

Thursday August 13, 2020

Editor, The Transcript:

The great civil rights activist, John Lewis, said, "Freedom is the continuous action we all must take, and each generation must do its part to create an even more fair, more just society."

He fought for the right to vote throughout his life and time in Congress. He recognized that voting is the path to equality and representation in government.

Today's youth realize this as well. The campaigns to lower the voting age to 16 in municipal elections across the country, from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., are a manifestation of that will. Youth today are eager to take an active role in shaping our communities.

Indeed, the Vote 16 Norman Survey of high school students in the Norman Public Schools district found in April of this year that the vast majority of youth want to vote and would vote if allowed to do so. Youth are heavily active and invested in our community.

About 25% of 16 and 17 year olds have jobs and pay taxes. They are also affected by sales tax increases, the passage of education bond issues, and impactful quality of life projects.

In the same Vote 16 Norman Survey, high schoolers were asked what local issues most concerned them. Education and affordable housing were at the top of their list. These are not radical ideas, but serious life challenges that many Normanites face.

Granting the vote at 16 and 17 would also allow young people to develop a habit of voting while they are still supported by their family and exposed to civics education in the local school system. At age 18, young people are in the most turbulent times of their lives. Many are transitioning into the workforce or higher education thousands of miles away from their home. Local elections provide the educational, hands-on experience needed to develop lifelong voters.

Some may say that 16 and 17 year olds lack the maturity and independence needed to vote. These were the same arguments used to deny the right of women, minorities, and 18 year olds to vote.

However, scientific studies show that 16 year olds have the mental capacity to make unhurried, logical decisions needed to vote responsibly and independently. In fact, 16 year olds have the same capacity to make these kinds of decisions as 18 year olds and 50 year

olds. The arguments against lowering the voting age in municipal elections, upon deeper inspection, lack merit.

Vote 16 Norman is not a partisan issue; rather, it is a referendum on whether we want to empower youth to take a more active role in shaping our community. It's up to us, the people, to create a more fair and just society.

If you are a skeptic of this idea, I urge you to take the time to seek out a young person, and engage in conversation on local issues. You will be pleasantly surprised.

Thank you for your consideration.

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