



**3rd PLACE  
2024 STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST WINNER**

***What Voting Means to Me***

**By Eva Hicks, Helena High School**

Throughout my life, I have had the opportunity to develop my personal opinions. These personal opinions will be the foundation of my future choices. I turn eighteen in June, and I am extremely motivated to vote in my first general election. To me, voting means having the freedom to choose, it gives me a voice in my community, state, and country. It is an opportunity for expression, and an opportunity where I can advocate for equality.

I believe my vote matters. I love how it gives me the chance to choose *who* will make decisions for my county, state, and our nation. In a small community like Helena, Montana we are exposed to a lot of political events up close because it is such a small town, and I am fortunate for that. I can express my personal opinion with others and advocate for policies and the people who I believe are stewards to my causes. I have strong opinions towards the environment, media, and women's rights as well as reproductive rights. Voting gives me the opportunity to advocate for them.

I am especially ready to vote this year because of my upbringing. Growing up in my house, my parents would show me all the voter mail, the "I VOTED" stickers, and even when their ballot would get mailed to us, I'd get to take a peek. I

have family members with different political views and so as time went on, I learned to respect them even through disagreement. I am fortunate to have been raised in a family who paved the way for me to believe whatever I wanted and never pushed any political views. Today, I feel extremely confident in who I am becoming and am excited to advocate for myself and my generation by voting this November which is why voting matters to me.