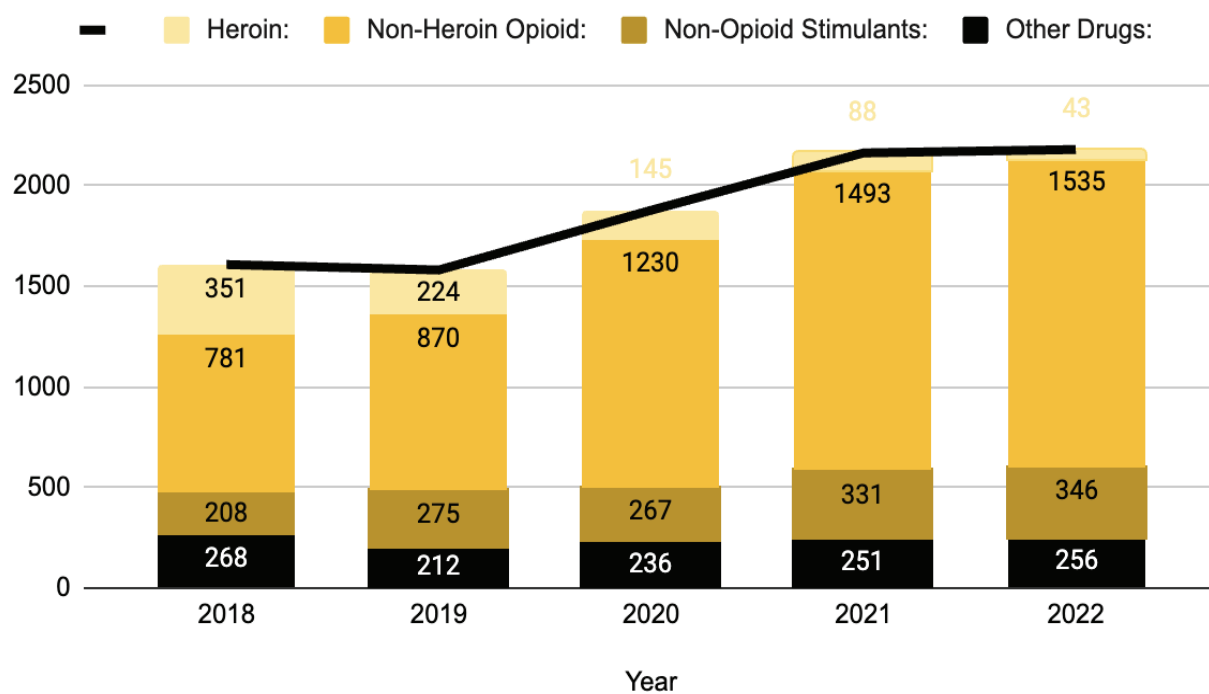
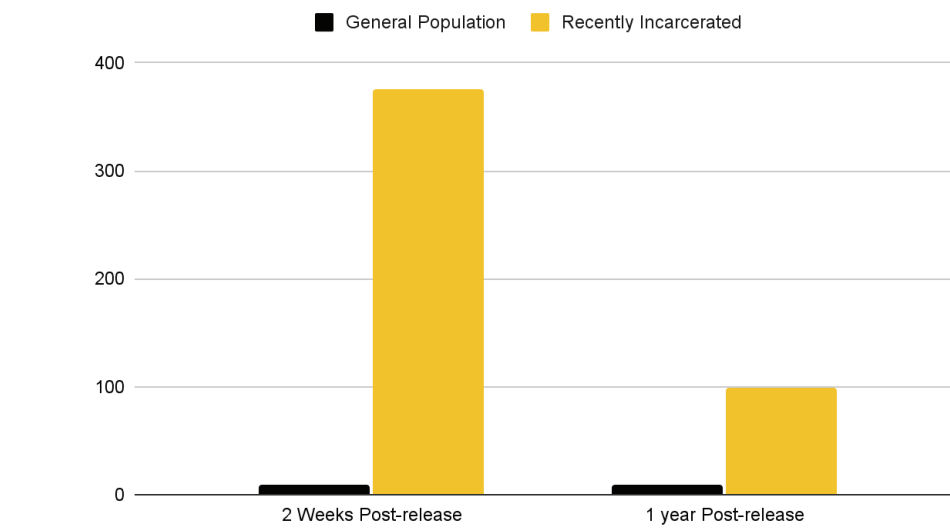


Figure 1. The data reveal distinct contributions of various Opioids to the overall rise in fatalities, underscoring the diverse impact of different substances on the overdose mortality rate.



