

Community Voice

Hey, Millennials: It's Time To Engage Politically

The generation is encouraged to stop being apathetic and become involved in issues before the Hawaii Legislature.

By Riley Johnson  / October 18, 2017

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With the consequences of the 2016 presidential election more apparent than ever, we must look to young people to become more engaged in positive political discourse.

Disengagement and a sense of futility are on the rise for many millennials (ages 18-35 in 2017). It was reflected in our disappointing turnout at the polls last November. Overall, barely 49 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot in the last election cycle. This statistic, combined with Hawaii's notoriously sparse turnout, says that our state's youngest citizens are the most civically disengaged across the nation.

We must take what we have learned from this mistake. We must recognize that our apathy has contributed to the lack of intelligence and humanity among our elected officials and apply ourselves where we have the power to exert influence: local elections.

The millennial vote, making up the largest block than ever before with roughly 70 million potential voters, has the power to swing elections. As our voices make little difference nationally, we should look instead to becoming more engaged locally to benefit our own communities.



The visitors gallery in the Hawaii State Senate. The author encourages millennials like herself to pay attention to legislative issues that directly affect them.

Rather than be a faceless voter with a limited capacity to engage nationally, we have the opportunity to personally benefit our communities on the local level. We can do this by encouraging each other to become involved in the political processes for the upcoming legislative session this spring.

We can expect to see issues regarding the protection of our environment, increasing the minimum wage and making affordable housing more widely available. These are all issues that will directly affect us as both young people, and more simply, as residents of this state.

It falls to Hawaii to model the way towards a better tomorrow.

Restoring empathy and aloha to public policy may not be easily done in Washington, D.C., but can certainly be managed within state elections. It falls to Hawaii to model the way towards a better tomorrow. This can be accomplished with increased public participation.

Here are some very simple, but important steps every millennial should take:

Exercise Your Right To Vote

Others before us fought hard for the right to vote. It is irresponsible of us to not exercise that right and leave it to others to be civically engaged. Progress can be attained by simply voting for representatives who inspire a shared vision and will act on it. In the previous legislative session, we bore witness to the failures of our legislature to uphold their duty and protect the interests of their constituents: us. We are still without livable wages, affordable housing, or adequate environmental protection. It is a failure not only of our legislators, but of us voters, for our own negligence. It is up to us to appoint dedicated public servants who are capable of restoring justice to our islands, just as it is up to us to communicate when our interests are not being represented.

Offer Testimony

Beyond the anonymity of the vote, we have the power to make our voices heard on a personal level. Submitting testimony is one of the most powerful avenues to utilize when facing controversial issues that affect our lives. Whether it be a concise statement over email or a public appeal at the capitol, your voice will count only as much as you make it heard. This adds a

human element to the otherwise cold realm of politics and has the capacity to inspire legislators that may not have held strong convictions. It is our responsibility as conscious voters to exhaust this often overlooked method of engagement.

Educate Yourself On The Issues

Perhaps the most basic civic duty of a voter is to remain informed about their locale. Media consumption is at all time high with countless platforms supplying an endless wealth of information. Therefore, only through willful negligence can a voter remain ignorant- as many have, apparently based upon the analysis of recent election statistics. Without proper knowledge and awareness of current issues, it becomes impossible to positively contribute to the political process. Whether it be by watching, listening, or reading the news, we all have a responsibility to remain informed and question the reliability of news that we are fed through social media. We should be mindful of what the 2016 elections taught us about outside interference in our democracy.

This spring, it falls to the generation that likes to thumb its nose at tradition to restore hope to the political process. It is time to rewrite the narratives of apathy and ignorance that have become synonymous with 'millennial'. By properly vetting and researching representatives, becoming active voices within our neighborhoods, and staying current on events, we have the opportunity to better not only our lives, but motivate other communities to do the same.

Millennials: It is time to engage and inspire.

Community Voices aims to encourage broad discussion on many topics of community interest. It's kind of a cross between Letters to the Editor and op-eds. This is your space to talk about important issues or interesting people who are making a difference in our world. Columns generally run about 800 words (yes, they can be shorter or longer) and we need a photo of the

author and a bio. We welcome video commentary and other multimedia formats. Send to news@civilbeat.com.

About the Author



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