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WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE AND FREE SPEECH?

Free speech and civil discourse have been core tenets of our nation since the moment of its inception. Respectful discussion and introduction of new ideas has been what has allowed us to grow and flourish as a thriving republic. Learning how to debate and see both sides of a given issue should be a key part of everyone's education. Even if we don't ultimately change our minds, hearing opposing views in a respectful manner can only improve us and make us more well-rounded.

The importance of free speech was not lost on our Founding Fathers. When they drafted the Constitution in 1787, they made sure that the very First Amendment would give Americans the right to free expression, regardless of whom it was against. This right, being the first one guaranteed to the American people, was clearly so crucial to the founders because they knew how much it would impact life, which has been an insight that held true through the years. The Founding Fathers even engaged in civil discourse themselves during the Constitutional Convention. The well-documented conflict between the federalists and anti-federalists formed the final product of the Constitution, with anti-federalists

heavily pushing for the Bill of Rights and with both sides working together to craft an intricate system of checks and balances. It is because of civil discourse that we have a Constitution today that safeguards individual liberty while also setting up a balanced government.

The most important thing about civil discourse is that it's not about who's right and who's wrong. If someone goes into a discussion with a mindset like this, they are likely to miss out on some potentially good points. The goal of civil discourse is to allow both sides to deepen their understanding of an issue. One side presents their arguments, and the other side counters with theirs. When done properly, both parties should walk away with an enhanced viewpoint on the subject, possibly even picking up parts from the opposing side. Open-mindedness is key, and the subject should be viewed as an exchange of ideas, not a conflict. Having the opportunity to participate in this tradition and work on my civic rhetorical skills through the Regent's Cup was an incredible opportunity this past year, and I would love to be able to do it again!