

Tess Snyder

## **Voice of Democracy 2017**

The white mail truck with the red and blue stripes pulled away from the mailbox with a start. I rushed down to check for the sixth straight day and was finally rewarded with an oversized envelope from the US. State Department addressed to me. Inside this envelope, patterned as the mail truck, was my ticket to a night out in the city of lights, window shopping on the Avenue des Champs Elysées and a romantic trip in the elevator as I ascend la tour eiffel. I opened the envelope and looked through the sharp little blue book, the cover embossed with the Great Seal of the United States and the words United States of America. I breathed a quick sigh of relief and tossed it in with the rest of my stuff for my dream trip to Paris. At this point I had not given any thought to my responsibility to America or America at all frankly as I was focused on my exchange trip to France. Where better to learn about citizenship then in revolutionary France, not in Paris, but on a lonely windswept beach.

Now, after my trip, when I think about my responsibility to America as a citizen, a few things quickly come to mind. One is stay informed of the issues that affect your community. Being a teen and thinking of issues that affect my friends and myself there are so many issues that bombard us for attention everyday. I think it is important for everyone to have an informed opinion on many of these issues like college costs, the teen heroin epidemic and protecting local public spaces. It is equally important for the informed citizen to do something, even in the smallest way to contribute to ongoing problems. I decided early to volunteer to help at a couple animal shelters. I have been collecting money and holding pet food drives for a local shelter for several years. If every citizen contributed in a small way the impact of issues like this would be lessened on our local community.

Another responsibility for an American is serve on a jury when called upon. I have not had the pleasure of jury duty. Spending time in Drama and Musical club I would like to think that jury duty will be more like the musical Legally Blonde than the drama Twelve Angry Men. This responsibility is one of the the bedrocks of our justice system with the presumption of innocence and the right to be represented by a lawyer.

Participating in the democratic process by voting is a responsibility to America. In the light of this latest national election I believe that the citizens have to look deeper than just voting. It is time to participate in the government as a member. Starting locally on a school or town board or helping elect a person to statewide office would go along way to restoring the faith in democracy for my younger generation.

After my trip to Paris I remember sitting on the couch in stunned silence watching the news footage unfold of the terrorist attack in Paris. I thought immediately of my friends Ivan and Rose and Rose's father who is a Paris police officer who were my host family. They would all turn out to be safe. As I listened to the reports I was struck by the fine line our nation needs to walk for one of our fundamental responsibilities respect the rights, beliefs and opinions of others.

One of the last responsibilities I thought about was the need to defend the country, if the need should arise, After spending a fun filled week in Paris, I travelled to Normandy in France. I stood on the very beach that American soldiers landed on, and saw the cemetery and museum dedicated to those who paid the ultimate price. The experience was surreal, knowing how many men lost their lives in that place in order to protect our freedom. Many were very young, not much older than myself. Defending our nation is a great responsibility, one that many take on willingly, knowing that they may make the ultimate sacrifice.

As I prepare to head to college, my responsibilities will continue to grow. And as a young adult, my responsibilities to our nation will increase as well. Voting, being part of the democratic process, learning and helping in my community are all things that I will need to focus on in order to fulfill my responsibilities.