# Missouri May Not be as Red as You Think

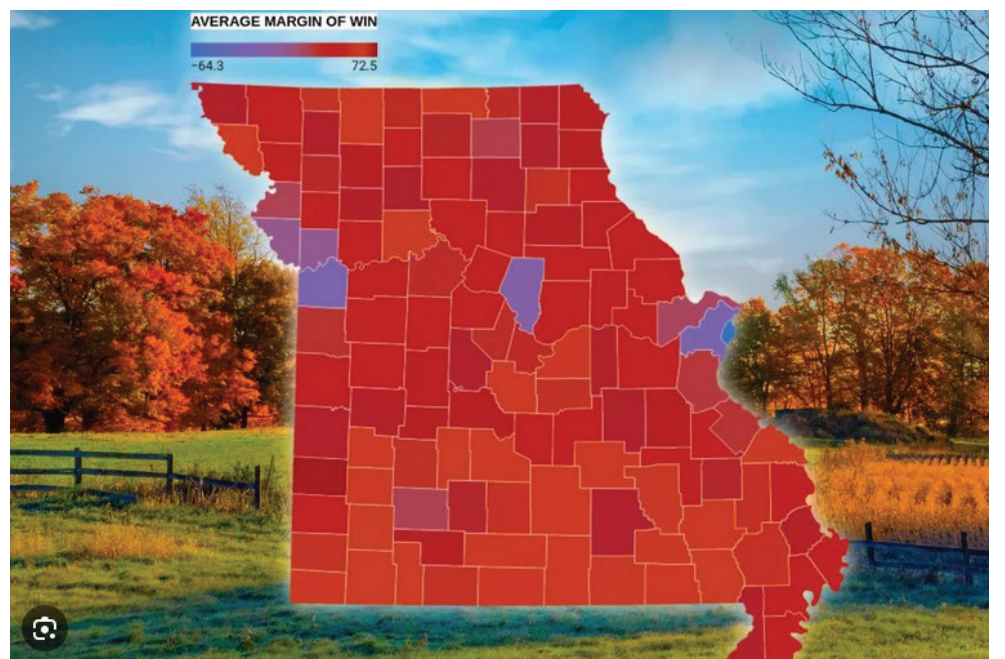
by Benjamin Yates  
Home School Network, 2026

Missouri is seen as a red state, however is this truly the case? Missouri last voted for a Democratic president only 28 years ago in 1996. We last voted for a Democratic governor only 16 years ago in 2008. Throughout Missouri many districts go uncontested, leaving no option but for Republican representation for those districts. High amounts of voter apathy contribute to low turnout throughout Missouri. Organizations such as the Heartland Collective are working toward flipping red states blue across middle America. Many districts that appear red on a map are often only a few points away from being swing districts.

Republican officials repeatedly voted against the wishes of the voters. They support stripping down abortion access which is supported by 44% and opposed by 37% of Missourians. These politicians removed the law banning puppy mills which was put in place by a voter petition signed by a majority of voters. In 2017 "right-to-work" was passed then the year after in 2018 a voter referendum stopped this in its tracks with the support of 67.5% of voters. Since then, there have been several small attempts by Republican representatives to reimplement right to work laws against the wishes of a majority of Missouri voters.

Many of Missouri's elected officials are not representing their constituents' views as they were voted into office to do. The lack of truly competitive districts leads to candidates who can do or say whatever they want

with little repercussions. Some of these districts need not remain uncompetitive. Many districts across Missouri are only a few points away from being a swing district and even if a Democratic candidate does not have a chance at winning the race the competition can force the opposition to moderate their opinions so they better represent their constituents.



Like many states, Missouri is geographically red, but it has several population-heavy pockets of blue.



# Iowa: Model for Legislative Districting

by Elliott Schusky

Collinsville, 2024; Georgetown U., 2028

During Civitas' Campaign 2024 internship program, we had the opportunity to hear from many different speakers involved with all facets of politics. Among the politicians, campaign managers, lawyers, and professional fundraisers interviewed, we had the chance to talk to Missouri State Senator Tracy McCreery.

