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WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE AND FREE SPEECH?

America was founded on the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, creating a government for the people and by the people. The best way to maximize these principles is through pursuing democratic ideals. Therefore, because civil discourse and free speech are essential to democracy, they are necessary to the survival of the country our founding fathers envisioned. Founding Father Thomas Jefferson once said, "I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend."

Democracy cannot exist without people's trust in the government. In order to increase that trust, we must use free speech in the media or in general to hold the government accountable for its actions. Whether it be through exposing corruption or a public call to action, accountability and trust require free speech. Unfortunately, modern politics have deteriorated the atmosphere of discussion to the point where many people will not even listen to dissenting opinions. Nowadays, our politics fall prey to political polarization, which is deadly to democracy. Political polarization has reached such a limit that we don't have the ability to have productive and fruitful discussions at large without getting personal. With uncivil discourse, people tie opinions and ideas to people such that "losing an argument" would almost make you an inferior person.

Democracies are built upon the voices of the people. Perhaps the most important function of democracy is to give representation to all voices and points of

view, thus promoting equality. Civil discourse allows for people to discuss ideas without being held back by ego or emotions. Having more respectful conversations about important ideas is what pushes people to educate themselves. Free speech allows us to share ideas through the media, increasing the accessibility of important information. This can especially lead to many voters being less apathetic to contentious issues, creating a more educated population of voters and better policies as a result.

The goal of civil discourse is not to be right, but to collectively share opinions and thoughts in order to advance society and enhance the common understanding of a subject. Through civil discourse, we convey to others that we acknowledge and appreciate their intentions and the common ground we share. Productive discourse in turn promotes change and innovation because the focus of discussion is to improve society. A key difference between civil and uncivil discourse is that civil discourse has a much higher likelihood of resulting in a collective and mutually beneficial solution, facilitating positive change.

Free speech and civil discourse pave the way for positive impacts on society. Often, the largest roadblocks to progression tend to be ego or personal feelings that affect debates. By removing these things and raising awareness on issues, civil discourse and free speech both prove their immeasurable worth to society.