



SCOTTSDALE PREPARATORY ACADEMY

A Great Hearts Academy

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Dear Spartan families,

Election day is a beautiful part of the American experience – not simply as symbolism but as the driver of our Constitutional order. And while we all venerate our right to vote, it can come with angst, trepidation, and sometimes anger at the possibility that “my side” will suffer defeat, and with the loss, it can feel as though the hopes and dreams of many Americans are in jeopardy.

One of the many reasons to be grateful for our Founders is the foresight in creating a system of government that protects against, as John Stuart Mill put it, the “Tyranny of the majority.” Our Founders anticipated these things – they understood human nature and the need for stability despite changes in leadership. This is why they constructed a nation of laws, not of men.

Our Founders recognized that voters often are full of ignorance and rage, even in the best of times, and can often be guided by very little other than tribalism and poorly calculated short-term self-interest. Therefore, it is comforting to realize the most important elements of our liberal democracy, such as the Bill of Rights, have been placed, as Abraham Lincoln said, “beyond the reach of a simple majority” rather than subject to the populism and whims of a mob.

In fact, at the ratification of the Constitution, only a small portion of the government - one-half of one-third of the three branches - was elected directly by the people (the president was chosen by electors and senators by state legislatures). The Founders intentionally designed barriers between the passions of the people and the mechanisms of government, recognizing the dangers of unchecked public opinion.

Still, election day is unnerving in some ways. The idea that our way of life can be swept away in a single day is stoked by politicians from both sides of the aisle. But our Founders gave us tools to manage this concern. Our ninth graders recently studied Federalist 10 in their Humane Letters class. In it, James Madison reflects on factions and how they are controlled in a republic and in doing so, gives us sage advice and quells our fears should an election not go our way. The first sentence reads:

“Among the numerous advantages promised by a well-constructed Union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction.” ~ Madison, Federalist 10

It is remarkable to reflect upon how deeply our Founders understood human nature and all its pitfalls, and furthermore, made considerations to mitigate our worst tendencies. Madison observes:

“The latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man; and we see them everywhere brought into different degrees of activity, according to the different circumstances of civil society... A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many

other points, as well of speculation as of practice; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions whose fortunes have been interesting to the human passions, have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to cooperate for their common good. So strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts.”

~ Madison, Federalist 10

Having acknowledged that “causes of faction cannot be removed,” Madison goes on to explain that factions can be dealt with in two ways: (1) Destroy the liberty which gives rise to varying opinions or (2) control the effects of factions. Madison argues that the first remedy “is worse than the disease” and thus sets out to explain how a republican form of government reins in the toxic effects of factions.

The answer comes in another recognition of human nature, that it is the very rare individual who is animated and motivated by one single idea or purpose. It is the sheer complexity of humans and their multitude of interests which limits the power of a single faction.

“If a faction consists of less than a majority, relief is supplied by the republican principle, which enables the majority to defeat its sinister views by regular vote. It may clog the administration; it may convulse the society; but it will be unable to execute and mask its violence under the forms of the Constitution. A republic ...promises the cure for which we are seeking. The smaller the society, the fewer probably will be the distinct parties and interests composing it; the fewer the distinct parties and interests, the more frequently will a majority be found of the same party; and the smaller the number of individuals composing a majority, and the smaller the compass within which they are placed, the more easily will they concert and execute their plans of oppression. Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens.”

~ Madison, Federalist 10

In other words, 340 million people, having various interests, coalescing around different factions, and advocating for many different ideas at the same time, makes it impossible for a majority to coalesce around a sinister plot and navigate the safeguards which have been placed as impediments in our Constitution. Madison goes on to explain:

“The influence of factious leaders may kindle a flame within their particular States, but will be unable to spread a general conflagration through the other States. A religious sect may degenerate into a political faction in a part of the Confederacy; but the variety of sects dispersed over the entire face of it must secure the national councils against any danger from that source.”

~ Madison, Federalist 10

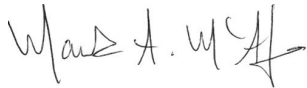
Our Founders had faith in the strength of our mediating institutions – schools, universities, churches, advocacy groups, professional organizations, business fraternities, and other cultural institutions. Our participation in civil society, and not simply political society, would be the

strength of our country. Our individual pursuit of happiness would create a heterogeneous society that would not place politics at the center of our lives. They understood that our interests are too numerous and our culture too varied for a singular faction to take hold.

This keen sense of human nature and how it would intersect with, and affect government led our Founders to construct our republic in such a way that the party in power never achieves all that partisans wish for, or all that the minority fears.

No matter who we are voting for, as election day approaches, we can find comfort in the wisdom of our Founders and the resilient republic they built. One of the many reasons for the success of the American order is that it keeps the mob at bay.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark McAfee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and 'A'.

Mark McAfee
Headmaster