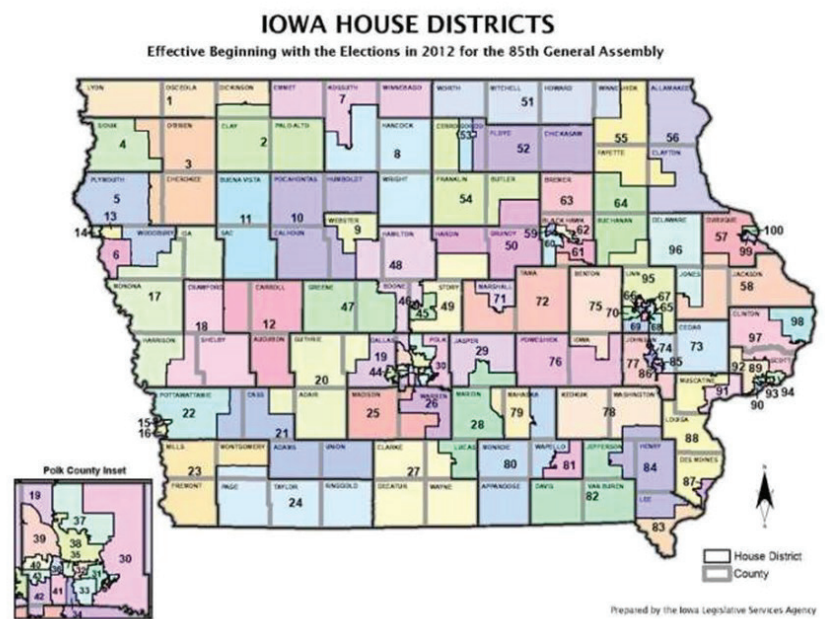
Although we discussed many interesting topics with her, one specific topic she brought up was the problem of gerrymandering. Criticizing the districting method used by Missouri and Illinois, Senator McCreery pointed to Iowa as a landmark of how districting should be done. Although we did not have time to explore this topic further during our interview with the senator, many of us at Civitas wanted to take a deeper dive into this unique method of districting employed by Iowa.

Deciding to research this topic for myself, I learned a lot about how other states draw the borders for their state and federal legislators. Missouri and Illinois, where Civitas' interns are from, both perform districting in the same way that most of the states in the US do it. In these states, the state legislature is entirely in charge of the redistricting process after each census. However, there are fourteen states, including Iowa, in which an independent commission is created to perform the redistricting. Although there are differences in the number of people on this commission and exactly how the commissioners are chosen, all of these commissions function quite similarly.

In general, both Democrats and Republicans in the state legislature chose an equal number of commissioners. In most states, these commissioners themselves then choose several more commissioners who are not members of either party (often an odd number to prevent ties, though not always). This team of Democrats and Republicans chosen by their respective parties in the state legislature, as well as independents chosen by the first members of the committee, then draw out the districts for the state's house and senate and federal Congressional districts. Depending on the state, this map either immediately becomes law or requires the governor's approval, the state legislature's approval, or the approval or both.

What makes Iowa unique is the strict limits placed on what information can be given to the members of the commission. Members are provided only with a map of population and existing governmental administrations, such as cities and counties. They are not allowed to see a map of political demographics which could be used in gerrymandering, nor any elected official's address.

I strongly agree with Senator McCreery's opinion that the rest of the United States, and Missouri in particular, should look to Iowa when it comes to redistricting. The state's policies limit gerrymandering and prevent politicians from trying to squeeze their address into a district they would not otherwise be placed in. Learning about Iowa was enlightening, and I hope that other states can learn from this system to improve their own. ↩



## Solutions for Increased Voter Turnout: Election Holiday, Incentives, and Penalties

By Leanna J.D. Haynes

In the 2016 general election more than one million eligible Americans did not vote, according to the US Elections Project. They had varied reasons including work conflicts, childcare, lack of faith in the voting system, or simply the recurring habit of not voting. So, how can we get more of these 43% of eligible voters to the polls on Election Day?

### Election Day Holiday

It is the law in 29 states and the District of Columbia that employers grant employees paid time off to vote. However, according to a survey from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) in 2018, only 44% of employers offered their workers paid time off to vote, and that was an all-time high!

One possible solution to this problem is making Election Day a federal holiday. That way, employers have to give the whole day off to employees. One of the biggest advocates for this holiday is US Representative Anna G. Eshoo (D-CA). She says:

“No one should be unable to vote because they have to work or care for a family member. Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy and Congress must make it easier to vote, not harder. With a presidential election this year, it's imperative that we reaffirm our commitment to the right to vote and ensure every voice is heard. Our democracy depends on it.”

### Incentivized Voting

Another topic of many discussions lately is the idea of incentivized voting. One example of a possible incentive is childcare on Election Day. If a parent wants to vote, the government can provide him/her with daycare services. This incentive would surely increase voter turnout, but questions are being asked doubting this solution: Could this incentive work in this modern society? Would Americans support their tax-paying dollars being used this way? Would Congress support this? However, the question I ask is: “Can we continue to allow problems that can be easily solved by greater voter turnout to go unsolved?”

