

Title: **Democracy works only when we engage our brains and vote**  
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# Democracy works only when we engage our brains and vote

**T**he Declaration of Independence wasn't about revolution.

Here's what it says: "We hold these truths to be self-evident... that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men... that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government...."

We generally think of this in terms of an uprising, and certainly it entailed that for the founding fathers — but for them, it was about preserving their rights.

To do that, they needed the rule of law.

This was an idea rooted in the Magna Carta, approved by King John centuries earlier when angry English barons told him to sign or else. The Magna Carta is not a moving or eloquent document like the Declaration, but it established the principle that no one — not even the king — could take your rights or property without due process.

That's why the rule of law is essential: without it, you have nothing to safeguard your liberty.

When the British government began to violate the rights of American colonists, it was up to the colonists to restore that rule by reining in the government. They didn't have any way to do that except begging England to

## Guest column

Hannah Hill

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please behave — which is why they were compelled to declare their independence.

But we have a way.

Every two years, we elect large portions of our government. The officers we don't elect are chosen by those we do. There is no area of our government that is ultimately beyond the influence of the people.

This, perhaps, is the real point of the Declaration. "Government by the consent of the governed" does not mean that we will have good government. It simply means that whatever happens —

good or bad — happens with our consent.

This is especially true of state government, simply because the state is both easier to influence and has more direct control over your day-to-day life. Think about the policies that annoy you most, such as all the regulations and fees for businesses. Most of them will be courtesy of the state, not the feds.

There's no silver bullet for the problems we face. If you want to influence your government, it means paying attention to what's going on. It means researching candidates and voting, and it may even mean getting involved in campaigns or becoming an activist for the causes you believe in.

For me, it means reading and analyzing proposed legislation. For others, it means wearing a uniform and standing ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm. For all of us, it means listening to each other, even — perhaps especially — when we disagree.

We the citizens control our government. It's hard work. It's not all hamburgers and watermelon, yet it's the heart of what we celebrated on the Fourth of July.

Now it's time to get back to it.

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