

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Opinion: 'A Call To Arms' For Young Voters

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Too often I hear of reasons why young people in the U.S. Virgin Islands do not vote. There is a litany of reasons; some may even call them excuses. Admittedly, some of the concerns are valid, while others are society-constructed reasons developed because one does not fully understand the process.

Politics, in general, can be disheartening to all those involved. From the candidates vying for political office, to elected leaders who are currently serving, to people serving on various campaigns, and most importantly, to the electorate--whose daunting task includes filtering out all the excess noise coming from the various campaigns and interest groups, and having to come up with a competent voting methodology relevant to their needs in order to elect our future leaders. With all these moving pieces, it is easy for

dismay to settle in for the people engaged and invested in the process. For the average disinterested voter, the feeling of apathy settling in for the process is understandable. However, it is not a valid excuse to not participate in it.

In the 2012 presidential election, approximately 128,768,072* million people voted. This number represented about 41 percent of the total population, and about 57.7 percent of the voter population. A total of 65,899,660* million people casted votes for the current president of the United States in the 2012 election, which represented 51.1 percent of the total votes cast; but only 29.2 percent of the total number of eligible voters only represented about 21 percent of the total population.



Bearing these figures in mind, theoretically, we had about 21 percent of the nation making a decision that affected 100 percent of the population. Lower voter participation means smaller groups of people have the ability to affect the process. This is even more apparent in our local elections here in the U.S. Virgin Islands. A small, yet active group of voters can have a profound impact on the outcome of an election.

The young demographic (18-35yrs old) in the U.S. Virgin Islands is one that is shrinking, as many of us are forced to leave for better opportunities abroad because we are discontented with our society's social deficiencies or frustrated with the perceived establishment as we try to push for change. However, the only way we are going to be taken seriously and affect change is if we become active.

Of all the social ills that politics has been accused of creating or enforcing, politics also has an equal opportunity to correct it--if we wish it to do so. Our elected leaders are a direct reflection of their electorate. Politics does not change with the individuals we elect; politics change when we, the electorate, first change individually. Then, as a result of that change, we change how we elect individuals.

A common narrative in the U.S. Virgin Islands is that, "it doesn't matter who we elect, because they all go in there and do the same thing, so that is why I will not vote". The narrative has some truth to it; however, this is only because we, the electorate, get the representation we deserve. If a large section of the population decides not to participate in the process, it takes a smaller set of the population to decide who gets elected. This means, candidates who are vying for political office soon become beholden to a smaller set of people and their ideologies—ideologies that may differ from yours--and special interests that may be contrary to what is in your best interest.



It is the goal of vying candidates to get elected, and they will spend their resources in areas that will bear the most fruit. So, by not participating in the process, you are making a statement that you agree with what is going on, or that you do not care. Either way, if you are dissatisfied with what is happening around you, you have no one to blame or criticize but yourself.

As young people, we also become disillusioned with the process because of the sometimes-perceived trivialization of it by some of the candidates running for office. What does that statement mean? Commercials filled with jingles and cliché mottos; parties thrown targeting the young demographic; recycled platforms with no real plan as to how to achieve them; and double talk by candidates, where they are speaking and not saying anything at all.

As frustrating as that may be, especially to young people who are astute and see through most of it, it is still not an excuse to not get involved in the process. It is up to us to demand something different, something more. It starts with getting involved in the process. It starts with us confronting the leaders vying for office and asking the tough questions. It starts with us properly vetting the candidates that we are considering supporting. It starts with us voting and making our voices heard, and making it known that this is a new generation and a new day.

It is good to be fired up about political issues on social media, but even better at the polls. Furthermore, this desire for change should continue after Election Day. When the leaders we vote for are elected, it is up to us to continue to push for what we expect from them. If we do not—if we fail to get involved and we fail to properly exercise the rights that people fought and died for—then we will continue to be stagnant, and things will not change. The more we get involved, and the more we demand more, the more leaders of our generation will rise up. The more the current group of leaders will take us seriously, finally addressing the issues that are of grave importance to the young people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and our counterparts who reside abroad and would love to relocate back to our beautiful home. That is democracy at work.



Leaders elected by the people make decisions everyday that affect all the constituents of that location. Some of those decisions have long-lasting ramifications that not only affect the current populace, but future generations who do not yet exist.

Society affects politics, just as politics affect society. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."** Let us conquer the evils of empty political promises by picking up our political weapons and responding to the call to arms...on Tuesday, get out and make your voice heard!

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