### Penalties for Not Voting

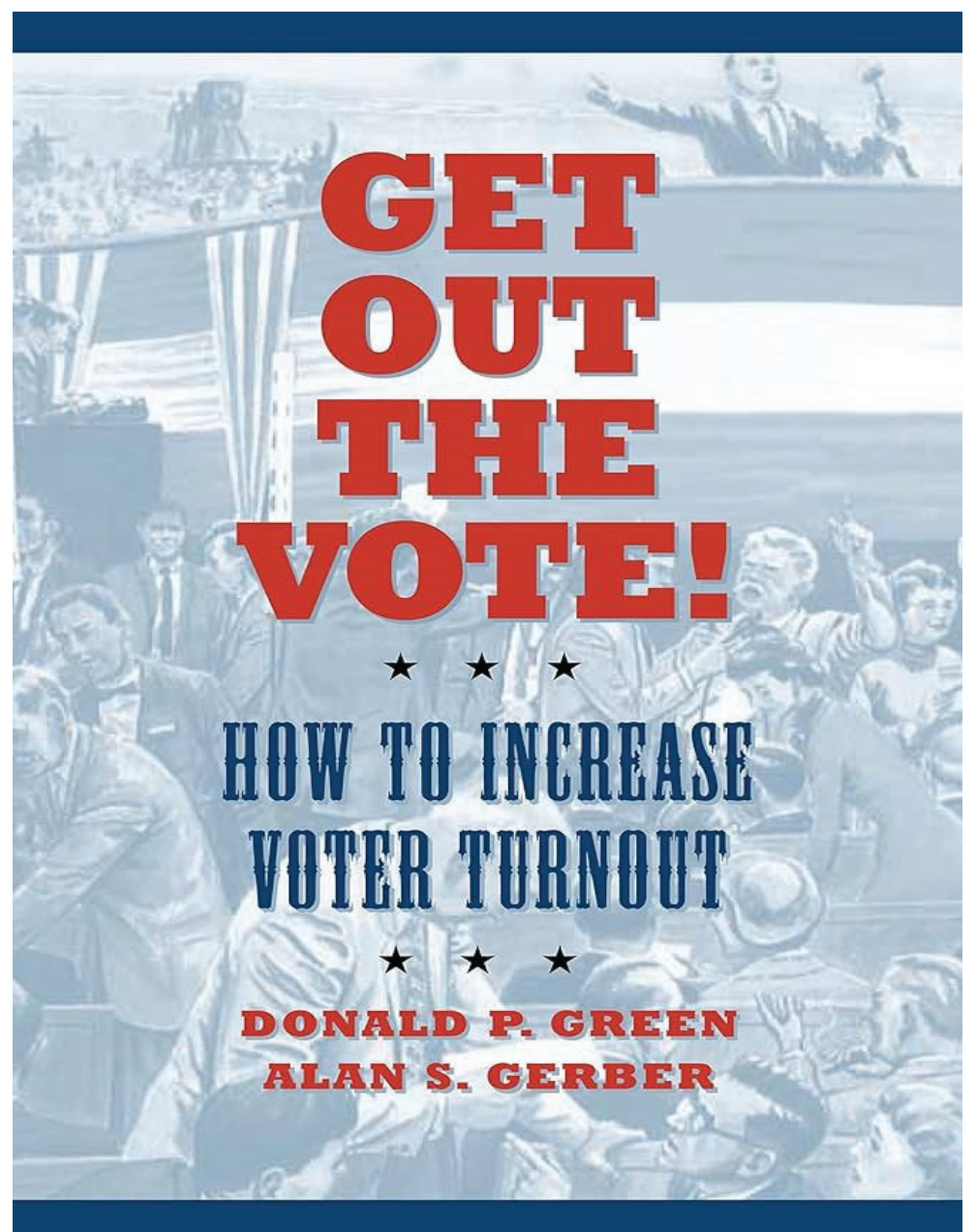
In the 2020 election we saw a record turnout of voters. Senator Ben Cardin (D-DE) said:

“The more people who participate in our system of government

through voting, the more we fulfill Abraham Lincoln's vision of ‘government of the people, by the people and for the people.’”

I think that most people agree that the more voters, the better for our democracy. One thing some countries, such as Australia and Mexico, have implemented to keep their voter turnouts high is consequences for not voting without good reason. This could be a simple and effective solution to the nonvoting problem in America.

Election holiday, incentives, and penalties would have to be monitored to ensure employers are following the law, only people who need the incentives receive them, and only people who don't vote without proper reason are penalized. How we monitor these, what is deemed a need, or definitions of a proper reason are beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, we see the pros of them all and this is where the discussion begins. ↩





## What is Christian Nationalism and what is the Harm of It?

by Kirill Kondratyuk  
Parkway West, 2027

You might have heard that recently people are worrying about Christian nationalism, but what exactly is it?

Christian nationalism is a type of religious nationalism, which is national identity based not only on ethnicity and shared culture, but also on shared religion. In the case of the U.S., Christian nationalism is a belief that America is defined by Christianity and its values. Christian Nationalists often advocate for Christian values to be taught in schools, for Christianity to be the dominant moral, and are opposed to the separation of church and state.

One of the most recent examples of Christian nationalism is Project 2025, a series of proposals meant for the next conservative U.S. president. Some of the proposals include teaching Christianity in public schools, banning abortion, and using taxes to fund religious schools. The main criticism of Christian nationalism is its exclusivist version of Christianity, with Islamophobic, homophobic, misogynistic, and xenophobic tendencies. For example, some ideas of Christian nationalists include advocating a patriarchal social system with male rule, nativism and opposition to immigration, and links to extremist movements such as QAnon. Also, former president Trump has seemed to embrace Christian nationalism, such as claiming that he will defend Christian values from what he calls “radical left”.

Many Trump supporters are also Christian Nationalists, such as Russell Vought, who openly identifies as a Christian Na-

ionalist and has played a key role in writing Project 2025. Overall, Christian Nationalists are no small group. Many Trump supporters are Christian Nationalists, and many of them are advocating things which can undermine our democracy, such as enforcing anti-abortion laws, ending separation of church and state by teaching Christianity in public schools, and discriminating against non-Christian minorities. Trump’s embrace of



this dangerous ideology once again highlights the danger of right-wing populists to democracy, as well as the danger of trying to implement religion on a state level.

Now, are there any ways to combat Christian nationalism? Yes, there is a way. The best way to combat it is to educate people about what Christian nationalism is—a type of fundamentalism that promotes an

exclusive version of Christianity and claims U.S. was founded as a “Christian nation”, explain the harms of Christian nationalism—such as its attempts to end the separation of church and state, complete nation ban on abortion, and exclusive views against Muslims, gays and minorities. By informing people on what Christian nationalism is, as well as how Christian Nationalists want to change America’s system through Project 2025,

we can stop it from advancing further and rescue our democracy. One reminder: stay informed, and be careful if you see a politician saying that “The U.S. is a Christian nation” or “U.S. is built on Christian values”, as those can be warning signs that a politician is a Christian Nationalist, or that the politicians may harbor an exclu-

sivist version of Christianity.

Also, about the claim that “The U.S. is a Christian nation”. There is no evidence that our founders wanted to make the U.S. Christian, as most were not religious, and our constitution openly states that the government does not have an official religion and that all religions are welcome to be openly practiced. ↩

## Interns Visit Ethical Society to Discuss Religion and Politics

by Henry Bauer  
Collinsville, 2025



Megan McCarthy, Youth Education Co-Director of STL Ethical Society, discusses secular religion with interns on July 15

On Monday, July 15, Civitas Campaign ’24 interns visited the Ethical Society of St. Louis, founded in 1886. It was first housed in the St. Louis Art Museum. It then moved to the Sheldon Concert Hall. The Ethical Society is a place where the community comes together. A place that has no religion involved. People come here to have intelligent conversations and engage in the city that they love, St. Louis.

The building it is housed in now was designed by Harris Armstrong. It is truly an architectural marvel. People travel from all over the country to look at this building. When you arrive outside the

building, you are immediately struck by its grandeur. You see a building with a large spire, stained glass windows, and a beautiful fountain. The fountain splashes and bubbles, giving the building the feeling of a great monument. The stained glass gives the place the appearance of a church, only this is a place of science and reason, not religion. The spire is extremely tall, forcing you to crane your neck when you look up. The spire is a representation of what the Ethical Society stands for, always striving to move upwards, and be a better person than you once were.

Megan McCarthy, the person who gave us a tour around the Ethical Society, had some serious concerns about the future of America. She is deeply afraid of Christian nationalism. It threatens the platform of the Ethical Society of St. Louis. The Ethical Society aims to create a diverse and humanistic society. Christian National and Project 2025 want to rip diversity out of this country’s hands. They want to sully the fabric of the United States of America. Megan McCarthy left us with one message, “Continue to fight against Christian nationalism.” ↩



# We had two other terrific speakers

Rosetta Okohson, CEO & Managing Partner



Thanks to all for making it such a terrific Civitas Summer Internship program.  
Keep the great ideas flowing!